

THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN – PART 3

The Eternal Heaven

- The intermediate/present/temporary heaven is the place we go to between our past lives on earth and our future resurrection to life on the New Earth...but it is not our final destination...though it is a wonderful place, the present heaven is not the place we are made for
- God's children are destined for life as resurrected beings on a resurrected earth...that is our true destination...the new heavens and the new earth...the eternal heaven...a new Eden
- For now, heaven and earth are separated...but one day they will be merged: the new earth will also be heaven since God will dwell there with His people...God's heavenly abode will one day be merged with a new universe for a perfect dwelling place that will be our home forever
- This will be a new kind of unification of heaven and earth
- This eternal heaven has always been the hope of the redeemed

Psalm 102:25-26 ~ Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.

Isaiah 65:17-19 ~ For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.

Isaiah 66:22 ~ For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me," declares the Lord, "So your offspring and your name will endure.

Hebrews 11:9-10 ~ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God

Hebrews 11:16 ~ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 13:14 ~ For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

- The redeemed of all the ages have set their hope on the eternal heaven because it is in this eternal city where Christ is going to fix everything.....It is described in Revelation 21-22

It is a New Heaven and Earth

Revelation 21:1 ~ 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

- John describes a time when "the first heaven and the first earth passed away"
- Peter describes how this will happen...how God judged the entire earth once and will do it again:

2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12 ~ But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men...But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up...the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

- This will be a meltdown of universal proportions when the elements burn with fervent heat...everything we know will be instantly burned up
- Peter describes a scene whereby the present universe will explode like a gigantic nuclear bomb, and the resulting intense heat will literally dissolve all the matter in it
- But it won't be a complete annihilation of what God created...it will most likely be a renewal of it...a temporary destruction that is reversed through resurrection and restoration
- This results in a "new heaven and a new earth" – not new in time but new in quality

It is Similar to the Present Earth

Revelation 21:1 ~ 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

- Since John calls this the "new heaven and new earth," there must be some continuity and similarity between the present heaven/earth and the new heaven/earth
- That suggests that the current earth has a significant number of clues about what Heaven will be like
- First, the new heaven is a city...vs. 2 ~ and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem
- We understand what a city is → Cities have streets, houses, buildings, parks, stores...culture, music, art, athletics, events, restaurants...people engaged in all kinds of activities and conversations...it is a place of political power, economic industry, higher learning, refined culture
- Think of all you can do in Grand Rapids – you can kayak a river...go to a White Caps game...go to a concert...walk in Riverside park...listen to the symphony...eat at Festival...smell the beautiful flowers at Meijer Gardens...hike in the woods...ride the White Pine Trail...eat at restaurants
- These characteristics are true of the heavenly city as well, though in a far greater way
- Life on the new earth will center around a great city, the New Jerusalem, much like it does today

The concept of a city includes relationships, activity, responsibility, unity, socialization, communion, and cooperation. Unlike the evil cities of the present earth, the perfectly holy people in the new Jerusalem will live and work together in perfect harmony.
John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22., 264.

- Second, our eternal home is a country: Hebrews 11:16 ~ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one
- Countries have territories, rulers, national interests, pride in their identity, citizens,
- Our eternal heaven is a country as well...That's why John says the new heaven/earth has nations and kings: Revelation 21:24 ~ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it
- Third, heaven has much of the natural beauty what we have on this earth
 - It has mountains: Revelation 21:10 ~ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain
 - It has river/water: Revelation 22:1 ~ Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal
 - It has fruit trees: Revelation 22:2 ~ in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
- All this shows that there is continuity between the present/first earth and the new earth
- So if you want to know what our eternal home is going to be like...just look around
- Heaven is not going to be a boring existence where all you do is sit on a cloud and play the harp forever
- Much of what we know and do and love about life on earth we will also do and love about heaven

The biblical doctrine of the New Earth implies something startling: that if we want to know what the ultimate heaven, our eternal home, will be like, the best place to start is by looking around us. We shouldn't close our eyes and try to imagine the unimaginable. We should open our eyes, because the present Earth is as much a valid reference point for envisioning the new Earth as our present bodies are a valid reference point for envisioning our new bodies. After all, we're living on the remnants of a perfect world, as the remnants of a perfect humanity.

Randy Alcorn, Heaven, 81

It Has Been Prepared for Us

Revelation 21:2 ~ And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband

- Notice that this holy city “comes down from heaven”...the assumption in vs. 2 is that this holy city...the new Jerusalem...comes all the way down until it meets the new earth
- And when it does, heaven and earth will be permanently and eternally bound together...this new city actually becomes part of the new earth
- So while the present, intermediate heaven is in the angelic realm, separate from earth, the future heaven will be in the human realm, on earth...So God will one day make his abode, not in heaven, but on earth!
- Notice that this holy city was “made ready”...this implies that the New Jerusalem has already been prepared before the creation of the new heavens and earth
- It was brought to the new earth from the abode of God because it has already been prepared
- New Jerusalem, the capital city of our eternal home, descends right before John's eyes out of the very realm of God where it has already been prepared!
- Who prepared it? → John 14:1-3 ~ Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 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.
- What is the place Jesus is preparing? → The holy city of the new heavens and earth! The Father's house with many dwelling places
- Think about this... when Christ made the material universe at the beginning of time, He did it in 6 days
- But now He has been working on this holy city of the new heavens and earth for over 2000 years
- What a magnificent place it must be...And He has prepared it for us!

It is Where God Dwells

Revelation 21:3 ~ 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”

- When the new heaven and earth are joined, God will dwell among his people
- This will be the full fulfillment of the New Covenant promises: Ezekiel 37:27 ~ My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people
- God's plan has always been to dwell among His people...like He did in the Garden of Eden
- God's plan for the ages has been to merge together the once separate realms of heaven and earth under Christ's lordship
- And that's exactly what we see described here in Rev 21:3...the dwellings of God and mankind – heaven and earth – will be brought together
- Heaven is God's home and earth is our home...but in the eternal state – God's home becomes our home and our home becomes His home

- If heaven is God’s special dwelling place and if the dwelling of God will be with mankind on earth, then heaven and earth will be essentially the same place!
- God’s ultimate plan is not to take us up to live in a realm made for Him but to come down and live with us in the realm He made for us
- So though the present heaven is “up there”...the future, eternal heaven is “down here” where we will dwell together with God
- When this happens there will be no difference between heaven and earth!
- The hope of our eternal home is the joy of a God-centered heaven
- As marvelous as heaven will be, God Himself is heaven’s greatest prize!

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the fountain. These are but drops; but God is the ocean.”
Jonathan Edwards

- The best part of life on the new earth will be enjoying God’s presence forever

Going to heaven without God would be like a bride going on her honeymoon without her groom. A heaven without God would be like a palace without a king.

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, 187.

I’d rather be in hell with Christ, than be in heaven without him.

Martin Luther

Oh, to think of heaven without Christ! It is the same thing as thinking of hell. Heaven without Christ! It is day without the sun, existing without life, feasting without food, seeing without light. It involves a contradiction in terms. Heaven without Christ! Absurd. It is the sea without water, the earth without its fields, the heavens without their stars. There cannot be a heaven without Christ. He is the sum total of bliss, the fountain from which heaven flows, the element of which heaven is composed. Christ is heaven and heaven is Christ.

Charles Spurgeon

It is a Place of Joy and Perfection

Revelation 21:4 ~ and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

- In the eternal heavens there will be: no more tears...no more death...no more mourning...no more pain
- For the Christian, life on this earth is the only hell we will ever experience...this is as bad as it gets for us!

It Has a Spectacular Capital City

Revelation 21:10-21 ~ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was

pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

- I'm not much of a city fan...I would much rather live in the country away from the city
- But there is something spectacular about a large city...something beautiful about its architecture, its lights, its buildings and streets, the culture and life
- Notice how John describes the city of God: vs. 11 ~ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.
- Heaven itself is an infinite, eternal expression of the divine glory...in fact, it is so brilliantly light that John describes this city as a gigantic brilliant jewel compared to jasper, clear as crystal...probably a diamond
- What a spectacular sight...John saw the eternal city of God coming down from heaven, and it resembled a sparkling, crystal, diamond-like stone blazing with the glory of God's very nature
- It is the very glory of God that will illuminate all of heaven and earth in our eternal home!
- Isaiah 60:19 ~ No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory.
- Rev 21:23 ~ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.
- There is no need for a light source in heaven because God himself is the light of heaven
- Notice too vs. 12-13 ~ It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.
- There are 3 gates on east, 3 on west, 3 on north, 3 on south and these are some spectacular gates: vs. 21 ~ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl
- It is hard to imagine gates that big, each made of a single pearl...these massive pearls will serve as the gates which lead in and out of the heavenly city!
- vs. 25 ~ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed
- In ancient cities, the gates were shut at night to protect the people from robbers or invading armies
- But in heaven, the gates will never be closed...There will be no enemies or threats
- The gates then simply serve as the means by which we will be able to leave and enter the city
- They become the means by which we will travel to and from the infinite universe
- Citizens from outside the gates will regularly travel in through them: Rev 21:24 ~ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.
- That implies that there will be other cities on the new earth
- There's more...vs. 14 ~ And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.
- The foundations are named after the 12 apostles
- So the gates are named after the 12 tribes of Israel and the foundations are named after the 12 apostles
- Shows that Israel and the church will be brought together in the city of God to form one people of God
- Notice the dimensions of this city...vs. 15-16 ~ The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.

- It is perfectly symmetrical...a massive cube....1500 miles wide, 1500 miles long, 1500 miles high



By way of illustration, if one corner of the city were placed on Los Angeles, a second corner would sit on Mexico City, a third corner on St. Louis, Missouri, and the final corner on Edmonton, Alberta.

- That's about 2 million square miles – that's the equivalent of 14 states of California put together or 4807 cities of Los Angeles
- To put it into comparison, Kent County is about 850 square miles and has almost 622,000 people
- The city of Grand Rapids is 45 square miles and has about 190,000 people with a population density of about 4235 people per square mile
- That means if the heavenly city was populated with the same population density as Grand Rapids, it could house 6.35 billion people (population of the world is about 6 billion)
- That's just square miles....Including the 1500 miles in height, it comes out to 3 billion cubic miles
- If you include the height and calculate the same population density as Grand Rapids, the city of God will be able to accommodate nearly 10 trillion people
- John describes the beauty of this city: Rev 21:18-21 ~ The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.
- This is a place of unbelievable and indescribably beauty
- It is a place of immense color and brilliance that will satisfy our love for beauty for all eternity
- And we get the joy and hope of getting to share in the glory of God's capital city as our eternal home!
- Enjoy the shadows of this life – the Grand Canyon, the beauty of a flower blooming in spring, the joy of a newborn baby, the excitement of skiing down a mountain, the pleasure of a day at the beach, the creativity involved in designing a home – but remember those are all faint outlines of the New Earth

It Lacks Some Wonderful Things

A. No Temple

Revelation 21:22 ~ And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple

- There is no need for a temple in the eternal state since God Himself will be the temple where we will constantly be in His presence
- This is a phenomenal reality...in the New Jerusalem, everyone will be allowed unimpeded access into God's presence and His throne

B. No Need for Sun

Revelation 21:23-24 ~ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. (cf. Rev 22:5)

- Some think this means that there is actually no light source at all in heaven – no sun, no moon
- But it says that the New Jerusalem will not NEED their light
- The emphasis isn't on the elimination of the sun and moon but on their being overshadowed by the greater light of God...God Himself will be the light source of the New Jerusalem
- This will restore the original pattern that existed before Genesis 1 - there was light in the original creation before the creation of the sun and moon (presumably God's glory)

C. No Threats to Security

Revelation 21:25-27 ~ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

- Nothing unclean will come into our eternal home...No threats to security...think about that: no deadbolts on the door...no fear of someone breaking into your house...no one will rob you
- See Rev 22:15 ~ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

D. No Needs

Revelation 22:1-2 ~ And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations

- Look how John describes the all satisfying nature of the New Jerusalem – there is a city, a river, and trees
- I love a river – we live a stone's throw away from the Rogue River
- There is a river in heaven too... flowing down the city's main street...for drinking, enjoying
- There is a tree of life...Remember that the tree of life in the Garden of Eden was a source of ongoing physical life...a real tree, with special properties to sustain eternal life...their sin banished them from it
- But on the new Earth, our access to the tree of life is forever restored...with 12 kinds of fruits
- So in the New earth, we will eat freely eat the fruit of the same tree that nourished Adam and Eve

E. No Curse

Revelation 22:3 ~ And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him

- In heaven, the curse will be reversed...overturned and erased forever...the sins we struggle with will be gone when we live in our resurrected bodies on a resurrected earth...completely free of the curse
- I love being home: it's where my wife is, my kids are, where I can eat my wife's home cooking, relax and watch some college football on the sofa, walk around in sweat pants and t-shirt, where friends come over to visit, where I can read on the deck...home
- For Christians that's what heaven is like...To be in resurrected bodies on a resurrected Earth in resurrected relationships enjoying a resurrected life with a resurrected Jesus is what it really means to be home
- The city of God is our eternal home, the welcome refuge that awaits us and calls our name
- I can't wait to get there...how about you?