

HEAVEN

Introduction

Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven, but Nobody Wants to Die, title of a 2019 book by Amy Gutmann and Jonathan D. Moreno, likely states where many are with respect to heaven and the afterlife. Everybody aspires to a heavenly realm and what we could experience there, but few, including some Christians, want to abandon their present reality to embrace it.

Beyond written works about heaven, scores of films have been made about heaven, the afterlife, or some aspect of it. Films like **Heaven is For Real** (2014), **Heaven Can Wait** (1978), and **Miracles From Heaven** (2016) are but a few. Many others are less spiritual and struggle to portray what heaven is really like, let alone share how you might get there.

Depending on which translation, heaven is mentioned in the Bible well over 500 times in both the Old and New Testaments. Some of the references are specific to heaven; others simply allude to afterlife or the heavenly places. No matter the media format or any searching you do in scripture, heaven's locality is hard to pin down, heaven is challenging to define, and there are many notions of how you get there. Let's explore these issues.

Where Is Heaven?

Many children and adults point toward the sky (up) when asked about the location of heaven. The question in response could be, 'in which direction is up?' Depending on where you are on earth, the answer ends up being a different sector of the universe around us. When the apostle Paul described an incident where he envisioned himself in heaven (**2 Corinthians 12:1-6**), he declared "I . . . was caught **up** to paradise" (**2 Corinthians 12:4**) (*emphasis added*). 'Up' could mean – above the surface of the earth, at an unknown place in the universe, in a different spiritual plane or realm, or something else. Some associate heaven with the New Jerusalem "coming down out of heaven" (**Revelation 21:2**), assuming it is a city somewhere in the universe. But we simply do not know the location of heaven; we can only speculate. More will be shared later when we discuss the New Jerusalem.

John, who received the vision recorded in the book of Revelation, said this, “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit . . .” and, in the rest of the book, goes on to share what he encountered and saw, including heaven itself (**Revelation 1:9-11; chapters 4-5, and other places**). Rather than trying to pin down a specific location, it appears to be a reality perceived or experienced when ‘in the Spirit,’ i.e., through *spiritual* means outside of our present *physical* reality.

The writer of the book of Hebrews senses this spiritual dimension – “we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” (**Hebrews 12:1**), described later in the chapter as angels, the church of the firstborn, the presence of God, the spirits of righteous men made perfect (believers already in the presence of God), and to Jesus (**Hebrews 12:22-24**). This ‘cloud’ of witnesses that surrounds us, could be likened to the technology ‘cloud’ we use every day to store computer, phone, and other data. The cloud is out there, but we do not see it with our physical eyes. We take it for granted (by faith), even though not visible. The heavenly cloud or dimension is the same. It is there, though not seen with physical eyes; it must be perceived and accepted in faith.

Finally, we could just concur that heaven is where God is. Jesus said, “God is *spirit*, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (**John 4:24**) (*emphasis added*). We know from scripture that God cannot be confined to an earthly tabernacle, a temple, or any other manmade structure. God is a Spirit that fills all the known universe and probably other dimensions we have yet to understand. The prophet Jeremiah declares the word of the Lord, “Am I only a God nearby . . . and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? . . . Do not I fill heaven and earth?” (**Jeremiah 23:23-24**). Our Creator, the Spirit God of the universe, fills all of reality – what we see and what we cannot see. In the spirit, we connect with God’s Spirit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus and will for all eternity. If we are connected to God, we are connected to heaven and will experience what that is like fully when we are no longer living in our earthly bodies.

What Is Heaven?

The Bible does not actually give a description of heaven. But wait, you may say, what about the river of life, streets of gold, walls, gates, precious stones, pearls, transparent glass, and other amazing things recorded in **Revelation chapters 21 and 22**? What do the words of those chapters describe? It is not heaven, though many cling to those words as their understanding of heaven.

John was so overwhelmed that he struggled to find the right words and could only describe what he saw in earthly terms, comparing what he observed with things familiar on earth. What John described is stated clearly as the **Bride of Christ**. Here is what John the Revelator said as part of a discussion with an angel,

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband,” (**Revelation 21:2ff**). Later John says, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel” (**Revelation 21:9-14ff**).

This is **key** – what John was being shown was a glorious and beautifully dressed **bride**, not heaven. The **bride** was ‘coming down **out of** heaven’ so John could see it. The **bride** had to be brought to a different level of perception for John, in the Spirit, so that he could see it. The second passage states it more clearly, “Come, I will show you the **bride, the wife of the Lamb**.” And then he was carried away *in the Spirit* and saw the Holy City, Jerusalem (called *New Jerusalem* in verse 2).

All through the New Testament, the **bride**, the wife of the Lamb, refers to the saints of God, the Church in whom the presence of God dwells. Jesus drew this parallel of the **bride** in parables about the kingdom of God recorded in the gospels; **Matthew 25:1-46** is a good example. The apostle Paul alluded to the **bride** in his letter to believers at Ephesus (**Ephesians 5:25-30**). In Revelation we find a great multitude shouting, “Hallelujah! . . . for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his **bride** has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints)” (**Revelation 19:6-7**) (**emphasis added**). The **bride** of all these passages is the Church, the saints who have become members of the kingdom of God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. That is what John saw in his vision.

Under the Old Covenant, God’s presence was with His people, the Israelites, in the tabernacle in the wilderness (**Exodus 25-40, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy**) and later in the temple in Jerusalem. Once established in Canaan, the Israelites worshipped God in the city of Jerusalem because God’s holy presence was there. But under the New Covenant, God does not dwell in manmade structures. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem (the city) . . . a time is coming and

has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth . . . God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21-24). Born again believers, the Church, are now the temple or dwelling place of God. That is why Paul said, “. . . we are the temple of the living God.” As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:16) (emphasis added).

The Bride of Jesus Christ, the Church, is the **New Covenant, heavenly New Jerusalem**, allegorical equivalent of the Old Covenant temple in the *earthly* city of Jerusalem. Many have not left the Old Covenant behind nor fully embraced this New Covenant truth.

If this article thus far is shining some light on things you did not understand, but now see more clearly, do not let it diminish your conception of heaven and how glorious it is. We believe it is **far greater** than anything we can imagine or hope for. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (2 Corinthians 2:9).

What will heaven be like?

Throughout the book of Revelation, you find a long list of wonderful things that the Bride of Christ in heaven will experience. Though we get a foretaste of some of these now, they will all be experienced fully when Jesus returns, and God completes the restoration of all things.

God’s glorious presence, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, acknowledged continuously by all in many ways.

Eternal life, immortality, restored to all of Creation.

Worship of God by all – humans, angels, and other creatures of God, a multitude that cannot be numbered.

Joy rather than sadness and despair.

Wholeness rather than pain, suffering, and death.

Diversity in the sight of God, “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). You would expect this to include loved ones, friends, as well as brothers and sisters in Christ who have preceded us there.

Abundant provisions, everything supplied.

And so much more we cannot begin to imagine.

How Do We Access Heaven?

There is only one way – through **Jesus**, the Savior of the world. At the Last Supper, Jesus had this exchange with his disciples:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. . . in my Father’s house are many rooms . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you . . . you know the way. . . Thomas said, “How can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “**I am the Way** and the truth and the life. **No one** comes to the Father except through **me**” (**John 14:6**).

Many people are not sure they are going to heaven. Maybe you consider your sins too overwhelming and do not feel worthy. You may be struggling to do enough ‘good’ things to expunge the record. **YOU CANNOT DO IT !** You are not going to heaven on your own merit. You only get there by **God’s grace**.

Jesus said “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (**John 3:3**).

“If you confess with your mouth “**Jesus is Lord**” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved**” (**Romans 10:9**).

Do you believe? Have you made that profession?

To get to heaven, you must be on the path **NOW**. If you are not sure you are on the path or whether you have received Jesus into your life, please visit [Getting Started](#) or, if you would like to talk to someone about it, call **800-700-7000**. Someone will speak with you, answer questions, and pray with you.

Closing Thoughts

Heaven is real. It is a spiritual reality or dimension that is just one of the important promises of God for those of faith.

Do not make heaven your primary focus. Make your focus the kingdom of God and knowing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The amenities of heaven are by-products of your relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Do not obsess over the location of heaven. It is all around you because God fills the universe. Someday, it will be fully revealed to all believers.

Heaven is not about seeking rewards. Your life of faith is about seeking God's acceptance and presence through Jesus Christ. When you do, heaven and much more will be given.

If you accept Jesus into your life and are born again, you are a citizen of heaven for eternity. You are encouraged to acknowledge the presence of God now and worship God in spirit and in truth every day.

If you want to get to heaven, the way is through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This is an introduction to the subject of *Heaven*. Here are a few other resources you may wish to explore on the subject:

Books

Heaven, by Randy Alcorn

Heaven is for Real, by Todd Burpo

Eden's Guest, by Vicki Edwards

Proof of Heaven, by Ebem Alexander

90 Minutes in Heaven, by Don Piper

Journey to Heaven, by Jacob Kodesh

Websites

[What Is Heaven? A Complete Guide \(christianity.com\)](http://christianity.com)

[What Does the Bible Say About Heaven? \(openbible.info\)](http://openbible.info)

[35 Beautiful Bible Verses About Heaven - Encouraging Scripture! \(biblestudytools.com\)](http://biblestudytools.com)

[Heaven - Encyclopedia of The Bible - Bible Gateway](#)

[Where is heaven? What is the location of heaven? | GotQuestions.org](#)