

## Heaven

Many people have a misconception of what Heaven is truly like. Revelation chapters 21-22 gives us a detailed picture of the new Heavens and the new Earth. After the events of the End Times, the current Heavens and Earth will be done away with and replaced by the new Heavens and new Earth. The eternal dwelling place of believers will be the new Earth. The new Earth is the "Heaven" on which we will spend eternity. It is on the new Earth where the new Jerusalem, the Heavenly City, will be located. It is on the new Earth that the pearly gates and street of gold will be.

Heaven, the new Earth, is a physical place where believers will dwell with glorified physical bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-58). It will be a new and perfect planet, refined and purged by fire. The new Earth will be free from sin, evil, sickness, suffering, and death.

What about the new Heavens? It is important to remember that "heavens" refers to the sky, outer space, as well as the realm in which God dwells. So, when Revelation 21:1 refers to the new Heavens, it is indicating that the entire Universe will be recreated - a new Earth, new sky, a new outer space. God's Heaven will be also be recreated, to give everything in the Universe a 'fresh start'.

Scripture speaks of different rewards in Heaven. Jesus said regarding rewards, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done." (Revelation 22:12) Since Jesus will be distributing rewards on the basis of what we have done, we can safely say that there will be a time of reward for believers and that the rewards will differ somewhat from person to person.

Only those works that survive God's refining fire have eternal value and will be worthy of reward. Those valuable works are referred to as "gold, silver, and costly stones" (1 Corinthians 3:12), and are those things that are built upon the foundation of faith in Christ. Those works that will not be rewarded are called "wood, hay, and stubble"; these are not evil deeds, but shallow activities with no eternal value. Rewards will be distributed at the "Judgment Seat of Christ", a place where believers' lives will be evaluated for the purpose of rewards. "Judgment" of believers never refers to punishment for sin. Jesus Christ was punished for our sin when He died on the Cross, and God said about us: "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 8:12) What a glorious thought! So the Christian need never fear punishment, but instead can look forward to crowns of reward that he / she can cast at the feet of the Saviour.

Different terms are used in the Bible for Heaven and Hell. The word "Paradise" is used as a synonym for Heaven. (2 Corinthians 12:3-4; Revelation 2:7) When Jesus was dying on the Cross and one of the thieves being crucified with Him asked Him for mercy, Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) Jesus knew that His death was imminent, and that He would soon be in Heaven with His Father.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word used to describe the realm of the dead is "Sheol". It simply means "the place of the dead" or "the place of departed souls and spirits". The New Testament Greek equivalent to "Sheol" is "Hades", which is also a general reference to "the place of the dead". The Greek word "Gehenna" is used in the New Testament for "Hell", and is derived from the Hebrew word "Hinnom". Other Scriptures in the New Testament indicate that "Sheol" or "Hades" is a temporary realm where souls and spirits are kept as they await the final Resurrection. At death, the souls and spirits of the righteous go directly into the presence of God - the part of "sheol" called "Heaven", or "Paradise". (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23)

The Lake Of Fire, mentioned only in Revelation 19:20 and 20:10, 14-15, is the final Hell, the place of eternal punishment for all those who have rejected Christ, albeit it angels, demons or humans. (Matthew 25:41) It is described as a place of burning sulphur, and those in it experience eternal, unspeakable agony of an unrelenting nature. (Luke 16:24; Mark 9:45-46) By contrast, believers whose names are written in the Lamb's Book Of Life are destined to live eternally in the presence of God.

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