

Heaven and Hell and Eternal Realities
Part 3

Heaven

First, The Meaning of Heaven and Heaven's in the Bible

The word "heaven" is usually a translation of the Hebrew word shamayim and the Greek word ouranos.

"...we should remind ourselves that the Hebrew here translated 'heaven' is a plural word form technically known as a plural of intensity; and the very fact that the first occurrence of the word is in the plural certainly implies that there are more than one heavenly sphere, one rising above the other." [Wilbur M. Smith. "The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven." (Chicago: Moody, 1968) p. 39]

The word "heaven" in the Bible may refer to one of three major realms (1) the atmospheric heaven, (2) the Celestial - stellar heaven, or (3) the abode of God.

First, the term "heaven" can refer to the Atmospheric Heaven or specifically the atmosphere which surrounds our globe.

- *Exosphere: (greater than 440 miles)*
- *Thermosphere: (50 to 440 miles)*
- *Mesosphere: (31 to 50 miles)*
- *Stratosphere: (7 to 31 miles)*

- *Troposphere: (0 to 7 miles)*

The second realm that the word “heaven” may refer to is the Celestial - stellar heaven, in which the sun, moon, stars and planets appear. Significantly with reference to interest in Astrology – the bible strictly forbids the worship of any of the stellar bodies or (Ex. 20:4, Ezek. 8:16) or to discern the future from the movement of the stars (Isa. 47:13, Jer. 10:2).

*The Bible bears testimony to what modern Astronomy is just now telling us which is that the stars are so numerous that **“they cannot be numbered”** (Jer. 33:22, Deut. 1:10, 28:62, Ex. 32:13, Neh. 9:23, Gen 22:17, 26:4, Heb 11:12, Rev 12:4)*

“How many stars are there in the entire Universe? ...According to astronomers, our Milky Way is an average-sized barred spiral galaxy measuring up to 120,000 light-years across... Astronomers estimate that the Milky Way contains up to 400 billion stars of various sizes and brightness.... And so, if you multiply the number of stars in our galaxy by the number of galaxies in the Universe, you get approximately 10^{24} stars. That’s a 1 followed by twenty-four zeros. That’s a septillion stars. But there could be more than that.”

[<http://www.universetoday.com/102630/how-many-stars-are-there-in-the-universe/#ixzz34vpA3tUn>]

“How strange (then) that as modern man has become increasingly aware of the vastness of the

universe, of the very heavens spoken of at the beginning of the Bible, he has felt that the idea of an eternal home located somewhere in these heavens must be abandoned.” [Wilbur M. Smith. *“The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven.”* (Chicago: Moody, 1968) p.41

The third realm that the word “heaven” may refer to is the the abode of God. Though as we have seen certainly does refer to the atmospheric and celestial heavens, the most important meaning of heaven, is that Heaven is where God dwells and is the ultimate destiny of believers.

Even though we are told in Scripture that “the heavens cannot contain God” (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6) and that God is everywhere present at the same time (Deut. 4:39; Joshua 2:11) these same Scriptures teach that God does dwell particularly in heaven.

Second, The Intermediate State.

However frequently Scripture speaks on the resurrection of believers and life in heaven, the state of the soul between death and resurrection is rarely referred to in the Bible.

It has been stated that there are at least seven different ideas regarding this intermediate state held by various religious groups. (Wilbur Smith. p. 155) But of all those only three would be considered important and two of those are outright rejected by most evangelicals; purgatory and soul sleep.

Purgatory, which is a Roman Catholic doctrine church, is the belief in an intermediary state after physical death in which those destined for [heaven](#) must undergo a period of purification, so as to be fit to enter heaven. There are three good reasons to reject the doctrine of purgatory. First, there is absolutely no foundation in Scripture. Secondly, it is rejected by practically all Protestant groups in the world. Third, if the soul of the believer enters at once into the presence of the Lord (Paul stated in Philippians 1:23 that to die was to be with Christ and in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that to be “absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”) then there is no place whatever for purgatory.

Soul-sleep on the other hand,

The bodies of those believers who have died awaits the day according to (1 Thess. 4:16-17) when the Lord will return from Heaven with a shout and when the trumpet sounds, the graves are going to splint asunder and the disintegrated molecules are going to be reformed into our gloried bodies. .

Third, The Resurrected Bodies. (1 Cor. 15:35-37)

The Biblical doctrine of resurrection is an affirmation that we are a spiritual and physical unity and that God intends to put us back together again. Although the

soul is separate from the body at death, this separation is only temporary.

Some of you could care less about what happens to your body – after you die. You are just hoping to find enough aspirin, icy/hot and duct tape to keep the thing running now. I understand how you feel, I really do, but indulge me for just a little bit this evening. I want you to consider what eternity holds for you physically. Hey, wait a minute did you say, physically? Yes, indeed, one day you are going experience the ultimate extreme, make-over. We can look forward to a new body.

- ***The Resurrected Body Is Real***

Paul addresses this issue with the question, “How are the dead raised up?” found in 1 Corinthians 15:36.

➤ *Death Is Necessary For Resurrection. (v. 36)*

“Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” This verse says that the body is “sown” – “sown” here means “buried.” It seems obvious that there is no need for a resurrection unless one is dead.

➤ *New Yet Part of the Old (vv. 37-38)*

“And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. (38) But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.”

Paul uses the illustration of a seed to explain what he mean about the relationship between the old you and

the new you. He says the seed doesn't look like the fruit it will produce. When you plant a pumpkin seed it does not look like a pumpkin. Although the pumpkin seed does not look like the pumpkin, you can't get the fruit if you don't plant the seed.

The body that is resurrected is a brand new you. If it's not you then it is not a resurrection. It will not be you as you were but a brand new you. Hank Hanegraaf points out that there must be continuity between the old you and new you. He said, "We see that the blueprint for our glorified bodies are in the bodies we now possess. While orthodoxy does not dictate that every cell of our present bodies will be restored in the resurrection, it does require continuity between our earthly bodies and our heavenly bodies. Just as there is continuity between our earthly bodies and the bodies we had at birth – even though all of our subatomic particles and most of our cells have been replaced – so too there will be continuity from death to resurrection, despite the fact that not every particle in our bodies will be restored. In fact without continuity, there is no point in even using the word resurrection." [Hank Hanegraaff. Resurrection. (Nashville: Word Pub.,) p. 70]

Joni Eareckson Tada, was paralyzed in a diving accident, explains it well when she said, "Somewhere in my broken paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become all the more grand when you contrast atrophied, useless legs

against splendid resurrected legs. I'm convinced that if there are mirrors in heaven (and why not?), the image I'll see will be unmistakably 'Joni,' although a much better, brighter Joni." [Joni Eareckson Tada. Heaven Your Real Home. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) p. 39]

- ***The Resurrected Body Is Recognizable.***

One of the most often asked questions concerning Heaven is, "Will we know our loved ones and will they know us?" The only real example of what our resurrected body will be like is what we read of Jesus in the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension. Jesus walked the earth in his resurrection body for forty days, showing us how we would live as resurrected human beings. We are going to have bodies like Jesus. (Note I did not say we were going to become little Jesus') It was the same body He had before he died and it was recognized by his friends.

Missionary Amy Carmichael wrote, "Shall we know each other in Heaven? Shall we love and remember? I don't think one need wonder about this or doubt for a single moment! For if we just think, we know! Would you be yourself, if you did not remember? We are told that we shall be like our Lord Jesus and does He not know and love and remember? He would not be Himself if He did not! And we should not be ourselves if we did not!"

Yet when the resurrected Lord appeared He was so different that at first they did not recognize him. He arose

from the dead and yet upon His body there were still the marks of the crucifixion, where-by his disciples knew implicitly that this was the same Jesus in the same body. He had a real body that could touch and be touched and could and did eat.

- ***The Resurrected Body Is Radically Different.***

In the second question (v. 35) Paul anticipates the question about what kind of body will we have that is suitable for living forever in Heaven. In verse forty-two Paul begins answering that question by drawing a series of contrast.

➤ ***The New Body Will Be Indestructible.***

(1 Cor. 15:42) ***“So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.”***

The first thing that Paul tells us is that our new resurrection bodies will be indestructible. Our new bodies are not like our old bodies. Our current bodies wear out. We get old; we begin to notice that everything does work like it use to. We begin to understand the old saying, ***“What does not hurt does not work!”*** We discover that no matter what the infomercials promise we can't stop the aging process. At best we can slow it down somewhat or camouflage it, but we can't stop it.

Our new bodies will be made to last forever. Our resurrection bodies will not be subject to disease or

decay or aging. Our resurrection bodies will literally out-live the stars.

➤ This Body Will Be **Glorious**.(v. 43a)

“It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.”

The word “glory” means brilliance and our new bodies will be glorious like that of the risen Christ. In Philippians 3:21 Paul states, *“Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”*

➤ The New Body Will Be **Powerful** (v. 43b)

“...It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.”

We will possess a new body with abilities beyond our widest imaginations. When Jesus was with His disciples, He had the power to come and go as he pleased, neither walls nor distance were an obstacle. According to John 20:25 Jesus came into the room without having to open the door.

But as Randy Alcorn points out, *“though we know that Christ could do these things (like pass through closed doors), we are not explicitly told that we’ll be able to. It may be that some aspects of His resurrection body are unique because of His divine nature.”* [Randy Alcorn. Heaven. (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2004) p. 116]

We may or may not share those special abilities that Jesus possessed but whatever abilities we do have will be more than could have ever dreamed of.

➤ This Body Will Be **Infinite** (v. 44a)

“It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body....”

To say that we will have a *“spiritual body”* does not mean that we will just be spirits. Somehow many Christians have come to the conclusion that life in eternity is going to be as some kind of a spirit or for lack of a better term, a ghost. I want to dispel the myth that we are going to be some kind of ghost like spiritual being. Jesus reassured His disciples, *“I am not a ghost..”* (Luke 24:39 NLT) R. A. Torrey writes, *“We will not be disembodied spirits in the world to come, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.”*

We will be raised with a body suitable for our new life!

➤ ***The Resurrected Body Is Received At Christ’s Return.*** (vv. 51-52)

Paul answers the question “Who will be resurrected and When?” in verses fifty-one and fifty two.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— (52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

*The dead in Christ will rise first and be given new glorified bodies. Living believers will follow and their bodies will be transformed. Paul further explains the sequence of events in 1 Thess. 4:16-17, *“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. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

I love the epitaph that Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself while still a young man. It wonderfully catches the spirit of Paul's words in 1 Cor.15.

“The body of B. Franklin, printer,(like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding) lies here, food for worms.

But the work shall not be lost; for it will (as he believed) appear once more, in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by the Author.”

Fourth, The New Heavens and the New Earth.

(Isa. 65:17, 66:22, 2 Peter 3:7, 10-14; Rev. 21)

➤ The Dimensions of the City (Rev 21:15-17)

“And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. (16) The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. (17) Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.”

The city at the center of the future Heaven is called the New Jerusalem. The continual coming and going of travelers through the city's gates suggesting that the city is not the whole of Heaven but merely it's center or capital.

*The size of the New Jerusalem is mind boggling. It is the answer to anyone who has ever asked, **“How is Heaven going to be big enough to hold all of the saved down through all of the ages?”** The city's exact dimensions are measured by an angel (Revelation 21:15-17) and reported to be cube-shaped with each side measuring twelve thousand stadia (nearly fifteen hundred miles). We don't have to worry that Heaven will be crowded for the base of the city alone adds up to more than 200 million square miles. A city this size if placed in the United States would reach from Canada to Mexico and from the Appalachian Mountains to the California border. Perhaps even more amazing if we allowed 12 feet per story the city would be more 600,000 stories high. Some (Alcorn) hold that it is within the vast and beautiful New Jerusalem that we will find the personal dwelling places Jesus has prepared for us (John 14:2, Rev 21:2).*

➤ **The Description of the City**

As you enter into the city your are going to stand in amazement. I just want to point out five of the features that John tells us about the New Jerusalem.

➤ **The Gates of Pearl.** (vv. 12-13, 21)

All our lives we have heard allusions to “the pearly gates” of Heaven. Is that just a story? Just an embellishment of the truth? Heaven is usually pictured with a single pair of pearly gates. But the Bible says in verse twelve, “Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: (13) three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.... (21)..... The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl...”

Not one gate but twelve gates, each made of a single pearl. Some find great significance in the fact that the gates to the Heavenly city are pearls and pearls are only created through suffering and travail. Each time one enters the Heavenly city it should be remembered that entrance is only possible because of the suffering and pain of our Savior.

➤ *The Foundation of Precious Stones* (vv. 19-20)

“The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, (20) the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.”

After the gates of pearl you will notice the foundations of the city. Normally, foundations lay underground where they cannot be seen. But this is not the case in the New Jerusalem, for the foundation supporting the walls is fully visible and is indescribably beautiful. This great city will be built upon a twelve layer foundation and each of the layers will be a beautiful stone. A buildings greatest strength lays in its foundation and the New Jerusalem is not built one foundation but twelve.

➤ *The Streets of Gold* (v. 21b)

*And as we enter the streets of New Jerusalem we discover that the streets are pure gold. Oh, I know that people think that it just comes from the tradition of folktales. We sing about the streets of gold in the gospel songs but really? Are the streets really gold in Heaven? Yes, I have it on the authority of the Word of God. The second part of verse twenty-one says, “...**And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.**”*

➤ *The Lamb That Is the Light* (v. 23)

*But the greatest thing in Heaven is not the glory of the city itself. Beyond the glory of the city itself, we have the Lamb who is the Light. In verse twenty-three John tells us, “**The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.**”*

*The prophet Isaiah had predicted in Isaiah 60:19 “**The sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for***

brightness shall he moon give light to you; But the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory.”

In the New Jerusalem there will be no electric lights, no power generators, no lamps of any kind because they are unnecessary. The presence of light will radiate throughout the city and it will emanate from the Lamb who sits upon the throne. The brilliance of the glory of Jesus the Son of God will fill the city.

➤ *The River of Life and Tree of Life.*

Revelation 22:1-2 says, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (2) In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” If you want to find the throne of God, all you have to do is follow the river, because the crystal river flows from the throne.

On each side of the river are planted not just a tree but trees of life (plural). The tree of life once stood in the center of the Garden of Eden. After Adam’s fall into sin, the tree of life was removed to Heaven where according to Rev 2:7 it is today. The New Jerusalem itself is also in the present Heaven, which will be brought down, tree of life and all and placed on the Earth (Rev 21:2). Just as the tree was apparently relocated from Eden to the

present Heaven, it will be relocated again to the New Earth.

The city will be beyond description, but the city will not only be characterized by what is in it but by what is absent from it.

Conclusion

In C.S. Lewis' wonderful books "The Chronicles of Narnia," the characters who've lived in Narnia have completed their time and work there. In a closing chapter entitled "Further Up and Further In," Aslan, the lion who represents Christ, has come for them in order that he might take them home. They are headed away from Narnia and are about to enter Aslan's land. As they do so they are met with familiar scenes. One of the characters cries out, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this."

I believe that when we finally enter Heaven, we will say, "This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason I have loved earth is that it sometimes looked a little like this."

If it were not for the hope of Heaven this life would seem to be impossible at times. However, we need to realize that the hope of Heaven is not a means to escaped

the difficulties of life. In fact just the opposite is true, the hope of Heaven is the means by which we can face the realities of life.

We are aliens and strangers in a foreign country called earth. We live in tents, feeble temporary dwellings but we are headed for glorious permanence. We may live on shifting sand now but we headed every day toward the city with foundations – the city that will never fall - the city whose builder and maker is none other than Jesus Christ, the Carpenter from Nazareth.

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- **The Resurrected Body Is Radically Different.**
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 - This Body Will Be Powerful (v. 43b) (John 20:25)
 - This Body Will Be Infinite (v. 44a)
- **The Resurrected Body Is Received At Christ's Return** (vv. 51-52) (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

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(Isa. 65:17, 66:22, 2 Peter 3:7, 10-14; Rev. 21)

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- **The Description of the City** (Rev. 21:15-17)
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 - The Streets of Gold (v. 21b)
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