

ON HEAVEN

Is Heaven really a city?

When some people think about Heaven they picture a long and boring church service or a bunch of white clouds floating in the sky. Both of these pictures are unbiblical! The Bible tells us that our eternal home is actually a city which has been built for us by God Himself. For example, take a look at this:

Hebrews 11:16: “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

This verse does *not* say “God has prepared for them a cloud and a harp”! The verse is quite clear: our God has prepared for us *a city*. In Revelation the apostle John was given a glimpse of that amazing place:

Revelation 21:10: “And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,”

If you're interested in an eyewitness account of this great city then read the rest of Revelation 21. The details of this heavenly metropolis are quite astonishing.

We don't know if this city is currently inhabited or not. It's possible the city is currently under construction and won't be unveiled until after Judgment Day. What we *do* know is that our ultimate destiny isn't to float on a cloud, but to live in a city.

Do people in Heaven know what is happening on Earth?

Do people in Heaven know what's happening on Earth? There are a lot of reasons to believe that they do. I don't know how much they're aware of, but they seem to have some knowledge of events. For example, Jesus once said this:

Luke 15:7: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

Jesus told us that when a sinner repents there's joy in Heaven. This is a pretty big clue! After all, how could people in Heaven know that a sinner has repented if they don't know what's going on? If events on Earth are causing people in Heaven to rejoice then *people in Heaven must know about those events*.

Or take a look at this:

Hebrews 12:1: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,"

Paul said that we should persevere through the trials of this life because we're surrounded by a great "cloud of witnesses." In the context of a race there are two distinct groups: the people who are running in the race and the spectators who are watching. It's tempting to think that the witnesses Paul mentions are simply other people on Earth, but I think that's incorrect because all of us who are still alive *are supposed to be racing*. The only ones who aren't in the race are those who have already finished it! The witnesses must be people in Heaven who are watching us as we live our lives. (It's a little unsettling to think that we're being

watched by millions of dead people, but keep in mind that Paul *did* warn us about this.)

Will we recognize people in Heaven and remember our lives?

Despite what you may have been told, the idea that you'll forget your entire life once you set foot in Heaven is incorrect. The Bible tells us we will indeed remember. We can see this in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which is found in Luke 16.

One thing to keep in mind when reading that chapter is that Jesus isn't telling a parable. Whenever Jesus told parables He started off by saying "The kingdom of Heaven is like..." This time Jesus didn't do that. Instead He matter-of-factly stated that there were two people and this is what happened to them. The text gives every indication that Jesus was telling a true story, not a fable.

Even though the rich man was dead he still immediately recognized Lazarus:

Luke 16:23: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."

The rich man recognized Abraham – and Abraham recognized the rich man and knew everything about his ill-spent life:

Luke 16:25: "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

We can see from this passage that no one had forgotten

anything. People recognized each other, they remembered their lives, and they knew everything about the lives of others – including people they never met while they were alive.

I think it's reasonable to believe that we'll recognize other people in Heaven and remember our lives. After all, these people did!

Are there books in Heaven?

The Bible tells us of the existence of several Heavenly books. First of all there's the Book of Life:

Philippians 4:3: “And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.”

There's also the Book of Tears:

Psalms 56:8: “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?”

And the Book of Remembrance:

Malachi 3:16: “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.”

From these passages we can see that there are actually several books in Heaven. However, are these the *only* books? It's possible but it's not likely. The Lord promised to give us a city, and cities are full of all sorts of things. What kind of things do cities have? What makes a city a city? Does it have buildings? Parks? Offices? Streets? Restaurants? Libraries? Houses?

This line of thinking may seem crazy, but stop and think. If Jesus had wanted to He could have said “God has prepared for them a cloud, where they will sit and be bored for all of eternity.” He could have also said “God has prepared a giant sanctuary, where the saints will sit in pews and sing hymns forever.” However, God didn't say either of those things! Instead He used a word that we're very familiar with – the word *city*. Is it crazy to think that God used the word “city” *on purpose* to give us an idea of what's in our future? The Lord wants us to know what Heaven is like because He wants our heart to be set on it! How can our heart be set on it if we don't know anything about it? Isn't it possible that since God used the word “city” then maybe Heaven *really is like a city, and has the sort of things a city has?*

Do cities have books? Yes, they do – and they have lots of other things as well. I believe there may be a great deal more for us to do in Heaven than sit on a cloud and strum a harp.

What will life in Heaven be like?

Some people think that nothing exciting or fun happens in Heaven. They believe that during their lifetime on Earth they may have had an exciting career, but once they die it's all over. They need to have all the fun they possibly can in this life because there's *nothing* to do in Heaven. Eternity consists of sitting on a cloud and doing nothing at all. If God called you to be a missionary and you gave up a promising career in order to do that then you're out of luck. You missed out on all the good stuff in life and your reward is everlasting boredom.

Even though this view is common I don't believe it's accurate. The city that God has built for us isn't a boring or dull

place where nothing ever happens. Quite to the contrary! I believe there's more going on there than there is on Earth.

Why do I think this? First of all, there's the fact that our destiny is to *live in a city*, not sit on a cloud. All sorts of things happen in cities. The fact that we'll be living in a city tells us that there will be activity, life, and vibrancy!

There's also clear Biblical support for this. In the parable of the talents the Lord rewarded His servants for a life well-lived. When He did this He didn't take away what they had previously and tell them to go sit on a cloud. Instead He *gave them more than they already had*:

Matthew 25:20-21: “And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.: His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

The five talents the servant was entrusted with weren't taken away. The Lord also didn't seize the additional five talents the servant earned. Instead this man ended up receiving even more stuff to manage:

Matthew 25:28-29: “Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

It's exciting to see that the word which our Lord used to describe our future lives was *abundance*, not boredom! Jesus

expected this man to keep managing the 11 talents he now had, on top of doing new and exciting things. The point is clear: in the afterlife God doesn't take away our talents and leave us with nothing to do. Instead He expects us to *keep using what He gave us earlier* while He gives us *even more!*

God gave us abilities and He wants us to use them to bring Him glory *forever*. These abilities aren't taken away in the next life! Instead they're enhanced and added to. The Lord also doesn't give us talents that we can never use. It's quite possible that the abilities we didn't have a chance to use in this life were meant to be used in the life to come.

Is there sadness in Heaven?

This idea may surprise people. After all, didn't the Bible say this?

Revelation 21:4: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

The verse does indeed say that there will be no more sorrow, crying, or pain. However, this verse is often taken out of context. This promise is about the world which God will create *after* Judgment Day. This is made clear if you read Revelation 20 and 21 in their entirety, but even this verse hints at it. Notice that one of the promises is that there will be “no more death.” When is death finally destroyed once and for all? On Judgment Day. Has death been destroyed yet? No. That alone tells us this promise is about the future, not the present!

There's a passage in the Bible which tells us there are some people in Heaven who are upset about something. We can find it in Revelation:

Revelation 6:9-11: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

Here we have a group of saints who were martyred for their faith in God. These people are clearly in Heaven. Are they blissfully at peace, without a care in the world? Nope. Instead they're crying out to God and asking Him to avenge their blood! They want to see His wrath poured out upon the people who killed them. These people aren't going to rest in peace until God has avenged them.

Is there anything sinful with their request? No, there isn't. God doesn't rebuke them for making this prayer. Instead He tells them to be patient for a little while longer and then He will do as they asked. There's nothing wrong with them asking for vengeance; after all, God did say that vengeance belonged to Him (Romans 12:19). These people were simply asking God to keep the promise He had made. There's nothing strange with the idea that people who were brutally murdered for believing in Jesus want justice to be done.

Here's another way to think about it. We know that Jesus (who is in Heaven) cares very deeply for us. He understands what we're going through because He was tempted as well:

Hebrews 4:15: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our

infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

Do you think that Jesus is indifferent to our pain? Do you think He feels nothing when His children are hunted down, put in prison, and murdered? Do you believe that all of our troubles in our life mean nothing to Him? Of course not! God isn't callous or unfeeling. He has tremendous love and compassion for His children.

So if we're in Heaven and we are like Christ, does it make sense that He would care about the things which are going on in this world and we *wouldn't*? I believe it's much more likely that we will share the emotions – and the compassion – of our Lord.

Are there mansions in Heaven?

Is there any truth to the idea that there are mansions in Heaven, or is this just a popular misconception? The idea that heavenly mansions exist comes from the King James Version of the Bible. In that particular translation John 14:2 reads like this:

John 14:2: "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."

The word “mansion” in that verse is the Greek word “mone” (Strong's #3438). It means “a staying, i.e. residence (the act or the place):—abode, mansion.” All other modern translations of the Bible render the word as “rooms.”

On the surface the word “rooms” makes a lot of sense. “In my Father's house are many rooms” seems plausible. After all, a house does have rooms! I've never seen a house that had mansions inside. The problem is that the word “mone” actually means dwelling place. It's misleading to teach that we will all be living together in one big house – much more misleading than translating that word to mean mansion.

Here's what I mean. Luke 16 has one of the most misunderstood parables in the Bible: the parable of the unrighteous steward. At the end of the parable Jesus summed up its message like this:

Luke 16:8-9: “And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

Jesus said that we should use our earthly wealth to help others so that when we're in Heaven they'll remember what we did and invite us into their homes. That's quite a thought, isn't it? Verse 9 clearly states that we're to “make to yourselves friends” with the “mammon of unrighteous”, which is our earthly wealth. The reason we're commanded to do this is so “they may receive you into everlasting habitations”. To put it a bit more clearly, “so they will receive you into their heavenly home.”

This verse isn't saying that lost people should make friends with saved people so that the saints can bail them out of Hell. That's blatantly unbiblical! Jesus said that people who end up in Hell can't escape and are trapped there. This verse is talking about Christians being invited into the heavenly home of other Christians.

If everyone lives in different rooms in one big heavenly house then this passage makes no sense because you can't be invited into someone else's home *if you already live with them*. Luke 16:9 only makes sense *if each person has their own estate*. For that reason I don't think we'll all be sharing the same house, and that's why the modern translation of John 14:2 is misleading. “In my Father's house are many rooms” sounds a lot like “we will all live together in a giant commune”, which is wrong. We will each have our own, individual homes.

So how large are these estates? Jesus told His disciples repeatedly that they were to store up their treasures in Heaven. In the parables of the talents He made it clear that the reward He would give us for our earthly service was far out of proportion to what we had actually done. This means God has promised to give us *far more than we deserve*. Is it reasonable to think that when we reach Heaven after a lifetime of service and are shown our eternal home in God's heavenly city, the only thing we will find waiting for us is an unfurnished one-bedroom apartment? Keep in mind that this is the same God who decided that the Earth needed a night-light and so created *billions of galaxies* to provide it. This is also the same God who uses gold for pavement! I find it difficult to believe that *any* home on Earth (even the most extravagant ones) will be better than what our Lord has prepared for us in Heaven.

To put this another way: can you imagine someone going to Heaven and saying that their home on Earth was better than the one God created for them in the New Jerusalem? I don't think so. No one in Heaven is going to be looking back at Earth and say that life was so much better there.

Will the Earth be restored? Is there going to be a new heavens and earth?

Our eternal home isn't going to be in Heaven. It's actually going to be here, on Earth! This may come as a surprise to many people but the Bible is quite clear about it.

It's true that when Christians die they go on to be with Jesus in Heaven. At some point in the future the Great White Throne judgment will occur. This is what the Bible has to say about it:

Revelation 20:11-15: "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the

dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

During this judgment Hell is emptied and the dead stand before God in order to be judged. After this judgment is over the wicked aren't cast back into Hell but instead are cast into the Lake of Fire, which is not the same thing as Hell. We know that Hell and the Lake of Fire are different places because verse 14 tells us that Hell itself is cast into the Lake of Fire. This means that Hell is *not* the final resting place of the wicked! *No one will spend eternity in Hell* because the wicked will only remain there until Judgment Day. The everlasting place of torment for those who didn't believe in Jesus is the Lake of Fire.

What about those who *did* believe in Jesus? Well, Revelation 20 isn't the last chapter in the Bible. The apostle John goes on to explain what happens *after* Judgment Day, and what he says is amazing:

Revelation 21:1-4: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with

men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Let's take this one piece at a time. Verse 1 tells us that the current universe – the sky, the stars, and the Earth itself – are going to be destroyed after the Great White Throne judgment. However, God will then make a *new* heaven and Earth. The word “new” here is a special one. It refers to something that's been restored to its former glory. It doesn't mean trading in an old car for a new one. Instead it's like taking that old car and remodeling it until it's better-than-new.

What God is saying is that after Judgment Day He's not going to get rid of the universe and then that's it. Instead He's going to make a *new* universe – a restored one! He's going to remake this planet and put it back to the way it was before mankind sinned. Verse 2 tells us that after God does this He's going to relocate the New Jerusalem (the heavenly city He built for us) *to this new Earth*. Why? So that He can live with mankind! This means God is going to recreate the planet Earth, relocate us there, and then *move Heaven to Earth so He can live with us forever*. That's the exciting truth: we're going to spend eternity *right here on Earth*, and God is going to move here and live with us.

Will there be rivers and trees in the heavenly city?

Absolutely! This is what Revelation 22 has to say:

Revelation 22:1-2: “And he shewed me a pure

river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

The heavenly city really does have a river, and there really are trees. Heaven isn't just a giant cloud that floats in a big void of nothingness.

Will there be mornings and evenings in Heaven?

I don't think so. The New Jerusalem is lit by the glory of God and doesn't need the sun:

Revelation 21:23: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

The Bible even tells us there will be no night there:

Revelation 22:5: “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

However, I *do* believe there will be time in Heaven. We find this in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 8:1: “And when he had opened the

seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

If half an hour went by in Heaven then time must pass there! The reason some people think that time won't exist in Heaven is because of a misunderstanding of these verses:

Revelation 10:5-7: “And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

In verse 6 the angel does indeed say that “there should be time no longer”. However, all the angel was saying was that the mystery of God wouldn't be a mystery anymore because its time had run out. It's like when a teacher stands up at the end of an exam and saying “Pencils down, class, your allotted time is over.” The angel isn't saying that time itself has stopped! After all, if time stopped then nothing else could ever happen. Everyone would be frozen in place.

Will we reign over things in the life to come?

This idea may surprise some people but it's quite Biblical. In fact, this teaching comes from Jesus Himself. In one of His parables He talked about rewarding people for their faithful service, and the reward which was given to them was authority over cities:

Luke 19:17: “And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.”

That's not the only place in the Bible which teaches this. Revelation also says the same thing:

Revelation 5:9-10: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

The people in Heaven are saying that God has made them *kings and priests!* What was their destiny? *To reign on the earth.* Nor is this the only passage that talks about it. Look at what John has to say about the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem:

Revelation 21:24: “And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.”

Here we're told that the *kings of the earth* are going to bring their treasures into the heavenly city. That tells me there must still be kings in the world to come! That means there's actually quite a bit of evidence which tells us that reigning is in our future.

Jesus did make that promise to His disciples:

Matthew 19:28: “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also

shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

One thing the Bible clearly teaches us is that the Lord Jesus Christ always keeps His promises.

Will there be corporations and businesses in the heavenly city?

This idea might seem weird, but stop and think about it. Isn't it possible that in the New Jerusalem people will form teams and work together to accomplish things? Isn't it also possible that some challenges might require large teams, and those teams may need to work together for an extended period of time?

Businesses are groups of people who work together to accomplish a specific goal. It's true that in this life the goal is usually to make money, but non-profit organizations exist even today. Since God has built a heavenly city for us and cities are full of people who work together to accomplish things, it's quite possible that there may be formally-established groups in the world to come that have dedicated themselves to reaching goals.

In today's world when people think of “problems” they often think of crime, or world hunger, or poverty. But there are also mathematical challenges, scientific riddles, space exploration, and all sorts of other things. There are forests to traverse, literal mountains to climb, and so on. Even if mankind had never sinned the world would still be full of challenges, mysteries, and opportunities! I see no reason to believe that doing away with sin and death would make all of these things go away – especially if God expects us to continue to use all of the abilities He's given to us.

Will there be technology in Heaven?

I have no idea if there are computers in Heaven or not. It's

possible that Heaven has moved on to something that's far more advanced, and computers are as primitive to them as stone knives and bearskins are to us. However, there's almost certainly some kind of technology in Heaven, and it's very likely that whatever technology exists there is far more advanced than what exists here.

The reason I believe this is because God has promised us a city (Hebrews 11:16). Cities, by their very nature, incorporate a certain level of technology. You can glance at a photograph of a town and tell how advanced it is. Is the city made of mud huts or log cabins? Does it have brick houses or glass-and-steel skyscrapers? How advanced are its buildings? What engineering principles are reflected in its design? What amenities does it offer? Do its houses have windows? Are they just empty holes or are there panes of glass?

The design of a city reflects the character, knowledge, and skill of the people who built it. The New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, is no different. Since it was built by God it will reflect His character, His knowledge, and His skill. Do you really believe that our modern cities are going to make God's city look primitive by comparison? It seems exceptionally unlikely to me that we're going to enter the New Jerusalem and discover that its streets of gold are lined with mud huts!

There may not be computers, but I do believe the technology and skill in that heavenly city will be astonishing. After all, the city was built by God Himself! It will reflect His infinite power, wisdom, and glory – just like the universe that He created does today.