

OUR ETERNAL HOME

by Richard W. De Haan

God's Dwelling Place And Ours

The mention of the word *heaven* raises at once a number of questions. Is there really such a place? If so, where is it? What is heaven like? Will everyone go there, or just a certain privileged few? And then, some will ask, "Do we go there immediately at death, or does the soul 'sleep' for a while?"

For many people in this last part of the 20th century, these questions are not relevant. They scoff at the idea of life after death and ridicule belief in a heaven of eternal bliss and a hell of everlasting punishment. They are convinced that man's existence ends at the grave.

Christians do believe in a beautiful place called heaven, and they look forward to eternal life within its gates. Based on their faith in God's Word, they anticipate the joys that await them in their eternal home. This comforting thought brings healing to the wounds of their earthly existence and quenches their sorrows.

The place to find out about heaven is the Bible. The word *heaven* in its singular and plural forms occurs more than 600 times in Scripture. We are given much information about our eternal home, and in this lesson we will consider it carefully in two aspects: (1) the habitation of God, and (2) the home of departed saints.

THE HABITATION OF GOD

The Bible often speaks of heaven as God's "habitation" and explicitly declares that He dwells there.

Thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15).

Solomon also recognized heaven as God's home when he prayed:

May You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive (1 Ki. 8:30).

This does not mean that God is absent from earth. His presence is everywhere, but His dwelling place is in heaven. He abides there,

and from that location He is present throughout all His creation.

The Bible also teaches that heaven is the location of God's throne. The psalmist declared:

The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all (Ps. 103:19).

God is king of the universe He created; the Bible speaks of "His throne" which He occupies in heaven. From there He rules over the affairs of men. Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of Babylon, learned of God's sovereign rulership through firsthand experience. He had become self-centered and proud, and the Lord had temporarily chastened him by a period of severe mental illness. When it was all over, he prayed:

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able

to put down (Dan. 4:37).

God, the Almighty King, rules in majesty over His entire creation. He holds all things together by His mighty power. He may permit evil men and the rulers of darkness to have their day, but He has not lost control of the world—not for one moment! Although the wicked may rebel against His laws and declare themselves masters of their own destiny, God from heaven is still in command.

Psalms 2 describes the empty efforts of the nations to rebel against the Lord God and against His Christ. These boasters say:

Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us (v.3).

But the psalmist went on to express the folly and madness of seeking to stand up against the Almighty:

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His

wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure (vv.4-5).

Yes, God in heaven has only to speak the word, and all His enemies will be destroyed. When the Bible speaks of heaven as God's throne, therefore, it means that this is the center of His administration, the seat of His authority, the place from which He issues His edicts, commands, and sovereign decrees.

The Bible also teaches that God accepts our worship and hears our prayers in heaven. The Lord told Solomon at the finishing of the temple:

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chr. 7:14).

King David, the father of Solomon, had also learned that God hears the prayers

of His people. David had earnestly sought God's help, and the Lord had granted him victory over the Philistines. In gratitude he wrote:

In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears (2 Sam. 22:7).

God has promised to listen to the prayers of His people. What a blessing that the same is true for Christians today! Whether we want to confess our sins to Him or just to praise Him, He will hear and respond.

In heaven, God not only accepts the worship of His people on earth, but He also receives the adoration of the heavenly hosts who dwell there with Him. In Hebrews 12:22, for example, we are told of an innumerable company of angels who abide in heaven. The Bible portrays them as constantly worshiping and serving God. They are continually

going back and forth, from earth to heaven and from heaven to earth, fulfilling the Lord's instructions.

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:14).

All of this activity centers around God's throne. There they receive their orders, and there they return when their mission is accomplished.

Other angelic beings, the cherubim and seraphim, are with God in heaven. Creatures of service and worship, they attend His throne to extol His virtues, to guard His holiness, and to render praise through obedience.

Heaven is the habitation of God. From there He rules over all creation, hears the prayers of His people, and accepts the worship of His earthly subjects and His heavenly attendants.

THE HOME OF DEPARTED SAINTS

Not only is heaven God's habitation, but it is also the place where His saints will dwell forever. We can rightly call heaven "our eternal home." Death does not end all, the soul lives on. And for the believer, the soul at death immediately enters forever into the presence of God.

Some false religionists teach otherwise. They refer to those who die as being "asleep," and by this they mean that their souls cease to exist until some time of future resurrection. But the term *soul sleep*, as used in this manner, is a misnomer—simply because a soul with no existence apart from the body could not be referred to as "sleeping." If it doesn't exist it's gone! This means that at some future time God would find it necessary to re-create the entire individual. The body would first have to be resurrected; then it would need to be given a new soul.

This is contrary to the teaching of God's Word.

Death involves physical and spiritual separation—not annihilation! Physical death occurs when the soul is separated from the body. Spiritual death is the eternal separation of the soul from God. Although the believer in Christ may die physically, having his soul separated from his body, he can never die spiritually. He will never experience the separation of his soul from God.

My believing friend, this should be a special comfort to you. It means that your Christian loved ones who have died are not separated from the Lord and never will be. When they gave their hearts to Christ, they received life everlasting. Jesus said:

He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life (Jn. 5:24).

Those who have died in Christ have entered into the presence of God, and

even now they abide with Him in heaven. Jesus taught this truth in His words to Martha at the time of the resurrection of Lazarus. When Jesus arrived at Bethany, 4 days after Lazarus had died, Martha came out to meet Him and complained, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn. 11:21). Then Christ, assuring Martha that her brother would rise again, stated this beautiful, comforting truth:

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (vv.25-26).

We may learn two important lessons from these words of Christ. First, even though believers may die physically, as Lazarus did, their bodies will someday be resurrected. Remember, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Second, through

faith in Christ the child of God possesses eternal life. Therefore, in the deepest sense of the word, he will never die. That's why Jesus could give the glorious promise, "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Yes, the body may perish, but the soul of the Christian lives on—never to be separated from God, the source of life. Those who teach that the soul of man ceases to exist at death deny a clear statement from the lips of our Lord Himself. Remember that Jesus said, "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

IN CHRIST'S PRESENCE

When the believer dies, he departs from this life to go immediately into the presence of Christ. At the moment physical life is ended, therefore, the Christian meets Jesus face to face in his eternal home in heaven. The words of the Lord Jesus at Calvary

emphasize this truth. As Christ hung on the accursed tree, one of the dying thieves expressed faith in Him, crying out, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). The Lord Jesus gave His word that they would meet again, and not way off in the far distant future. He promised, "Today you will be *with Me* in Paradise" (v.43).

The apostle Paul viewed the period between death and resurrection as a time of joy, blessing, and fellowship in the presence of Christ. He told the believers in Philippi:

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better (Phil. 1:21-23).

It's plain to see that the apostle fully expected to be

with the Lord the very moment he departed from this life. Because of this he could say, "To die is gain" and "to depart and be with Christ . . . is far better."

In 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, he expressed again his sincere conviction that the day he would leave this body, he would join his Savior in heaven:

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

To give proper emphasis to the tenses used in the Greek, this last verse should read, "We are confident, I say, and willing, rather to be once-for-all away from home as far as the body is concerned, and to be once-for-all at home with the Lord."

Paul was not speaking

here about the resurrection of the body. That will occur when the trumpet sounds for the rapture of the church. Rather, he spoke of what happens to the soul immediately following death. When a Christian dies, his soul is ushered into Christ's presence in heaven. Death for the believer brings about an immediate, once-for-all change—from being in our body on earth to being with our Lord in our eternal home.

This is the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer of John 17, spoken shortly before His crucifixion:

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (v.24).

For the believer, this prayer finds fulfillment at death. He enters heaven and begins to experience all the wonderful blessings of being with the Lord.

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have emphasized two important truths. First, heaven is the habitation of God. It's where the Lord rules over all His creation, accepts the worship of His beings, and hears our prayers. Second, heaven is the home of departed saints, where we will abide forever in the presence of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Although our bodies may be buried in the grave to be resurrected at the rapture of the church, our souls go immediately to be with the Lord.

Not everyone, however, will enjoy the glories of heaven. There is one condition that must be met if you are to enter that eternal home. The only condition is faith in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He said:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

The Holy City

I am sure many Americans who visit our capital city, Washington, DC, are as impressed as I was when they view its magnificent structures and monuments. A walk down the Federal Mall, going past the Art Institute and Smithsonian Institution, the towering Washington Monument, the majestic White House, and standing finally in a moment of reflection at the Lincoln Memorial is a thrilling experience. As Americans we can be proud, in the right sense of the word, of our national capital! It ranks with the great cities of the world—London, Paris, Tokyo, or Rome—in beauty and splendor.

Yet, every Christian is a citizen of a heavenly city—a city more dazzling and beautiful than anyone on earth has ever seen. Its streets shimmer with gold and its jeweled walls and foundations glow in a

spectrum of color. We are told that it is free from evil of all kinds, and nothing in it will ever tarnish or decay.

You see, a day is coming when our present solar system will be burned with fire and will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. Peter wrote:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

According to this prophecy, our universe will be shattered with a mighty roaring sound. It will burst into flames with such intense heat that even the elements that make up matter will be dissolved. The sun, the moon, the planets, and the distant stars will all be engulfed in flame, but this will not be a tragedy. It will not mean annihilation but transformation.

The Word of God declares that out of the ruins will emerge a glorious new world—our eternal home. The apostle John saw it in a vision, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit described the scene:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:1-2).

The New Jerusalem, which John proceeded to describe, will rest upon the great planet that will come into existence. This holy city that comes down will be the capital of the new heaven and new earth. It is called the “New Jerusalem” to distinguish it from the two other Jerusalems mentioned in the Bible—the earthly city still in Palestine today and the “heavenly

Jerusalem” of Hebrews 12. (The heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem are actually the same city, but seen at different stages of redemptive history.)

Let’s now consider three aspects of this heavenly city, the eternal home of the redeemed: (1) its present location, (2) its place in the coming millennial reign of Christ, and (3) its external appearance as it comes down to rest upon the great planet of the future.

THE LOCATION OF THE HEAVENLY CITY

The eternal home of the saints is now in heaven as the capital city, which is implied in the name “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). But this raises a question that has often been asked, “Where is heaven?”

Some think it is located somewhere in the northern skies. To support this, they point out that astronomers have discovered only one area in space that appears to be empty—the region

around the North Star. No other stars have ever been discovered there. Rather, only a faint luminous glow has been detected. Therefore, they speculate that this must be the location of heaven.

For biblical evidence to support their position, they point to Psalm 75, which reads in part:

*For exaltation comes
neither from the east
nor from the west nor
from the south (v.6).*

Their reason that if “exaltation” does not originate from the east, west, or south, it can come only from the north. Thus they conclude that since God is the One who gives blessing, this verse teaches that His throne is located somewhere in the north. In addition, they point out that the altar sacrifice was the brightness of God’s glory coming from the north (Ezek. 1:4).

These scriptural affirmations may give us a hint as to the present

location of heaven and its capital city, though we can’t be sure that it is in some distant place out in space. It may be much nearer to earth than we think, and we need not be disturbed by statements of unbelievers who say that no astronomers have ever seen evidence of its existence. The fact is that vast reaches in space have not yet been probed by the most powerful telescopes. Besides, it is foolish to deny that something exists just because it cannot be seen with the eyes or detected by our present equipment. Every scientifically minded person in our atomic age realizes that something may be very real while being completely imperceptible to us.

We believe beyond all doubt in the existence of a glorious city called “the heavenly Jerusalem.” We are confident that the saints of past ages and our loved ones who died in Christ are there now, and that we will someday join them. The

patriarchs looked forward to entering this promised city when they died. Abraham left his homeland, an area of well-established cities, to follow the call of God, though he did not know his earthly destination. Nevertheless he was able to exercise great faith and patience while living as a wanderer because “he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

Even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were never able to gain full possession of the Promised Land, they did not despair. They realized that a heavenly city was awaiting them. That’s the reason the Bible says that “now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Heb. 11:16).

This heavenly city, planned and built by God, is mentioned again in Hebrews 12.

But you have come to

Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels (Heb. 12:22).

I repeat, then, that today the great city of God for which Abraham looked is in heaven, the dwelling place of the souls of all believers in Christ who have died. We do not know exactly where heaven with its capital city is located, but we wait for it with hopeful anticipation.

ITS PLACE IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

What will be the location of the heavenly city during the millennial reign of Christ? Some believe that throughout the coming golden age it will be suspended above the earth as a satellite city. While this theory cannot be proven, there is some evidence to substantiate it.

In the first place, the Scriptures indicate that Christ and His glorified

saints will rule the earth during the millennial age. Our Lord is depicted as reigning from Jerusalem accompanied by resurrected believers. This does not mean, of course, that the glorified saints will be subjected to the limitations of earthly life. Their home will be the heavenly Jerusalem, but they will serve in certain capacities here. Dr. Alva J. McClain explained it this way:

The residence of the saints in heaven while ruling on earth, actually, is much less of a problem than that of a businessman whose office is in a city while his residence is in the suburbs.

A number of Bible scholars believe that during the tribulation period, which comes just before the establishment of the millennial kingdom, the heavenly Jerusalem will become visible to earth dwellers. This would be in perfect keeping with the

fact that miracles of power will be on open display. Furthermore, in Revelation 13:6 we may have a hint that the people on earth will be able to see the heavenly Jerusalem.

We read:

Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

The Greek text does not contain the word *and* which we find in our English version. It should read, "Then he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle—those who dwell in heaven."

Could it be that the sight of this satellite city where the saints dwell triggers this blasphemy?

Another indication that the heavenly Jerusalem will be relatively near the earth is found in Paul's description of the rapture and resurrection at Christ's

coming for His own. He told the Thessalonian believers that the meeting place will be “in the air.”

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Th. 4:16-17).

The place where the Lord and His saints will meet in the air could be the location from which they will share with Christ in His rule over the earth during those 1,000 years. If this is true, and the heavenly Jerusalem is a satellite city suspended above the earth, the resurrected and translated saints would have ready access to earth from their dwelling place above. This would facilitate their ruling

with Christ, as promised in the Word of God.

A further implication that during the millennial age the heavenly Jerusalem will be a satellite city is found in John’s description, which we read earlier, as he saw it descending from heaven (Rev. 21:2). The language used indicates that this city was already in existence before it made its descent to earth. When we recall that Hebrews 12 depicts the “heavenly Jerusalem” as a home of “the spirits of just men made perfect” (v.23), we have good reason to believe that the eternal home of the resurrected believers will be the same city. We find it logical to think of it in three stages: (1) the heavenly Jerusalem where the spirits of the dead now live, (2) the satellite city from which certain believers commute to earth during the millennial age, and (3) the settled city which will ultimately rest upon “a new earth.”

ITS GENERAL DESCRIPTION

John described graphically the coming of the New Jerusalem to the earth. Remember, our entire present solar system will have been dissolved into one great mass by God's fire of judgment, and the new heavens and new earth will have been built out of its ruins. Then John said:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, 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, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:1-3).

What a breathtaking

sight this must have been! And how awesome the voice that declared the glorious truth that God will forever dwell there with His people! As John looked at the city coming down, he saw it glowing with the glory of God. He observed it resting upon its 12 jeweled foundations and rising skyward, sparkling like a diamond in the sunlight and reflecting its brightness over the whole earth. Then John gave its measurements:

He who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal (Rev. 21:15-16).

The New Jerusalem is depicted as being 1,500 miles long and wide. We also read that "its length, breadth, and height are equal." Many Bible students

believe these numbers should be taken symbolically and that the city, cubical in form, resembles the shape of the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple. There seems to be no good reason, however, to depart from the literal acceptance of the dimensions of the holy city.

Even if we take the numbers literally, though, we cannot speak with absolute certainty about its height. But if the phrase “length, breadth, and height are equal” means that the city is actually 1,500 miles high as well as wide and long, we still cannot be sure that we should take this as depicting the shape of a perfect cube or of a pyramid going up 1,500 miles. Some Bible students believe that the word equal in this context simply means that it will be square, and that in height it will be level.

Whether we accept the city as existing in the form of a cube, a pyramid, or a perfectly level square makes

very little difference. In either case the size is most amazing. At the ground level it covers more area than India, and if placed in the United States, it would reach from the tip of Maine to the tip of Florida, and from the shore of the Atlantic Ocean westward to Denver. What a city that will be! It will rise up from the earth on 12 foundations of precious jewels and will glow with perpetual light as it reflects the glory of God and shines out through its jasper walls. What beauty! What immensity! No need for anyone to worry about whether or not there will be room for the redeemed!

Yes, glory—indescribable blessedness—will be the eternal portion of all who trust in Jesus Christ. Believers are now citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, and someday in glorified bodies they will enter the New Jerusalem. What a great salvation is ours! What a wonderful prospect! What a blessed hope!

The Home Of Beauty

The day is coming when a great explosion will occur and a cleansing fire will sweep across our entire planetary system. This catastrophic event will mark the end of time, the final defeat of Satan, and the ushering in of eternity. After describing the millennium, the apostle John said:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them (Rev. 20:11).

The apostle Peter also described this day of judgment when he wrote:

The heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

In this manner the material of our present

universe will be purged, purified, and transformed. Out of this all-encompassing conflagration will emerge a new planet which John called “a new heaven and a new earth.” The heavenly Jerusalem, where the saints of the ages now dwell with Christ will then descend from a region untouched by the flame and come to rest on the new earth, where it will remain forever as the capital city of heaven. It will then be called the New Jerusalem. The apostle John described this great event in Revelation 21.

When we think about the eternal home of all who believe in Jesus as personal Savior, some questions naturally arise: “What kind of place will it be?” “What will we do there?” Many of our questions are answered in Revelation 21 and 22. Included is a description of the beauty of the heavenly city from without and its glory within. In this chapter we will consider these two aspects of our eternal home.

ITS BEAUTY FROM WITHOUT

Let's imagine we're standing on a vast plain with the heavenly city towering above us in resplendent beauty. We see a brilliant, shining city, with light streaming through its jasper walls and pearly gates, and a full spectrum of color gleaming from its jeweled foundation.

Its Jasper Wall. As we gaze in awe on the city, the first thing to attract our attention is its massive jasper wall. The apostle John described it as follows: "Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall" (Rev. 21:11-12). In verse 17 he said this wall measures 144 cubits in height (216 feet). Even though we may not be able to identify exactly what kind of jasper this is, we do know that these semi-precious stones are translucent in composition, so that light is able to pass through them. From these jasper walls,

therefore, radiate brilliant rays of dazzling color for all to see. The glory of the city will thus be visible from afar, and even the dwellers in the area outside the walls will share in its brightness.

Although the wall around the city is real, it is also symbolic. The purpose of the wall is not to preserve the city against invaders, for God will have no enemies in the new earth. Being 216 feet high, it impressively signifies that no one will enter the city apart from God's grace. The wall is too high to be scaled by human effort, and the only portals are the 12 guarded gates. The requirement for admittance is salvation, and no one who has rejected God's plan will be able to go in. Salvation is the gift of God's grace to those who humbly acknowledge their need of forgiveness and who receive Jesus Christ as Savior.

Its Jeweled Foundations. The next thing to catch our vision as

we look at the city is its jeweled foundation. Normally, foundations undergird the walls of a city and lie below the ground where they cannot be seen. But this is not the case in the New Jerusalem, for the foundation supporting its walls is fully visible to all and is indescribably beautiful. Comprising 12 layers of different precious stones—from sapphire to emerald—the wall stretches all the way around the city.

Many Bible students believe that these jewels reflect all the colors of the rainbow, though we do not know the precise characteristics of each stone. Beginning at ground level, these were probably the colors seen by the apostle: the jasper stone may have been a light green or yellow; the sapphire, a sky-blue or azure; the chalcedony, containing a combination of colors, was mostly green and blue; the emerald, bright green; the sardonyx, red and white; the sardius, reddish

in color; chrysolite, golden yellow; beryl, sea-green; topaz, yellow-green and transparent; chrysoprasus, golden-green; jacinth, violet; and amethyst, either rose-red or purple. The radiating light of the city, shining out through the jasper wall and blazing through the open gates, reflects from these precious stones in splendrous color.

The beauty of the city to the observer from the outside will be magnificent, as described in Revelation 21:19-20. In the foundation stones will be inscribed the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb (v.14), those valiant men of Israel who first proclaimed the message of a risen Christ to the Gentile world.

Its Pearly Gates. In the walls of the heavenly city are 12 gates of pearl, and they will never close. Here is John's description:

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names

written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass (Rev. 21:12,21).

Some Bible scholars believe that these gates of pearl suggest salvation by grace. Even as a wound to an oyster results in the formation of a valuable pearl, the gates of heaven can be entered only because the Lord Jesus was “wounded for our transgressions” (Isa. 53:5). Although men wickedly rejected Him and crucified Him, it was through this death that salvation was made possible. Now, all who believe on Him can look forward to entering the pearly gates of heaven. Jesus Himself said, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (Jn. 10:9).

The gates are open at all

times and in every direction, for salvation is still offered freely to everyone. The angels who keep watch at the open gates, therefore, are a wonderful contrast to the cherubim who guarded the closed gate of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned. These angels keep the way of access open, while the cherubim kept the Garden closed to fallen humanity.

In the gates are inscribed the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, for “salvation is of the Jews.” The Lord Jesus Christ was born of the seed of Abraham and David, and only those who come through the blessedness of His “Messianic gate” can pass through the pearly gates into heaven.

ITS BEAUTY WITHIN

Having envisioned the beauty of the New Jerusalem from the outside, let us now pass through one of those pearly gates and enter the city. As we cross the threshold, we gaze in wonder, for before us lie a

golden street, a crystal river, and the tree of life.

Its Golden Street.

One of the characteristics of the heavenly city is the abundance of gold. A precious commodity throughout man's history, gold has been used as an overlay in works of art and as a standard of value, and has been the means of a great amount of both good and evil in society. It served the purposes of God in the tabernacle and temple, for much gold was in evidence there; it was also used by idolaters in the making of images. On earth, men have fought, suffered, and died for it. But in the New Jerusalem, gold will be so plentiful that it will be used for cobblestones and building blocks. And it will be like glass, possessing transparent qualities, so that the glorious light of the holy city will both shine through it and be reflected by it. Here is John's description:

The city was pure gold,

*like clear glass. . . .
and the street of the
city was pure gold,
like transparent glass
(Rev. 21:18,21).*

Traditionally, gold has symbolized purity. In the wedding band, for example, the circle speaks of endlessness and the gold stands for purity. The golden street of the New Jerusalem, therefore, might well suggest the pure and holy walk of God's redeemed in their eternal home. And the brightness of the city, reflecting from the gold that abounds everywhere, will have its uncorrupted counterpart within the heart of every citizen of heaven. Yes, holiness and purity will pervade the eternal city.

Its Crystal River. A river clear as crystal will flow through the New Jerusalem. The apostle John declared:

*He showed me a
pure river of water
of life, clear as crystal,
proceeding from the
throne of God and*

of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

Just as in Eden there was a river to water the garden, so also in the New Jerusalem there will be a river of life. It will begin at the throne of God, the very uppermost part of the city, and it will course downward through the entire area.

Cities have always been dependent on a good water supply, providing for their inhabitants freshness, cleanness, and life. Even today the river continues to be an emblem of fruitfulness, vitality, and abundance, its waters being fed by melting snows from mountain ranges and refreshing springs, and constantly purified as they tumble downward to be used by people. In fact, our Savior very fittingly used the words “rivers of living water” (Jn. 7:38) to indicate the outflow of blessings from the life of the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Jerusalem, a river of crystal will flow forever, reminding us for all

eternity that God has graciously and abundantly provided for our every spiritual need.

Remember, life in eternity will not be a nebulous existence in some nameless place. No indeed! We will lead rich and full

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lives in glorified bodies. We'll dwell on a renewed earth in a real city of gold, and our lives will be filled with significance and meaning as we give praise to our Redeemer and gladly do His bidding.

This crystal river flowing through our eternal home will be of sparkling beauty

and of clarity beyond the purest water man has ever seen. Think of it! All who believe in Christ will walk the banks of this glorious crystal river. What a blessed joy will then be ours!

Its Tree Of Life.

A third item of special interest in the New Jerusalem will be the tree of life. When Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord God drove them from the Garden of Eden. One reason He did this was to prevent them from having further access to the tree of life. You see, they had rebelled, bringing the curse of death on themselves. The tree of life was therefore out of bounds for them. But in our eternal home we will once again be free to partake of the fruit of this tree, for Revelation 22 says:

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life (v.2).

The term *tree of life* does not refer to one single tree, but to a species. Apparently there will be many such

trees, for we are told that “on either side of the river, was the tree of life.” While only one tree of life stood in Eden’s garden, here in the New Jerusalem—man’s eternal paradise—a multitude of these trees are seen lining the river and producing fruit continuously. Their leaves will be a special blessing to mankind, for John said that “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

It’s difficult to envision just how the trees, the crystal river, and the street of gold will be related. Some excellent Bible teachers feel that a river will flow through the middle of a broad street, and that alongside the river on each bank will be the trees. Others believe that a grove of trees is centered between the avenue of gold on one side and the river on the other. Regardless of which view you may choose, it’s evident that those who conceive of heaven as a place where the redeemed

will do nothing but sit on golden stairs playing harps are grossly mistaken. Life in heaven will be filled with beauty and variety.

Christian friend, we've been concerned with what the Bible tells us about our eternal home. We have seen its beauty from without: its gleaming jasper walls, its jeweled foundations, and its gates of pearl. We have also seen its glory within as we have envisioned the street of gold, the crystal river, and the tree of life.

This glimpse of our eternal home should bring two responses to the heart of the true believer in Christ. First, there should be a renewed determination to place top priority on the spiritual and eternal rather than on the physical and temporal. May we therefore, in anticipation of the glory and beauty of our eternal home, begin right now to "lay up . . . treasures in heaven" (Mt. 6:20) by putting the Lord first and by a constant

willingness to serve Him.

Second, the thought of heaven should cheer us when we become discontented with life and discouraged about the future. No matter how badly things may be going or how

✿ The thought of heaven should cheer us when we become discontented with life and discouraged about the future. ✿

difficult the struggles, the prospect of that wonderful abode awaiting us should be a source of encouragement and hope.

Remember, in heaven we will live forever in the presence of our loving Savior. Life will be rich and full, and we will know a purity, bliss, and love such as could never be experienced here.

The Home Of Blessedness

The pain, sorrow, and unhappiness in this world of ours are distressing to any sensitive individual. Starvation is rampant in some parts of the globe, mothers and their children have been left homeless by war, and young and old alike are destroying their lives inch by inch through alcohol and drug habits. Crime has increased drastically. Selfishness and sin have turned our earthly home into a habitat of untold suffering and wickedness.

A time is coming, however, when all of this will be changed. Our solar system will be purged by a great consuming fire, and it will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. Writing in Revelation 21 and 22, the apostle John recorded his vision of an immense city of shimmering beauty, descending slowly from heaven to become the

capital city of our eternal home. It will be radiant with the light of God's glory shining through its jasper walls, its jeweled foundation, and its pearly gates. And this city, the New Jerusalem, will be the eternal abode of all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. All who have been saved will walk the street of gold in transformed, glorified bodies. We'll enjoy heaven's beautiful crystal river and have ready access to its tree of life. We'll be eternally delivered from every evil and burden that plagues our world today. And we'll finally have become what God intended us to be.

What a wonderful life we'll have in our eternal home! In that perfect society we'll realize our full spiritual potential as individuals. Having entered an eternal fellowship with God, we'll be engaged in an endless variety of meaningful activities. We'll join with the saints of all the ages in a spirit of communion,

fellowship, and love, all centered on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this concluding lesson on *Our Eternal Home*, I'd like to consider with you some of the marvelous blessings that await us. We'll see that the imperfections of this life will be missing and that positive blessings will be there in abundance.

THE EFFECTS OF SIN REMOVED

So that we may more completely understand the blessings and glory of our life in heaven, John's record mentions a number of things that mar human existence on earth, and assures us that they will not be present in our eternal home.

No Tears. Our days on earth are filled with tragedy, heartache, suffering, disappointment, and evil. As a result, tears are all too common in the experience of mankind. The lonely vigils at bedsides, the secret burdens buried deep in a mother's heart, and the

memories of tragedy, rejection, and pain are all too close to us. But before eternity begins, God Himself will wipe away all tears from our eyes! The ministry will not be entrusted to angels. No lesser citizens of heaven will perform this task, for the Lord Himself will pour His healing balm into the wounds and hurts of our lives. The apostle John wrote:

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:4).

Let me be quick to point out that these words in no way imply that saints will shed tears in heaven concerning the sins and failures of their earthly lives. Not at all! The gracious, comforting work of God, not the remorse of the children, is the emphasis of this verse.

No Death. Not only will there be an absence of tears in heaven, but John also said, “There shall be no more death” (Rev. 21:4). This fearsome enemy continually casts its shadow on our lives here on earth. Eventually death enters every happy family circle. Sooner or later, every home experiences the feeling of emptiness—the dreadful vacuum caused by the passing of a loved one. No member of humanity, even the most strong, can escape the relentless passing of time and the realization that the earthly sojourn is brief. How happy we can be that in our eternal home we will experience no more anxiety, no more wondering when the end will come, no more long hours by hospital bedsides, and praise God, no more funerals!

No Sorrow Nor Crying. These words are closely related to the tears God wipes away, but the sorrow absent from our eternal home has reference to mourning or grief. Here

on earth we have many occasions for sorrow—our own sins and shortcomings, personal misfortunes, disappointments in others, and distressing national conditions. When we reach the New Jerusalem, we shall never again mourn, but we’ll be completely free from sin, experience no adversity or discouragement, and never have occasion to be concerned over calamitous national or world conditions. In James 4:9 sinners are warned to change their laughter into mourning, but in heaven the saints will exchange mourning for joy.

We also are reassured that there will be no more crying. This refers to loud, uncontrolled sobbing, the kind of weeping that results from the shock of deep, piercing hurt. Thank God, when we reach the eternal home, we will never again hear agonizing cries of sorrow or anguish. There will be no heartbreak in heaven.

No Pain. We are also given the comforting assurance that “there shall be no more pain” (Rev. 21:4). What a blessing to read these words from the Bible! A brief visit to a cancer ward, convalescent home, or hospital quickly gives us an unforgettable glimpse of the widespread suffering that curses our world. In heaven, however, we will never again experience hurt of any kind. These bodies of ours in their glorified state will be free from all disease. We’ll never again know physical distress or suffering. And, we’ll never grow old. A feeling of vigor and youthful energy will forever mark the resurrection body that will be ours.

No Night. Then too, we are told that night will never fall in heaven.

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its

light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there) (Rev. 21:23-25).

In the present, we’re dependent on the sun for light and heat. We have day and night, and the four seasons, because of the earth’s rotation and our relationship to the sun. In heaven, however, there will be no need of sunlight, for the radiant glory of God will fill the city and spread throughout the entire earth.

No Defilement.

Another element common to this life that will be missing in heaven will be defilement from evil. Revelation 21:27 tells us that “there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie.” Today our larger cities are filled with crime, violence, obscenity, and hatred. Pornographic literature, obscene theatrical productions, and blatant

immorality pervade the streets. In urban areas, parents are even afraid to let their children walk to the playground alone, for fear they will be harmed or molested. Drug addiction and its related evils and heartaches threaten many teenagers who attend our high schools. Violent crimes such as rape, armed robbery, and murder are on the increase.

The promise of no defilement in heaven, therefore, comes as good news. Within the gates of the New Jerusalem no sin can enter. No defiling substance nor personal acts of desecration can mar its eternal purity. And no spiritual or physical harm will ever come to any of God's children.

Think of it: No rebellion! No murder! No violence! No immorality! What a blessed place heaven will be!

No Curse. Another effect of sin that will be removed forever when we enter our eternal home is

found in the promise that "there shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3). In our world, farmers must toil endlessly in their battle against weeds, poor soil, plant disease, and insects. A violent storm can wipe out a year's crops in a few minutes. But in heaven, nothing will impair productivity. All the effects of Adam's curse will be gone forever. Fields and orchards will flourish. Finally delivered from the consequences of Adam's fall, nature will smile on mankind. We'll experience an abundance that has been unknown since the fall of man.

In our eternal home, we will be free from tears, death, sorrow, crying, pain, darkness, and disappointment. How comforting and strengthening it is to reflect on the curse-free world that awaits us! The tears and sorrows of this life will only serve to make heaven all the sweeter.

MAN'S DESTINY FULFILLED

The evils that mar our life on earth will be gone in heaven, and we will fulfill perfectly the purpose for which God created us: to enjoy His presence, fellowship, and blessing. God has planned that we should be exalted above angels, for they are “sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14).

We Will Know Him Perfectly. Our present knowledge of God, while real and precious, remains incomplete. Sin has entered and distorted the picture, and we often fall short of the Lord's ideal for us. But in heaven we will know Him perfectly. We'll behold the glory of His presence, and faith will turn to sight.

I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with

them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3).

Yes, we will delight in the glory of the Lord God. And we will know Him personally, for the Bible says:

They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads (Rev. 22:4).

Our hearts will throb with joy as we comprehend the fullness of the Lord's glory and majesty. Loving adoration and sincere praise will flow from our hearts as we gaze into the face of our Savior.

We Will Worship And Serve Him. In addition to the blessing of knowing and enjoying God, we will be kept busy in fruitful activity.

There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (Rev. 22:3).

Sometimes heaven is incorrectly pictured as a place of never-ending

boredom and sameness. Its inhabitants are portrayed as floating around on clouds, wearing long white robes, and playing harps all day. Or they are depicted as standing forever around the throne of God, mouthing His praises in unison for all eternity.

I'm glad that's not the accurate story. We'll worship God! It will be an important and rewarding part of our heavenly activity. The shortcomings and imperfections of our praise here will all be removed. Our minds won't wander during prayer as they do now, and we won't be thinking about business or other less important matters when our full attention should be directed toward God. No temple will be needed in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22), for it would be an element of the imperfect, symbolic worship of this world.

The new world will also present opportunity for an endless variety of activities.

The joys we derive from God's beautiful world of nature will still be ours, only on a far higher plane. The delight of fellowship with others will also exceed anything we have ever experienced on earth. In our heavenly home we will know one another perfectly, and each will be without fault. Our fellowship today is often marred by evasion and a covering of our deepest thoughts, but then a wonderful spirit-to-spirit communion of radiant personalities will exist. Remember, the verse said, "His servants shall serve Him." We'll be busy doing things He considers important, and we'll be infinitely happy as we do His will. Yes, in our eternal home we'll know a life of praise, satisfaction, and usefulness such as we have never experienced here on earth.

We Will Reign With Him. Finally, all believers in Christ will reign with the Lord Jesus for all eternity.

The apostle John, after describing the light of God's glory that will surround us, revealed that we will share in His dominion over the earth. He declared:

There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:5).

This completes our glorification. We will actually share in the authority of God over the transformed creation. Exalted far above the angels, transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, set free from all pain, sadness, sin, and death, we'll enjoy a life of never-ending happiness, satisfaction, and glory. We will have realized the purpose for which God made us, for with Jesus Christ we will exercise dominion over the earth.

You can make certain right now that heaven will be your eternal home by praying something like this:

“Lord Jesus, I want heaven to be my home. Therefore, believing that You died for me and arose from the grave, I accept You and the salvation You have provided. Forgive my sin. I'm trusting You and You alone for my salvation. Save me. I do believe. Amen.”

If you prayed this sincerely, you can claim the promise of the Lord Jesus, “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn. 6:37).

This booklet is taken from messages taught by Richard W. De Haan on the Day Of Discovery television program. Richard was president and teacher of Radio Bible Class (now RBC Ministries) from 1964 to 1984.

Managing Editor: David Sper

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