



YES, NO AND MAYBE

1. I'm going to live longer than the people on either side of me.
2. There are still a few things I want to do before Jesus takes us to heaven.
3. The main road in the New Jerusalem will be sopping wet.
4. The tree of life in heaven is only one tree.
5. Jesus will come within my lifetime.

WHAT WILL HEAVEN BE LIKE?

➤ READ Revelation 22 (NIV)

« What is your favorite element of this description of heaven?

» **Vs. 1: River of life** - Jesus consistently used the term “living water” throughout the Gospels to refer to having a direct connection with the Spirit of God.

- **As clear as crystal** - This designates absolute purity.

- **Flowing from the throne** - That the river flows from the throne indicates God is the source of life.

» **Vs. 2: Down the middle of the great street** - Perhaps the most difficult idea to visualize here is that the river flowed through the middle of the street of the city. The issue is whether this phrase is to be taken with verse 1, placing the river in the middle of a broad city street with trees on either side, or with verse 2, implying that the river and street are side by side with trees between. Whatever John saw in the vision, the meaning is clear: in the city eternal life is central and available to all. This is likely a counter-image of the martyrs dying in the middle of the street of the city in 11:8 (Michaels, 1997:246).

« What does this imagery tell you about the character of God?

- **On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month** - Although Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat from the tree of life, here there is free access to its fruit, eternal life. The image probably means twelve successive harvests. Both the water and the tree of life symbolize that in the New Jerusalem the faithful saints will have free access to life—eternal and abundant.

- **Two trees have become one** - In the middle of the Garden of Eden there were two trees; the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Here it appears as if the two trees do not lead to separate ends anymore, but that God has joined them into a happy-eternity-after. What once led to death, God now has grafted into eternal life. Because of His sacrifice, God changed our desires for knowledge of good and evil into a knowing of his incomparable love, generosity and grace.

« What does the tree of life mean to you personally?

- **And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations** - The word “healing” (therapeian) can be understood as “health-giving.” The English “therapeutic” is derived from this Greek word. It might be asked why the nations need to be healed if they are in the New Jerusalem. Because these are the nations that identified with Babylon (21:24) and nothing unclean is allowed in the city (21:8, 27; 22:15), their healing is necessary (7:17; 21:4; see also 2 Chron. 30:20; Hos. 6:1).

« What pain caused by others who may be in heaven will need to be healed to bring you eternal peace?

» **Vs. 4: They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads** - To see the face of God was denied to Moses (Exod. 33:20, 23), but it is the privilege of all God's servants in the holy city. The consummation of their bliss is

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the vision of God. There is nothing between him and them. More, his name is on their foreheads, as in 14:1. They are wholeheartedly attached to God. They bear his name.

« What does it say about God that his great desire is for us to have nothing between Him and us?

» **Vs. 7: Look, I am coming soon!** - The Greek word *tachy* may be translated “soon” (NIV) or “quickly” (NASB, ASV), and from the divine standpoint both are true. The coming of Christ is always soon from the standpoint of the saints’ foreview of the future, and when it occurs, it will come suddenly or quickly.

« How do you rectify Jesus’ statement that he is coming “soon”?

» **Vs. 11: Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong...** - He probably means that the Lord’s coming will be so swift that there will be no time for change. As they are at that moment, so the Lord will find them. The words are clearly meant as an encouragement to believers. The evil continue to pursue their way. Well, let them. The Lord’s return is sure and soon. The last word is not with the wicked. The saying may also be meant as a challenge to repentance now.

» **Vs. 12: My reward is with me** - The word reward literally means “wages,” that is, what is due to a person for work done (Isa. 40:10; Matt. 5:12; 10:41–42; Luke 6:35; 2 Pet. 2:12–16; Rev. 11:18; see also Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Jer. 17:10; Rom. 2:6–10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23–25; 1 Clem. 34:3). Moreover, the reward is for everyone: to the faithful, the joy of citizenship in the holy city; and to the unfaithful, condemnation to the lake of fire. Yet work here is singular, focusing particularly on loyalty. The imminence of the coming of Christ should evoke, not “elaborate charts and timetables,” but “repentance from sin and faithfulness to the Lamb” (Wall, 1991:263).

» **Vs. 14: Blessed are those who wash their robes** - The washing of the robes is a recognition that the spirits of all men are contaminated by sin. This is overcome once again by the blood of the Lamb. Early in the book there is the hymn of praise, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev 1:5). As indicated in that particular place, the words for “wash” and for “freed” or “loosed” are pronounced the same way, and the original text cannot be decided with certainty. Most favor “that he freed us from our sins in his own blood,” but it is also true that he washed us in his own blood (1:5).

« What does it say about God that he rewards us, not based on our wages, but on His gift?

» **Vs. 15: Outside are the dogs** - The intriguing feature of the verse is the mention of “dogs” (*kunos*). This tends to be an especially difficult concept for Westerners to understand since their love for canines is well known—whether in Europe or in America. But in the East such is often not the case. The dogs were unclean animals and were often the street-scavengers who had no real home or obligation. They were often viewed as dangerous; and although they fulfilled a purpose, they were granted none of the affection that many Westerners pour out on their canine companions. Still, seemingly the reference here is metaphorical and not a reference to canines, whether of an endearing or reprehensible variety. At least this much is obvious: The reference is to despicable people whose behavioral patterns are in some sense or another indistinguishable from street-roving scavengers.

» **Vs. 16: I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony** - You is plural, which is a little unexpected, for the angel spoke to John. But his message was not a private one; it was for Christians at large, and so the plural is meaningful.

» **Vs. 17: The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life** - “Come” is the present active imperative of *erchomai* and is at once both a mandate and an invitation. Most likely, these four exclamations are invitations to the wedding banquet. It should be noted that “Come!” as a present imperative throughout, indicates that the appeal is continuous.

« What does this open and continuous invitation tell you about God?

» **Vs. 19: God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life** - Though *dendron* is most often the word translated “tree,” here *xulon* is used (v. 14). The latter may mean “tree” but is more often rendered “wood” (e.g., Rev 18:12). This same word is employed in reference to the cross (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Pet 2:24).

« What do you think Jesus is trying to say here by using the typical word for cross, not tree?

MY PRAYER...

1. What healing do I currently need God to bring into my relationships?
2. How am I responding to God’s invitation to “come”?
3. What new aspect of God’s character does He want me to know?



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