

#37 Our Future Eternal Home

Heaven is the final place of destination for all who believe and trust in our Lord, Savior, and Life—Jesus Christ. There are three heavens noted in the Bible. The first Heaven is where we see clouds. The second Heaven is where we see the stars. The third Heaven is where God's throne and His angels reside. It is where the Apostle Paul was taken and shown things that he could not express. **I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don't know—only God knows. But I do know that I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.** 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

As we, who are God's children, look to our future and physical death, we have been told many scenarios about where our permanent Heaven will be and what it will be like. Those imagined images and settings include us sitting on a cloud playing a harp, or singing glorious songs of praise in a choir of humanity, or being instantly transported to parts of the universe fulfilling our heavenly calling. None of which may be close to what God does have for us in our search for practical insights for discussion.

First, let's look at just a few of the scriptures that offer what God has told us, so far. One of the Old Testament prophets wrote in the 8th century before Christ... that God told him He would bring forth out of Jacob's seed a glorious future for His servants (Israel) and **His elect, by another name** (Christian?). He told Isaiah, **Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore.** Isaiah 65:17

This was further noted by John's vision in his writing of Revelation, **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.** Revelation 21:1-2

John was shown further images as God revealed to him, what is to come... **So he took me in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone... The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. There were three gates on each side—east, north, south, and west. The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked to me held in his hand a gold measuring stick to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. When he measured it, he found it was a square, as wide as it was long. In fact, its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles. Then he measured the walls and found them to be**

216 feet thick (according to the human standard used by the angel). The wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold, as clear as glass. The wall of the city was built on foundation stones inlaid with twelve precious stones... Revelation 21:10-20

Peter was looking forward to the new heavens and earth to come... **But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.** 2 Peter 3:13

Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Revelation 21:25-26

It is safe to believe that our future home will be on a new planet earth, placed in re-created heavens and solar system. The city will have walls and gates, but also access by some outside the city. The city will be shaped like a cube 1,400 miles high, wide, and deep. That is the distance from Denver to Atlanta, if you're wondering.

Does that mean we will have physical bodies, breathe clean air, eat healthy foods, and work on assigned projects? Good question. I will take from the writings of an author who has committed much of his career writing and speaking on the topic. Randy Alcorn's best selling book, *Heaven* is a book of nearly 500 pages of focused research and thinking on nearly all aspects of a discussion on Heaven. Having read it several years ago and used it often in my personal research and reference—I will take several paragraphs from its pages to enlighten my *Musing* readers on his scholarly views regarding some aspects of what we are considering. If it peaks your interest, I would encourage you to pick up a copy of his book to soak up his very thorough offering (in blue below).

The most interesting of Acorn's views is how well he presents his case that Heaven for believers will actually be Heaven on Earth. We will be the physical beings that we presently are—with new bodies and certainly new and exciting features as part of our eternal bodies and souls (physical and psychological). As noted in the above scripture passages, we will live and work out of the Holy City, which will physically come to the new Earth from the third Heaven which God has prepared for us. As Jesus told us, **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 14:2-3

Acorn presents his case for Heaven being on Earth...Upon creating the heavens and the earth, God called them "very good." He isn't going to abandon his creation. He's going to restore it. God will bring Heaven and Earth together into the same dimension, with no wall of separation... **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.** Ephesians 1:10

Christ died not merely to make the best of a bad situation. He died so that mankind, Earth, and the universe itself would be renewed to forever proclaim his glory.

God has never given up on his original creation. Yet somehow we've managed to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point clear. *Reconcile. Redeem. Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Regenerate. Resurrect.* Each of these biblical words begins with the *re*-prefix, suggesting a return to an original condition that was ruined or lost. Grace restores nature, making it whole once more. Earth was made for people to live on, and people were made to live on Earth.

In the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, when Jesus is headed toward Calvary, on his knees under the weight of the cross, he says to his shocked and grief-torn mother, "**Behold, I make all things new.**" These words are straight from Revelation 21:5, where they are spoken by the risen Jesus concerning the New Earth, where a renewed humanity will live on a renewed Earth...

Of the New Jerusalem, we're told that "nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27). Isaiah tells us... "**Then will all your people be righteous**" (60:21). Isaiah added, "**and they will possess the land forever.**" The earth will be theirs (God's people), not for a glorious decade, or century, or millennium, but *forever*.

Acorn continues — Do we remain conscious after death? At death, the human spirit goes either to Heaven or Hell. Christ depicted Lazarus and the rich man as conscious in Heaven and Hell immediately after they died (Luke 16:22-31). Jesus told the dying thief on the cross... today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43). The apostle Paul said that to die was to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23), and to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). After their deaths, martyrs are pictured in Heaven, crying out to God to bring justice on Earth (Revelation 6:9-11).

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 is Heaven," we're referring to the intermediate Heaven.

By definition, an intermediate state or location is *temporary*. Life is the Heaven that we go to when we die, where we'll dwell prior to our bodily resurrection, and it is "better by far" than living here on Earth under the Curse, away from the direct presence of God (Philippians 1:23). Still, the intermediate Heaven is *not* our final destination.

We're told we'll have resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:40-44). When God speaks of us having these bodies, do we shrug our shoulders and say, "I can't imagine what a new body would be like"? No, of course we *can* imagine it.. We know what a body is—we've had one all our lives! (And we can remember when ours looked better, can't we?) So we *can* imagine a new body.

The new heavens and New Earth are about God making space and time his *eternal* home. Revelation 21:3 tells us—God will relocate his people and come down from Heaven to the New Earth to live with them: “**God himself will be with them.**” Rather than our going up to live in God’s home forever, *God will come down* to live in our home forever.

John Piper — God promises that the glory of his people will demand a glorious creation to live in. So the fallen creation will obtain the very freedom from futility and evil and pain that the church is given. So when God makes all things new, he makes us new spiritually, and morally, he makes us new physically, and then he makes the whole creation new so that our environment fits our perfected spirits and bodies.

Anthony Hoekema — Resurrected bodies are not intended just to float in space, or to flit from cloud to cloud. They call for a *new earth* on which to live and work, glorifying God. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, in fact, makes no sense whatever apart from the doctrine of the new earth.

R.A. Torrey — We will not be disembodied spirits in the world to come, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.

C.S. Lewis observed, “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversation of the Roman Empire, the great men who built us the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this world. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”

Alcorn on the New Jerusalem — The biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the dead begins with the human body but extends far beyond it. That is why the bodily resurrection of the dead is so vital. And that’s why Job rejoiced that *in his flesh he would see God* (Job 19:26). We will never be all that God intended for us to be until body and spirit are again joined in resurrection.

The best life on Earth is a glimpse of Heaven; the worse of life is a glimpse of Hell. For Christians, this present life is the closest they will come to Hell. For unbelievers, it is the closest they will come to Heaven.

The New Jerusalem is all the square footage anyone could ask for—1,400 miles in length, width, and height. We don’t need to worry that Heaven will be crowded. The ground level of the city will be nearly two million square miles. This is forty times bigger than England and fifteen thousand times bigger than London. It’s ten times as big as France or Germany and far larger than India. But remember, that’s just the ground level. Given the dimensions of a 1,400 mile cube, if the city consisted of different levels (we don’t know this), and if each story were a generous twelve feet

high, the city could have over 60,000 stories. If they were on different levels, billions of people could occupy the New Jerusalem, with many square miles *per person*.

Why will the gates of the city remain open? Because the city's twelve gates are attended by twelve angels. Of course, there will be no enemies outside the city's gates—the entire New Earth will be filled with the knowledge of God (Habakkuk 2:14). And citizens from outside the gates will regularly travel in and out through them (Revelation 21:24,26)

Clearly, these pages cannot do justice to a 500 page book—it is meant only to offer some very brief insights from our Bible and a book that can give us a better understanding of what God has told us about dying and our eternal future.

I have always been somewhat surprised that pastors and teachers avoid any kind of in-depth study of prophecy—specifically teaching on the end of times and our future on the new Earth, new Heavens and Holy City in which we will be living for all eternity. The study of it all breeds a fresh excitement about our Lord's loving-kindness and mercy that have graciously been written for us to soak up the history of God's people, and better understand his work for our present age, and to rest and rejoice in all that He has for us in the eternal future.

Think on these things!!! Bless His holy name!!! — ra