

Is Heaven for real? What the Bible Tells About the Resurrection, Heaven, and the New Earth.

“Heaven” has become a byword in our culture. When you recline in a hammock on a warm summer day, lemonade in hand, you might say it “feels like heaven.” The first bite of your favourite dessert may taste “heavenly,” and help that arrives just when you need it might seem “heaven-sent.”

But what is heaven, really?

The Bible has much to say about heaven. For instance, we’re told God is in heaven, and angels are there with Him. But when you start digging into Scripture to find out more, you’ll also come across a less familiar term: the New Earth.

Is this New Earth different than the earth we’re on now? And what does it have to do with the paradise called heaven we’ve heard so much about?

Furthermore, what meaning does this all hold for our lives today?

While “heaven” seems like a nebulous, far-away concept, it can have more impact on your daily spiritual walk than you might think.

DO WE GO TO HEAVEN AFTER WE DIE? OR DO WE WAIT TO BE RESURRECTED?

If you asked random people on the street what heaven was, there’s a good chance most will answer, “It’s where you go when you die.” This belief is held by many Christian denominations, and it’s embedded deep into our culture. But is it biblical?

Understanding what the Bible teaches about death and what happens after we die is key to understanding what heaven is. When someone you love dies, naturally you want to know what becomes of them. You might even wonder, *Are they aware? Are they in pain? Is there some way I can contact them?*

Because God knows this is a sensitive topic for a broken world like ours, the Bible lays it out as plainly and simply as possible.

“...until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ ... who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen nor can see...” (1 Timothy 6:14-16).

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6).

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake [at the resurrection], some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

“...and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to the God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

“...the body apart from the spirit is dead...” (James 2:26).

That may not be considered a cheerful image, but it is a clear one.

According to the Bible, people lose all thoughts, senses, and emotions once they die. They are not conscious in any sense of the word. They are not looking down onto the earth, watching what everyone's doing. Their spirit, which makes them a living soul, has returned to God.

But this is actually a good thing.

It's sad to think of our loved ones as no longer existing. And it's comforting to think of them in heaven with God.

But we can truly take comfort in knowing ***they are at peace***. It is like they are asleep.

In fact, Jesus likened death to sleep in more than one instance during his earthly ministry. Once when he resurrected the daughter of Jairus after she succumbed to her illness (Mark 5, Luke 8), and again before bringing Lazarus, Mary and Martha's brother, back to life (John 11).

Now imagine what it would have been like if Lazarus and the little girl went straight to heaven after they died. When Jesus brought them back to life, He would have taken them away from the glories of heaven they would have just had a taste of. He would have brought them back into a damaged world full of suffering.

There's another way to look at this idea, too. Would heaven really be much of a paradise if everyone who died was able to witness everything happening on Earth? And be unable to do anything about any of it?

Those in heaven would have to watch the suffering of their loved ones and all the problems in the world. Afterlife wouldn't seem very heavenly.

The above verses of Scripture can give us peace that death is like a deep sleep, a completely unconscious state without thoughts, sensations, or dreams.

But now we're onto a new question. What is the point of a "sleep" unless there's a "waking up"?

Exactly. Hold that thought.

HOW DOES THE BIBLE DEFINE HEAVEN?

If heaven isn't the place where we go right after we die, what is it?

THE BIBLE DESCRIBES HEAVEN AS A LITERAL PLACE, AND IT'S GOD'S HOME BASE.

Jesus also made it clear to the disciples how much heaven mattered:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Heaven is a physical location where humans can go, and where Jesus went after his work on Earth was finished (Luke 24, Acts 1). In fact, He is still there right now, sitting “at the right hand of God” (1 Peter 3:21-22, ESV) and working with each one of us through His Holy Spirit (Hebrews 7:23-26, Romans 8:9-10).

Also, heaven is the place where God reigns and watches over the universe (Psalm 33:13-14). With Him are angels, praising Him and doing His work.

THE BIBLE DESCRIBES HEAVEN AS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE.

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

“In my Father’s house are many mansions...” (John 14:2).

The most stunning description of heaven and the activity around God’s throne is given to us by John of Patmos, the author of the book of Revelation. He describes how, during a prophetic vision from God, he was allowed to see heaven and a glimpse of God’s throne room.

There are many mentions of how bright things are, and that there is no night. Precious stones are sparkling in the light everywhere. The streets are made of gold and the gates are “made of a single pearl” (Revelation 21:21).

John describes a throne that appears to be made of jasper, surrounded by an emerald rainbow. A set of burning torches and a sea as transparent as glass also fill the throne room. Around the throne are seated twenty-four elders and four winged creatures covered in eyes.

The elders and the creatures are both giving praise and honour, acknowledging the one seated on the throne. They declare the holiness and worthiness of this Person for creating all things in heaven and on Earth (Revelation 4:1-11).

The throne is surrounded with rumbling thunder and flashes of lightning. The identity of the one seated on the throne is revealed by the elders and creatures when they praise the “Lord God Almighty” (Revelation 4:8).

THE BIBLE DESCRIBES HEAVEN AS A PLACE WITHOUT EVIL, WITHOUT SADNESS, WITHOUT FEAR.

When God brings His followers to heaven, it will be in a state of finality for sin. The world, as we know it, will have already ended. We will be made perfect so we can live with God in the Eden-like environment He always intended for us.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Through John’s words we’re able to get a feel for what heaven is: a real, physical place and the location of God’s throne. Heaven is a perfect, sinless place where Jesus is right now, as He does His work on earth through His Holy Spirit.

But how do we get there? What can us sinful humans do to ever be good enough to step into heaven?

HOW DO WE GET TO HEAVEN?

While Jesus was on Earth, He told a parable about a wedding feast a king hosted for his son. The people the king invited refused to come, so he sent his servants out into the town and to bring back as many people as were willing to come.

When everyone arrived, each was given a white garment to wear, but one guest refused to take it. When the king saw this, he had the man thrown out (Matthew 22:1-14).

What does this story about a king's wedding feast have to do with getting to heaven?

Just like in the story, God is searching for people who are *willing to become citizens of heaven*, and he will gladly accept them.

But there is one condition.

Like the white garments given out at the wedding feast, *we must accept the grace God offers*.

We must give up the idea that we can get to heaven our own way. We must acknowledge that only God's power and righteousness can get us to heaven. We make a decision to follow God and yield to His will in our lives. It's that simple.

HEAVEN AND THE SECOND COMING.

Once we are redeemed by God's grace, after we make the decision to follow Him, we are promised entrance to heaven—when the time comes.

Christ explained the plan before He left Earth, promising to come back for us (John 13:1-3). Christ's return—known as the Second Coming—has been a pinnacle of Christian faith ever since the first apostles began spreading the good news of the Gospel. And even though centuries have passed since Jesus spoke those words, His promise still holds true.

The book of Revelation has all the details of the plan and gives us a stunning view of what the Second Coming will be like.

- The sky will break open and a figure on a white horse will emerge.
- He will bear a jeweled crown, and His eyes will be like fire.
- He will be called Faithful and True, a righteous judge coming to make war.
- Behind Him will be the entire army of heaven in pure, white garments atop snowy white horses (Revelation 19:11-14).

When the Second Coming occurs, it will be more incredible and spectacular than anything we can imagine. All evil will be blotted out and the people living on earth who are still faithful to God will be taken to heaven. With them will be everyone who died believing in Christ, their bodies made fresh and new as they are resurrected, (Revelation 20:4-6).

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will be no means precede those who are asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

This first resurrection has been the hope of millions of Christians, beginning with the first martyrs willing to die for their faith. The Bible tells us what it will be like for all those who return to heaven with Christ, both the living and the resurrected.

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:15-17).

A place like that—without any suffering or pain, where everything is restored—can only be possible in the presence of God. He is what makes heaven heavenly.

HEAVEN AND THE MILLENNIUM

Next you might wonder, *What exactly will we be doing in heaven?*

Revelation mentions how God’s people will reign with Him for “a thousand years” (Revelation 20:1-6).

According to the Bible, as we reside with God for the first thousand years in heaven, also called “The Millennium,” we will spend most of our time learning.

“...until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. ...” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

It’s no wild guess that we’ll have questions about where people ended up where they did. How some are with us in heaven and others aren’t (Daniel 7:22, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 1 Corinthians 6:2).

And not only will we be learning from the cases of other humans, but of the fallen angels as well. Like the apostle Paul said, “Do you not know that we are to judge angels” (1 Corinthians 6:3).

That seems like a pretty heavy responsibility. But remember we will have been made perfect, freed from sin. And God is right there beside us.

That’s what this thousand-year period is for. When it’s over, we will understand God’s judgement.

We will see for ourselves that the people God didn’t bring into heaven chose to ignore His call. It will also be clear that heaven wouldn’t have been paradise for them because they were too attached to their sin. Heaven—a place of total selflessness and peace—would instead be torture for them.

And this won't be all we'll be learning. Think about anything you've ever wondered about. During this time, *all* your questions will be answered.

What's more, you'll have the universe at your fingertips, and the Creator of all things as your tour guide.

But while all of this is going on in heaven, what will be happening on Earth?

Those who were not resurrected during the Second Coming because they rejected Jesus Christ will remain in their graves. The planet will be desolate, except for one being and his angels.

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a short time”
(Revelation 20:1-3 ESV).

With the earth completely devoid of any human life, Satan and his evil angels will be trapped without anyone to torment or deceive. Left to an earth in ruins after the violent disasters that happened right before Christ's Second Coming, Satan will have nothing to do except wander the world, observing the consequences of all the suffering he caused.

The prophet Isaiah described the scene of the empty earth. The people who chose to follow Satan, who broke away from and tried to change God's laws, will ultimately be wiped out, and the planet itself will feel the final consequences of sin (Isaiah 24:1-6).

There will not be a single living thing left on earth. Like every place where God's power is not present, the earth is completely dead, and Satan has no choice but to sit and consider his actions for the thousand years.

And when the thousand years are finished, will Satan repent? Will he be sorry for his actions? Though he was given ample opportunity...no. Quite the opposite.

THE END OF EVIL

At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released just in time for the second resurrection—the resurrection of the wicked, the judgement of the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15). These are the people who rejected Christ, and they will end up standing with Satan.

Christ will return to Earth and sit on a holy throne to resurrect and confront the wicked, and a whole host of angels and the redeemed will be watching.

When the wicked are resurrected, they will not have been redeemed by God's grace so they will still bare the blemishes of sin and disease. It will be as if the ground and the sea are spitting them out (Revelation 20:12, 13) and the marred earth itself will have “fled away” (Revelation 20:11) in the presence of God's holiness. It will just be the wicked and Jesus. He will present their judgment and they will be consumed by fire, along with Satan and his angels.

This will truly be the end of the world.

Then Jesus says from His throne, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5). John sees “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1).

Then the Holy City God created will descend from heaven and be set up on Earth.

“I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:21:2)

Christ will lead His people, humans and angels, into the splendid city and shuts the gates.

THE NEW EARTH AND THE NEW JERUSALEM

Once Earth is cleansed and evil is finally done away with, God will set to work making the world new, just like He designed in the Garden of Eden. It will be living and bright and perfect. After thousands of years of trouble and suffering, God’s people can finally see the world the way God originally wanted it to be.

This is the city John described in Revelation 21 as “a bride adorned for her husband.” A place where God will dwell among His people and there will be no more pain or sorrow.

The city itself will be as radiant as a jewel, clear as crystal. It will have great, towering walls with twelve gates built into them, and the names of the twelve sons of Israel will be carved over the gates.

Its measurements are described as a perfect square, with the foundations “adorned with every kind of jewel” (Revelation 21:15-20).

There is no temple in this New Jerusalem. No church or chapel or designated place of worship. We won’t need it anymore because God will be *right there with us* (Revelation 21:22).

We won’t need the sun or the moon, because God’s glory will provide all the light needed (see Revelation 21:23, 22:5).

John goes on to describe the River of Life flowing from God’s throne and through the centre of the city. And growing over the river is the Tree of Life, with its twelve different kinds of fruit which change every month, and leaves that are meant for “the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1-5).

It’s almost impossible to imagine. Your every need will be taken care of—the need for nourishment, the need for companionship, the need for a home.

God originally created us as complete beings, meant to be able to live alongside Him for all eternity. We will finally be redeemed and restored, ready for an eternal life that surpasses our wildest dreams.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US TODAY

After catching a quick glimpse of heaven, Christ's triumphant return, Satan's demise, and a world made new, our short lives seem to shrink in perspective. Yet it's easy to still wonder, *What does all this mean for me? What are we supposed to do with all this information? How is this supposed to affect us?*

Peace and hope, rather than fear. We can take comfort that death isn't something to be scared of. We won't be immediately zapped up to heaven or sent to hell for eternal torment. Death will seem little more than a nap once we awaken to see Jesus Christ in the clouds. And while we still trudge through our lives here on earth, He promises to stay beside us so we can face it bravely, awaiting the day when He'll come back to take us to our eternal home.

Informed decision-making. This insight into God's final judgement emphasizes how important our choices really are. Every day we are choosing to either take the side of God or the side of self, which is encouraged by Satan. Free will is one of the first gifts God gave us, and our choices ultimately decide where we'll be on the last day. It isn't a choice made once, it's a daily choice. And God is the only one who truly knows our hearts.

Foresight. It's also important to understand what will happen in the end, so we don't have to be afraid the next time we hear about the apocalypse or an "End of the World" event. From the Bible, we already know how the world is going to end, so it's not something we have to be scared of, but rather an event to look forward to.

And if we already know how things are going to end, we can come to realize how petty the cares of this world really are. Thinking "heavenward" thoughts can actually improve our perspective here and now.

Christ's second coming is going to end the world as we know it. He will undo all the trouble and chaos sin has brought to our planet and make something better than we could ever conceive in our own minds.

If you ever find yourself becoming afraid of what the future holds or how everything's going to end, remember Christ's promise that He's coming back soon and bringing the Holy City with Him.

Imagine walking streets of transparent gold, eating from the Tree of Life, meeting Moses, and talking with the apostles. God has this incredible plan for us, greater than anything we could dream up, and He's eagerly waiting to take us home to be with Him.

And all you have to do is choose Him.