



Kingdom of Dreams

Dream a New Dream of Eternity

Finding Hope in Our Eternal Home

Let's be honest. Most of us are just not that excited about heaven. In fact many of us are probably more looking forward to the upcoming summer blockbusters than to eternity. There are several reasons for this, I think. First, there is the whole death thing. It has been said that death is the number two greatest fear, right behind public speaking. Since, presumably, you have to die to get to heaven, it is something many folks would rather not think about. Next, for those of us who are relatively young, life after death doesn't present itself as that pressing of an issue. Modern medicine has greatly extended the average life span of both women and men, so for many in Western culture heaven is just not on the radar screen. Finally, for those of us who do consider the reality of Heaven, if we are honest, we probably imagine it as a pretty boring place. One author sums up this sentiment when he says this:

Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service... We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks. Forever and Ever? That's it? That's the good news? And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more 'spiritual'. We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can.

John Eldredge, The Journey of Desire: Searching for the Life We've Only Dreamed Of (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 111.

If we claim to know Christ, we know we should be more excited about spending eternity with Him. Our apathy exists in large part, due to the great amount of confusion concerning heaven. Is it a place of monotony and boredom where we sing old hymns like a broken record? Is it a real place or a place for Casper the ghost floating around on cloud 9? The Bible has much more to say on this topic than we sometimes give it credit. Let us cast aside our pre-conceived ideas and Dream a New Dream of Eternity.

Something to Consider

When you think of heaven, what is the first thing that comes to mind? Explain why you think this was the first thing that popped into your head.

Let everyone share what they wrote down, this should be a fun and revealing exercise. The point of this is to show what sources influence our thinking the most. This should set up the section where we spend time where we look at common misconceptions of Heaven.

Does the thought of spending eternity in Heaven excite you? Why or why not?

The group should feel free to be honest here. They may all be very genuinely looking forward to the reality of heaven, but the likelihood is that at least one person will express disappointment or a lackluster attitude. Encourage your folks that if there is disappointment, that is ok. The point of the study is to help address some of that.



Barbara Walters recently did an ABC Special, called *Heaven—Where is it? How do we get There* in which she basically did a study of differing religious worldviews and their perspectives on the afterlife. Our purpose here is to look at the biblical presentation of Heaven, not give an apologetic for it over and against other systems of religious thought. For more information on the uniqueness of the Christian message a suggested resource would be *Jesus Among Other Gods* by Ravi Zacharias (this comes in DVD and book format).

What in the “Heaven” are we talking about?

When one of our loved ones dies “in Christ” we say they have gone on to a “better place”. A few questions come to mind. What is the nature of this better place? Does the Bible answer this question? What difference does this make?

In the next section we will attempt to clarify our language concerning Heaven by looking at one of the primary passages devoted to it. Some of what is presented may seem strange to those who are considering this for the first time.

You may get some resistance in your group in taking the book of Revelation “literally”. Without getting into a lesson in hermeneutics, we must concede that Revelation is of the apocalyptic genre and highly symbolic. However, most modern, evangelical interpreters, regardless of their theological stripe, take Revelation 21 and 22 to be a literal depiction of the consummation of human history and a transition to the eternal state. Our point in this study is not to get into an argument over millennial issues or the rapture, but to get straight at what heaven will be like. For those who have no idea what I am talking about, disregard the previous comments.

Read Revelation 21:1-8

“The revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1) was written by the apostle John while in exile on the island of Patmos, just off the coast of modern Turkey. It was addressed to seven actual churches. Revelation begins with letters from Christ himself to these churches, letters that include commendation, criticism, and comfort. Then comes a long series of interrelated visions of judgment on the wicked, all in highly symbolic language. The church is depicted under great distress, but is assured of the final triumph of Jesus as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19:16), bringing to an end the rebellion of humanity and ushering in “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1), where God himself will reign forever and ever (11:15). John wrote about A.D. 95–96.

Introduction to Revelation—*Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001)

¹Then 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. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And 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.” ⁴He 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.” ⁵And 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.” ⁶And 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. ⁷The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸But 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.”

Revelation 21:1-8 ESV



Taken at face value, this passage has some very important implications. Here are but a few:

- ⇒ A New Heaven and new Earth implies there was an old Heaven and old Earth. (v. 1)
- ⇒ The New Heaven and New Earth are connected in some way through the New Jerusalem. (v. 2)
- ⇒ The dwelling place of God will be with man in the New Jerusalem on the New Earth. (v. 3)
- ⇒ The One on the throne is “making all things new”. (v. 5)
- ⇒ Not everyone will spend eternity with God on the new Earth. (v. 8)

Old Heaven, New Heaven - What's the difference?

In his book, aptly entitled *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn discusses the Biblical concept of there being an old and new Heaven:

When a Christian dies, he or she enters into what theologians call the intermediate state, a transitional period between our past lives on Earth and our future resurrection to life on the New Earth. Usually when we refer to “Heaven,” we mean the place that Christians go when they die. When we tell our children “Grandma’s now in Heaven,” we’re referring to the intermediate Heaven.

Later he makes this paradigm-shifting statement:

The answer to the question, Will we live in Heaven forever? Depends on what we mean by Heaven. Will we be with the Lord forever? Absolutely. Will we always be with him in exactly the same place that Heaven is now? No. In the intermediate Heaven, we’ll be in Christ’s presence, and we’ll be joyful, but we’ll be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and permanent relocation to the New Earth.... It bears repeating because it is so commonly misunderstood: When we die, believers in Christ will not go to the Heaven where we’ll live forever.

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Sisters: Multnomah Books, 2004) 41-42

Question: Does the idea that Heaven in some way “changes” seem weird to you? Explain.

Question: Is it easier for you to imagine what a New Heaven or a New Earth would be like? Explain.

Alcorn along with many others argues that the church has historically been overly influenced by Platonic thought (thought reflecting the ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato) when it comes to the Spiritual and physical world. Plato believed that the physical world was just a reflection or shadow of eternal spiritual forms. These forms, true realities, could be apprehended by the intellect and should be the pursuit of our lives. To understand what is good, true, and real had nothing to do with the body, but only with the psyche or soul. Unfortunately his philosophy also led many to think that only spiritual things are good, and all things physical are bad. This is a foreign view from the Scriptures that teach God created all things, including the world and our bodies as “good” (See Genesis 1-3). The Bible presents the idea that God, who is Spirit (Jn. 4:24) will dwell with His people on a physically redeemed new Earth.

The “new Jerusalem” ... does not remain in a “heaven” far off in space, but it comes down to the renewed earth; there the redeemed will spend eternity in resurrection bodies. So heaven and earth, now separated, will then be merged: the new earth will also be heaven, since God will dwell there with his people. Glorified believers, in other words, will continue to be in heaven while they are inhabiting the new earth.

Anthony A. Hoekema, “Heaven: Not Just an Eternal Day Off” *Christianity Today* (June 6, 2003)



What Dreams Really Come

We don't look forward to heaven more because it seems like such an other-worldly place that it is impossible to conceive of. It is true that It will be vastly different from this world in so many ways, but it is something we can and should conceive of. The old Heavens and Earth shall pass away and the New Heavens and Earth shall descend. We won't be floating on clouds, but will have resurrected bodies (1 Cor. 15) and be in the presence of our Resurrected Lord. For those who have a difficult time imagining what this will be like, Randy Alcorn paints us a wonderful picture.

...close your eyes and envision the most beautiful place you've ever been—complete with palm trees, raging rivers, jagged mountains, waterfalls, or snow drifts. Think of friends or family members who loved Jesus and are with him now. Picture them with you, walking together in this place. All of you have powerful bodies, stronger than those of an Olympic decathlete. You are laughing, playing, talking and reminiscing. You reach up to a tree to pick an apple or orange. You take a bite. It's so sweet that it's startling. You've never tasted anything so good. Now you see someone coming toward you. It's Jesus, with a big smile on his face. You fall to your knees in worship. He pulls you up and embraces you.

At last, you're with the person you were made for, in the place you were made to be. Everywhere you go there will be new people and places to enjoy, new things to discover. What's that smell? A feast. A party's ahead. And you're invited. There's exploration and work to be done— and you can't wait to get started.

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, 18

Suggested Reading

Heaven by Randy Alcorn

Article, by theologian Anthony A. Hoekema, "Heaven: Not Just an Eternal Day Off," *Christianity Today* (June 6, 2003) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/122/54.0.html>

Scripture Memory

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 22:3-5 ESV

The Intersection of Truth and Life

Each week we will wrestle with the intersection of God's truth with our lives and how we might respond? Here are a few questions for this week:

- Does thinking through the reality of spending eternity on the New Earth with Jesus change your outlook on this life?
- Does the reality of eternity give you more motivation to share this "blessed hope" with others? Explain.

