

What Does the Bible Say About Heaven? Revelation 21:1-8

Introduction

- 1) One of the promises of the Bible is that those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ will one day spend all of eternity with Him in a place called heaven. However, it is surprising to listen to people describe what that heaven will be like and who all will be there. Unfortunately, there is more confusion than clarity, more human speculation than divine revelation.
- 2) For example: *68% of Americans believe they will go to heaven when they die. Only 3% believe they will go to hell (*Newsweek*, Nov. 1, 1999, p. 73).
*43% of Americans believe pets will go to heaven, while 40% think it is only for people. Interestingly, Northeasterners were the most likely to believe pets will enter the pearly gates, along with younger people. The same poll discovered that 87% of those surveyed believed in heaven, 8% did not, and 5% had no opinion. (*ABC News / Beliefnet Poll*, July 23, 2001).
- 3) What would heaven be like if you could plan eternity? Dorothy Brandle of Fresno picked “an unlimited charge card;” an unidentified Maryland woman opted for chocolate; Francis Pratt of Latrobe, Pa., asked for an “instant replay” of God’s creation of the universe; and Robert Holden of Swanton, Ohio, wanted to “be able to play golf every day (if there are days.)” Phillip Pinkstaff of Gary, Ind., envisioned the celestial realm as a place where “we’d play lots of baseball.” He intended to drive “one of God’s fastballs into the upper deck.”
- 4) Well the fact is we don’t choose who gets there and we don’t choose what heaven will be like. That’s God’s business and I, for one, am glad it is, for the heaven I find described in Revelation 21-22 is more awesome and wonderful than anything man could come up with.

Transition: Let’s go to the Bible and let God tell us what heaven and eternity will be like.

I. Look forward to a new heaven. 21:1

- Chapters 21-22 are a unit, yet there is a clear 3-fold division: 1) 21:1-8; 2) 21:9-22:5; 3) 22:6-21.
- John again begins a new section with the statement, “And I saw...” The vision of the “great white throne judgment” has passed. The scene wonderfully shifts from hell and the lake of fire to the new heaven, new earth and New Jerusalem.
- John sees first “a new heaven.” Heaven is mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible, and right at 50 times in Revelation. 3 heavens are mentioned in the Bible: 1) the earth’s atmosphere where the clouds are and the birds fly; 2) the stellar heavens where the planets and stars reside; and 3) the unique dwelling place of God where good angels and saints will live forever and ever. **POINT:** That heaven has not been created yet and no one is there right now. Believers who die do immediately go to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), but that is an intermediate place of blessing, not our final heavenly home.

II. Look forward to a new earth. 21:1

- **Isaiah 65:17**, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.”
- **Isaiah 66:22**, “For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the Lord, “So shall your descendants and your name remain.”

- **2 Peter 3:10-13**, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”
- Taken with 2 Peter, our understanding is not that God renovates but recreates heaven and earth. The old completely disappears.
- No more sea is understood to mean, 1) the removal of large bodies of water, 2) the destruction of the source of the satanic beast (13:1), or 3) the place of the dead (20:13). The latter views take the terms in a moral/spiritual sense, not in a cosmological/geological sense.
- In an article in *Time* entitled “The End” (by Michael Lemonick, Jun. 25, 2001; pp. 48-56), the question is raised... How will it end? In fire or in ice, as Robert Frost put it, or with a bang or a whimper, as T.S. Eliot framed the question? The conclusion, based on new evidence that has emerged only this year, is that while the universe will survive, for several billion years, ultimately it will end in a whimper. It won’t be the Big Crunch, as some had suggested, a collision brought about by a reversal of direction, so that the universe implodes upon itself. No fire, no bang, just a whimper. The sun in our solar system will continue to heat up but later will begin to burn off and cool down, turning into a white dwarf, and even later devolve into minute particles of space dust. The Earth, what’s left of it, will die a lingering death that will go on for about 100 trillion years. This may be the best speculations and guesses of modern science; we however, have a more sure word from God as to how it will all end and ... how it will all begin when eternity makes its entrance.

III. There will be a New Jerusalem. 21:2 (cf. 21:9-22:5)

- The New Jerusalem will be heaven’s capital. It is described as 1) the holy (pure, spotless in character) city, 2) coming down from heaven (suspected in the air between the new earth and new heaven?), 3) prepared as a bride (beautifully arraigned) for her husband. Thus she is both a place and a people! God’s people have long awaited the coming of the New Jerusalem.
- **Galatians 4:26**, “but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.”
- **Hebrews 11:8-10**, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”
- **Hebrews 12:22**, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.”
- **Hebrews 13:14**, “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”
- Here John only introduces the New Jerusalem. In Revelation 21:9-22:5 he will wonderfully describe her.

IV. Look forward to a new relationship. 21:3

- Heaven will be heaven because God is there.
- Heaven will be heaven because Jesus is there.
- Loud voice (20+ times in Revelation) – signals an important announcement.
- Tabernacle of God is with men – God will again pitch His tent (John 1:14) among His people. His *shekinah* glory will we see “up close and personal,” and forever!
- He will dwell with them – emp. further God’s presence with His people.
- They shall be His people – looks to God’s covenant promise to Israel in Leviticus 26:11-13 now applied to all the redeemed of the ages.
- God Himself (emphatic) will be with them and be their God. Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” That marvelous promise now becomes reality. Will we see God in heaven? Absolutely says 21:3 (see also 22:3-4!)
- “When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be” but... there’s more.

V. Look forward to a new hope. 21:4

- This may be the most precious verse in the Bible.
- Wiped out forever are the horrible effects of sin.
- Note the 4 specific things John mentioned. Does this verse imply the taking away of sad and hurtful memories?
- Ex. When a great pastor whom I knew died (W. A. Criswell), the hurtful things all but faded away, only the good remained in my memory. How much more perfect will God do this in eternity!
- **Revelation 7:17**, “for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”
- **Isaiah 25:8-9**, “He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us, This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’”

VI. Look forward to a new reality. 21:5

- The throne – God the Father (emp. sovereignty and majesty).
- Behold – signals a special announcement. God breaks His silence in Revelation, having spoken only in 1:8, 16:1, 17 and now here. In sovereign majesty God announces His “New World Order” and what a wonderful world it is. No decay, no death, no pain, no tears and ... you can count on it, for the one who declares this; His words are faithful and true (cf. 22:6), trustworthy and authentic, dependable and reliable.

Transition: Yes, all things are new: a new heaven, a new earth, a New Jerusalem, a new relationship, a new hope, a new reality, and finally:

VII. Look for a new security. 21:6-8

- When God speaks the issue is settled. No debate, no discussion. Verse 6 simply affirms, “It is done!” Why? Because the one who speaks is the Alpha and the Omega, the A and the Z, the Beginning and End. He sees it before it happens and He brings things to their end. He is present before it happens and He is present when it ends. Because He is this great God, 2 eternal truths are affirmed: one negative and one positive.

1) See what we get. 21:6-7

- Spiritual thirst is satisfied forever (v. 6).
- All the blessings and privileges of heaven (v. 7).
- Throughout all of eternity God will be our personal Father and we shall be His child (v. 7).

2) See who is gone. 21:8

- A serious warning concludes this summary overview of eternity.
- God provides a selective, not exhaustive list of persons who will not be in heaven. Eight specific sins are noted that characterize the lives of those who will spend eternity separated from God in the Lake of Fire, who experience the second death. The “cowardly” are individuals who, because of fear, will not confess Christ openly when confronted with persecution (see Heb. 10:38-39). The “unbelieving” are those who deny Christ by their conduct and speech. The “abominable” are those polluted by gross acts of idolatry. “Murderers” are malicious, savage killers (especially those who kill the Tribulation saints). “Sexually immoral” are those who lived sexual lifestyles contrary to God’s plan and purpose. “Sorcerers” are those who mix drugs with the practices of spirit worship, witchcraft, and magic. “Idolaters” are worshipers of idols and images (this practice will be prevalent when the world bows to the Antichrist’s image). “All liars” are those who habitually deceive others. None of the aforementioned people will have access to the new Jerusalem. They will spend eternity “in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (v. 8).

Conclusion

Let me conclude by raising and attempting to answer some common questions raised concerning heaven.

1. *Will babies go to heaven?* Yes. Anyone who has not reached an age of moral responsibility or accountability will be the gracious recipient of God’s mercy and salvation. This truth would also apply to those who because of some mental handicap are also incapable of moral discernment of right and wrong. God’s grace, I believe the Bible affirms, will extend to all such persons.
2. *Will we know each other in heaven?* Yes. We will maintain our personal identity in heaven. Men will be transformed, glorified men and women will be transformed, glorified women. It is even possible that we will possess our individual names in heaven. In other words, all of you will be you and I shall be I. Personality and individuality do exist beyond the grave.

3. *Do those in heaven have any knowledge of what is happening on earth right now?* The Bible is not clear. Some believe Hebrews 12:1, 1 Sam. 28:16-18, and Luke 15:7 & 10 teach that persons in heaven have a knowledge of what is taking place on earth. Certainly God and the angels have knowledge of what is taking place on earth. As for believers who are now in heaven, there is no conclusive answer.
4. *Will we be aware of loved ones who are not in heaven?* I do not believe so. The Bible teaches in Rev. 21:4 that there will be no tears, nor sorrow, nor pain in heaven. The knowledge of a loved one who is not there would certainly be cause for pain. Therefore, I believe God will wipe away such memories from our mind.
5. *Will there be marriage in heaven?* No. Jesus said in Matt. 22:30, “for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels of God in heaven.”
6. *Will there be sex in heaven?* That is a most interesting question and has received various answers by theologians. The Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian, Peter Kreeft, argues that there will be sex in heaven because humans are sexual beings and they will maintain their sexual identity throughout eternity. With respect to the issues of sexual intercourse, he says, “I think there will probably be millions of more adequate ways to express love than the clumsy ecstasy of fitting two bodies together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Even the most satisfying earthly intercourse between spouses cannot perfectly express all their love. If the possibility of intercourse in heaven is not actualized, it is only for the same reason earthly lovers do not eat candy during intercourse: there is something much better to do.” (*Is There Sex in Heaven?* p. 131). He concludes by arguing, “this spiritual intercourse with God is the ecstasy hinted at in all earthly intercourse, physical or spiritual” (p. 132).
7. *Will Jesus be the only person of the trinity we shall see in heaven?* No. The Bible makes clear in Rev. 21 & 22, we shall see God in all of His fullness. In other words, we will see that there is only one God, yet this one God exists as three persons; Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.
8. *Will Jesus still have the scars in His hands, feet and side in heaven?* Yes. We will see that these are the only man-made things in heaven!
9. *Can you eat all that you want in heaven and not get fat?* Yes. For in heaven with a glorified body, everything will be processed perfectly and everything will be enjoyed supremely.
10. *Will angels escort us to heaven?* Based upon Luke 16:22, there is reason to believe that when a believer dies, an angel will escort him or her into the very presence of God.
11. *Will we go to heaven as it eternally exists or to an intermediate state of blessedness when we die?* The Bible teaches that we go immediately into the presence of God into an intermediate state, sometimes called Paradise in the Bible. Therefore, we are with God though we are not in our final resting place.

Who will get to go to heaven? Those who have put their personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. The Bible is crystal clear. Jesus, and only Jesus, is the way to spend eternity with God in heaven.