

HEAVEN: OUR FUTURE HOME
Tom's Perspectives
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"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no long any sea."

—Revelation 21:1

If you are a believer who has trusted Jesus Christ as your Saviour for the purpose of Him forgiving your sins, then your eternal destiny is secure. You have a home at some point in the future in heaven. But what is heaven and where is it located? I will examine in this article the basics concerning the biblical teachings about heaven.

BIBLICAL USES OF HEAVEN

In English translations of the Bible, there are more than 500 occurrences of the word "heaven." Most of the verses use either the Hebrew word *shamayim*, which is literally translated "the heights," or the Greek word *ouranos*, which is literally translated "that which is raised up." These words are used throughout the Bible to refer to three different locations or realms: the atmosphere, the universe, and the abode of God. These three divisions have been recognized throughout history in Christian sources. While it is the third usage that we are primarily concerned with, all three usages are common in the Bible.

The first category is *the atmospheric heavens*. Examples of this usage are seen in passages such as Deuteronomy 11:11, 17; 28:12, 24; Joshua 10:11; Psalm 18:13; 147:8; Proverbs 23:5; Zechariah 2:6; 6:5. Verses such as these emphasize the "first heaven" or the atmospheric realm. It is of this realm that Isaiah speaks when he records God's words in Isaiah 55:9-11:

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

The second category refers to *the universe or celestial skies*. Examples of this usage are seen in passages such as Genesis 1:14; 15:5; Exodus 20:4; Psalm 33:6; Jeremiah 10:2; Hebrews 1:10. Frequently the celestial skies or heavens are used biblically in a figure of speech such as a hyperbole (Deut. 1:28; Dan. 4:11, 20, 22) or a metonymy which emphasizes totality (Deut. 4:39; 30:19; Mat. 24:31; Col. 1:23). It is in this realm of the celestial skies and the totality of the universe that we read in Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse." It is also in this sense that we read of Jesus Christ's authority in Matthew 28:18-20: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'"

The third category is as *the abode of God*. Examples of this usage are the primary focus for our examination of heaven as seen in passages such as Psalm 33:13-14; Isaiah

63:15; Matthew 5:16, 45; 6:1, 9; 7:11, 21; 18:10; Revelation 3:12 and 21:10. It is the abode of God that Jesus speaks of when He stated in Matthew 10:32-33: "Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." It is the abode of God, the "third heaven," that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 12:2. Jesus referred to heaven in this sense many times throughout his ministry. It is also this usage that Paul writes of throughout his letters to the early churches.

Heaven is more than a mystical notion, imaginary dreamland, or philosophical concept. It is a real and present place in which God, the Creator of all things lives. It is a place spoken of throughout the Bible. It is the true home of all Christians. It is where Jesus came from at the incarnation, where He ascended after the resurrection, and from whence He will come again to receive all those who truly follow Him. It is the place which the writer of Hebrews calls a "distant country" and for which those in his "hall of faith" longed (Heb. 11:13-16).

THE ETERNAL HEAVEN

As Christians, the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20 that "our citizenship is in heaven." Heaven is somewhere beyond earth and our universe. Heaven is in existence now and has been the dwelling place of God since eternity past. Heaven is the dwelling place of God, though God is not limited spatially to heaven since He is omnipresent. Scripture gives us some glimpses of heaven as the throne room of God (Isa. 6; Ezek. 1 & 2; Dan. 7:13-16; Rev. 4 & 5). But Scripture indicates that when eternity arrives heaven will be located on the new earth.

According to Revelation 21 and 22, the eternal state will begin at the end of the millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. From our current point in history, the next event in God's prophetic plan is the rapture of the church, which will be followed by the seven-year tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, and finally, the eternal state. Eternity is a distinct from the millennial kingdom.

After the judgments at the end of the millennium, Jerusalem will be destroyed by fire along with the rest of the earth (Mat. 24:35; 2 Pet. 3:10). However, according to Revelation 3:12 and 21-22, there will be a new city, the New Jerusalem, which will replace the destroyed city and which will continue throughout eternity. This New Jerusalem is the "eternal city."

Jesus told his disciples in John 14:2-3 that He was going away to heaven to prepare a place for believers. It appears that this place the He is preparing is the Heavenly Jerusalem.

The New Jerusalem will be a heavenly city throughout eternity in that its origin is heavenly, as opposed to having been built upon this earth. However, it will be earthly in that it is physical and geographical, and will be the earthly part of the New Heavens and the New Earth that will replace the current heavens and earth after their destruction. This time the new earth will never be tainted by sin and will thus not be cursed. After this present earth has been destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3:10), then the new city will descend from the heavens.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned

for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them." (Rev. 21:1-3)

Revelation 21–22 is very specific and detailed about the city, its inhabitants, and the blessedness of the eternal state. Though there are many questions we may have about eternity, John's vision leaves no doubt that citizens of this New Jerusalem, *the* Eternal City, will exist in conditions unlike any this world has known.

HEAVEN IS A WONDERFUL PLACE

The Bible describes life in heaven as full of joy, purposeful activity, and worship. When we think of eternity, it's easy to wonder if we will get bored in heaven. However, the biblical glimpses are not ones of boredom. The Bible speaks of at least five activities in heaven: worship, service, authority, fellowship, learning, and rest. Heaven upon the New Earth and in the New Jerusalem will be a place just as physical as our current world, but without sin or the pain caused by the curse. This is why we will receive resurrection bodies so that we can live with our Triune God in perfect fellowship in a resurrected new creation. In fact, Scripture says that the streets of the New Jerusalem will be paved with translucent gold (Rev. 21:21).

When we get to heaven there will be clear recognition of others and we will be able to fellowship not only with God Himself, but also with all other believers. In His resurrection body, Jesus was clearly and readily recognized. In this same manner, we will be known and recognized to each other in heaven. We will not be nameless and faceless souls without identities. Rather, we will maintain our present identities, but in resurrected and glorified bodies that have no infirmities or faults.

Angels will be present in heaven and eternity and believers will also interact with that aspect of God's creation. Church age believers will judge them because of our union with Christ. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Do you not know that we shall judge the angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)? We also know from other passages that the fallen angels who sided with Satan when he rebelled against God will be judged in the future and cast into the Lake of Fire forever with him (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Thus, heaven will be populated with the Triune God (The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit), elect or non-fallen angels, and all believers throughout history from Adam and Eve to the last person saved during the millennium.

CONCLUSION

The important thing that you must know is whether or not you are going to heaven. It is a false view to think that everyone goes to heaven. Since we have all sinned and fallen short of God's righteous standard we all deserve to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. However, God sent His Son (Jesus) to die in our place on the cross, which satisfied God's wrath so that anyone who believes that Jesus' sacrifice paid for their sins then they will be given the gift of eternal life and spend eternity in heaven with God. Make sure you have reserved your place in heaven by trusting in God's gracious offer. In fact, after the Book of Revelation concludes with telling us about heaven and the New Heavens and New Earth it provides one last closing invitation to those who have not trusted Christ when it says: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Rev. 22:17). Maranatha!

ENDNOTE