

HEAVEN

Allow me to give you some excerpts from a thought provoking book by Randy Alcorn entitled, HEAVEN.

In John 14:1-3 believers are given the promise of living in God's home with Jesus. A unifying characteristic of all peoples, and all civilizations in history is that every culture has a God-given innate sense of the eternal, that there is life beyond this world. I found this book by Alcorn to have an original thought (at least to me), that eternal life involves life on earth, a new earth, a resurrected earth inhabited by resurrected people.

The human race has a terminal disease called mortality. The statistics on death are very impressive, currently running at 100%. Three people die every second, 180 every minute, and nearly 11,000 every hour. This means that over 250,000 people every day go to either Heaven or Hell. The fear of death is a powerful force, a very humbling force. Some famous men chose to deny death like King Louie XIV of France who decreed it illegal to mention the word in his presence, but others saw it as an important humbling force. Philip of Macedonia ordered a servant to remind him every day, "Philip, you also will die." The good news is that Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death as Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "by Christ's death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death". In speaking of the resurrection for all who are in Christ, Paul said, "Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?" (1 Cor.15:55). Our Savior, Jesus has been resurrected and gone ahead of us to make a place for us to live in heaven with Him. The questions for us to explore then are—What is Heaven like?, Where is Heaven?, What will we do?, and Who will be there?

Where Do You Get Your View of Heaven ?

Many people have such a false view of Heaven that they have no desire to go there. To the cynic, a boring existence that lasts forever of floating around on clouds playing a harp has no appeal. Others believe we will have no identity in heaven or any memory of family or friends from the previous life, so we will be like mindless drones. Still others imagine Heaven as an unending, inescapable church service like a never ending sing along in the sky. These ideas provoke a fear of death which is the opposite of the biblical perspective. The cynics also say that positive views of Heaven are wishful convenient thinking. Nevertheless, the real reason we desire Heaven is because God has made us for it. God has planned for us to live in Heaven where we will be fulfilled. Eternity in bliss is currently in our soul, so we long for it.

Where do people get their views of Heaven? Researcher George Barna offers valuable insight that almost all Americans believe in Heaven, but what they believe varies widely. They take bits and pieces from television, movies, and speculations with their friends and family. Amazingly, very few people have an accurate biblical view because it simply is not taught in church, Bible studies, or even in seminaries. We are told how to get to

Heaven, but taught very little about Heaven itself. How can we get excited about Heaven if it is a vague lifeless place? Satan doesn't need to convince us that Heaven doesn't exist, he only has to sow the seeds that it is a boring ghostly place.

Imagining Heaven

Since people typically don't have an objective view of Heaven that is biblically based, they imagine a non-physical realm without gardens, cities, kingdoms, buildings, or bodies. Yet the Bible reveals it to be a physical tangible place. Human beings with bodies are both physical and spiritual so we were designed to live in a physical realm. We are physical beings so our bodily resurrection is essential to our future. When men in the Bible like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul, and John who saw Heaven described it, it was a real physical place inhabited by created beings. The city of God, the New Jerusalem, has dimensions, walls, streets, gates, and people. God commanded John to write about his visit to Heaven, and Isaiah and Ezekiel described it. From the description of these men we get a good idea of Heaven as a physical place with dimensions, gardens, walls, thrones, rivers, trees, streets, buildings, and many created beings. It is great to use your imagination to imagine the splendor and awesomeness of Heaven, but let's start with the objective reality provided by the Scriptures.

Important Bible Passages

Hebrews 11:8-16 is a passage about the faith of Abraham. By faith he answered the call of God not knowing where he was going. He lived as an alien in a foreign land because of God's promise. Verse 10 reveals what he ultimately was looking forward to—"the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God...they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one...for God has prepared a city for them" (v.15-16). This tells you that the heavenly city referred to as the New Jerusalem was already created even in Abraham's day. In the same way, all believers are like strangers and aliens on earth who desire a better country, a better city---that is a heavenly one. Paul said even now "our citizenship is in Heaven." People ask the question, "Is Heaven an actual place or just a state of spiritual consciousness?" All these authors who went there and saw it would hardly devote so many chapters describing a place that did not exist. Heaven is mentioned as a place hundreds of times in the Bible and 50 times just in Revelation.

Revelation 21 may be the most detailed passage about Heaven and the eternal state. After the final rebellion of Rev. 20, the current earth that has been tainted by sin will be "burned up" according to 2 Peter 3:10 and Rev. 21:1. God will create a "new earth" and then something surprising will happen---"the holy city, new Jerusalem" will descend to the new earth. This is the eternal state which we generally refer to as Heaven. In Rev.21:3, John heard the announcement that at that time the dwelling of God will be in the new Jerusalem on the new earth. It will be a time without sin, suffering, or death. Therefore the inhabitants of Heaven will live in the presence of God in a state of bliss forever. The capital city of the eternal state is the new Jerusalem which we can assume is the location where Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Paul visited and wrote about. It is also the city the

author of Hebrews was talking about that the great people of faith like Abraham looked forward to.

Who Will Be There ?

Besides the manifestation of the Trinity, and the holy angels, Rev.21:7-8 tells us that those that thirst for the spiritual water of life that is without cost will be there. Jesus offered this living water to all who believed in Him. Jesus told the Samaritan woman in John 4:14, “the water that I will give will become in you a well of water springing up to eternal life”. In John 7:37 Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty (spiritually), let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.” Just to be completely clear about who will and won’t be there, John wrote in Rev.21:7-8 that unbelievers would not be there. Again in v.27 he reiterates, “only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s (Jesus) book of life” will be there.

What Will the New Jerusalem Look Like ?

The glory of God will shine throughout the city such that there will no longer be any need for the sun or the moon to shine (v.23). All the streets and walls and buildings will be made out of translucent material so that the glory of God will radiate as through gold, diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and many other precious gems. Paul had told Timothy in 2 Tim.6:16 that “God dwells in unapproachable light”. Now in the eternal state in our resurrection bodies we will bask in that glory. The whole city is designed to transmit the light in all the beauty and color. There will be no need for fossil fuels or nuclear power plants, the uncreated energy and light of God will fill the city.

The dimensions of the city are given in Rev.21:16 as a perfect cube, about 1500 miles wide, 1500 miles long, and 1500 miles high. The living space in our world currently is mainly two dimensional because of gravity, but I take it gravity will not apply to spiritual beings. It has been calculated that even if only 25% of this space in the new Jerusalem were used for dwellings, 20 billion people could live comfortably. There will be memorials to history as we see the names of the Apostles on the city wall.

What Will We Do ?

The most amazing reality of all is that sinners like us will be made righteous and enjoy intimate fellowship with God. We will serve Him, glorify Him, and praise Him, but the adventure of this eternal life will be that we will reign with Jesus over the universe which is an immense place. We will have purposeful work, accomplishments, friends to enjoy, and an eternity of learning and discovering. DON’T MISS IT.

CHARLIE TAYLOR