

# The Hope of Heaven

## Introduction

May 2, 2010

Throughout history people have pondered the future of humanity. What will happen to this world? To us? To me and those I love? This week we're beginning a new study called "The Hope of Heaven." Our goal is to explore the vision of the "new heavens and the new earth" that the Apostle John records for us in Revelation 21:1-22:5 and to unpack the **hope** that this vision should infuse into our hearts and lives in the "here and now." We know that the mere **mention** of heaven (or the book of Revelation, for that matter) immediately raises all kinds of questions, from fun curiosities to serious concerns about the future and its implications for everything from personal decisions to global socio-political issues. With that in mind, we're going to start by taking a look at a few of the more popular topics. We'd like to deal with them this week and then set them aside so that we can focus on *the eternal destiny of every believer* and the practical, "day-in, day-out" effect that this vision of heaven should have on us. Let's start with these questions below:

### Q1

**So what about our pets? Will *they* join us in the new heavens and the new earth?**

1) What do *you* think, and why?

### Q2

**What am I going to look like when I get to heaven?**

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-54**

<sup>35</sup>But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" <sup>36</sup>You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup>And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup>But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>39</sup>For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup>There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. <sup>41</sup>There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. <sup>42</sup>So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup>It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup>It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup>Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. <sup>50</sup>I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup>Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

**Read John 20:19-20**

*<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."<sup>20</sup>When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*

2) What do these passages teach with regard to the "resurrection bodies" that we will enjoy when we, like Jesus before us, are "raised on the last day (the day of the return of Jesus)"?

### Q3

**Since John's vision of the new heavens and the new earth is entirely future, where do I go if I die now? Where are my loved ones who die in faith in Christ?**

**Read Philippians 1:20-23**

*<sup>20</sup>as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup>For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

*<sup>13</sup>But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

3) Based on these passages, where would you say followers of Jesus go when they die between now and the coming of Jesus (the "day of the Lord")?

### Q4

**What has to happen, and when, for the "New Heaven and New Earth" to come?**

**Read 2 Peter 3:1-13.**

*<sup>1</sup>This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup>that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup>knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup>They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."<sup>5</sup>For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, <sup>6</sup>and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup>But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. <sup>8</sup>But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

**<sup>11</sup>Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup>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! <sup>13</sup>But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**

This book was written to believers in Jesus (see 2 Peter 1:1) who, like many of us, have questions about his return, the new heavens and the new earth, and the chronology of events that yet lay before us in the future.

#### **Review 2 Peter 3:1-4**

**<sup>1</sup>This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."**

4) What question will scoffers pose? What prophetic claim will they challenge, and on what grounds? Have you heard such scoffing? Have you ever had these same thoughts?

Peter now takes on the scoffers with regard to Jesus' promised return and begins to construct a framework from which we can rightly discern the chronology of events leading up to the return of Jesus and the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth. Let's follow his argument.

#### **Review 2 Peter 3:5-6**

**<sup>5</sup>For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, <sup>6</sup> and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.**

Peter here speaks of God's original creation of the world, right out of the first few pages of the book of Genesis—a world that was then destroyed (or cleansed) as a result of its ungodliness and unrighteousness by water (a cleansing agent).

5) Why do you suppose that people would choose to "deliberately overlook" the judgment of God on ungodliness and unrighteousness and the destruction of this "world that was."

6) What is the significance of overlooking the reality of the judgment of God?

#### **Review 2 Peter 3:7**

**<sup>7</sup>But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.**

Here Peter begins to talk about the world that we live in.

7) What similarity does Peter reveal between the "world that was" during ancient times and the present earth ("the world that is" - this world that we now live in)?

Peter then continues by making another statement to the "beloved" (to these Christians that he's writing to here).

**Review 2 Peter 3:8-9**

**<sup>8</sup>But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**

8) Who is the Lord being "patient toward" here? In other words, who is the "you" that Peter is identifying? Or, to put it yet another way, who are these people that God is unwilling to see perish, but rather that he wills to come to repentance?

9) How does God's perspective on time differ from ours, and from those who would "deliberately overlook" his judgment and mock the promise of his coming?

**Review 2 Peter 3:9-10**

**<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.**

Notice here what Peter states happens upon the return of Jesus (in "the day of the Lord"). Did you also notice what he omits? (7-year tribulation, 1,000 year Millennial reign of Jesus from the city of Jerusalem, etc.) Peter is essentially saying, "as it was in 'the world that was,' so it will be in this 'world that is.'" They both end in sudden, cataclysmic judgment (one by water and the other by fire - both cleansing agents.) Moreover, this world ends upon the return of Jesus!

Jesus says the same thing in the following text:

**Matthew 24:37-39**

**<sup>37</sup>For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup>and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**

**Take another look at 2 Peter 3:10-13 as well.**

**<sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.**

**<sup>11</sup>Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup>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! <sup>13</sup>But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**

10) Did you notice what Peter says in verse 13? "But according to his promise..." What promise? What is the promise that the scoffers will mock?

11) What are we waiting for that will be fulfilled when Jesus returns in fulfillment of his promise?

12) What then is the chronology of events that needs to take place between now and the ushering in of the new heavens and new earth?