

Heaven

It's impossible. How can you describe in words what is indescribable? How can eternity and infinity be explained in four pages of notes and an hour of discussion? Paul wrote, quoting Isaiah, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Heaven.

Paul immediately added, "But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (2:10). Later he wrote, "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (Eph.1:13–14). We know heaven is real because through the Spirit, a deposit of heaven has been placed in our hearts. Eternal life is our possession now! ¹ Heaven.

Heaven has some exclusions

In heaven, all tears will be wiped away and all sorrows erased; everything about heaven is joy. There will be no pain, suffering and death; everything about heaven is life. There will be no darkness and amazingly no sun or moon which are replaced by the glory of God. Everything about heaven is light. There will be no sin, nor ungodliness, nor ungodly people. Everything in heaven is holy, pure and perfect. And every curse from Adam's sin will be removed.

For Christians who have died, their bodies may be buried or cremated, but their spirits are with the Lord. They are in heaven; they have no sense of loss, separation or regret; they have seen the face of Jesus and are completely satisfied. What is excluded in heaven is replaced by blessings beyond human comprehension, (Rev. 21:4, 8, 22–27; 22:1–5). Heaven.

Heaven has some wonderful inclusions

Central to heaven is the holy city. Built of pure gold, walls of jasper, foundations decorated with every kind of precious stones, gates of pearl and a central street of pure gold. Resident in the city is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. They negate any need for a temple, nor sun to give light. Their presence brings security for the gates are never closed.

¹ Deuteronomy 11:21 reads, "That your days and the days of your children may be multiplied, as the days of heaven upon the earth." "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Jesus has brought heaven to earth and given us his life.

Flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb is “the river of the water of life” that flows down the middle of the great street of the city. Ezekiel had seen that river, too broad to cross and too deep to wade (Ezek. 47:5). Jesus promised a river that would satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart (John 4:14, 7:38). On either side of the river of life stands the tree of life that produces fruit every month. The leaves of that tree “are for the healing of the nations²” (Rev. 22:2). Crystal clear water, abundant fruit, medicinal leaves; sounds like heaven! (Rev. 21:9 – 22:5).

Heaven is another dimension

Where is heaven? Because humans are limited by time and space, it is natural to think of heaven in terms of distance; but it is more accurate to consider heaven as a different dimension. Paul spoke of a man who was “caught up³ to the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2). The first heaven may refer to the atmosphere, the second heaven to space and the physical universe, and the third heaven is the location of God’s throne.

This third heaven is primarily spiritual but nevertheless real.⁴ At the baptism of Jesus, “heaven opened” (Matt. 3:16), John saw “the Spirit come down” (John 1:33), and heard the Father’s voice. Mark uses a violent word describing the event as “heaven being torn⁵ open” (Mark 1:10). Stephen saw “heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Peter “saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth” (10:11).

Humanity is limited by time and space; we live in a physical universe. Heaven is a different dimension and from time to time God breaks through our ‘space time continuum’, he tears it apart and heaven is ‘opened’. This is what Isaiah prayed for, “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down” (Isa. 64:1).

Jacob experienced this in a dream when he saw “a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord” (Gen. 28:12–13). Jacob responded with, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven” (28:17).

² The phrase “healing of the nations” begs the question, what nations? This cannot refer to the Church who have been given glorious new bodies like Christ (Phil. 3:21) that have no need of medicinal leaves. Are these ‘nations’ the people who have survived the cataclysmic events of the tribulation and the Return of Christ; or were they born during the kingdom reign and accept his reign? There is no definitive answer to this question.

³ The same word appears in 1 Thess. 4:17 when the living saints are caught up, raptured to meet him in the air.

⁴ The resurrected body of Jesus was real. He invited the disciples to touch him, he could consume and presumably process food; yet he could appear and disappear at will. When he returns his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4).

⁵ Matthew uses the same word to describe how the veil in the temple was torn open (Matt. 27:51).

Heaven is closer than we think; we are a heartbeat away, a breath away from heaven. This should change our view of death which in reality is simply stepping through an open door; from this dimension to another dimension, from this life to “the life that is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:19).

Heaven is a celebration

Heaven is filled with music; it appears we will be able to play instruments (Rev. 5:8, 15:2). Heaven is filled with song, “with a loud voice they sang” (5:12); we may not be a great singer here, but we will sing there! Heaven is filled with shouting, “I heard what sounded like the voice of a great multitude in heaven shouting, Hallelujah!” (19:1). Heaven is filled with worship, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty” (4:8).

Psalm 23 describes a journey from green pastures, to quiet waters, through a dark valley and ending at the house of the Lord. There a table is spread, heads are anointed and cups overflow. The Song of Songs, an intimate love poem, reflects the mutual love between a groom and his bride. The bride declares, “He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love” (Song of Songs 2:4).

It is not surprising that many of the images Jesus used to describe heaven have similar celebrations. “Many will come from the east and the west and take their places at *the feast* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Matt. 8:11). “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared *a wedding banquet* for his son” (22:2, 25:10). “Come and share your master’s *happiness*” (25:23). “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until *I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom*” (26:29). And in Revelation 19:7, “*the wedding of the Lamb* has come”.

Heaven is more than a destination

In Session 6, *What Happens when a Christian Dies*, we imagined a train line with a terminus, and likened this to the pre-Calvary idea that death was the end of line. Jesus, through his death and resurrection extended the line to heaven; for the Christian, death is no longer the terminus, it is just another station on the line. Does that mean heaven is now the terminus?

“In my Father’s house are many rooms” (John 14:2), the King James reads “many mansions”. The word for rooms is *mone*, and has two meanings. Primarily it refers to a permanent address, a fixed abode; *mone* usually refers to where you reside. Father’s house is now our home, his address is our address. It is spacious; there are many, a great number of rooms. There is room for everyone who wants to make Father’s house their permanent abode.

There is a secondary meaning to *mone*; the word was used to describe staging places on a journey, lodging houses or staging posts along the way. This infers that Father's house is not just our destination but our destiny which will be an on-going journey of discovery. If this is correct then we may not be spending eternity idly sitting in our 'mansion' but enjoying the continual discovery of knowing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Because the Father, Son and Spirit are eternal and infinite, it will take eternity to discover their fullness.

We go from faith to faith; from glory to "ever increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). God has prepared things, plural, for those who love him (1 Cor. 2:9 KJV). Paul refers to "the coming ages" (Eph. 2:7), ages means indefinite periods of long time. This word is also in the plural; a paraphrase could be, the unfolding ages of eternity. This is heaven, and there's more!

Heaven is a revelation

Paul wrote, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). The invisible God has been made visible in Jesus, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3). But there is something more.

"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" (1 John 3:2). "We shall see him," a stunning statement leading to, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, his servants will serve him, they will see his face." (Rev. 22:4).

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matt.5:8). This was David's desire, "I thing I seek, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4). To see the Lord is the ultimate blessing, "The Lord bless you and keep you; and make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you" (Num. 6:24–26). In heaven we will see him; not in a burning bush or a pillar of cloud, but face to face.

The last word

"Behold I am coming soon! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 22:12–13). In literature and language, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. In position and prominence, Jesus is the First and the Last; in the parade of human history, Jesus leads and concludes the parade. In time, Jesus is the beginning and the end; from eternity to eternity he is God.