

# The Traveling Pulpit

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## A Description of Heaven

### Part I

**“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. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”**

**(Rev. 21:1-5)**

### Introduction

A description of “heaven” that is given in our text was given under divine revelation and reveals just a glimpse of what’s in store for every “born again” (Jh. 3:3) believer. This message is not necessarily an exhaustive study of this passage, but merely a little glimpse into a biblical description of the final state of Heaven for a Christian. Heaven is mentioned numerous times throughout Holy Scripture and sometimes it’s described in figurative language and sometimes literal. Just because the Bible uses figurative language to describe a literal truth, doesn’t mean that something is not real. For example, Scripture uses metaphors (figures of speech) to describe Christ, such as “light” (Jh. 8:12) and “door” (Jh. 10:7), but that only helps us better understand the work of our Savior. One thing is for certain, Heaven is a real literal place and it speaks of the

place of God's presence and God's promise of it being the eternal residence of His redeemed people.

Scripture makes many different references to "heaven" and frequently it's referred to or implied as bring UP. "Heaven" is declared to be God's "dwelling place" (I Kings 8:39) "in the height of heaven" (Job 22:12) from which He looks "down ... upon the children of men" (Ps. 53:2). When "Lucifer" rebelled against God, he is said to have "fallen from heaven" (Isa. 14:12) "as lightning" (Lk. 10:18). When God Incarnate entered the world through the birth of the Christ child, He was recognized as the "last Adam" Who was the "Lord from heaven" (I Cor. 15:45-47). After the resurrection, Jesus ascended "up into heaven" (Acts 1:11) where He is seated "on the right hand of God" (I Pet. 3:22). At the time of Christ's second advent, "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven" (I Thess. 4:16). According to Christ's promise concerning the coming Comforter, "the Holy Ghost" was "sent down from heaven" (I Pet. 1:12) and filled the disciples for service on the Day of Pentecost. When Scripture emphasizes the doctrinal Truth of the Trinity, it teaches that "there are three that bear record in heaven" (I Jh. 5:7).

In doing a close study of Scripture, we discover where there is actually a temporary and permanent state for a believer to enjoy "heaven." The temporary or INTERMEDIATE STATE is a term that we use in referring to the realm or condition in which a soul exists between death and the resurrection. Technically, we can say that a man's life falls into three stages. First, from birth until death, life is lived in this present world in the natural body. Second, between death and the resurrection, life is spent in the INTERMEDIATE STATE where life is lived without a physical body in a soulish state either in the place of paradise or torments. Third, following the resurrection of the body, a person will enter his final and eternal state which will be Heaven for the redeemed or Hell for the unregenerate.

Scripture has little to say about the INTERMEDIATE STATE simply because it's not the ultimate state and we know almost nothing about it. When speaking of HEAVEN, the Bible focuses more attention on the return of Christ and the final state of Paradise than on the temporary state. For a Christian, the INTERMEDIATE STATE is a state of spiritual rest and happiness. However, the INTERMEDIATE STATE for a believer is NOT a state of completion which cannot be finalized until the "soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12) are reunited with a resurrected body. As we'll discover from our study, that final state of completion will be upon this "new earth."

Our text, as do most of the Scriptural references concerning Heaven, refers to the final state of Paradise which is described as the eternal "city" of God called the "new Jerusalem." As we'll see in our study, this is believed to actually be a description of God's redeemed people where they will rule and reign with Christ for all eternity. Our text appears to be the final consummation of "the kingdom of God" (Rom. 14:17), which is the same as "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21), that is taught and anticipated throughout the New Testament. There is much that we don't know about Heaven, but we're promised that it will be a glorious place and the most glorious thing of all, is that Jesus will be there in our midst.

While exiled on the Isle of Patmos, God revealed unto "John," one of Christ's original twelve disciples, the promised "place" that Jesus has gone to "prepare" (Jh. 14:1-3) for

His people. I cannot begin to tell you everything involved in that preparation process, but it's bound to be glorious. As we begin examination of our text, I want to remind you that this description of Heaven that we have in the Book of Revelation is simply the best that can be written by the mortal hand of man even under divine inspiration. Some of what we're going to read about is literal and some is no doubt figurative, but it's all a picture of eternal bliss with our Lord. Anytime we find metaphors, symbolism, or figures of speech in Scripture, like is often the case with prophecy, we must look for the literal truth.

The following passage portrays the beauty of God's people in the eternal splendor and state of Heaven (Rev. 21:1-27). As we begin our study in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of Revelation, let me say that there are numerous views of interpretation when it comes to Eschatology (the study of last things) and especially the Book of Revelation. As Bible Believing Christians, we ought never to fall out of fellowship with anyone who differs from us in our own personal view as long as we agree on the cardinal doctrine that Jesus Christ is Coming Again. With that being said, I'll be sharing with you my understanding of this subject as I admit that it has changed from what it was early in my ministry, and trust that God will use it to encourage believers as we anticipate our final abode with God.

### **Heaven Is a Peaceful Place v.1**

The "new heaven and new earth" will take the place of the "first heaven and the first earth" upon which we lived in mortal "flesh and blood" (I Cor. 15:50). This does not mean that it will be a "new" creation like unto what we read about in Genesis, chapter one and verse one. God did create the "earth" upon which we now live by separating the waters and gathering them together to form the "seas" (Gen. 1:2, 6-10). The word, "firmament" simply means space and refers to the "heaven" that separated the "waters ... above" the "earth" from the "waters" on the "earth." The "waters" that originally surrounded the "earth" were parted to bring forth "dry land" as the "seas" sank into the "earth" and the remaining "waters" arose to form the water vapor in the "firmament" covering the "earth."

Our text is referring to God taking the "earth" and making it a "new" place free from sin with "no more sea" on earth. This is exactly what Peter was telling us when He wrote about God purging the earth during Noah's day by water and the next time it will be a purging by "fire" (II Pet. 3:1-13) for the "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." God will take the present "earth" and renovate it by "fire" to make a "new" environment for His redeemed people for all eternity. The "earth" upon which we now live will be transfigured for our glorified bodies.

With this background, I call your attention to the fact that there will be "no more sea." Scripture doesn't say that there will be no more "water" (Rev. 22:1,17), but there will be "no more sea." It's been speculated that perhaps the mountains will sink into the "sea" and the waters therein disposed or absorbed into the atmosphere. We're currently told that the oceans cover **71 percent** of the Earth's surface and contain **97 percent** of the

Earth's water. Less than **1 percent** of the Earth's water is fresh water, and **2-3 percent** is contained in glaciers and ice caps. This means that today, the oceans contain **99 percent** of the living space on the planet.

Scripture tells us that God has established “the bounds” of our “habitation” (Acts 17:26) among the nations of the “earth” and the “sea” helps to accomplish that divide. However, there is coming a day when all of that is going to change. When we think of the “sea,” we think of storms, hurricanes, restlessness, shipwreck, and separation. Whenever a loved one goes overseas, you tell them goodbye and farewell until you meet again being separated by huge bodies of water. As one sails across the stormy “sea” of death, there is brought a vacancy into our lives on this side, but in Heaven there will be “no more” separation and turmoil, but only peace, harmony, joy, gladness, and reunion (I Thess. 4:17)

### **Heaven is a Pure Place v.2-3**

It's a pure place because it's said to be “holy” and when you find “holiness” (I Thess. 4:7), you will not only find sacredness and separation, but purity. As we pay close attention to these verses, we discover a beautiful picture of what this “holy city” actually is. To begin with, we need to understand that without people a “city” is needless and useless. In order for a “city” to serve a meaningful purpose, it must be occupied with people. During one of my trips to South Korea on an evangelistic crusade, I was taken into the DMZ and shown through a telescope an empty city across the border into North Korea. It appeared to be a big modern city because the North Korean government wanted people to think that they were a progressive nation, but the truth is that it was unoccupied. For that reason, the South Koreans called it Propaganda City because it was only used for propaganda purposes.

The “holy city” that we read about in our text is called the “new Jerusalem” which comes “down from God out of heaven.” Some believe that this will be a literal city that bears a literal likeness of the description that follows. However, from my perspective and interpretation of the text, it's appears to me that this “new Jerusalem” is speaking of the “bride” of Christ that is perfectly sanctified, or in other words, has reached that “glorified” (Rom. 8:17,30) state promised by Christ. This “holy city” is a community of saints and is “holy” because it is speaking of the “bride, the Lamb's wife.” Look at it this way, a church is not a building of human material, but the redeemed “body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

We'll see again, as we progress through this chapter, the apostle John was told by God, in verses 9-10, that he was going to be shown “the bride, the Lamb's wife” and then he was shown “that great city, the holy Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:9-10). Currently, we consider ourselves in the militant church as we “fight the good fight of faith” (I Tim. 6:12), but in our text we see the Church triumphant in Heaven in her “glorified” state. Some people think that this “city” is a picture of the believer's eternal home of Heaven in which they will abide. But, to me, it is a picture of the redeemed “body of Christ” who comprise the “holy city” in Heaven.

This location of “heaven” is no doubt the place of “paradise” that the apostle Paul saw and was not permitted to tell about (II Cor. 12:2) and referred to it as the “third heaven.” The “third heaven” is most likely given this numerical degree when we stop to consider the other spheres of “firmament.” The “firmament” (Gen.1:8) in which we live would be the one of which we are most familiar as we gaze up into the sky. Beyond this “firmament” is found the seat of Satan’s domain which reaches out somewhere into the universe (Gen. 1:14-19, Eph. 2:2).

Verses two and three of our text must not stand alone, but read together and taken in context like all other Scripture. Ancient Jerusalem was the capital of Israel where the kings ruled over the nation. But this “new Jerusalem” is where Christ will rule over His “kingdom” of believers who are made “to reign on the earth” (Rev.5:9-10) with Him. We all know and recognize the earthly city of Jerusalem in the Middle East as being a promised place for God’s Old Testament people where He met with them in the temple when sacrifices were offered. The imagery continues, but takes it a step further by reminding us that God’s redeemed people are the “bride” of Christ. Do any of you, ole timers, remember when it was customary for a virgin bride to wear a white dress? Now in our day, we say that a woman can wear white to either symbolize her virginity or to symbolize her sin being washed as white as snow by the blood of Christ.

In our day of fornication, adultery, and divorces, it’s refreshing for God’s Word to remind us of the purity intended in the marriage relationship. God admonishes His people not to become guilty of spiritual adultery, but to present themselves as a virgin “bride” to “Christ” (Eph. 5:25-27). Heaven will be a “holy” place where there will be no more lust, fornication, adultery, and immorality of any description. This “holy city” is Christ’s “bride” where He will “tabernacle” (dwell) with them forever and after establishing that fact, He proceeds to tell us some more glorious things to expect in Heaven.

### **Heaven is a Painless Place v.4**

“Pain” (internal or external, spiritual or physical) sometimes produces tears and Scripture says that in Heaven, “God shall wipe away all tears.” This life is filled with accidents, injuries, discomforts, injustices, sufferings, worries, aggravations, and frustrations. Everything that brings us “tears” in this life will be done away with in Heaven. But, in Heaven, there will be “no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”

The reason for this is because “the former things are passed away” that we knew during our mortal existence. That means there will be no more cemeteries, funeral homes, obituary columns, sicknesses, hospitals, eyeglasses, crutches, wheelchairs, broken bones, broken homes, unemployment, drugs, drunkenness, cancer, heart disease, poor health, persecutions, or anything else that has caused us “pain.” All these type things can cause “tears” both external and internal because there are so many things that can break our hearts and grieve us on this side of Heaven. But, in

Heaven, God has promised us that when the Lord takes us out of this body of flesh, that we'll know these things "no more."

### **Heaven is a Permanent Place v.4b-5**

God assures us in Heaven that, "the former things are passed away," such as "things" I've just mentioned of which we are currently victims under the curse of sin. However, there is something else that is going to pass "away," which is not directly mentioned but must be included, and this is TIME as we know it today. Things of this earthly existence cannot be called permanent because God plans to renovate this earth by "fire" (II Pet. 3:12). When the "new heaven and new earth" appear, they will be permanent, never to change again.

The "things" of TIME will have "passed away" while ETERNITY will be fully in focus. Eternity can be described in several different ways, but it can be called TIME without end. There will be no need of clocks or time pieces in Heaven because eternity will take the place of time since "all things" will be "made ... new." "All things" means "all things" which tells us that nothing of our current earthly existence will be as it is today. I simply illustrate this by the mention of TIME because we're told in just a few more verses that there is no need for the "sun" and the "moon" (v.23) which governs the matter of day and night and the measure of TIME. We're currently living on a sin cursed "earth," but in Heaven there will be utter perfection in "all things." Our feeble minds cannot even begin to comprehend the environment that is in store for us in Heaven and it will be forever without end.

### **A Ministry Update**

The study of Revelation captures most people's attention the moment they hear the word. The Book of Revelation itself can be a controversial one among Bible students. It's been said that there are probably more varied interpretations of the Book of Revelation than almost any other book or subject matter in the Word of God. That's simply because we are all seeing through a "glass darkly" (I Cor. 13:12) and we're living on this side of its fulfillment rather than on the side of it being fulfilled.

To be honest, down through the years, I've changed my views regarding this particular Book in the Bible as I've studied the rest of the books found in the canon of Scripture. None of us know it all and I'll be the first to tell you that I don't have all the answers to your questions nor to the prophetic teachings of Scriptures. However, from the study of God's Word, I've reached some personal views that I've found to be in keeping with the remainder of Scripture. Besides, that's how we come to the conclusion as to doctrinal beliefs, as we compare Scripture with Scripture.

In the study series that begins this quarter, I would like to share with you the mighty truths about the final state of Heaven that have blessed my soul. May it prove to be a blessing to you also.

Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM