
An Eternity in Heaven

We have discussed why we need to be reborn spiritually, how to do this and why we need to attend church and study the Bible. Next, let's see what happens when we leave this earth. How will we leave? Where will we go? What will it be like when we get there?

As the title of this book points out, it is almost certain that every person reading this will have departed from this earth 100 years from today. Some of us will die within the next year and leave. Some of us will die in five years, some in 10 or 20 years and some of us can expect to live for many years. However, there is one generation of human beings that will leave this earth without dying. This will happen when Jesus Christ returns to earth and the end of this world takes place. Many biblical scholars believe that our generation is this generation.

There are many signs that indicate that the end of the world could be drawing near. Continual conflicts in the middle east hold the key to much of the world's oil. Air and water pollution and the possibility of worldwide famine could be very significant problems in the future.

The possibility of nuclear warfare is always present. Communism is a continual threat to the delicate balance in the world. Population growth is a cause of serious concern. Earthquakes are increasing around the world.

The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies about what will happen in the last days before Jesus comes again. Many of these prophecies have already been fulfilled and more are being fulfilled with every passing year. Jesus spoke of some of the worldly problems that we have mentioned and He said, "when you see the events taking place that I've described you can be just as sure that the kingdom of God is near. I solemnly declare to you that when these things happen, the end of this age has come" (Luke 21:31-32 TLB)

There is a possibility that we will leave this earth without dying. However, there also is a very real possibility that some or all of us will leave this earth as a result of death. What happens when we die?

The Bible tells us what it means to die. "The body is dead when there is no spirit in it" (James 2:26, TLB) We die physically, but the spiritual part of us leaves the body and continues to live. There is no question what happens to our bodies. "Then you will return to the ground from which you came. For you were made from the ground, and to the ground you will return" (Genesis 3:19 TLB) There is considerable disagreement among Christians about what happens to the spiritual part of us when we die physically. Some people believe our spirits will go immediately to heaven. Others believe that we will sleep until Jesus returns. The apostle Paul, when he was torn between death and staying on this earth, said, "I am hard-pressed between the two. My yearning desire is to depart – to be free of this world, to set forth – and be with Christ, for that is far, far better; but to remain in my body is more needful and essential for your sake. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and stay by you all, to promote your progress and joy in believing" (Philippians 1:23–25 AMP)

Paul decided it was best for him to stay here to help the new Christians. Why would the decision have been so difficult for him if his soul was just going to sleep until Jesus returned? The Word of God says that Paul was deciding between staying on earth or going to be with Christ. I believe our spirits go directly to heaven when we die and, when Jesus returns, our former physical bodies will be resurrected from the grave, changed into glorified bodies and reunited with our spirits. I find confirmation of this in the Bible. When Christians die, angels are present. As our spirits depart from our bodies, these angels guide us into the presence of the Lord. Jesus explained this in a parable

about a rich man and a beggar by the name of Lazarus. The rich man seemed to have everything, but he ended up in hell. The beggar died and angels carried him to be with Abraham in paradise. "The beggar died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham in the place of the righteous dead. The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went into hell" (Luke 16:22 – 23, TLB)

People who are not Christians should fear death. However, Christians should have no fear of death. In the spiritual realm, almost everything is the opposite of what it seems to be in the worldly realm. If we are Christians, death is our friend, not our foe. It is the beginning, not the end. When Christians die, we win – we don't lose. "To die is gain (the gain of glory of eternity) (Philippians 1:21, AMP) There is nothing to be afraid of. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4, NIV)

This verse of Scripture is often read at Christian funerals. We should focus on the two words, valley and shadow. They are very important. What is a valley? It is a low point between two high points. And what is a shadow? It is something without substance, something that seems to be more than it really is.

This is what death is. It's like a shadow – it's not what it seems to be. A Christian's death is passage through a valley between our temporary life on earth and eternal life in heaven. Death isn't the end – it's merely a transition. This is why God's Word says that we walk through the valley.

There is no reason for Christians to be afraid. Angels are with us when we die. The Lord is with us every step of the way. Death is a blessed event for a Christian. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13, KJV)

Death is not a time of defeat and despair. It is a time of victory and triumph. When non-Christians die, this is the end for them. "When an evil man dies, his hopes all perish, for they are based upon this earthly life" (Proverbs 11:7, TLB) When Christians die, we go to our real home to live forever with the Lord. "And we are not afraid, but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord" (2nd Corinthians 5:8, TLB)

Almost every Christian pastor can tell you true stories of Christians on their deathbeds who "lit up with joy" as God gave them a vision of what was to come. The great evangelist, Dwight Moody, experienced it. Just before he died, he said, "Earth is receding. Heaven is opening. This is my triumph; this is my coronation day! It is glorious!"

Yes, death is a glorious occasion for a Christian. Death is not the end. It is the beginning of a wonderful life in the most beautiful place in the entire universe. Most people who fear death are afraid of the unknown. God's word tells us some very specific facts about heaven. Let's take a good look at these facts.

First, it's important to understand that heaven isn't some kind of abstract dream or mirage. It is very real. Jesus spoke specifically about heaven when he said, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places (homes). If it were not so, I would have told you. For I am going away to prepare a place for you (John 14: 2, AMP) This doesn't sound abstract to me. Heaven is a specific place and, when we get there, we'll find that Jesus has prepared a home for each of us.

Our lives in heaven will be much better than our fragile, temporary lives on earth. "You have in heaven a better and enduring substance" (Hebrews 10:34, KJV) The apostle Paul was taken to Heaven for a brief visit and he tells us it is so magnificent that he can't even put it into words. "Fourteen years ago I was taken up to heaven for a visit. Don't ask me whether my body was there or just my spirit, for I don't know; only God can answer that. But anyway, there I was in paradise, and heard things so astounding that they are beyond a man's power to describe or put in words" (2nd Corinthians 12:2–4, TLB)

Stop reading this book for a minute and think of some of the beautiful scenes here on earth. Think about a clear lake with the soft blue sky above and sunlight reflecting off the shimmering water. Think of a breathtaking ocean scene with the surf pounding and seagulls flying just above the waves. Think of trees as fresh new leaves appear in the spring and of the radiance of autumn foliage turning into vivid shades of red, yellow and orange. Think of a majestic snowcapped mountain silhouetted against a clear blue sky and of a brilliant flaming red sunset at the end of a gorgeous day.

All of us have seen the beauty that God has created on earth. Isn't it reasonable to assume that the place where he lives will be much more beautiful than anything we have ever seen on earth? Heaven is going to be more magnificent than anything we have ever seen, heard or imagined. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1st Corinthians 2:9, NIV)

Not only will heaven be stimulating to our eyes, but we'll hear music there that is far beyond anything we have heard on earth. We'll sing songs of great joy. "These, the ransomed of the Lord, will go home along that road to Zion, singing the songs of everlasting joy. For them all sorrow and all sighing will be gone forever; only joy and gladness will be there" (Isaiah 35:10, TLB)

There won't be any filth in heaven – it is clean and pure. The area is invigorating. The water in the river of life is crystal-clear and much better than the finest drink we have enjoyed here on earth. Whenever we want, we'll walk over to the tree of life and help ourselves to luscious fruit that is better than any fruit that we have tasted on earth.

Also, we can look forward to a glorious reunion in heaven. All of our friends, relatives and loved ones who have received Jesus as their Savior will be there to greet us. Many of those people were sick and suffering before they died. Won't it be great to see them in heaven – healthy, happy and full of energy?

When we're in heaven we'll make friends with many wonderful Christians whom we never met on earth. Would you like to meet Paul, John and Peter? Matthew, Mark and Luke? Paul John and Peter? David, Solomon and Daniel? Would you like to meet John Wesley, Dwight Moody and other great men of God? All of God's family will be there and will have the endless years of eternity to get to know each other. "Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11, NIV)

It's going to be exciting to meet those Christians in heaven, but it's going to be overwhelming when we meet our father, God, and our wonderful big brother, Jesus. When we first see Jesus, we'll see the wounds on his glorified body – wounds he received so we could live eternally with him in heaven. "On the Lamb were wounds that once had caused his death" (Revelation 5:6, TLB)

Here on earth we go to church to worship God and Jesus. There won't be any churches in heaven because they will be with us continually and everyone in heaven will be worshipping them at all times. "No temple could be seen in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are worshiped in it everywhere" (Revelation 21:22, TLB)

We're going to enjoy total relaxation when we get to heaven. Our short vacations here on earth can't begin to compare with the eternal rest that we'll experience in heaven. "There is a full complete rest still waiting for the people of God. Christ has already entered there. He is resting from his work, just as God did after the creation" (Hebrews 4:9–10, TLB)

We live in a world filled with worry, fear and tension. We have to deal with problems pertaining to pollution, drugs, alcohol, greed, selfishness, lack of ethics and crime. None of these conditions and no evil people will be present in

heaven. "Nothing evil will be permitted in it – no one immoral or dishonest – but only those whose names are written in the Lambs book of life" (Revelation 21:27, TLB)

There won't be any fear in heaven. No one will argue. Everyone in heaven is perfectly healthy. There is no aging in heaven. We'll always be young. There aren't any drugstores, hospitals or cemeteries in heaven. God will take away all of the pain and sorrow that we have on earth. "The home of God is now among men, and He will live with them and they will be His people; yes, God himself will be among them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. All of that has gone forever" (Revelation 21:3–4, TLB)

When we get to heaven, we'll grow spiritually. We'll always be learning. We'll understand many of God's great truths that we understand only partially, if at all, now. "We can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see him in his completeness, face to face. Now all that I know is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly" (1st Corinthians 13:12, TLB)

Great new spiritual horizons will open up to us in heaven. We'll be able to deepen ourselves spiritually. The truth will open up before us. Truth is infinite. The more we learn, the more there will be to learn. We'll always be growing when we are in heaven and our growth will be very, very fulfilling.

It's nice to think about, isn't it? This is exactly what God wants us to do. "Let heaven fill your thoughts: don't spend your time worrying about things down here. You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person does. Your real life is in heaven with Christ and God" (Colossians 3:2–3, TLB)

We shouldn't get all caught up with this world. We're just visiting here. "You are only visitors here, your real home is in heaven" (1st Peter 2:11, TLB) Instead of worrying about our temporary lives on earth we should look forward to our eternal joy in heaven. "This world is not our home: we are looking forward to our everlasting home in heaven" (Hebrews 13:14, TLB)

So many of us have it all backwards. Many people love life on earth and fear death and what it will be like after we die. Non-believers have good reason to be afraid, but Christians should do exactly the opposite. We should make the best of our imperfect life on earth and look forward with great anticipation to the magnificence of our eternal home in heaven.

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