

THE END #3: "WHAT IS HEAVEN?"

- The afterlife was never used as a motivator by God to have Israel follow him - neither the promise of heaven or the threat of a literal hell. God's focus was on how they related to him and the world in this life and on this earth.
- Are our images of heaven real? Is it boring? Do I really want to go there?

1. Just as we saw that the essence of hell is separation from God, so the essence of heaven is the presence of God.

▶ John 14:3: "If I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

▶ Revelation 21:3 "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

➔ *If that concept doesn't get your heart rate going, something's missing in your relationship with God! He is your savior, your lord, your life. In him you live and move and have your being. He is your joy, your love and your hope. And now you are with him forever!*

◆ "I Can Only Imagine" - "Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for you, Jesus, or in awe of you be still? Will I stand in your presence or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing Hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine!"

2. It will have a physical nature.

● Not spirits floating! God initially created us with bodies and souls, and we will live forever with bodies and souls. That's what it means to be human.

▶ 1 Corinthians 15:49 "And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man [Jesus]." ▶ Philipians 3:21 - "by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, [Jesus] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." ▶ John 20:19 Jesus appears in a room to the disciples, even though the doors were locked. ▶ 1 Corinthians 15:52-53 "...the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality."

● Matthew 22:30 "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." [We will be married to Jesus; All relationships in heaven will be intimate; Sex? We will not have *less* pleasure in heaven, but more – just different! Earthly pleasures are mere shadows of heavenly pleasures. We will be *more* real in our new location, not less!

● We will recognize one another (disciples > Jesus); 1 Thess. 4:18.

▶ Revelation 21:4 "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

● No sin: Jesus has defeated sin, evil and the devil by the cross; we are no longer slaves to sin; "the redemption of our bodies".

● Many questions! See "Heaven" by Randy Alcorn.

3. Heaven is Earth!

● Dr. Richard Middleton, Roberts Wesleyan College - "Heaven' was never part of God's purposes for humanity in the beginning of the story and has no intrinsic role as the final destiny of human salvation. Indeed, there is not one single reference in the entire Old or New Testament to "heaven" as the eternal destiny of the believer."

● Of 232 times in NT, 3 imply it: 2 Corinthians 5:1; Colossians 1:5; 1 Peter 1:4. Each is about something *stored* in heaven for us – not given.

▶ Isaiah 65:17 "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." ▶ 2 Peter 3:10-13 "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. . . But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." ▶ Revelation 21:1 "Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away..." the final, permanent dwelling place of God with humanity is on an earth. So then the question follows: Is this new earth on *this* earth – but renewed, or is it another earth created new for us? We don't know. three primary evidences that God will renew this earth:

● Evidences that the "new earth" is our current earth – but renewed:

1. God created the human race to rule the earth and the earth was good. Sin marred it, but sin will be defeated – so the earth will be restored.

2. It fits with the way God motivated his people in the Old Testament to live – to live for God on this earth, not some future one.

3. Many texts speak about restoring creation (which includes the earth) to its original intent. E.g. ▶ Romans 8:21 "[creation will be] "liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." ▶ Revelation 5:10 "...and with your blood you [Jesus] purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." ▶ Colossians 1:20 "[God will] "reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross." (Also Acts 3:19; Ephesians 1:10)

● "Heaven" is the realm of God's life. ▶ "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mat. 6:10) We are called "citizens of heaven" (Phil. 1:27) – not because it's a place we are going to some day, but because it's a realm we live in now.

● "But what abouts" - 1 Thessalonians 4:17 > The people go out of town to meet him and escort him into their city. (?? > John 14:2; Mat. 24:37-41)

▶ Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

● What will we do on this earth? Revelation 5:10 - We will "serve" God and "reign on the earth." To "reign" is to participate with God in glorifying him; it's to use our bodies to live on the earth and develop the earth and serve one another – all for his glory. (Also Matthew 25:21; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Cor. 6:2-3)

● Imagine taking all our interests/abilities and working together to create!

▶ 2 Peter 3:11-14 "...what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. . . But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."

➔ *It means we don't need to fear death; our physical & spiritual struggles here will not be forever; we live now in light of the future; we want our friends to be there!*