

# what is heaven like?



**Ron Bailey**

## 1. CAN ANYONE TELL ME WHAT HEAVEN IS REALLY LIKE?

Yes, I can, with absolute certainty.

You don't have to read far into the Bible before you meet the word 'heaven'. The first chapter has seven separate references to 'heaven'. But where is it and what is it? The first reference appears to add to the confusion as it literally reads "God created 'both heavens' and the earth". Both heavens? Two heavens? How many heavens are there? Well, the romantic may say he is in the 'seventh heaven' but the Bible makes reference to three. Modern commentators sometimes say that the Hebrews believed in a heaven and earth of three concentric spheres but that is because modern commentators think that ancient people were too unsophisticated to speak in pictures. Their comments tell us more about modern arrogance than ancient naiveté. We might as well conclude that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century man who says 'the sun rises at 5.30' thinks that the earth is flat and that the sun is doing the moving.

The Hebrew word for heaven means something that is "above" and is a relative term. (The Greek word for 'heaven' has the same kind of etymology.) Consequently there is a 'heaven' above the earth where the sparrows fly, and there is a 'heaven' above that where the stars shine. (Gen 1:16, 20) And above (or beyond) that a third! The imagery is of a place beyond man's reach. Modern scientific technology may have taken man through the sparrows' heaven and into the starry heavens (or to the moon, as a start) but the third heaven still remains above, beyond his reach.

The last Bible reference to 'heaven' is in the book of the Revelation. The writer sees;

**'the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God (Rev 21:10).**

Let's try to express this simply, that third, or ultimate, 'heaven' is God's Place and it is absolutely 'beyond man's reach' in every sense. It is beyond him physically, mentally and morally.

## 2. MORALLY?

Yes. Because 'heaven' is God's Place it has to be a place where a holy God can be 'comfortable' and that means it must be a place of holiness. As the Book of the Revelation expresses it;

**"But nothing unclean, no one who deals in filthiness and lies, shall ever at any time enter it—only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Rev 21:27)**

The third, or ultimate, 'heaven of heavens' referred to in the Bible is God's dwelling place; **"Our Father, who art in heaven..."** During Old Testament times God's heavenly dwelling place had an earthly picture; it was called the

Holy of Holies, the place of ultimate holiness. God's ultimate place is ultimately above and is ultimately holy, and ultimately 'beyond our reach'.

### **3. SO THAT BRINGS US ON TO ANOTHER QUESTION; "WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WILL INHABIT HEAVEN?"**

King David was thinking about 'heaven' when he asked

**"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psalms 24:3)**

He had an answer too, but it is not very encouraging. To qualify you must.

- never have done anything wicked (clean hands),
- never to have had a wicked thought (pure heart),
- never to have been proud (even if you qualified for the first two!) and
- never to have promised something you didn't do.

How many boxes have you ticked so far? Mmmm, me neither. However, according to another Psalm of David someone once actually qualified...

**"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them." (Psalms 68:18)**

And here's the good news; according to this Psalm, this person didn't just qualify for himself but he opened a way for the rebels too. Paul identified this Qualifier in his letter to the Ephesians; it is none other than Jesus Christ. (Eph 4:7,8) His sinless life, given up willingly on the cross, becomes my sole qualification for entrance into God's Place. The Bible records the prayer He prayed a few hours before His crucifixion:

**"Father, I want those whom you have given me to be with me where I am; I want them to see that glory which you have made mine—for you loved me before the world began."  
(John 17:24)**

### **4. OK, HE IS THE ONLY WAY IN, BUT WHAT IS 'HEAVEN' REALLY LIKE?**

All that we can ever know about heaven is what God has chosen to reveal, and for the time being there are some things that God has chosen 'not to reveal'.

**"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."  
(1 John 3:2)**

## **5. SO THAT MEANS MY GUESS ABOUT 'WHAT HEAVEN IS LIKE' IS AS GOOD AS YOURS?**

Not at all; this is not guesswork. God has given us some wonderfully clear indications of what 'heaven' is like. Notice however, that for the time being the best we can achieve is to know what 'heaven' is 'like', hence the title of this article. These 'likenesses' are not just pretty pictures, they have been specifically chosen by God to convey eternal truth through ideas with which we are already familiar. These expressions are common to the whole human race and consequently the whole human race can know 'what heaven is like'.

## **6. SO IF WE CAN'T DESCRIBE IT IN EXACT DIMENSIONS OR COLOURS WHAT IT IS 'LIKE'?**

The Book of the Revelation gives us some powerful symbolism to show us very clearly what heaven is 'like'.

It's a place 'like' a glorious, beautiful and peaceful city where the inhabitants are completely safe. It is 'like' a place filled with music and which has golden streets. It is 'like' a place with a broad refreshing clear river and with the shade of trees along all its banks. It is 'like' a place where all sickness is healed and pain has no memory. It is 'like' a place where there is no disease, no death, no night, no tears of mourning. (Don't try to paint this picture, feel it.) And, best of all, it is 'like' a place where..

**"there is no longer a curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face...." (Rev 22:3)**

In this present world everything is touched by the shadow of a reign of sin and death. It obscures my appreciation of God, and impedes my best service for Him. 'Heaven' is the place where nothing will come between me and my God and His perfect reign; no sin, no curse, no disease, no death. 'Heaven' is the place where I shall love and serve Him without interruption from my past or distraction from the present, "for ever and ever". Now I have a question for you...

## **7. "COMING?"**