

## STUDY GUIDE

NEW VISION  
THE MIDDLE  
JESUS THE  
WAY TO THE  
FATHER



# NEW VISION

JOHN 14:1-6; REVELATION 4:1-11; 21:1-8  
11/19/2017

### MAIN POINT

Heaven is a place prepared for Christ-followers to dwell in the perfect, holy presence of God forever.

### INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Invite your group members to name books and movies that depict heaven. Why do you think people are so interested in these kinds of books and movies?**

**What are some cultural ideas about heaven that are often portrayed in books and movies?**

**Why do you think the Bible doesn't include more about what heaven is like?**

The details we are given in the Bible about heaven let us know that it is perfectly planned and completely new. It is a place Jesus prepares for those who follow Him. People are naturally curious about what we will do in heaven, who we will see and know, what we will look like, and other things, but today's Scripture passages let us know all of that is secondary. Primarily, heaven is the place where God will finally and forever dwell among us and we will worship Him for eternity.

### READ AND REFLECT

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER TELL THE STORY (JOHN 14:1-18) DO AS BEST YOU CAN, DO NOT STOP AND TEACH, TRY NOT TO MAKE POINTS (COMMENTARY), JUST TELL THE STORY.**

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**REBUILD THE STORY AS A GROUP: CHRONOLOGICALLY REBUILD THE STORY FROM MEMORY. ASK QUESTIONS IF NECESSARY. LIKE – "WHAT HAPPENED FIRST?", "WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?", "DID WE LEAVE OUT ANYTHING?" FINALLY, HAVE PARTICIPANTS LOOK AT THEIR BIBLES AND SEE IF ANYTHING WAS ADDED OR LEFT OUT OF THE STORY AS THEY GO THROUGH IT ONE MORE TIME**

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Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 14:1-6.**

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**Why were the disciples' hearts troubled? Direct the group to look back at the end of chapter 13 to find out.**

**What did Jesus say to comfort the disciples? Are those truths comforting to you when you are uncertain about your future? Why or why not?**

**By His words in verses 1-4 and His reply to Thomas in verse 6, what does Jesus teach us about heaven?**

Jesus wanted His disciples to know He wasn't going abandoning them forever. He also wanted them to know they didn't need to worry about the specifics of their future with Him. Rather, they could trust Him because He alone grants entry to heaven, the place where God dwells. If we want to know what heaven is like, the first thing we can know is that Jesus is preparing a place there for all who follow Him. Knowing Jesus is synonymous with knowing the way to heaven and the very presence of God.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 4:1-11.**

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John's words, "After this," refer to the letters to the churches God instructed him to write. At the start of chapter 4, John's vision turned from the 7 churches to a glimpse of heaven.

**Who, or what, was the predominant subject of John's vision of heaven? What does this tell you God wants us to know about heaven?**

**John struggled to describe what he saw. Can you relate? What aspect of God or your relationship with Him do you have the hardest time putting into words?**

As John entered, he saw a heavenly throne. The concept of a throne room conveys the idea of God's kingship, majesty, and holiness. Like Isaiah, John saw "the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne" (Isa. 6:1). John did not describe God; rather, he described the majesty surrounding Him. God's majesty surpasses the ability to describe it. Other images in John's vision, such as the stones of jasper and carnelian, lightning and thunder, point to the power and holiness of God. God must be worshiped for who He is.

**Look at the heavenly creatures' song in verse 8. What specific aspects of God's nature did they praise? What specific attribute of God do the elders praise in verse 11?**

**How might our questions and ideas about heaven be impacted if we constantly reminded ourselves of God's holiness?**

The heavenly creatures (angels in the forms of a lion, ox, man, and eagle) sing God's holiness in His presence throughout all time. Holy refers to something that is set apart, in this case, referring to God's nature, which is uniquely set apart from everything else. The repetition communicates that God is utterly other than anything or anyone. Additionally, these angels drew attention to God's power ("Almighty") and His eternal quality ("who was, and is, and is to come"). John's perspective pulled back to the twenty-four elders. In their unceasing worship the elders present their crowns before the throne—an obvious reference that God's power and majesty are greater than theirs.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 21:1-8.**

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**List every description of heaven you find here.**

## **What do verses 1-3 and verses 6-7 infer again about what God wants us to know is the predominant truth about heaven?**

At the close of his vision, John saw the new heaven and new earth, along with the new Jerusalem, where God's people will dwell with Him forever. Short on words, John described this new holy city as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. A great scriptural promise God made repeatedly, especially in connection with the New Covenant, was that they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God (see Jer. 31:33; 32:38; 2 Cor. 6:16). Now His promise finds perfect fulfillment. In Revelation 21:4 the heavenly voice noted five more evil things of the old order that exist no longer—every tear, death, grief, crying, and pain. These are things we experience now because of sin's impact on our world. But when the old has passed away, their evils will be gone as well.

## **Look back at verse 8. Why is it important that we see this verse as part of the new order God is creating?**

In the new order, God's final justice will be executed. That means eternal reward for those who have trusted in Jesus, but it also means that those who have not will receive the justice that is due. This, too, is part of God setting all things right in the new order. For the children of God, the promise of God's justice and restoration is a great source of hope and confidence, because these things are faithful and true.

### **APPLY**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How does knowing this day is coming increase our urgency to bring hope to the world?**

**From today's passages, what aspect of eternity should receive the majority of your focus? Why?**

**What situation in your life needs to be informed by God's promise of the future? How are you going to do that?**

### **PRAY**

Thank God that He is preparing the place where you will dwell in His perfect presence forever. Ask Him to help you live with a sense of expectation, urgency, and hope in light of that coming day.

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **JOHN 14:1-6**

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1:1-2. The central focus of this verse is eternity. Like His Heavenly Father, Jesus always was and therefore existed at the beginning of time. It is interesting that John should call Jesus the Word rather than some other name to introduce his book—interesting, but not surprising since the Jews often referred to God in such terminology. The doctrine at stake here is the deity of Christ. Jesus is God, and John wanted to make that point immediately. In fact, this prologue (vv. 1-18) begins and ends with a strong statement of this doctrine. The term Word (logos) would have been familiar to the Greeks as well. Their understanding centered on ultimate reason or the rationale of the universe rather than the personal God revealed to Abraham and his descendants. John claimed that the God of creation, the ultimate mind of the universe, had taken on human form; He had become incarnate.

14:3-4. Forget the mansions; what this passage talks about is the personal touch of the Savior. Count the times he says I or me in these two short verses, and you will come up with five. He wanted the disciples to trust him personally. It was not just preparation of a place in focus here, but the personal return of Jesus to take his own to heaven. This passage does not speak about levels of reward or big buildings in heaven. It promises the second

coming of Jesus Christ.

The setting of these verses centers on promise and peace. Jesus would take care of his disciples by making sure they could be with him in the Father's presence.

14:5-6. Thomas was an honest follower though always the skeptic, so he was the first to ask, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus' response is the key verse of the passage, memorized by Christians all around the globe. Jesus is the way—reconciliation; Jesus is the truth—illumination; Jesus is the life—regeneration. This is the exclusive gospel. The New Testament knows nothing of universalism—the idea that God will find some way to save everybody. What could be clearer than Jesus' words in verse 6, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

## **REVELATION 4:1-11**

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4:1-2. The phrases after this and what must take place after this signal the beginning of the body of the book (4:1-22:5) spoken of in 1:19, in the wording, "what will take place after this." Even though John was told to come up here, it is not clear whether: (1) he was actually taken up into heaven (with the same command in 11:12 the two witnesses were taken to heaven), or (2) he was still "in the Spirit" on the isle of Patmos (1:9-10). What he saw of the heavenly throne room in chapters 4-5 is trustworthy either way, since the vision came from the Lord.

4:3-4. Jasper is an opaque jewel also mentioned in the description of the new Jerusalem (21:11,19). Carnelian stone is a vivid red color. A rainbow is God's covenant sign that He will never again judge the earth by a flood destroying all humanity (Gen 9:8-17). The Apocalypse tells of God's just judgment of the world by other means. The 24 elders could refer to angels, but since there were elders as leaders in both Israel (Num 11:16) and the church (Titus 1:5), it is more likely that 12 of the 24 represent the tribes of Israel and the other 12 the apostles of Christ, previewing the reference to the 12 tribes and 12 apostles in the new Jerusalem (21:12,14). Elsewhere in Revelation, white clothes and gold crowns make up the attire of victorious believers (3:5; 6:11; 7:9; 19:8,14).

4:5. Flashes of lightning... and thunder coming from God ( the throne) represent the first mention in Revelation of phenomena that intensify and spill over from heaven to earth as part of God's just judgment (8:5; 11:19; 16:18,21).

4:6-7. The four living creatures resemble the cherubim in Ezekiel 1 and 10, though there are differences as well. Covered with eyes means that very few things escape the notice of these watchful angelic creatures. The imagery of the lion, calf, man, and eagle has strong linkage to Ezek 1:5-10 and may represent animate creation.

4:8. The mention of the creatures having six wings and the words holy, holy, holy echo the description of the seraphim in the heavenly throne room in Isa 6:1-3.

4:9-10. The heavenly throne room is characterized by unceasing joyful praise, thanksgiving, and worship toward the Lord by the four living creatures and the 24 elders.

4:11. The beginning point of worship is to recognize that God is completely worthy to be recognized for His unrivaled glory and honor and power, and His work as Creator and Sustainer of all things.

## **REVELATION 21:1-8**

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21:1. While like the present creation in some ways, the new heaven and a new earth will be much different. For example, there will be no sea. However, some believe that "sea" is symbolic for the wickedness of the current created order.

21:2. The bride of the Lamb, introduced in 19:7-9, is now pictured as the Holy City, new Jerusalem. The expression coming down out of heaven is used in all three references to the new Jerusalem. This has been taken to imply that the new Jerusalem will be suspended in the air, slightly above the new earth. Prepared... adorned may mean that the bride will be just as beautiful—and will be for eternity—as she was during the wedding festivities (19:7-8).

21:3-4. God's presence (dwelling... with humanity) will do away with all death... grief, crying, and pain.

21:5-8. In the present creation, a Christian is a "new creation" spiritually (2Co 5:17), but in the new heaven and new earth, the Lord will make everything new. The written Word of God is faithful and true (2Tim 3:16), and the living Word of God is also faithful and true (Rev 19:11). Living water (22:17) will always be available as a gift, and this pictures the word of grace, received through saving faith, that offers eternal life even in the present.