

THE BIBLE AND THE FUTURE: HEAVEN (PART 1)

Revelation 21:1-8 (ESV) ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Introduction: Popular depictions of heaven often portray it as a place of endless tedium, boredom, or inactivity. Are such depictions of heaven accurate? Is heaven just one long eternal day off filled with mind-numbing idleness? C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*: “There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of ‘Heaven’ ridiculous by saying they do not want to ‘spend eternity playing harps.’ The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them. All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns, gold, etc.) is, of course, a merely symbolical attempt to express the inexpressible ... People who take these symbols literally might as well think that when Christ told us to be like doves, he meant that we were to lay eggs.”

What is heaven like? The question implies that we are compelled to think about heaven by *analogy*. It is *like* a wedding feast (Rev 19:9), a multi-roomed house (Jn 14:2), a city with gates of pearl and streets of gold (Heb 11:10, 16; Rev 21:21), a country whose mountains drip with sweet wine (Amos 9:13). The biblical descriptions of heaven are heavily metaphorical, which doesn't mean that heaven is fictional and boring, but rather unsurpassed in its grandeur and beauty. It is *more* glorious and real than the metaphor suggests.¹

1. *Heaven is qualitatively new.*

The purpose of Revelation 21:1-8 is summed up in Jesus's proclamation in Rev 21:5: “Behold, I am making all things new.” *Newness* permeates the passage. Christ makes all things new — a new home for his beloved Bride, a new heaven and new earth wherein righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13), a new life for those who trust in him. He is in the process of making everything right that has gone wrong with the world.

¹ Several insights for this lesson were borrowed from the following sources: Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2004); William Boekestein, *The Future of Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2019); Derek Thomas, *Heaven on Earth* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2018); Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).

The “first heaven and the first earth” are *the old cosmic order infected by evil and sin*. It is the world as we know it today — in “bondage to decay” and the futility of the Fall (Rom 8:21-22; cf. 2 Pet 3:10).

2. *Heaven is solidly physical.*

Heaven in its final form will be *a physical, tangible place*. The final expectation in Scripture concerning what lies ahead is “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1). We are to expect a new earth! It is something solid and physical rather than something spiritual and ethereal. Earth is comprised of mountains, oceans, rivers, birds and animals. And human beings. The new earth will be comprised of these too, but without the effects of the curse.

3. *Heaven is blessedly perfect.*

It will be perfectly beautiful, sinless, and glorious. Everything negative has been banished (Rev 21:4). The curse will be reversed. Fullness of fellowship with God will be restored. We will experience inconceivably joyous worship.

4. *Heaven is ceaselessly active and creative.*

We will work, labor, and discover. Heaven is depicted as a city in Rev 21:2. Cities are usually active, bustling places. So much for the notion of mind-numbing boredom. According to the parable of the talents, the master's reward to the faithful servants is this: “You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things” (Matt. 25:21, 23, NIV). “Being in charge” or “ruling over” (KJV) many things suggests *a busy program of administrative activity*. We will continue creating and building in the new heavens and the new earth.

5. *Heaven is securely safe.*

Rev. 21:1 says “the sea was no more.” The “sea” in Revelation is a source of evil, rebellion, chaos, and unrest. It was from the sea that the beast emerged (Rev 13:1), but the portal of evil has been closed permanently.

John describes a vast city of enormous proportions and security (Rev 21:15-17)—one interpretation of “12,000 stadia” is 1400 miles! The city shines with the glory and beauty of God.

Conclusion: Will heaven be boring? Absolutely not! We will know freedom from sin, fullness of joy, sinless service, worship, and praise of the Triune God. We will finally—unencumbered by sin and pain—do what we were made to do and be.