

Joy, Restoration, and Healing

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT HEAVEN



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Why is Heaven Important?

Heaven is more than just hope for a better future. It is at the heart of God's plan for all creation. It is also at the center of the human heart.

The common experience of losing loved ones, and the eventual loss of our own lives, make the issue of heaven one with which everyone must wrestle. We wonder what happens when we die, when our loved ones die. Have we lost them forever? Are they in a better place? Will we see them again someday? What is life after death like? What is heaven like? Can we even know something about heaven?

Heaven is a source of hope, guidance, and meaning for every believer.

Heaven gives:

- Hope for our future destination and strength for life in the present
- Guidance for living as God's people today
- Meaning by giving us the certainty that there is more to life than this world

In the following pages, we will answer some of the most common questions about heaven. We will also broaden our perspective about heaven. We will realize that heaven is not only about *hope* but also about *faith* and *love*.



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What do we mean by heaven?

In popular culture, and for many believers, heaven evokes images of cloudy, ghost-like existence, or angelic beings floating about among the clouds. This image comes directly from the radical separation of the physical and spiritual worlds. Some of the misconceptions are:

Popular View of Heaven

- A place for disembodied, ghost-like beings
- A place where people sing all the time
- A place up by the clouds
- A place everyone goes after death
- A place where all beings live as angels

Biblical View of Heaven

However, the final destination of believers is not an ethereal place like that. The final destination of all believers is *the renewed heavens and earth* anticipated in Revelation 21. A very physical, concrete future awaits us when Christ comes back.

What can we know about heaven?

The answer is not as much as we would like; however, we can know just enough to be confident that:

- We can trust in God's promises.
- We will be with God and our loved ones.
- God will do something awesome with his creation.

How do we know anything about heaven?

- The only completely valid source of knowledge about heaven is the Bible. The Bible has direct and indirect information about heaven—over 600 verses in the Bible mention *heaven*.
- The Bible is the rule with which we can decide if other information is valid.
- However, for the most part, people's ideas about heaven come mainly from literature, movies, and television. Media has shaped much of our imagination and knowledge about heaven. Not all of this knowledge is accurate.
- A non-biblical understanding of the world has informed much of what popular culture knows about heaven.
- It mainly portrays heaven as boring and unappealing.

A non-biblical understanding of the universe

Behind the cloudy, ethereal idea of heaven lies the old Gnostic belief that the physical world is evil and the spiritual is good. Thus, one must focus on the spiritual to escape this evil world. This is not a biblical idea. It ignores some basic biblical facts:

A biblical understanding of the universe

1. God made the whole universe and called it *very good* (Gen. 1:31).
2. Satan is a spiritual being and is evil—thus, not all *spiritual* is good and not all *physical* is evil.
3. God promises a renewed heavens and earth at the end of time (Rev. 21).

Although sin has profoundly affected creation, God never called creation evil. It is under a curse. However, Jesus came to lift that curse and turn it into blessing. God is redeeming all of creation. At the end of time, God will renew all things to their original intention.

Understanding God's original plan for his creation helps us understand our final destination as well.

What Was God's Original Intent for Creation?

God created the whole universe for his own glory and relationships. He intended all his creatures to relate to each other, to nature, and to himself in harmony. Humanity's main and great goal in life is to glorify God (Isa. 60:21; 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31) and enjoy him forever (Phil. 4:4; Rev. 21:3–4).

Human sin twisted God's original intentions. However, because of God's grace and faithfulness, his plans would not be frustrated. He planned to rescue his creation from the effects of sin (Rom. 8:18–27). Through the saving work of Jesus on the cross, people can find peace with God and each other. Through the same process, believers can begin the reconciliation with one another and nature.

Neos and Kainos

Greek has two different words for the idea of *new*. *Neos* is a newness of time; *kainos* is a newness of quality. A *neos* object would mean that the object did not exist and now is there. A *kainos* object means that the object was there but its quality has changed: it is better, it is made different. In this sense, the *new heavens and earth* in Revelation 21:1 are not *neos* but *kainos*. That is, God will renew, transform, improve, and refresh his creation. It will be a *kainos* heaven and earth.

What is the renewed heaven and earth?



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This process will have a glorious ending when Christ returns. He will renew all things (Rev. 21:1). It will not be a different creation or a non-creation. It will be *this* creation renewed; God will restore his creation to its original glory and purpose. As if to close the circle, what God began at Eden he will fulfill in Revelation. Not everything will be the same. Some things from the biblical idea of Eden will continue in the renewed creation; others will end (see page 13).

We do have glimpses of heaven, even if many things are not clear. We can see it in the love we experience for and from people, in the majesty of nature's beauty and power, in the generosity and kindness of people in times of need, in the smile of a happy baby, in the loyalty and warmth of our pets, in the tenderness and wisdom of old age, and in moments of deep emotional and spiritual connections with our loved ones and God.

What is our hope for the future?

Our hope for the future is firmly rooted in God's faithfulness. We can trust that God will do what he has promised us because he has been faithful in the past. We can safely conclude that many features and characteristics of this world will continue in the renewed creation. Of course, there will be things that will end as well. Based on biblical testimony, we can identify many things that will continue and some that will not.



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What Will Continue	What Will End
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical bodies • Emotions (relationships) • Nature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily cycles • Weather • Animals—including pets • Many activities, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work (Gen. 2:15) • Learning (1 Cor. 13:12) • Science • Art (Rev. 14:2–3) • Entertainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No evil • No curse • No brokenness, emotional or physical • No more sin • No death • No marriage • No more suffering or sadness • No war • No famine • No need for temples

"This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." —John 6:39 (NASB)

Besides referring to people, this text also refers to God's creation. The neuter pronoun *it* (Greek *auto*) would seem to extend Jesus' mission from people to all of creation (see Romans 8:19–22 and Colossians 1:20). Jesus' words in John 6:39 are a guarantee that no good thing shall be lost, but rather shall have some new and fulfilled form in the renewed creation. Everything good belongs to Christ, who is the life of the whole world as well as the life of every believer (John 6:33, 40). All things good in this world will continue to exist in the next, but they will be transformed and improved in the renewed creation.

Why does Jesus' resurrection matter?

Jesus' resurrection gives us a good idea of what heaven may look like. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that our future is tied to Jesus' own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12–34). He concludes, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...” (15:17).

- Because Christ has been raised from the dead, our hope is true and secured.
- Christ is the firstfruits or first example of all who will be raised into new life (15:20).
- Our future includes a *resurrected body*; that is, it will be a physical reality. Our future resurrected bodies will be like Jesus' own resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:42–49).
- The women and the disciples recognized Jesus after his resurrection (Matt. 28:9, 17).
- Jesus' body was physical (Lk. 24:39). Jesus ate with his disciples (Lk. 24:41–43). Yet, it was not a body like ours. The Apostle Paul uses two ways to explain this difference:

- 1 Just as different animals have bodies suited for their environment (for the sea, the air, and the ground), so our resurrected bodies will be suited for the renewed creation (1 Cor. 15:39).
- 2 There are also “natural bodies” and “spiritual bodies.” Both Jesus' pre- and post-Resurrection bodies were physical; the difference is about perishability. That is, natural bodies die; spiritual bodies do not. Sin has polluted and damaged our natural bodies; our bodies die, decay, and are unfit for a future in God's presence. Just as God will renew this creation, also marred by sin, God will give us renewed bodies that will not be polluted by sin, will not decay, and will be fit to be in the presence of God.



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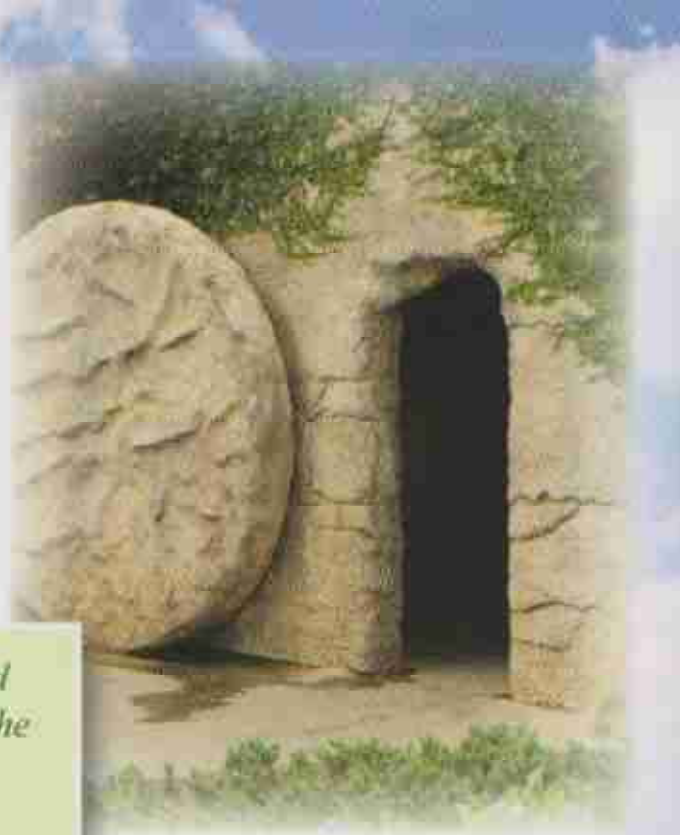
Natural Bodies	Spiritual Bodies
<i>Psychikos</i>	<i>Pneumatikos</i>
Derived from <i>psyche</i> , meaning “soul”	Derived from <i>pneuma</i> , meaning “spirit”
<p>The ending <i>ikos</i> is used in Greek to make an adjective, and it means “in reference to.” It does not describe the material out of which something is made. Rather, it refers to the force that animates an object. In this case, <i>psychikos</i> refers to the human soul that animates our bodies. In the case of <i>pneumatikos</i>, it refers to the Spirit, God's Spirit, as the animating force (see, for example, Rom. 1:11 and Gal. 6:1). Thus, both kinds of bodies are physical. The difference is that a “natural body” dies and a “spiritual body” does not die.</p>	

Will we be able to recognize our loved ones in heaven?

Yes! When Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his friends and disciples, they recognized him (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). There will be continuity between our bodies today and our resurrected bodies in the renewed creation.

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

—Job 19:25–27



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What kinds of relationships will exist in heaven?

Emotions and relationships are a very important part of what it means to be human. There will be emotions and relationships in heaven, though they may not be exactly the same. They will be renewed emotions, emotions as they were meant to be from the beginning: joyful, satisfying, enriching, intimate, and refreshing.

There will be no sorrow, or regrets, or guilt. Rather, love, compassion, gentleness, tenderness, and other emotions will find new heights and depths in heaven. Relationships will be all we can imagine and more.



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What happens when people die?

When one experiences the loss of a loved one, the pain of the loss makes it difficult to focus on the ultimate destination. The immediate concern is *what has happened to my loved one? Is my loved one in heaven?*

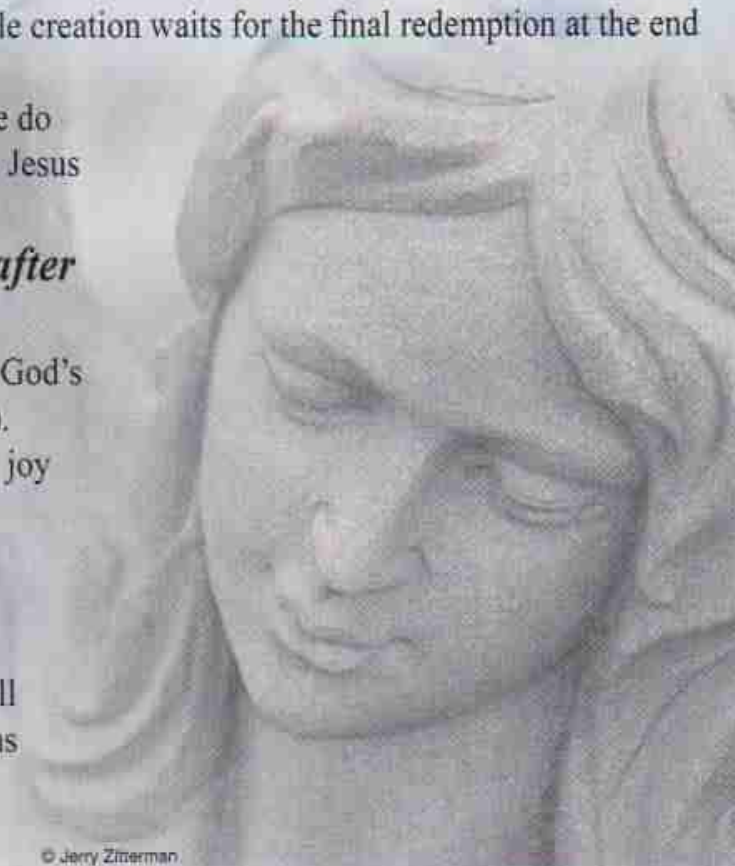
What will happen to me when I die?

Although some of the details remain hidden, we know that:

- Our life and future are secure in God's hands (Ps. 34:6; 91:4; Is. 25:4; Rom. 8:37–39).
- We go to a place of waiting in the presence of God (1 John 3:2–3). Many theologians call this period between our deaths and Jesus' return the *intermediate state*. (See panel 12.)
- It is not a permanent place; the whole creation waits for the final redemption at the end of time.
- It is not a place up by the clouds; we do not know where it is, but it is where Jesus is present.

Can we be sure what happens after we die? Yes!

- Believers will enjoy the blessing of God's presence (1 John 3:2–3; Rev. 21:22).
- Believers from all of history wait in joy and peace, but with longing, for the return of Christ (Rev. 6:9–10).
- As believers, we will join them at some point.
- When God renews all things, we will all dwell together in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21–22).



Will there be disabilities, injuries or deformities in heaven?

No. There will be no brokenness at all, either emotional or physical. God will renew our bodies; they will be beautiful and work as God intended them to.

Because Jesus' injuries were present after his resurrection (Luke 24:39; John 20:27), many people think that martyrs, those who died for the name of Jesus, will wear their healed scars as badges of honor. Although it is possible, it remains, like so many other things about heaven, just speculation.

Will our bodies need food, clothing, and language in heaven?

Because we do not understand the nature of the future bodies, it is difficult to know whether they will need food, clothing, and languages. However, since our bodies will preserve much of their characteristics, we could imagine that language, food, and clothing will have very

similar functions. The beautiful diversity of characters and gifts makes life more interesting. Each person reflects God's image in a way that none other can. Together, with our differences and similarities, with our talents and strengths, we reflect God's image as no individual human could.

Yet, there will certainly be differences as well. Now, differences in language, culture, and expression can be causes of deep, fierce divisions (Gen. 11:1-9). However, in the renewed creation, communication will be transparent. We will say what we mean, and people will fully understand us. This side of heaven, clothing can be used as a status symbol that can serve our pride. It is also used to cover our shame. There will be no shame in the renewed creation, nor will we have the need to boost our ego at the expense of others. Rather, clothing will not conceal but could reveal our inner being.



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Will heaven be boring?

Definitely not! People may get the idea that heaven will be boring because we will worship God all day long in heaven. It is true—we will worship God non-stop! But let's revisit what we mean by *worship*.

Worship is not just the singing and praying part of Christian church services. Everything we do can be worship: from the moment we wake up, take our meals, relate to others, do our work, play games, and live life. Worship is not just an activity; it is primarily an attitude. Worship is the attitude that arises when we recognize who God is and who we are:

God	Human
He is the creator	We are the creatures
He is in control of our lives	We depend completely on God's grace and mercy
He is all powerful	We are limited and weak
He knows all things	We know imperfectly
He loves us unconditionally	We are just learning to love in the same way

Worship is the attitude that acknowledges God's presence at every moment in our daily lives, sometimes moving us to tears, sometimes to great joy, to repentance, to humility, to gratitude, to hard work, to commitment, to compassion, to love.

In the busyness of our lives, we often miss this reality: God is interested and active in our lives! We may go days or weeks without realizing that our words, actions, and thoughts have brought glory or sadness to God. This forgetfulness will find no place in the renewed creation; we will not miss God in our lives because he will dwell in our midst.

Worship = an attitude of awe and gratitude, of humble submission to God's greatness and grace, of obedience and love.

What will we do in heaven?

The Bible does not give many details about activities in heaven. But we can be sure that:

- God loves his creation. He proclaimed it good (Gen. 1:31).
- Nature itself reflects God's greatness and glory (Ps. 19).
- Nature will be renewed so it may fulfill God's purposes.

So it is at least possible that much of the new creation will be similar to what we experience now. The best things about this world will just become better in the renewed creation.

Will we have pets?

Our relationships with our pets are also important and meaningful. These relationships reflect the way God intended us to relate to animals in general: with love, respect, and companionship. Will God, then, resurrect our beloved pets? Yes, it is perfectly possible. We cannot be sure, since the Bible does not address this issue, but based on God's love for animals, their role as our companions, it is at least possible.



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The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.

—Isaiah 65:25

Will there be work?

Because work can become an almost painful toil, we often wonder if *rest* means no more working. But remember that

- Work is also a form of worship;
- God meant for humans to help take care of his creation (Gen. 2:15).

Each person will develop and thrive with his or her own talents. We will no longer work in places that do not allow us to grow as individuals, or where our work might be unappreciated, or where we cannot possibly be happy.

God intended work to be a joyful activity. Rather than just making a living, work should be a way to fellowship with God by caring for his world. For this reason, we can be sure we will have plenty of interesting things to do in the renewed creation!

Will there be learning, science, sports, and arts?

As with work, we could imagine the same for learning, science, arts, and sports. The gifts and talents of painters, poets, athletes and scientists will be used simply to worship God.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

—Colossians 3:23–24



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So, what's so great about heaven?

Everything! Heaven is all we ever dreamt and more. In this life, we grow, reach our peak, and begin a slow descent until our life ends. Life in the intermediate heaven will be much better because we will be in God's presence. However, life in the renewed creation will be beyond our imagination.

It is true that we do not know many facts about the renewed creation, heaven, and even less about the intermediate state, intermediate heaven. However, what we read in the Bible and what we know about God give us great hope and joy.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure,

—1 John 3:2–3

The Ultimate Great Escape?

- Heaven is not an escapist idea.
- We do not think about heaven to escape this world's troubles—we think about heaven as a guide to live better in this world, to serve God with greater joy, and to show others God's great love.
- For many believers who suffer persecution for their faithfulness, and others who suffer in this life in indescribable ways, heaven is a great source of comfort.

- Knowing that God will make all things right one day gives us strength to continue life in faithfulness and obedience.

Who will be in heaven and how do we get there?

- In popular culture, it's common to believe that all people go to heaven, and, in some cases, they become angels. However, biblical testimony does not support either of these ideas.
- Just as we acknowledge the reality of heaven, we must recognize the reality of hell. We don't know very much about hell either, except that it exists, it is a place of punishment, and there is only one way to escape it. The other details are hidden from us.
- The Bible is clear, however, to specify who will go to heaven. Only those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus and who experience the renewal of their hearts will be allowed in God's presence.



For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

—John 3:16–17

What is the New Jerusalem?

The book of Revelation provides another image of the renewed creation: the city of Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). The city is described as a bride and its dimensions are detailed. Believers understand this text in different ways. Some understand the city to be a literal city, and the dimension an accurate representation of what the city will be like. The resulting picture is an enormous cube of about 1,400 miles per side.

Others take this image as a symbolic representation of God's people. Since the image of the bride ready to marry the Lamb occurs before, and it seems applied to God's people (Rev. 19:7), it is possible that the Holy City stands for God's holy people. It is perfectly

possible that there will be no seas (21:1), or sun and moon (21:23). It is also possible that the language is symbolic—it says the “city does not need the sun or the moon...” not that they will not exist. If there is continuity between this creation and the renewed creation, as we have suggested, then the beauty of the sun and the moon will be present, even if not needed.

In any case, it is clear that:

- The renewed creation is God's work, since it comes from above.
- It is large enough to fit all of God's people and more.
- It points at the beauty and splendor of the renewed creation.
- God dwells in its midst.
- It closes the circle from Paradise in the Garden of Eden to the Holy City in the new heavens and new earth.

<i>Original Creation (Genesis)</i>	<i>Renewed Creation (Revelation)</i>
Heaven and earth created, 1:1	Heavens and earth renewed, 21:1
Sun created, 1:16	No need of sun, 21:23
The night established, 1:5	No night there, 22:5
The seas created, 1:10	No more seas, 21:1
The curse enters the world, 3:14–17	No more curse, 22:3
Death enters the world, 2:19	Death is no more, 21:4
Humanity is cast out of paradise, 3:24	Humanity is restored to paradise, 22:14
Sorrow and pain begin, 3:17	Sorrow, tears, and pain end, 21:4

Regarding knowledge of heaven, we must humbly recognize our limits.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever. —Deuteronomy 29:29

- Mystery requires faith to know that God is in control.
- We do not need to know everything.
- We know all that we need to be faithful and obedient.