

What is Heaven?

Objectives are to discuss the following subtopics:

1. BFC Article 28 - The Eternal State
2. The Renewed Heaven, Earth, and Creation
3. The Undeniable Glory of God

Introduction

- After the final judgment, believers will enter into the full enjoyment of life in the presence of God forever. Jesus will say to us, *“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matt. 25:34). We will enter a kingdom where *“there shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him”* (Rev. 22:3).
- When referring to this place, Christians often talk about living with God “in heaven” forever. But in fact the biblical teaching is richer than that: it tells us that there will be new heavens and a new earth—an entirely renewed creation—and we will live with God there. (Is 65:17, 66:22, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1)

BFC Article 28 - The Eternal State

28-1 There are two final, eternal destinies for man: heaven for the righteous and penitent, and hell for the unrighteous and impenitent. At the great white throne judgment, all of the enemies of God will be consigned to the place of eternal conscious punishment, from which there is no escape. The new heavens and the new earth shall be created as the final state in which the righteous shall dwell forever in the presence of God.

The Renewed Heaven, Earth, and Creation

- **What Is Heaven?** Scripture uses the word heaven in three ways: 1) to describe the atmospheric heaven (1st heaven) which we breath in (Gen 7:11-12, Ps 147:8), 2) the planetary heaven (2nd heaven) which is where the stars, moon and planets exist (Gen 1:17-17), and 3) the heaven (3rd heaven) where God dwells (2 Cor 12:2). During this present age, the place where God dwells is frequently called “heaven” in Scripture. (Ps 33:13-14)
 - The Lord says, *“Heaven is my throne”* (Isa. 66:1), and Jesus teaches us to pray, *“Our Father who art in heaven”* (Matt. 6:9).
 - Jesus now *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God”* (1 Peter 3:22).

While it is important to note that God is omnipresent, and that there is not a place, which can contain God (1 Kings 8:27), we can say that heaven is God's unique home, the center of His operations, and the place where the most perfect worship of Him occurs. ***Therefore, Heaven is the place where God most fully makes known his presence to bless.***

- **Heaven Is a Place, Not Just a State of Mind.** The New Testament teaches the idea of a location for heaven in several different ways, and quite clearly.
 - When Jesus ascended into heaven, the fact that he went to a place seems to be the entire point of the narrative, *“As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight”*. The angels exclaimed, *“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11).
 - The story of Stephen's death shows us that Just before he was stoned, he, *“full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”* (Acts 7:55-56).
 - Jesus promised, *“I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2). He speaks quite clearly of going from his existence in this world back to the Father, and then returning again: *“And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”* (John 14:3).
- **The Physical Creation Will Be Renewed and We Will Continue to Exist and Act in It.**
 - In addition to a renewed heaven, God will make a *“new earth”* (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Several passages indicate that the physical creation will be renewed in a significant way (Heb 1:11-12, 12:26-27, 2 Peter 3:10, Rev 20:11, 21:1). This probably means that the actual creation, which God deemed as *“very good”* will not be ultimately destroyed completely and replaced, but just changed, renewed, and perfected into harmony with the purposes for which He created in the first place.

2 Peter 3:10 - “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat and the earth and its works will be burned up.”

“The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19-21)

- **Our Resurrection Bodies Will Be Part of the Renewed Creation.** In the new heavens and new earth, there will be a place and activities for our resurrection bodies, which will never grow old or become weak or ill.
 - All material matter, God’s creation, was “very good” in the beginning (Gen 1:31). There is nothing inherently evil or sinful about it including our physical bodies. Although the creation, as well as our bodies have been marred by sin, God will not completely destroy the physical world, but rather perfect it.
 - According to God’s original plan, eventually all things will be subjected to man. In this sense, we will ‘inherit the earth” and reign over it as God originally intended. (Heb 2:8) This is why there are many descriptions of life in heaven that include features that are very physical, like eating and drinking (Rev 19:9, Luke 22:18, Rev 22:1-2). We will also carry on other physical activities as well, possibly using our God-given abilities for the glory of God.
 - Since God is infinite and we can never exhaust his greatness (Ps. 145:3), and since we are finite creatures who will never equal God’s knowledge or be omniscient, we may expect that for all eternity we will be able to go on learning more about God and about his relationship to his creation. In this way we will continue the process of learning that was begun in this life, in which a life “fully pleasing to him” is one that includes continually “increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Col 1:10)
- **The New Creation Will Not Be “Timeless” but Will Include an Unending Succession of Moments.**
 - Heaven will have no light except that which comes from the glory of God (Rev 21:23) and will have no night there (Rev 21:25). However this does not mean that time will be unknown or where events cannot happen one after the other.
 - Since we are finite creatures, we might also expect that we will always live in a succession of moments. Just as we will never attain to God’s omniscience or omnipresence, so we shall never attain to God’s eternity in the sense of seeing all time equally vividly and not living in a succession of moments or being limited by time. As finite creatures, we will rather live in a succession of moments that will never end. (Rev 21:24-26)

*“through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit **each month**. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”*
(Revelation 22:2)
- **The Doctrine of the New Creation provides a Great motivation for storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.**

- This present creation is only temporary. Our lives in the new creation will last for eternity. Therefore we should have a strong motivation for godliness and living in such a way as to store up treasures in heaven.
- 2 Peter 3:11-13 - *“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn. But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”*

The Undeniable Glory of God

- **The description of heaven in Revelation 21 and 22.**
 - A *“holy city”* (21:2),
 - A place *“prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”* (21:2).
 - A place where *“death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more”* (21:4).
 - We can drink *“from the fountain of the water of life without payment”* (21:6).
 - A city that has *“the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal”* (21:11).
 - A city of immense size, whether the measurements be understood as literal or symbolic: 1500 miles long, 1500 miles high and 1500 miles wide. (Rev 21:16)
 - Parts of the city are constructed of immense precious jewels of various colors (21:18-21).
 - It will be free from all evil, for *“nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (21:27).
 - We shall also have positions of rule over God’s entire creation, for *“they shall reign for ever and ever”* (22:5).
- **The glorious fellowship of heaven.** But more important than all the physical beauty of the heavenly city, more important than the fellowship we will enjoy eternally with all God’s people from all nations and all periods in history, more important than our freedom from pain and sorrow and physical suffering, and more important than reigning over God’s kingdom—more important by far than any of these will be the fact that *we will be in the presence of God and enjoying unhindered fellowship with him.*

“Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (21:3-4).

- **The glorious joy of heaven.** In that city we shall live in the presence of God. It will be our highest joy to be giving God glory. (Ps 16:11)

When we finally see the Lord face to face (22:4), our hearts will want nothing else. *“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you....God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26).*