



THE QUESTION

This month the question we are to consider has been prompted by the statement of Jesus found in John 14:2 of the 'Authorized Version', where we read, "...in my Father's house are many mansions", and the question is, "Are there really 'mansions' in Heaven?"

In order to answer this question, we must first ask two other questions

1. To what did the Lord refer when he used the phrase, '*my Father's house?*' Was he, in fact, referring to Heaven?
2. What is the meaning of the word, which is here rendered '*mansions?*'

Now, these are crucial questions, because when this verse is quoted in a sermon, the way it is used almost invariably leads the hearers to believe that it reveals what the Lord Jesus is preparing in the hereafter for those who believe in him, and, not surprisingly therefore, it is unquestioningly thought to refer to Heaven.

I hope that, after looking at the verse more closely, we shall see that its significance is even wider than that.

FIRST, THEN, CONSIDER THAT PHRASE, 'MY FATHER'S HOUSE'.

The Lord Jesus was the only person to use it, and the Scriptures only record him using it twice; here in John 14:2, and earlier in John 2; 16, where we read about his cleansing of the Temple at the *beginning* of his ministry. At that time he said, **"Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise"**.

There can be no doubt that, on that occasion, he was referring to the Temple in Jerusalem as his 'Father's house'. His disciples certainly understood this, because we are told that they **"remembered that it was written, 'the zeal of Thy house has eaten me up.'"** (Psalm 69:9)

We may be quite sure, therefore, that, having witnessed his actions, and having heard his words on the earlier occasion, the Twelve had no difficulty in understanding him, when, near the *close* of his ministry, he again used the expression, '*My Father's house*'. They would recognize that Jesus was saying that his 'Father's house' was the Temple. And, indeed, in the whole of Palestine in those days, I doubt if you could have found a single Jew who did not also believe this. Whatever else Sadducees and Pharisees may have disagreed about, there would be no debate on that point!

The Psalmist expressed how all Jews felt about the Temple when he wrote, **"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go up to the House of the LORD.'" (Psa.122: 1).** This was one of the 'Psalms of Ascent' which they sang as they made their way up to the 'City of David' to present themselves before God, in His house, when they celebrated the major annual Feasts, and the briefest of glances at the five books of Psalms will show clearly that such expressions as, '*the house of the Lord*, and, '*God's house*', occur constantly, in referring to the Temple.

SECONDLY: THE WORD 'MANSIONS'.

Let us now think about this word which the 'Authorized Version' uses in John 14:2. Please bear in mind that this well-loved version of the Scriptures which first appeared in 1611, was, for more than 250 years, the only version in English available to the vast majority of Christians. Furthermore, even later, when the 'English Revised Version' was produced in 1881, it still retained the word '*mansions*'.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many hymn-writers, influenced by these early translations, produced songs and hymns which proclaimed the bliss to be enjoyed by the redeemed in the '*many mansions*' of '*heaven*'. How could they have done otherwise?

One of these hymns, popular in certain parts of the United States, proclaims that there will be '*no mortgages in heaven*'. Another has the congregation declaring, '*I want a mansion of silver and gold*'. And another song proclaims that there is '*an empty mansion just waiting for me*'.

You may also have noticed that in some of the 'song-books' in use in this country, we too, are sometimes invited to sing "*Yonder, over the rolling River, where the shining mansions rise.....*"

The hymn-list is almost endless, and this is perhaps understandable when we realise that many of these songs, hymns and 'spirituals' may be traced back to the Negro slaves, who, before – and even after – their emancipation, living in appalling conditions, and having little to hope for in this life, and supported only by their faith, focussed their hopes on the '*mansions of glory*' in the '*better land*' on '*the other side of the Jordan*'.

It is interesting to notice that in the Lord's statement, '*In my Father's house*', the word for '*house*', is '*oikos*', which is the usual Greek word, and occurs more than 100 times in the New Testament. In contrast, the other word he used, that is translated '*mansions*', is the Greek word '*monee*', and this occurs only once in the entire New Testament; here, in John 14:2.

In versions of the New Testament produced after 1881, '*monee*' has been rendered in a variety of ways, but '*mansions*' is not now used. For example,

- the 'Revised Standard Version', published in 1946, '*mansions*' was replaced, first, with '*abiding places*', and later in the 2nd edition of 1971, with '*rooms*'.
- Moffat's translation has '*abodes*'.
- Knox gives us '*dwelling places*'.
- The 'New King James Translation' says, '*places to live*'.
- E.V.Rieu renders it '*resting places*'.
- And, one 'translation', 'The Living New Testament', (which really is not a translation at all, but an interpretation – and a ridiculous one at that), offers us, '*houses up there where my Father lives*', which is even worse than '*mansions*'!

MANY ROOMS IN THE TEMPLE

We see, then, that what the Lord said was, '*In my Father's house are many rooms*'. The disciples would not take this as a reference to heaven, but, would know he was alluding to the Temple, and they would realize that he was using an illustration, because they most certainly knew that the Temple-complex contained about 70 rooms, all having their particular uses. '*Many rooms*'!

In other words, Jesus was using the Temple as an object-lesson; presenting a sort of parable; painting a picture, with the intention of teaching his disciples something of tremendous importance.

WHAT WAS THE MESSAGE?

John 13:1 reveals that Jesus was aware that the time had come for him to **'depart out of this world'**. He also knew that when he broke this news to his disciples it would have a devastating effect upon them, and so, at v.13, we hear him addressing them with that tender expression, *'little children'*. He was right, of course!

Four of them responded immediately to the news that he was going away. It seemed that they were losing him, especially since he had warned them, **"Where I am going you cannot come."**

- Peter looked for a destination. *"Where are you going?"*
- Thomas, the practical man, asked to know *how* they might come to know the way.
- Philip, the spiritually-minded man, was concerned to know *to whom* Jesus was going. **"Show us the Father."**
- And, finally, Jude wanted to know *why* Jesus promised to reveal himself to them, but not to the world.

So, when Jesus said, **"Let not your hearts be troubled... In my Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you,"** he was reminding them that, just as there were many rooms in the Temple, which represented God's dwelling-place among His people, with His Presence filling all of them, so, also, the entire Universe is His 'house' and it, also, is filled with His Presence.

The glorious truth revealed by Jesus is that the Father, occupies all of Time and Space. The Psalmists and the prophets had hinted at this truth. They caught glimpses of something that was really quite beyond their comprehension. It remained for the Lord Jesus to speak about it in this definitive, confident and reassuring way.

- Everything that exists has been created by the Father – and is filled by His Presence.
- Planets and worlds – known and unknown, seen and unseen – are 'rooms' in His house.
- Our Earth is one of those – and Jesus was about to leave it.
- But he was only moving *'from one room to another'* in his *'Father's house'*.
- One day, these men, who had been saddened by the news of his imminent departure, would rise up and follow him. They, also, would go to that *'other room'* which their Lord was now going to prepare for them.
- He would not be far from them; just in the next room in the Father's house.
- For all Christians such a message as this should dispel the fear of death and draw out its sting.
- And, we should always remember that, of all the religious faiths in the world, Christianity alone brings such a comforting message!

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(The Question Box is empty!)**

Editor's Note. I have discussed the lack of questions with Frank in the past and we have decided that there is no point in 'making-up' questions to keep this feature going – questions must be genuine inquiries from readers or their contacts. I am personally committed to this feature continuing because we need authoritative, researched answers to questions. So it is up to you the readership. No questions means no QB and the SS will be very much the poorer for that.