

Why You Should Pay Careful Attention to the Book of Revelation in This Hour

In the book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus gives John a vision of heaven. It's a vision of comfort and encouragement for everyone who is burdened by the sufferings of this life.

I guarantee you won't be bored in heaven. You won't be floating on the clouds, strumming a harp for eternity. Heaven will be filled with all the excitement and love you could ever want.

But because heaven can give us so much hope, Satan is fighting hard against it. Satan was thrown out of heaven; he will never be allowed back in. So he'll do everything he can to kill that hope within us.

You can see Satan's strategy playing out in our country today:

In February 2015, *Salon* posted an article called "Ten Reasons the Christian Heaven Would Actually be Hell." The writer explains, wrongly, how boring and bland heaven will be.

Even in our churches today, there is very little preaching on heaven. Most of it is focused on the problems and blessings of this life, and how to get the most out of it.

How different are those priorities from the priorities of God's Word? The Bible mentions heaven more than 500 times. The book of Revelation mentions Heaven more than 50 times.

If you think heaven will be a miserable and boring experience, I want you to know that Satan has sold you a bill of goods.

In Revelation, God graciously opens a door into heaven, and we

begin to see heaven in all its glory. John writes:

“After this I looked. And there was an open door in heaven. The first voice I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit. And there was a throne set in heaven with One sitting on the throne!” (Rev. 4:1-2).

John describes his first glimpse of Heaven—a throne with Someone seated on it. The throne symbolizes the power and authority of our God. He is the Creator and Ruler of this vast universe.

But most importantly, He should be the Ruler of our hearts. If we will step down from the throne of our hearts and put Christ there instead, He will come into our lives with strength and might.

John continues:

“And He who sat there appeared like a jasper and a sardius stone. There was a rainbow around the throne, appearing like an emerald. Twenty-four thrones were around the throne. And I saw twenty-four elders sitting on the thrones, clothed in white garments. They had crowns of gold on their heads” (Rev. 4:3-4).

John sees Jesus, our great High Priest, as having the appearance of gemstones—jasper and ruby. Jasper is a diamond-like white stone, symbolizing the glory and purity of Jesus. And the ruby is a blood-red stone symbolizing the sacrificial blood of Jesus. The rainbow recalls the covenant rainbow that God showed Noah after the flood. And the 24 elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus—bridging both the Old and New Testaments.

Next, John gives us a glimpse of worship in heaven:

"In the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures covered with eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures had six wings each, and they were covered with eyes all around. All day and night, without ceasing, they were saying: '"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," who was, and is, and is to come'" (Rev. 4:6b-8).

Although the angels continuously make that proclamation, please don't get the idea that in heaven we'll do nothing but sing a thousand choruses of "How Great Thou Art."

Will we continually praise God? Yes! Will we stand around a throne, singing endless choruses? Hardly. Wherever we go in the new heaven, we will be able to speak to Him, thank Him and praise Him. With each new discovery, with each new wonder, our hearts will leap with praise.

If you're afraid that heaven will be boring, consider this: The same Creator who gave us the incredible beauty of places like the Grand Canyon will be the One to create the new heaven. If there's so much beauty in a world broken by sin, imagine what heaven will be like!

Everything New

One of the most important revelations John receives is that the Heaven we think of today is not the final heaven, the eternal heaven that Jesus promised to prepare for us.

As John writes in Revelation 21:1: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth.' For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

God is going to take a wrecking ball to the universe and start over from scratch. In Revelation 22:5, the Lord tells John, "I am making everything new!"

This will be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah:

“For I create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Is. 65:17).

But that’s not God’s only new creation. John continues with a sight that must have taken his breath away:

“I, John, saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven, saying, ‘Look! The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them. They shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death.” Neither shall there be any more sorrow nor crying nor pain, for the former things have passed away’” (Rev. 21:2-4).

The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, is God’s new capital city. The New Jerusalem comes out of heaven, and God announces that His dwelling place is now among the people. He will wipe away all their tears, and death will be no more.

If your heart is heavy these days, I have wonderful news for you: Jesus Himself is going to wipe away your tears and take away your sorrow.

In the midst of this vision, the Lord gives John a message for all people:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the spring of the water of life to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Rev. 21:6b-7).

Jesus wants everyone to have one more opportunity to receive Him as Lord and Savior.

If the book of Revelation teaches anything, it’s that our choices today will determine our future. Our eternal destiny

will either be in heaven with Jesus—or in hell with Satan. There is no third alternative. For if God does not judge sin and disobedience—why did Jesus have to die?

He desperately wants everyone to be saved. But He is not willing to save people against their will.

A neighbor of mine teaches a class in a mainline denomination church. He recently told me, “We’ve been talking about the doctrine of hell. And every person in that class agrees that God is simply too loving to condemn anyone to hell.”

His jaw dropped when I replied, “I completely agree. God is too loving to condemn anyone to hell. That’s why God sent Jesus to the cross. He’s not willing that any should perish. But people possess the awesome, frightening power of free will. If they reject the gift of salvation, they condemn themselves to hell.”

A Vision to Lift Our Burdens

After the New Jerusalem descends, an angel says to John, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

The angel takes John to a mountaintop to view the New Jerusalem. The city is brilliantly lit by the glory of God, gleaming like a sparkling jewel. It has 12 gates, symbolizing again the 12 tribes of Israel, and it has 12 foundations, representing the 12 apostles.

Then the angel gives John the city’s dimensions—are you ready for this?—1,400 miles long by 1,400 miles wide by 1,400 miles high. That’s 2.7 billion cubic miles!

In the New Jerusalem, there is no Temple, because “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22). There is no sun or moon because “the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (Rev. 21:23). And the River of Life, clear as crystal, flows “from the throne of God and of the

Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.” (Rev. 22:2)

And wonderfully, in the New Jerusalem, we will find the restored Garden of Eden! There, the Tree of Life will bear “twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2).

Better yet, among that incredible abundance, we will each have meaningful and exciting work to do. John tells us that we will serve God in the new heaven. Our work may take us to distant galaxies, and we will reign with God for ever and ever (Rev. 22:5).

Today, you may be carrying the weight of a Steinway piano on your back. It might be an enormous load of guilt or suffering or worry. Whatever your load, a vision of heaven will lift your burden.

If you avoid what the Bible teaches about heaven, then you miss out on one of God’s great blessings. The expectation of heaven enables us to soar above the problems and frustrations of this earthly life.

If you’ve never looked forward to heaven with eager anticipation, I hope you’re beginning to catch the excitement right now. I hope you will begin each day thinking about heaven. And I hope that as you go to bed each night, your last thoughts will be prayers of gratitude for the wonderful gift of that world to come. {eo}

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