

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING: REVELATION, VISION 7

Over the last few years there has been an explosion of books written about heaven. Why are these books so popular? I think because as humans we are desperate for some hope of what might come after death. And as Christians we want something to confirm what the Bible says. The problem that is often neglected in all these accounts is that the supposed authoritative details of what heaven is like are all different. And a lot of them have details that do not line up with Scripture.

The first issue we have to deal with is how we use the word heaven. Word used in 3 different ways.

1. Talking about the sky, space
2. Technically heaven is where we go when we die. Jesus words to the thief on the cross. Today you will be with me in paradise. The Persian Word used is of an outer garden, a pleasant resting place. It is not the main house. This is where our Spirits go to be with the Lord, not our physical bodies. Heaven is not our final destination. Heaven is life after death, but it is not the eternal home of resurrected believers.
3. The third way we use heaven is to talk of the new heaven and earth which is what is being talked about in the final chapters of Revelation. It is a physical place. Jesus said I go to prepare a place for you. John 14:2-3 It is a new cosmic reality, where earth and heaven as it were become one. Jesus was resurrected with a physical body and we will be as well.

We are often not very good about talking about new heaven /earth. We have presented it as some long eternal church service. Or as sitting on clouds with angels and harps. In fact if we are really honest, we don't really get that excited about heaven. We simply want to avoid hell, and so we accept that heaven is the alternative. Many have been scared in the kingdom but we lack any real desire for the world to come. Christians seem determined to cram every last experience in this life, for fear of somehow missing out. This seems a denial of what we the Bible teaches of the world to come.

Read Ch 21 –Ch 22 Powerful piece of Scripture. High point of mega story of Bible. The fog is clearing; it is tough seeing all the judgments and suffering. John is left trying to Describing the indescribable. Imagine someone from Jesus era 1st century being teleported into the 21st century. Then sent them back. People would be asking them. What did you see? They would not have words to describe what they saw. They would have to try to find images to describe stuff that just blew their minds.

That is what is going on hear. Symbolic language. Huge imagery referring back to the OT. Very interesting but unless we know our OT very well, it doesn't communicate to us quite as well.

20.1 Not a second heaven and earth Renewed heaven and earth Physical reality to it. New used is not the word for brand new. Or new in time. Maybe a renewing, restoring of the earth as we know it. That is it bears similarities to the world today, but is also very different. When says no sea. Sea represent evil - the source of the beast. Place of the dead. References back to Isaiah 65. 17,19.

20:2 Why is new heaven/earth described like a city? City activity life, relationships, work purpose Do things. Don't just sit around playing a harp. Bride imagery is about intimacy with God. Purity. Fulfilling Is 62:1-5

20:3 God's home. Literally God's tabernacle. Fulfilment of Ezekiel 43:7 God's promised restoration of Israel is fulfilled not by the current nation of Israel, but by the gentile and Jewish Christians living in fellowship with God.

20:4-5 No sin, pain, death, grief. Enemy that distorted God's purposes and caused pain is gone. Wipe away our tears. Image here is of a mother, wiping the tears away of child Beautiful image.

20:6 *Alpha and Omega*. First mentioned in 1:8 and now at the end of the book. Way of emphasizing that history is under God's control. Just as God bought the first creation into being, he can bring it to both an end and a renewal.

20: 7 See Jesus words in John 4:10, 7:38 and Isaiah words 55:1. 49:10. John is also encouraging the believers to be faithful. God fulfilling our deepest needs

20:8 List not only includes those who have not believed. But cowards, liars, - people who have claimed faith but not actually put it into practice. Empty faith. Bowed to human pressure. Or have been hypocrites.

20:9 A cube is symbolism Not literal 12000 stadia

20:17 Not literal. Or you would have a very narrow wall. In Human terms very thick so very secure. Literal measurement is 144 cubits. So lose the symbolism when it gets converted.

20:18-21 12 stones listed seem to link back to Aaron's breastplate, that had 12 stones. 8 are listed the same, the other 4 similar. Beauty beyond description jewels, colours, light trying to describe what is not possible. Think of the beauty of creation now and magnify it.

20:22 God will be with us all the time. No temple. Not going to be some rebuilding of OT temple as some have speculated. God dwells everywhere. This is the longed for fulfilment of Ezekiel vision in Ch 40- 48.

20:24-27 Open to all – the gates are open. This does not mean that those outside can come in. Means it is open to all now. No barrier of race, colour, sex, Unhindered access to God. Multicultural *And all the nations will bring their glory and honour into the city*. Something of us bringing something into heaven Bringing it to the glory of God. Maybe the best of each culture creativity design.

21:22- 22:1 Water, of life clear as crystal symbol of life healing, purity.

22:2 Remember the mark of the beast on the forehead. Not literal. But it is about who we align ourselves with. Here we are not literally marked by God but set apart. Contrast with the other mark.



Some of this we can see in the church today. Not perfectly but in part. No temple in church. Holy Spirit in us. Guided by the light of Christ Open to all. Multicultural. Should be something of beauty about the church. Should not be a place where evil dwells Purity about it. Church should be a foretaste of heaven As a leader in the church, I am very aware of how far the church fails at times. But at times I see glimpses of heaven. See Jesus shining out from people. I see pure love. I see acceptance. I see beauty. I see healing. I see streams of water bring cleansing. I see community. Maybe I am a dreamer. But I have a choice. Whine and moan about all that is wrong with church. Or I can look for where I see glimpses of heaven. Work to see more and more of those glimpses.

22: 10 Not to seal up the words of the book. They are for now. Not for some future time. People of God of all ages.

22:11 Not an encouragement to carry on doing wrong stuff as if it does not matter. Contrary to all of NT teaching. Not let's do this. Let it be. If we have heard to call of God, and said No to the love of God, then let it me. Very sobering

If we spend this life ignoring God, then that is what will happen when we die. If we choose to follow God on this earth, we will continue to do right in the life to come. God does not send anyone to hell. We choose The way we live on earth and the choices we make determine our future. Eternal destiny. That is sobering.

22:17 Church, Spirit say Come. Two ways of seeing this verse. One is invitation to us to come Think more likely in context. Call for the Jesus to return. Then invitation for those who are thirsty to come.

22:18-21 Not to add or remove any words from this. Add when we create our own conjectures, speculations. Remove when we ignore the warnings,

Invitation. Thirsty. Longing for healing, more to life, meaning, belonging. Something missing within. Desire for intimacy maybe filling in all kinds of others ways. Something within you crying out for more. Invitation for free. Water of life.

Challenge: Do we long for Christ's return? Do we long for that place of being with God. If not, why not? Is it fear, have we been seduced by Babylon and the things of this world. Idols.

Cry of the Spirit of God, and of the bride is Come. Is that our cry, or have we passively accepted the inequality, injustice, suffering, deception of this world. Are we inoculated to what is happening around us so it no longer grieves our heart?

Challenge: Are we ready for Christ's return? It will be sudden. Many will be shocked, predictions proved wrong. Jesus said many will fall away before he comes, having given up waiting.

The fact is Christ might have returned sooner if for centuries the church had not ignored the instruction of Jesus to take his message to all the earth. The delay is because God is giving time for all people to have the chance to repent and come to him. We are on borrowed time. Remaining people groups who have not heard of Jesus is rapidly decreasing.

I think our vision of the world to come is too small and narrow.

- We will recognize each other
- There will be no disability, sickness, disease, sadness or sin
- Our new bodies will be both similar and very different.
- Relationships on earth will continue, but there will not be marriage.
- We will work , eat, drink, rest, play, create and grow.
- Life will be characterized by refreshing delight.
- We shall rule and reign with Christ.
- We will be in intimate relationship with God, in His presence at all times.
- There will be animals on the new earth. Is 11, 65 seem to indicate there are. Why would there not be? Like us , the same different and in perfect harmony
- There will be a multitude of believers from every age and culture
- God will enable us to be at peace with the fact that some of our loved ones will not be there
- Everything that brings joy, and delight and purpose in this life will be in the new heaven and earth, but magnified in intensity. All those things that cause us grief and limit our delight in this world will be gone.

The one thing I can say with absolute confidence. We will not be bored in the new heaven/earth Heaven is the ultimate fulfilment of every deep and good desire of the human heart

We will be totally safe and secure in who we are. We will know we are loved and accepted by God and by every person. We will be able to be in perfect relationship with others. We will be able to grow, explore, work and find fulfilment and delight in a physical and tangible world.

We are to long in anticipation for this world to come. We are not give up on this world and hide in a bunker and see everything as evil We are also not to unrealistically think we can somehow forcibly bring about God's kingdom on earth.

We live in a world where the kingdom has come but is mixed evil and suffering. Creation itself is groaning. We see glimpses of the kingdom. But we live in anticipation that God's promises are going to be fulfilled when God renews, recreates this world in a brand new way.

Questions.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

When you use the word heaven, what comes to mind?

Which is stronger: fear of hell or a longing for the world to come?

Discuss the fact that the world to come is a physical reality, not a "spirit" world.

What surprises you about the world to come, from the bullet point list above? Does it excite you? If not, why not?

How do we live with the tension of the kingdom here now and yet also not come? Can we lurch too far one way or the other?

Is it naïve to think church can reflect something of the world to come?



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