

Heaven

1) What is heaven?

- A) The Bible teaches that heaven is the dwelling place of God (Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55). It is a created realm filled with angelic beings who are continually worshipping and serving God (Rev 4). Within heaven is a dazzling and gigantic city—the New Jerusalem—which contains the throne of God (Rev 22:3).

2) Do we go to heaven when we die?

- A) The apostle Paul said that for a Christian, to be “away from the body” is to be “at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). When we die, our spirit leaves our body and goes to be with God in heaven (Luke 23:43; Phil 1:23). There we will worship God and enjoy His presence while we wait for our bodily resurrection.

3) Will we live in heaven forever?

- A) Christians often talk about living in heaven forever, but in fact heaven is *not* our final home. The Bible teaches:
- (1) At the end of this present world, God will create new heavens and a new earth (Rev 21:1–5).
 - (2) We will live on the new earth in our resurrected bodies (1 Cor 15:50–54; Rev 21:24–27).
 - (a) Although our spirits go to be with Christ immediately after death, our physical bodies remain in the grave “sleeping.” Before the Millennial Kingdom of Christ is established, our physical bodies will be resurrected, glorified, perfected and then reunited with our spirits. We will live in our new spiritual bodies for eternity.
 - (3) God will come from heaven to the new earth, and He will live there with us for eternity (Rev 21:3–4).

4) What is the new earth?

- A) Our present world was originally created perfect and without sin. Sadly, Adam rebelled and the entire universe fell under the terrible effects of sin (Rom 8:19–23). Yet God was not caught by surprise. He had a plan by which He would redeem mankind and all of creation from sin. Just as He promises to make us new, He promises to make a new earth:¹
- (1) “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isa 65:17).

¹ Randy C. Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2004), p. 87.

- (2) “For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain” (Isa 66:22).
 - (3) “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).
 - (4) “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” (Rev 21:1).
- B) The new earth will be very different from the earth we know today. There will be no sickness, disease, suffering or death. The ground will no longer be under the curse of sin. The toil and sweat of working the land will be gone and thorns and thistles will vanish (Gen 3:17–18; Rev 21:4). There will be no more sea, and the sun and moon will not be needed to give light to the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1, 23). Animals will no longer fear mankind, and they will never harm anyone again (Isa 65:25).
- C) This present earth, with its natural wonders, is but a foretaste and glimpse of the new earth which is to come. God Himself prepared mankind’s first home on earth: “And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen 2:8–9). The phrase “planted a garden” shows God’s personal touch, His intimate interest in the creative details of mankind’s home. In the same way that God poured Himself, His creativity and His love into Eden, God will also pour Himself into the creation of the new earth.²

5) What is the New Jerusalem?

- A) When most people think of heaven, they are actually thinking of the New Jerusalem. As mentioned previously, the New Jerusalem is a dazzling and gigantic city that is currently inside of heaven. But it will not be there forever. The apostle John told us what will happen after God creates the new heavens and the new earth:
- (1) “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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. 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’” (Rev 21:2–4).
- B) The width, the length and the height of the New Jerusalem are all equal (Rev 21:16). This description allows for two possibilities, namely that the city is either in the shape of a cube or of a pyramid. The size of the city is given as 12,000 furlongs. According to our present-day measurements the city would be roughly 1,400 miles long, high and wide. If placed in America, it would reach from New York City to Denver, Colorado, and from Canada to Florida. It would tower up into the sky more than 200 times higher than Mt. Everest!

² Ibid., p. 233–234.

- C) The city rests upon 12 layers of foundations stones with each layer being inlaid with a different precious gem. These are:
- First foundation – inlaid with jasper, an opaque brilliant red stone.
 - Second foundation – inlaid with sapphire, a blue opaque stone with gold specks.
 - Third foundation – inlaid with chalcedony, a sky-blue stone with stripes of other colors running through it.
 - Fourth foundation – inlaid with emerald, a bright green stone.
 - Fifth foundation – inlaid with sardonyx, a white stone with layers of red.
 - Sixth foundation – inlaid with sardius, a fiery red stone.
 - Seventh foundation – inlaid with chrysolite, a transparent golden yellow stone.
 - Eighth foundation – inlaid with beryl, a sea-green stone.
 - Ninth foundation – inlaid with topaz, a transparent golden-green stone.
 - Tenth foundation – inlaid with chrysoprasus, a blue-green stone.
 - Eleventh foundation – inlaid with jacinth, an orange stone.
 - Twelfth foundation – inlaid with amethyst, a flashing purple stone.

These twelve foundations are not only inlaid with costly gems, but each foundation layer carries the name of one of the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14).

- D) The walls of the New Jerusalem are 216 feet high and are made of jasper, an opaque brilliant red stone. The wall is not for protection but for beauty. In comparison to size, a 216-foot wall around a 1,400-mile high city would be like a one-inch curb around the Empire State Building. There are 12 gates to this city, 3 gates on each side. On each gate is the name of one of the tribes of Israel. Each gate is composed of a beautiful solid white pearl.

- E) Within the city are even more wonders:

- (1) The main street: “And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass” (Rev 21:21).
- (2) The throne of God: “At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God” (Rev 4:2–5).

- (3) The river of life: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city” (Rev 22:1–2).
- (4) The tree of life: “On either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2).
- (5) The New Jerusalem will be the focal point of life on the new earth. We will enjoy the presence of God and worship Him forever (Rev 21:24).

6) What will we do for the rest of eternity?

- A) The Bible indicates that life on the new earth will consist of all the things we enjoy in good conscience here on this present earth: God, relationships, work, play, nature and many other things (1 Tim 6:17). Yet there will be significant differences: sin and its curse will be gone, people will no longer be self-centered, and crime and violence will no longer stain our society. Everyone will be a Christian and will always desire to please God in everything they do. Consider what such a world would be like!
- B) Some Christians mistakenly believe that we will be sitting around all the time with a harp in our hand. Nothing could be further from the truth! Although we will enjoy worshipping and singing praises to God, the Bible teaches that we will also be serving God on the new earth (Rev 22:3). There will be organization and administration within society much like there is today (Rev 21:24). All of us will play a part in this new world, and we will find complete fulfillment and joy in our service to God.