

Andy Telfer

Heaven

Forever, For Real, For Sure



 6-Session Bible Study

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A Good Book Guide

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Introduction

One of the Bible writers described God's word as "a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God gave us the Bible to tell us about who he is and what he wants for us. He speaks through it by his Spirit and lights our way through life.

That means that we need to look carefully at the Bible and uncover its meaning—but we also need to apply what we've discovered to our lives.

Good Book Guides are designed to help you do just that. The sessions in this book are interactive and easy to lead. They're perfect for use in groups or for personal study.

Let's take a look at what is included in each session.

Talkabout: Every session starts with an ice-breaker question, designed to get people talking around a subject that links to the Bible study.

Investigate: These questions help you explore what the passage is about.

Apply: These questions are designed to get you thinking practically: what does this Bible teaching mean for you and your church?

Explore More: These optional sections help you to go deeper or to explore another part of the Bible which connects with the main passage.

Getting Personal: These sections are a chance for personal reflection. Some groups may feel comfortable discussing these, but you may prefer to look at them quietly as individuals instead—or leave them out.

Pray: Here, you're invited to pray in the light of the truths and challenges you've seen in the study.

Each session is also designed to be easily split into two! Watch out for the **Apply** section that comes halfway through, and stop there if you haven't got time to do the whole thing in one go.

In the back of the book, you'll find a **Leader's Guide**, which provides helpful notes on every question, along with everything else that group leaders need in order to facilitate a great session and help the group uncover the riches of God's light-giving word.

Why Study Heaven?

We sort of know heaven should be good, don't we? We often "thank heaven", we love to see a "match made in heaven", we describe wonderful things as "heavenly", and when joy overflows we're in "seventh heaven".

But when we think about it, heaven has an image problem—seemingly full of harps, choirs and baby angels; or a vague, misty place of drifting spirits. As a result, most people choose to live for the moment—for what seems "really real". Life, they say, is all there is. But that isn't what the Bible shows...

Imagine there's a heaven; it's easy if you try... Well, all you have to do is turn to the Bible to discover the reality. This Good Book Guide helps us look into what the Bible tells us. Forget fluffy clouds, floating figures and everything painted white—heaven is the throne room of God right now, and heaven is also the future new creation.

Heaven exists now—God is on the throne. He is pure and unapproachable, but he has a plan that he is working out in "his-story". This plan involves his Son, who through the cross and resurrection has opened for us the way to the heaven of the future—the new creation. A heaven which we don't go to—but which comes to us!

All this has massive implications for how we live now. The future heaven will be astonishing—but it will not be enjoyed by everyone. So it's incredibly important that we know what heaven is, who enjoys heaven, how that's possible, and why—through Jesus Christ—we can be sure of heaven.

The message of this Good Book Guide is that heaven truly is for ever, for real and for sure. Our lifespan on earth is tiny in comparison to eternity. What then can be more worthwhile than spending some time finding out about heaven?

1

Heaven and the Throne

Revelation 4 – 5

Talkabout

1. What do you imagine when you think of heaven?

Investigate

Revelation was originally written by the apostle John to seven churches (see Revelation 1:4), many of which were facing persecution.

In chapters 4 and 5 John shares with them, and us, the first glimpse of heaven that God has given him in a vision. It's rather surprising and perhaps a little difficult to get our heads around. John is attempting to describe the indescribable! We should aim to enjoy the whole picture rather than pore over every detail.

Read Revelation 4

DICTIONARY

Jasper (v 3): type of gemstone.

Twenty-four elders (v 4): powerful angelic beings representing all of God's people. "Twenty-four" recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the church.

Seven (spirits) (v 5): seven symbolises completeness. The spirits might be angelic beings or the Holy Spirit.

Sea (v 6): for the Jews this was a place associated with chaos and fear.

2. Who is the main focus of this chapter and how do we know?

3. How many times is God's throne mentioned?
 - Why is it mentioned repeatedly, do you think?

4. What things are we told about God by the four living creatures and by the elders (v 8, 11)?

5. How does the imagery in this chapter reinforce the message that God is...
 - beyond physical description (v 3)?

- merciful (v 3; compare Genesis 9:15-17)?
- powerful (v 4; check out “twenty-four elders” in Dictionary on p. 8)?
- holy (v 5; compare Exodus 19:16-23)?
- sovereign (v 6; check out “sea” in Dictionary)?

Explore More | OPTIONAL

Read Isaiah 6:1-5

- What similarities are there between Isaiah’s vision and that of John?
 - How does Isaiah react, and why?
 - How does Isaiah’s reaction challenge our attitude to God?
-

Apply

6. How is this description of heaven and of God different from the typical images we come across? Complete the table.

Common views of heaven	What Revelation 4 teaches us
Heaven is a fairy tale	
Heaven is about the future	
Heaven is filled with white fluffy clouds	
Heaven is about me and my desires	
If we live a "good life", we will go to heaven	

- How do people live in light of these typical views? How might they live differently when they understand the truth of Revelation 4?

Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

God the Creator is on the throne of heaven. What areas of your life don't reflect this fact?

Investigate

The scene is set. We have a glimpse into the throne room of God, who is seen in all his glory. But there is a problem...

Read Revelation 5

DICTIONARY

The tribe of Judah (v 5): one of the twelve tribes of Israel—the one from which God’s chosen King would come.

The Root of David (v 5): a descendant of King David, Old Testament Israel’s greatest king.

Lamb (v 6): used in sacrifices in the Jewish tabernacle/temple for the forgiveness of sin.

Horns (v 6): symbol of power.

Harp (v 8): musical instrument associated with praise and celebration.

7. Why do you think John weeps when no one is found who is worthy to open the scroll (v 4)?

8. What is announced in verse 5, and what appears in verse 6?

- What is unique and striking about the king that John now sees on God’s throne?

9. How do we know who this is? What do the following verses indicate?

- Genesis 49:1, 8-10; Luke 1:30-33

- John 1:29

- What do all these passages together tell us about him?

10. What does the “new song” in verses 9-14 tell us about who Jesus is and what he has done?

Explore More | OPTIONAL

Read Hebrews 9:24-28

- What has Christ done in the past (v 26, 28)?
- What is Christ doing now (v 24; see also 1 John 2:1)?
- What will he do (v 28)?

Christ's rescue of his people is far bigger than we often realise.

Christ's people *have been saved* from sin's penalty through Christ's death on the cross; *are being saved* from sin's power as God works in them and Christ represents them before the Father's throne; and *will be saved* from sin's presence when Christ returns as King.

- How does this help you to join in the songs of Revelation 5?
-

Apply

11. How does what is described in this chapter affect the destiny of those who have been purchased by Jesus' blood?

- What about those who haven't?
- Think of one way in which that will affect how you live this week.

12. How can we give honour, glory and praise to Jesus in our daily lives?

- What do verses 10 and 12-13 suggest about how we do this?

Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

God the Rescuer is on the throne of heaven. In what ways does this encourage you today?

Pray

Praise the God who is seated on the throne of heaven: God the Father and the Son—the God who is both Creator and Rescuer.

Reread Revelation 4:11 and 5:9-10. To help you praise God, you might also like to use the words of Timothy Dudley-Smith's hymn: "Heavenly Hosts In Ceaseless Worship".