

A HEAVENLY CITY

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Revelation 22:1-7 contains a beautiful description of Heaven given to us by God's inspiration through the Apostle John. "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And 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: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." What is this place like? What will we do there? And how can we get there?

The river of life

In Revelation 22:1, an angel of God showed John "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." The description of this river is very similar to the river that came out from the temple in Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 47:1-12. In Ezekiel's vision, the river flowed to the east, getting deeper and deeper, gradually reaching an impassable depth as it flowed into the Dead Sea and turned it into a fish-filled freshwater body. There were "very many trees" on both banks of the river and the river gave life to every living thing where it flowed. The river in John's vision in Revelation 22 also gives "water of life" (Rev 22:1), and has the "tree of life" on either side of it and in the midst of its street (Rev 22:2). The tree of life produces twelve kinds of fruits, a different kind each month, and its leaves heal the nations (Rev 22:2). When man sinned in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-13), he was cursed (Gen 3:16-19). At that time, he forfeited his right to eat of the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). Those who enter heaven will have the right to the tree of life (Rev 22:14), and "there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it" (Rev 22:3). All men, the "nations," have the opportunity to partake of the healing waters of the river of life. Heaven is pictured in these verses as a place of eternal life that is open to all.

A place of service

Revelation 22:3-5 makes it clear that heaven is a place where we will labor, a principle that is also taught in the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-26). The giving of talents in the first place was a responsibility (Matt 25:16-19). Their duty was to produce more with what they were given. They were rewarded by their lord by entering his joy with their talents (Matt 25:20-23,28-29). And because of their faithfulness, their lord made two of them "rulers" over many

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(continued)

things (see also Luke 19:15-19). Being “rulers” necessitates having authority and responsibility. This is *work*, in the form of service to the Lord. It is true that we will rest from our earthly labors in heaven (Rev 14:13). But this does not suggest that in heaven we will be doing nothing. Singing and worshiping God are excellent things, but heaven is much more than that. Hebrews 4:10 says, “For he that is entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” God rested the seventh day and has been working ever since. In heaven we will rest “as God did.” After being given a period of rest, faithful Christians will be eternally rewarded with duties and responsibilities in heaven, and we will *serve* him there continually. Those in heaven will be “before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sits on the throne shall dwell among them” (Rev 7:15). Revelation 22:3 again says that in heaven God’s “*servants will serve him,*” and verse five adds that they will “*reign forever and ever.*” Serving, ruling, and reigning is work. In this life, we are being trained through our earthly service to God for our eternal service that we will render to Him in heaven (Luke 16:10). But that will be a joyful service that we render to our God for eternity, bringing glory to him “throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:21).

Seeing God

Revelation 22:4-6 gives us several exceeding great and precious promises. Verse four gives us the promise that in heaven we will see God’s face. To be able to actually see God is one of the greatest promises we have been given (2 Pet 1:4). No man yet has seen the Father (John 1:18; 1 Tim 6:16). But after Jesus pardons the righteous on Judgment Day, he will deliver them (his kingdom) to the Father (1 Cor 15:24). At that time, Jesus will show the Father to the redeemed (1 Tim 6:13-16). But to be eligible for that incomparable reward, it is essential that we be pure in heart (Matt 5:8), and holy (Heb 12:14). Those who are not holy and not pure in heart will face everlasting destruction, permanently separated from God’s presence and from the glory of His power (2 Thes 1:9). Can such a great place truly become our eternal dwelling place, and can we truly receive such wonderful promises there? Remember that “all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Cor 1:20). We have a “strong consolation,” because it is impossible for God to lie (Heb 6:18), and “he is faithful that promised” (Heb 10:23; 11:11). Revelation 22:6 emphasizes the certainty of God’s promises in the previous verses: “*These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.*” This verse also reminds us that this earth will not be here for long, and we will all soon be facing our eternity. The question is, Where will we be spending our eternity? To inherit the eternal blessings in heaven, we must keep God’s sayings. Jesus is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey* him” (Heb 5:9).