



## Small Group Leader Guide

### Revelation 21:1-27 | What Jesus said about...heaven

Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together

- **Think** about heaven. What do you think of when you think about heaven? What are the images that paint the portrait of your imagination? From where do those images originate? **Pray, praising God** for the gift of heaven and the promise that believers call heaven their home. **Thank God** for His grace that makes heaven your destination, through faith in Jesus. **Ask God** to guide you in your study of the Scriptures, so you can help your group see heaven as it is biblically illustrated.
- **Read** the following Scriptures: Revelation 21 and John 14:1-6. **Explore** the details presented about the geography, description, and beauty of heaven. **Personalize** the promises that Jesus makes about heaven. **Invite** God to lead you in your preparation, guiding you to develop a small group experience that will speak to the needs of every person who participates. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to use you to be a teacher of influence for each person in your group, for the glory and cause of Jesus. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

### To The Point – What to impart to your small group

**Key Verse:** "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21"3-4, ESV)"

**Objectives:** Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

**Explore** the details of heaven

**Personalize** the promises of heaven

**Discuss** the significance of heaven, in regard to daily life

**Apply** the implications for living, in sight of heaven and eternity

### Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

## Ice Breaker: Heaven - A True/False Quiz

**Ask** Raise your hand if you think each of the following is true or false (answer in parenthesis).

- There are levels of heaven (**False**, the Bible speaks of three heavens, but not three levels of heaven. The “first heaven” is the sky, the “second heaven” is space and the universe, and the “third heaven” is actual heaven).
- Heaven today is only temporary (**True**, the Bible explains that eternity will consist of a new heaven and a new earth).
- Heaven’s residents consist of God, Jesus, angels, and believers. (**False**, the Bible teaches that in addition to these, the eternal Godhead includes God’s Holy Spirit).
- The faith and the works of every person will be judged (**True**, the Bible explains that a person’s faith is the basis for entering heaven, and for the Christ-follower, works done in faith are rewarded).
- Heaven citizens are either in the choir or orchestra in eternity (**False**, the “sitting on clouds, strumming harps” imagery is not biblical)

*Allow participants to respond.*

**Say** There are many images and misconceptions about heaven, things that are thought of or even misunderstood about heaven. Jesus wants us to know about heaven, to “whet our appetites” about it, so to speak. Our time together is going to peek in on the vision of heaven that Jesus gave to John, and from that, we endeavor to do nothing less than inspire and encourage one another to press forward by faith until that day when we may experience heaven’s glory first-hand!

Open in prayer for your time together.

## The Personality of Heaven (Revelation 21:1-8)

When you read this passage, what are some of the details that speak to you about the intimacy of heaven or on the emphasis on relationship?

*This passage is rife with details revealing the intimate love of God for His creation, including:*

- *There is no more sea - we will no longer depend on the earth for providing us with the resources for life, or the purifying effect of the salt waters. This does not mean there won't be water, or even great bodies of water (since the riches of the deep will be brought to New Jerusalem [cf. Is. 60:5,9]).*
- *The old has passed away. Everything from the old life is reconciled, judged, accounted for, and rectified. There is nothing to hinder the eternal relationship between God and His children.*
- *Jerusalem is described as being adorned as a bride for her husband.*
- *God’s dwelling place is with His creation, and their co-habitation is detailed.*
- *God will be the consoler, the overcomer. In Him, there is no mourning, crying, or pain.*
- *Jesus makes all things new. This is a completed work.*
- *He offers Himself fully and freely to anyone who asks.*
- *He is vigilant to exclude those who will not come to Him on His terms.*

Which of these details is most significant to you and why?

*Allow the participants to respond. Encourage the group to apprehend the grandiosity of*

*heaven and the goodness of God in making heaven available to us.*

Why do you think God will institute a new heaven and a new earth?

*Allow the group to respond. It is important to help the participants see that God's work in creation has always included the intentionality and essentiality of redeeming what would be cursed or corrupted because of the Fall. God intends to redeem and restore. In presenting the new heaven and the new earth, God is demonstrating His faithfulness to complete what He started. He is showing the lengths that He will go for you, for the sake of His relationship with you.*

What is the significance of verses 5 and 6 to you?

*Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:*

- *If God can establish a new heaven and a new earth, He truly can overcome your sin and shortcomings.*
- *He makes "all things new." There is no detail of life that He is not able to redeem.*
- *There is no part of creation or history that God is not sovereign over or intimately attuned to. He offers an ongoing invitation to relate with Him as the source of the Water of Life, to anyone and everyone who will receive Him as such.*

Why do you think verse 8 is important to include in this description?

*It is important to see that accessibility to heaven is not universal. God does indeed have the standard of His holiness. Heaven is only accessible through agreeing to God's terms. Heaven is distinctly different from creation as it exists today, with its desperate terminal sickness of sin and self. The reality is, heaven is a glorious place of great joy, completely absent of evil. Forever.*

### **The Presentation of Heaven (Revelation 21:9-21)**

What are some of the descriptions that present heaven (the new Jerusalem) as the Bride? Why do you think these details matter?

*Heaven is described as being radiant like a jewel, completely reflective of the glory of God. It is described as being pure, of perfected gold, of various gems. These details matter because it demonstrates that God's work in creating the new heaven is perfect, and it is a perfect work of love. It is like a husband's attention to his bride, evocative of unsurpassed beauty. The picture of marriage continues, demonstrating the sense of intimate, selfless love that God has for his creation.*

Why do you think it is significant that the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles are included in the details about heaven's wall??

*This is a precious indication that God's redemptive plan is complete. He did not replace Israel with the church. He redeems Jew and Gentile alike. God's love and grace is available to all people, and heaven will be an eternal dwelling place for all who call on Jesus as Messiah and Savior.*

Using modern equivalents, the walls around the New Jerusalem indicate the city is approximately 1,500 miles by 1,500 miles, but also ascending 1,500 miles. The city within this wall is made of pure gold. What is significant about John 14:2-3, considering this entire passage,

and the dimensions of the New Jerusalem?

*Allow participants to respond. Insights you may want to highlight:*

- *This presentation comes after the "last of the plagues." This is a presentation of the finality of God's wrath against sin. There is no more enmity against God. Jesus is victorious against all ungodliness!*
- *The city is described as the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb. This is a presentation of the Faithfulness of Jesus*
- *This magnificent city is unlike anything we can imagine that currently exists. This demonstrates the remarkable, incomprehensible majesty and power of God.*
- *The dimensions of the New Jerusalem are immense, massive. Its capacity to accommodate all the citizens of heaven (in "rooms" or "mansions" that far surpass contemporary constructions) is evident. This presents the ample, generous provision of God.*
- *Everything about the city -- its walls, its gates, even its foundations -- are all described in terms of perfect beauty. This presents the unsurpassable goodness and glory of God.*

### **The Promises of Heaven (Revelation 21:22-27)**

How are you affected by verse 22 that declares there is no temple, for God and Jesus is the temple in heaven?

*Allow participants to respond. If possible, discuss the challenge we imagine now trying to worship the God we believe in by faith, worshipping Him in person forever. Highlight the promise that we will be bodily in God's presence forever. There will be no faith, no religion in heaven - just true worship in the very presence of Almighty God!*

What are promises you see in verses 23-26, and what implications do these promises have on you, personally?

*Allow participants to respond. Highlights may include:*

- *There is no need for the sun or moon to give light to creation, for God's glory fills the entirety of heaven.*
- *There will continue to be nations, or groupings of people. But there will be no war, no conflict, but everlasting global peace.*
- *The world's kings will be under God's authority. There will be order and civilization. All the world will be under God's sovereignty.*
- *The gates of heaven will never close - there will never be a need to close the gates. There will be no sin, no opposition to God, no personal or national, or global, or celestial rebellion.*
- *There will be no night in the New Jerusalem. While there is speculation about all that this may entail, it indicates that God's glory in heaven is unending and all encompassing.*

Verse 27 makes clear that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and nobody who does anything detestable will enter the new City, nor will anything unclean be permitted in there. How does this promise shape your hope and expectations of heaven?

*While the various responses should reflect a personal faith and appreciation for the holiness of God, you may want to remind the group of the following:*

- *Nothing unclean is permitted in the redeemed creation. This speaks to the former thinking that Gentiles were unclean and unable to exist in the presence of God.*

*However, because of the work of Jesus alone, the unclean has been brought into the family of God and eternally enjoys relationship with Him.*

- *There is no reason to consider that there will be creatures (people) outside the gates who are denied entrance (for they will have already been judged and separated from God in the Lake of Fire). Heaven is a fully free, fully functioning, place of perfect purity, holiness, goodness, and love, illuminated by God's glory because of His never-ending full presence there, relating with His creation forever.*

How does all that Jesus says and reveals in His Word about the Bible (and your place in it) affect or influence your life now?

*Allow the participants to respond. You may want to encourage the group to consider:*

- *Heaven is real! Jesus offers heaven and eternal life to everyone, but it is not automatic.*
- *Heaven is available on God's terms. If you don't accept God's terms, He respects you enough to honor your independence.*
- *Heaven is the most wonderful place, beyond what you can imagine. There is literally no conceivable reason why someone would opt not to be there.*
- *Heaven is available because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. For those who have trusted and believed in Jesus, a life of faith and obedience is a reasonable expression of gratitude for God's generosity and goodness.*
- *Heaven is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. God wants you there!*
- *Living with "heaven in sight" entails being so excited for the incredible wonder of eternity that you enthusiastically share the opportunity for it with others. It means being an active participant in God's redemptive work, so that more people can experience heaven and eternal life with God.*

### Jesus in Focus

Where in this study do you see Jesus: Christ-like practices, examples, principles?

*Among the many acceptable answers:*

- *Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for you! He wants you to be with Him forever.*
- *Heaven is prepared as the bride for Jesus! Heaven is the everlasting experience of living in the vast love of Christ in full!*
- *Jesus is described as the Temple in heaven. There is unfettered access and interaction with Jesus as the object of your worship in heaven!*
- *Jesus is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer! Heaven is where you experience the reality and totality of Jesus, and you are because of His completed work on the cross!*

What are some other Scriptures that come to mind or are relevant to this chapter's themes, teachings, or emphases?

*Among the many acceptable possibilities:*

- *John 14:6*
- *Isaiah 11:9-10; 60:5, 9; 66:19-20*
- *Psalms 102:15-16*
- *Haggai 2:6-7*
- *Daniel 12:13*
- *Matthew 6:20*

What is one "take-away" for you from this chapter?

*Allow the group participants to respond.*

**Say** Heaven is so incredible that it should impact and influence your life now. Heaven is so wonderful it's unreasonable not to share the promise of it with others who do not have a saving relationship with Jesus. May we be so expectant for the realities of eternity that our attitude and conduct reflects our anticipation of it through sharing the Gospel with others while we have opportunity!

**Let's close in prayer:**

**Invite** the group to pray for one another. **Pray** over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. **Pray** over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important. **Confirm** your plans for your next gathering!