

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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The cold reality of death confronts us daily. The obituary page of the newspaper is just one of the many reminders that we are destined to die. Even a nutritious diet, regular exercise, super-vitamins, and the best medical care won't prevent death. But will death mean the end of our existence? Or is there a future life? If so, what will it be like? And can we do anything to get ready for it?

This booklet, written by Kurt De Haan, explores the biblical answers to these perplexing and troubling questions. My prayer is that these pages will help you live a more fulfilling life and encourage you to be prepared for what will happen to you when you die.

Martin R. De Haan II

Managing Editor: David Sper

Cover Photo: Denis Felix/FPG International

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Printed in USA

WHISTLING IN THE DARK

Those who talk of going to heaven have often been accused of “whistling in the dark.” Most of us know what that means. We can remember dark moments during power failures, or we recall times when we had to walk down a lonely street in the blackness of night. We feared the worst and hoped for the best. Is that what we are doing now when we think about hell or speak of heaven? Or is all the talk about the terrors of hell and the joys of heaven just the product of overzealous ancestors who wanted to scare people into being good?

An **atheist**, of course, would argue that thoughts of immortality are only dreams. He would say that man and beast are products

of chance and destined for the same fate—extinction.

A **skeptic** would not be able to come to any conclusions on this issue, which he feels has no objective means of positive verification.

A **Marxist** would call all religious explanations of life and God mere illusions. Karl Marx, in fact, said that religion was just “the opium of the people”—a way of getting us “high” on hope and ignoring the cold emptiness of life and death.

A **Hindu** thinks of the present life as just one of many lives in a cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths. When the individual eventually becomes good enough, he achieves eternal bliss as he is absorbed into the universal spirit.

A **Buddhist** lives a highly disciplined life in order to extinguish all desire and to attain a vague

impersonal existence he calls nirvana.

A **Muslim** devotes his life to the teachings of the prophet Muhammad in an attempt to make himself worthy of acceptance into paradise and to escape the torments of hell.

A **hardened criminal** may scoff at the idea of hell, saying, "I'd just as soon go to hell, since that's where all my friends are going to be."

A **dog owner**, fanatical about his pet, may envision heaven as a place where he and Fido will play frisbee and tug-of-war forever.

A **battered wife** may believe that she is enduring hell right now.

A **playboy** laughs at the thought of judgment and lives only for the pleasures of the moment.

A **follower of Jesus Christ** may sacrifice fame, fortune, and power in this life, knowing that he will

receive God's approval in the life to come.

A **college student** may be so overwhelmed by the diversity of religious beliefs on campus that he loses all certainty of where he is going in this life or the next.

An **8-year-old** probably worries more about being punished by Mom or Dad than he does his future encounter with God.

***"You take heaven.
I'd rather go to
Bermuda."***
Mark Twain

Who's right? Does anybody really know how to sort out the fantasy from the reality? Who is whistling in the dark? And who knows what death will bring? In the following pages, we will search out the answers given in the Bible.

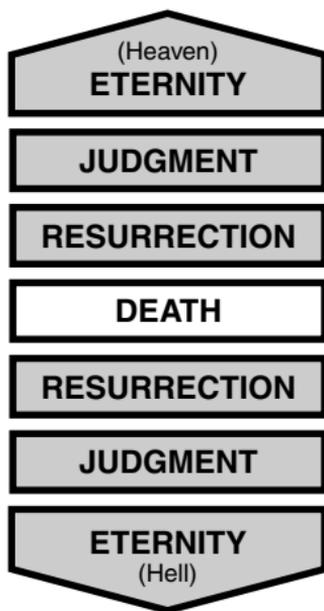
WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

Some people claim to know what will happen when they die. But how can they be so sure? Not through such things as space probes or archaeological digs. The answer comes only from God—the One who created life and holds all people accountable to Himself. He's the One whose Son died for us to prepare us for eternity. He has spoken to us through the Bible, a book we can trust. The author, God Himself, is an expert on life and death.

The Bible speaks of life as but a brief moment of our existence, followed by death, resurrection, judgment, and finally an eternal existence in one of two destinations. In the pages to follow, we will look carefully at each of these

four stages of life beyond the grave.

DEATH: Door To Another World



People often joke that only two things in life are certain: death and taxes. But that impression is not accurate, for many have been known to cheat the tax collector and avoid payment. Death, however, can't be cheated.

Another inaccurate

impression is that death ends all of our problems. While it's true that after we die we will not have to face the tax auditor, listen to an angry boss, or deal with problem children, we will have to face God. Death is not the easy way out. It will be gain for some and loss for others. And many people are in for a big surprise.

“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.”

Genesis 2:17

What Is Death? Death is an ugly beast. It comes at us like a fictional dragon with snorting nostrils and blazing breath, intent on devouring us. The Bible speaks of it as the last enemy Christ will destroy

(1 Cor. 15:26). There is no use trying to gloss over its awfulness and unnaturalness. After all, God didn't create man and woman to wear out and be thrown away like broken toys. God made us special, with the ability to relate to Him as no animal could.

Death crashed Adam and Eve's garden party the moment they decided to disobey God. The Lord had warned our first parents of the side-effects of eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17). But the temptation was great and their resistance was small—so they fell (3:6-7).

Death came to Adam and Eve in two forms: spiritual and physical. They first experienced a spiritual separation from God when they sinned. They hid from Him and were soon expelled from the garden where they had once walked and talked with

Him. Spiritual death opened the door to physical death, which came years later.

First and foremost, then, death is a *separation*. In a spiritual sense, it is the separation of the soul from God (Isa. 59:2; Eph. 2:1). In a physical sense, it is the separation of the soul from the body (Mt. 10:28; Rev. 6:9; 20:4). The Bible also talks about eternal death. This is the irreversible spiritual death—the second death spoken of in Revelation 2:11 and 20:6,14—which follows the final judgment.

Here are some things that death is not:

- rebirth into another life form
- an unconscious state of the soul
- being absorbed by the “cosmic consciousness”
- the doorway into eternal bliss for everyone
- the end of our existence

Where Do I Go? If death is not the end of us as distinct personalities, and if it really is the doorway to a new kind of continuing existence, what is the first thing that will happen to us after we die?

Although the Bible offers us only a glimpse of life on the other side, it does indicate that there are two very real places where the dead await the resurrection and final judgment. Christ gave us the most vivid picture of these two places when He told the story about the rich man and Lazarus.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom (Lk. 16:22-23).

Some experts say this story is simply a parable,

while others insist it was an actual incident. Regardless of who is right, we can be sure that Jesus was telling us some important truths about life on the other side of death. The story tells us that there are two destinations for the soul at death: a place of comfort and a place of torment. In describing life after death in this way, Jesus was filling in the Old Testament picture.

In Old Testament times, the Hebrew term *Sheol* referred to the place where all souls went at death. Our English Bibles translate *Sheol* as “the grave,” “hell,” and “the pit.” (*Hades* is the New Testament Greek equivalent of *Sheol*.) This was the place where God’s children and His enemies awaited the final resurrection and judgment.

In that “waiting room” there were two distinct places with two very different conscious existences.

Although the Old Testament picture may seem fuzzy at times, it depicts a destination that the righteous could look forward to (Ps. 16:10; 49:15; Hos. 13:14) and the wicked should fear (Job 24:19; Ps. 9:17; 31:17; 49:14; 55:15).

***Once we have
passed through the
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The story Christ told in Luke 16 explains that people will either exist in comfort and blessing or inhabit a place of torment. It also makes clear that once we have passed through the door of death, we can't pick up our suitcases and move out

because we don't like the accommodations.

We need to remember that the fuzziness of the Old Testament has been removed through what Christ has said and done. Paul told us that Christ Jesus "has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

When a Christian dies, his soul goes immediately to be with Christ (Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23).

The resurrection and glorification of our bodies will take place at the rapture of the church, when soul and body will be reunited (1 Th. 4:13-17). The souls of the non-Christian dead, however, will remain in the "waiting room" until the time of resurrection and judgment.

Some people have difficulty understanding what kind of existence we will have before we get our

new resurrected bodies, yet the New Testament doesn't make it a big issue. We may have some sort of temporary body, though it will be an incomplete existence. When the rich man and Lazarus of Luke 16 died, they had real bodies that experienced

"It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Woody Allen

physical discomfort and sorrow. Another example is when Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus at the transfiguration. The disciples saw them with bodies that were recognizable and real (Mt. 17:3). This intermediate state will last only until the dead rise from the grave

and receive their new bodies.

How Can I Be Ready?

It is one thing to realize that we are all destined for either heaven or hell; it is quite another thing to be certain that you will go to heaven. One of the clearest descriptions of what it takes to be ready is John 3:16, which says:

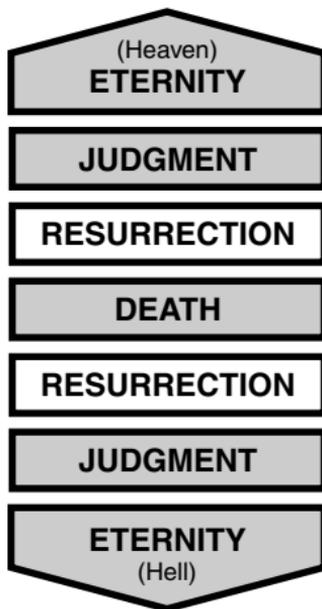
For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The final choice is yours. Will you recognize that you are lost without Christ? Will you trust Him to rescue you from sin's penalty and power? Will you accept His offer of eternal life?

Thinking It Over. Since you have only one life to live, what do you think God wants you to do with it? What would you like others to remember about you

after you have finished your life? How would you live today if you knew it would be your last? If a person has accepted Christ's offer of eternal life, why is physical death still necessary? Which Christians will not have to die? (1 Th. 4:17).

RESURRECTION: Dressed For Eternity



Medical science has done wonders in extending our lives. Complex procedures

bypass clogged arteries, kill rebel cancer cells, filter impurities from blood, and replace worn-out joints. Vaccines have nearly eliminated polio and other dreaded diseases of the past. But no one has discovered a vaccine against death. Unlike a new car or new appliance that carries a warranty promising customer satisfaction, our body is not guaranteed against a major breakdown that will cause it to quit before the average 70-year lifespan is over. Our body is susceptible to sickness and decay. If we are to live for eternity, we need a completely new model. The Bible tells us that we will be given a new body at the resurrection. It is then that we will be “dressed for eternity.” To understand what the Bible teaches about resurrection, let’s look at the answers to five basic questions.

What Is Resurrection?

Physical death is the separation of the body from the soul. This creates a problem, because without bodies we are incomplete. Resurrection, which reunites body and soul, is the solution. It is not merely the bringing back to life of a corpse, but rather the re-creation of the body to make it fit for eternity.

Why Is Resurrection Necessary? Couldn’t we simply exist forever as spirits? If man is basically a spiritual being, why do we need a body? The answer is that a body is part of our basic nature. To ask why humans need bodies is to ask a question like “Why do fish need gills?” or “Why do birds need wings?” Bodies are basic to our nature.

The reason we are decaying and dying is not because we have bodies. It is because sin has infected our bodies. God designed us

as physical and spiritual creatures who were to find fulfillment through physical and spiritual activities. Just as having a physical nature without a spiritual nature would make man an animal, so possessing only a spiritual dimension without a physical shell would make him more like an angel than a human being.

New bodies are also necessary to fulfill God's perfect justice. The rich man in the story of Luke 16 experienced both mental and physical anguish. Because the Bible teaches that God will resurrect all of humanity and that He will assign many to physical suffering in hell, we can conclude that deeds done in the body can only be dealt with justly if real physical suffering is endured.

How Can I Be Sure Of Resurrection? Is there any precedent? What right do we have to believe that all

people will be resurrected and given new bodies for eternity? The apostle Paul had to address this issue because some people were apparently denying the resurrection of the dead.

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is not resurrection of the dead? . . . But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Cor. 15:12,20-22).

Paul argued that our faith in God and hope of resurrection rests entirely on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Christ did not rise, then our hope is lost and He is

dead and under the same judgment as we are. But Jesus did rise from the grave! The empty tomb, the hundreds of people who saw the risen Christ, the changed lives of His disciples, and the very existence of the Christian church testify that Christ truly did rise from the dead. Because He arose, we can believe Him when He said that all will rise again (Jn. 5:28-29). Even before Christ spoke about resurrection, the Old Testament assumed it and spoke briefly of it (Job 19:25-26).

Who Will Be Resurrected, And When?

All people will be resurrected, but not all at the same time. Even though the Bible sometimes speaks of the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteousness with no distinction of time, it clearly indicates two main resurrections.

The first resurrection is that of believers. Jesus Christ will return at the end of this age to take all of His own, living and dead, to be with Him. This event, referred to as the rapture, will take place before the terrible outpouring of God's wrath on unbelieving Jews and Gentiles during the tribulation. The dead in Christ will rise first and be given new, glorified bodies. Living believers will follow, and their bodies will be transformed. Both groups will meet the Lord in the air. This will occur suddenly.

We shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of

an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Th. 4:16-17).

Old Testament saints and the martyred believers of the coming tribulation will be raised at Christ's return to earth at the close of the tribulation (Dan. 12:1-3; Rev. 20:4).

The initial stage of the first resurrection, then, will occur when believers meet Christ in the air. The second stage will take place 7 years later, after God has poured out His wrath on the rebellious nations and Christ returns to set up His kingdom.

The second resurrection will occur 1,000 years after the first resurrection

(Rev. 20:1-15). The subjects of this resurrection, all the unbelievers throughout history, will come from Hades, the place of temporary suffering. They will be given bodies in which they will face God's judgment and final sentencing.

What Kind Of Body Will I Have? When we are resurrected, will our bodies be like they are now, or will they be entirely different? The scriptural answer to this question seems to be that our bodies will be similar in some ways and different in others. Also, the bodies of believers will apparently be different from those of unbelievers. The resurrected body of a believer is described in the following ways:

- Flesh and bone, but dramatically changed (Lk. 24:39; 1 Cor. 15:50).
- Like Christ's resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:49;

Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2).

- Incorruptible
(1 Cor. 15:42,50).
- Awe-inspiring
(1 Cor. 15:43).
- Having new abilities
(1 Cor. 15:43).
- Suited for heaven
(1 Cor. 15:47-49).
- Spiritual (1 Cor. 15:44).

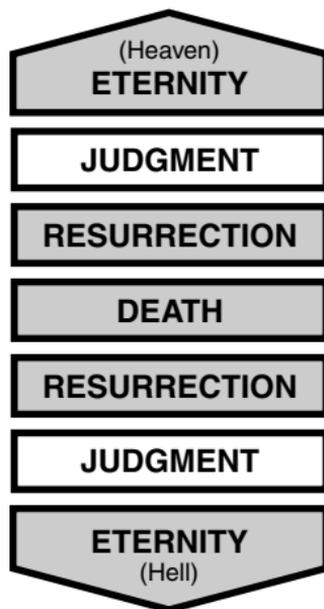
That last point may raise some questions in your mind, How, you may ask, can a physical body be called a “spiritual” body? The term simply points out the imperishable and perfect nature of the new body. It will be able to stand in the presence of and relate to God who is spirit. It is a body designed for life in heaven for all eternity.

What about the bodies of nonbelievers, who must face judgment and hell? The Bible doesn't tell us. But they are not promised a body like Christ's glorious body. We assume that their bodies will be capable of sensing God's

judgment on sin, though they will never die.

Thinking It Over. Both believer and nonbeliever will be resurrected to allow God to dispense perfect justice on all mankind. Are you ready? Do you know which body will be yours? When will you be resurrected? What are you looking forward to about the resurrected body?

JUDGMENT: Final Exams



When I was in school, I tried not to think about tests until I absolutely had to. After all, thinking about tests would have spoiled many a night of watching TV or talking with friends. Likewise, I have the feeling that most of us would rather not think about the final exam when we will stand before God. That would cramp our style, wouldn't it? It would make us take life more seriously and be more conscious of wasted time.

No, God's judgment isn't usually talked about at coffee breaks. We would rather discuss sports, the weather, or the new car models.

But just because the topic makes us uncomfortable, and just because we would rather not think about it until we are forced to, does not mean it is wise to ignore it or to delay facing the facts. We will all be judged—believer and nonbeliever

alike—but we will not all be judged alike. Although the two judgments are different, both are serious occasions. And the time to get ready for them is now.

Why Is Judgment Necessary? If God is a God of perfect justice, then He must judge us after this life. The inequities and injustices of earth must be resolved. God will not let those people who have ignored His laws since they were children get away with it. And Christians, who have been entrusted with gifts to use for God's glory, will give full account of their use and be rewarded accordingly.

Who Will Be The Judge? God Himself will be our Judge (Heb. 12:23). He will judge us through His Son. Jesus told us, "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (Jn. 5:22; cp. Acts 17:31).

Who Will Be Judged?

No one will be excused from God's "final exam." It will take place in two parts: (1) the judgment of believers, and (2) the judgment of unbelievers.

Believers: At The Judgment Seat Of Christ.

Believers will be judged at "the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). Paul referred to this judgment when he wrote:

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

This is not a judgment to determine whether a person is going to heaven or hell. That issue was settled by the person's acceptance or rejection of Christ during his earthly life (Rom. 5:1-2). Christ Himself assured us that we cannot lose our salvation:

He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (Jn. 5:24).

At the judgment seat of Christ, believers will either suffer loss or be rewarded, depending on their faithfulness. Although we are saved by faith, our works will be tested (1 Cor. 3:13-15; 4:5; 9:16-27). Christ told three parables to illustrate our accountability to God for the use of all that He has given to us (Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 16:1-13; 19:11-27). Some believers will enter heaven by the skin of their teeth. They may get there through a "deathbed conversion" (like the thief on the cross in Lk. 23:39-43). And many will be there who never matured beyond spiritual infancy.

The New Testament mentions that rewards and

crowns will be given to those believers who earn them. For example:

- The incorruptible or imperishable crown for those who build their lives with works that please God (1 Cor. 3:12-14; 9:25-27).
- The crown of righteousness for all who long for His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).
- The crown of life for the person who perseveres in trials (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10; 3:11).
- The crown of glory for good shepherds of the church (1 Pet. 5:4).
- The crown of rejoicing for those who lead others to Christ (Phil. 4:1; 1 Th. 2:19).

Unbelievers: At The Great White Throne.
All unbelievers will be judged at the great white throne. This will occur after the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth (Rev. 20:7-

15). At that time, the unsaved dead of all the ages will stand before God's throne. It will not be a time of rejoicing. Every person who stands before the Lord at the great white throne will be declared guilty.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them (Rev. 20:11).

“One might better try to sail the Atlantic in a paper boat than to get to heaven on good works.”

Charles Spurgeon

The unsaved will be judged on the basis of their relationship to Jesus Christ, and also on the basis of their deeds (Rom. 2:5-11). Since these people have

rejected the light they had about Christ, they will be excluded from heaven. Their names are not included in the book of life (Lk. 10:20; Rev.3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27). On the basis of what they have done on earth, they will suffer varying degrees of judgment in hell (Lk. 12:47-48; Rev. 20:12-13).

“If we would truly know God, and be known of Him, we should ask Him to teach us here and now to reckon with the solemn reality of His wrath.”

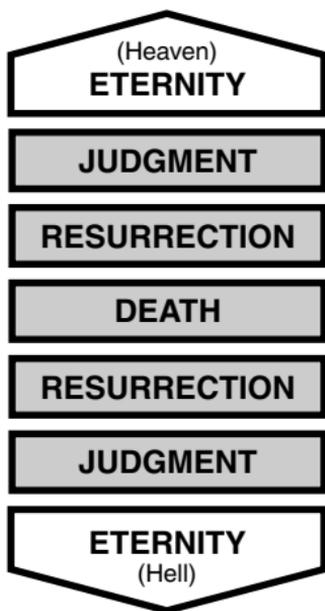
J. I. Packer

This discussion about judgment should be upsetting. Hebrews 10:31 tells us that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands

of the living God.” We cannot afford to take that warning lightly. And we cannot live without caring about the eternal destiny of those whose lives we touch. Only a cold and calloused heart will hoard the life-giving news about salvation. And only a shortsighted person will refuse the love Christ displayed on the cross and pursue the passing pleasures of sin.

Thinking It Over. If a Christian no longer has to fear judgment for sin, why should he be concerned about facing the judgment seat of Christ? Should a person be content to get to heaven “by the skin of his teeth”? What “crowns” do you think you will receive? Could it be wrong to think too much about what you will get for serving Christ? Take a moment to thank God for providing a way of escape from the penalty of sin.

ETERNITY: Good News And Bad News



Have you ever gone to your doctor, dentist, or auto mechanic and heard good news and bad news at the same time? The good news may have been that you were still alive, but the bad news was that it would take major surgery to keep you that way. Or perhaps you learned that your daughter doesn't have any cavities, but she's going to need

braces. Or it may be that when you took your car in for a routine brake inspection, the mechanic told you that the brakes were fine but that the engine was ready to fall out.

Good news and bad news is not only a part of life, it is also a part of death and the hereafter. The good news is that many people will enjoy heaven; the bad news is that many will agonize in hell. The decision must be made in life.



Heaven: The Good News

It sounds almost too good to be true. It's better than a mouse getting locked in a cheese-processing plant. It's better than a beggar inheriting a million dollars. It's better than a lazy person finding a job as a mattress tester. It's better than winning the Nobel Prize. We are talking about

heaven, and it's far better than any earthly joy we can imagine. Our minds cannot begin to comprehend a perfect environment where we will be united with God and no longer have to endure the struggles of life.

What Will Heaven Be Like? The Bible does tell us some things about our eternal existence with God. After He creates the new heaven and new earth, there will be:

- No more sorrow, tears, pain, or death (Rev. 21:4).
- No more night (Rev. 21:23-25).
- No more evil (Rev. 21:27).
- No more curse (Rev. 22:3).

And in heaven we will:

- Serve God (Rev. 22:3).
- Reign with Christ forever (Rev. 22:5).
- Live in a place prepared for us by Christ Himself (Jn. 14:2-3).

- Have perfect knowledge (1 Cor. 13:8-12).
- Be united with the redeemed of all time (1 Th. 4:17; Rev. 21:12,14).
- Have glorified bodies with powers and abilities beyond our imagination (1 Cor. 15:35-49; Phil. 3:21).
- Live in beautiful surroundings that include magnificent buildings and wonders of nature (Rev. 21-22).

What a wonderful future awaits us in heaven! The anticipation should cause us to live right now as citizens of heaven, as children of the King. God should be ruling in our hearts, even though this world is still under the control of the wicked one.

The apostle John wrote:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is

revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

Who Will Be There?

God will be in heaven, of course, as its primary focus. With Him will be all the Old Testament saints (believing Israelites and believing Gentiles), the church (Jew and Gentiles alike who trusted Christ for salvation), those who put faith in Christ during the great tribulation, Jesus Christ in all His glory, and the multitude of good angels (Rev. 5:11-14; 7:1-17; 20:4; 21:12,14,22).

Who On Earth Has Ever Seen Heaven? Has anyone ever had a sneak preview? Yes. In fact, three men have given us firsthand information about what heaven will be like. One of them could hardly talk about his experience, but another

man wrote a book about it. And the other person, the one who knew the most, gave us only limited information.

• **Paul:** He mentioned a time when he was “caught up to the third heaven” or “Paradise”—the dwelling place of God (2 Cor. 12:2-4; cp. Lk. 23:43). But he did not tell us any specifics about that experience, except that he had heard “inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

• **John:** While in exile on the island of Patmos, John saw heaven in a vision and wrote down what he saw (Rev. 4–22).

• **Jesus:** He left heaven to live and die on earth (Jn. 3:13-17; 6:32-58). He then ascended to heaven, where He will be until He returns in power (Acts 1:11; 2 Th. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:11-21). Jesus assured us of the reality and glories of heaven (Jn. 14:1-6).

What Is The New Jerusalem? In his vision recorded in the book of Revelation, John said that he saw “the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). The holy city will appear after everyone has been resurrected and judged, and after the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The city will be the capital of heaven, the place of God’s special presence. It will be the primary dwelling place of the redeemed. The city is said to have 12 gates symbolizing the presence of the 12 tribes of Israel (v.12) and 12 foundations representing the presence of the church of the 12 apostles (v.14). John described it as being an immense jeweled city of great beauty.

Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham was willing to live

in tents during his life because he knew that one day he would live in “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (v.10). This is the same city that believers anticipate as their eternal home (13:14).

“Though Christians believe in heaven, sometimes they act as though going there were a calamity.”

Henry Jacobson

Thinking It Over. Will any people who arrive in heaven miss their old life on earth? What questions are you looking forward to finding answers for when you get to heaven? If we are already citizens of heaven as Christians, how should that affect the way we live here on earth? What will be

our greatest joy in heaven? Why do you suppose God gave us so little specific information about heaven?

ETERNITY

(Hell)

HELL: The Bad News

The first reaction to bad news is often a refusal to accept it. A person who is told he has a terminal illness, for example, may go through a stage of denial before he comes to terms with reality. Many react to the bad news about hell in a similar way. They feel it is just too awful to be true. They think God is too loving to create such a place. They say eternal punishment based on a relatively brief life span would be like sentencing a person to the electric chair for a parking ticket.

Why Would A Good And Loving God Condemn People To Hell?

We must not underestimate

the seriousness of rejecting God. It is not merely a matter of doing something a little wrong and then having God overreact. The sin we commit by rejecting Him is a monstrous crime (Rom. 1:18; Col. 1:21; Heb. 10:29-31). It is a crime so great that the only way God could rescue us from its penalty was to sentence His own Son to die on our behalf (Col. 1:15-22; Heb. 9:11-10:18). It is only as we realize the significance of Christ's death for us that we begin to realize the immensity of our guilt before God.

Our good and loving God is also a God of holiness and justice (Ps. 33:5). He cannot ignore sin. He will not tolerate imperfection in His holy presence (Heb. 12:14). To execute His justice, He created a real place called hell, originally for Satan and his angels (Mt. 25:41).

What Will Hell Be Like? As with heaven, the Bible gives us only general descriptions of what hell will be like. Although some people have questioned the literalness of a physical hell filled with fire and smoke,

“Almost every natural man that hears of hell flatters himself that he shall escape it.”
Jonathan Edwards

we must remember that unbelievers will be resurrected with some sort of body that can endure physical torment. The essence of hell is eternal separation from God; even so, its inhabitants will endure varying degrees of physical suffering (Mt. 11:20-24).

Some people want to believe that Jesus is so

loving and merciful that He would never send anyone to a place like hell. But when Jesus taught, He spoke more about hell than He did about heaven. Whereas the Old Testament had revealed very little about the eternal condition of those who reject God, Christ described hell as:

- A place of fire (Mt. 5:22; 7:19; 13:42,50; 25:41; Mk. 9:43-48).
- A place of bodily torment (Mt. 5:29-30).
- A place separated from God's presence (Mt. 7:23).
- A place of darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13).
- A place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 25:30).
- A place of varying degrees of punishment (Mk. 12:40; Lk. 10:13-14; 12:47-48).

The apostles described hell as:

- A place of indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish (Rom. 2:8-9).
- Flaming fire and everlasting destruction away from God's presence (2 Th. 1:6-9).
- Eternal judgment (Heb. 6:2).
- Fiery indignation, which will devour God's enemies (Heb. 10:27).
- A place of fire (Jas. 3:6; Jude 6-7).
- The final expression of God's judgment (2 Pet. 2:4-9).
- A fiery place where the smoke of suffering will rise forever (Rev. 14:11).
- A lake of fire, the second death (Rev. 20:14-15).

Why Not Annihilation?

“Would God be any less just,” some ask, “if He simply ended the existence of the wicked after they are judged and found guilty?” Perhaps not, but the terminology of Scripture clearly says that hell, like

heaven, is a real place that will exist for all eternity (Mt. 18:8; 25:41,46; 2 Th. 1:9; Heb. 6:2; Jude 7,13; Rev. 14:11). When the Bible uses words like *cut off*, *death*, and *destruction*, it does not mean the extinction of the soul.

What About Purgatory? Some people believe that even those who are saved by grace will endure some sort of “hell” before they enter heaven.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”
Hebrews 10:31

They say that prayers for the dead, acts of devotion, and gifts of money to the church will help shorten a person's stay in purgatory. There is absolutely no biblical support of this view. In fact, it deprecates the

effectiveness of Christ's death on the cross by implying that He did not fully pay the price to cleanse us from all our sins.

“The safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

C. S. Lewis

Who Will Be There?

Will only the worst of humanity be in hell? Will people like Hitler, Judas, Jezebel, child molesters, murderers, rapists, and drug peddlers be the only ones condemned? No.

Most people like to believe they are not bad enough to go to hell. They like to think that when God

balances their good deeds against their bad, the good will outweigh the bad and they will go to heaven. But that's not what the Bible says. It tells us that everyone has fallen short of God's entrance requirements (Rom. 3:23). No one has the proper passport to get through heaven's gates on his own.

Only those who have personally trusted Christ for their salvation will escape hell. Those who heard the gospel but scoffed at it, as well as those who never searched out the truth their consciences spoke to them about, will be there. The citizens of hell will be those who have taken the broad road, the road that deceives travelers into a false sense of security (Mt. 7:13).

Satan himself will be the host of hell. He will be joined by his cohorts: Antichrist, the false prophet, and all his demons. It will

be a gathering of the
“Who’s Who Of Evil.”

Hell is a difficult topic to think about. Even so, it is a reality. In His teaching, Jesus often pointed to hell’s terrors with one hand while

We can’t straddle the fence, and we can’t wait to make a decision until after we have passed through death’s door.

pointing to the joys of heaven with the other. He said we will all go to one place or the other. There is no escape. We can’t straddle the fence, and we can’t wait to make a decision until after we have passed through death’s door. Scripture does not allow us to believe in a “second chance” for those

who reject Christ. True, it would be nice to believe that everyone will eventually be saved—but that is not what the Bible tells us will happen.

Yes, according to the Bible, hell is real. This thought should cause us to make sure of heaven and to help others escape hell’s terrors.

Thinking It Over. Why do some people reject the idea of a literal, eternal hell? Why must we believe in hell even though we would rather not? How should a knowledge of hell’s awfulness affect our heart? For believers, how is the idea of purgatory different from the biblical picture of the judgment seat of Christ? Why is it that many people don’t like to talk about sin and hell? If unbelievers are going to hell, what can you do to help them get off the road to destruction?

ONLY TWO OPTIONS



Imagine yourself standing at the door of an open elevator. How do you decide whether or not to get on? Your choice is influenced by two factors: the elevator's direction, and where you want to go. You wouldn't want to end up in the basement if you intended to go to the top floor.

Now imagine yourself standing at the doorway to eternity. Where will you go?

Will it be heaven—or hell? The decision you make now, before you die, will determine whether you are headed for the resurrection of the righteous or the resurrection of the condemned, whether your judgment will be joyful or miserable, and whether you will spend eternity with God or eternity separated from Him. The choice is yours. There are only two options.

***Imagine yourself
standing at the
doorway to eternity.
Where will you go?
Will it be heaven—
or hell?***

THROUGH THE TUNNEL

Joseph Bayly was a respected author and speaker on the subject of death. In this excerpt, he wrote of the difficulty we have when we try to understand the realities of the life to come.

I cannot prove the existence of heaven. I accept its reality by faith, on the authority of Jesus Christ: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (Jn. 14:2).

For that matter, if I were a twin in the womb, I doubt that I could prove the existence of earth to my mate. He would probably object that the idea of an earth beyond the womb was ridiculous, that the womb was the only earth we’d ever know.

If I tried to explain that

earthlings live in a greatly expanded environment and breathe air, he would only be more skeptical. After all, a fetus lives in water; who would imagine its being able to live in a universe of air? To him such a transition would seem impossible.

It would take birth to prove the earth’s existence to a fetus. A little pain, a dark tunnel, a gasp of air—and then the wide world! Green grass, laps, lakes, the ocean, horses (could a fetus imagine a horse?), rainbows, walking, running, surfing, ice-skating. With enough room that you don’t have to shove, and a universe beyond.

What is heaven like? For the tired, it is a place of rest. For the sorrowing, a place where “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain” (Rev. 21:4).

Or war or greed or evil of any kind. It is a place of total happiness: “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11).

Heaven is also a place of activity, of work (but without the curse of toil and sweat and barren ground), of sharing in the responsibility of divine government.

I sat with a friend recently in his hospital room. The diagnosis is terminal cancer. If death comes, it will interrupt a distinguished career as a leader in training young men to serve Jesus Christ. “When we think of heaven,” he said, “I don’t think we give enough consideration to what we’re told in Revelation, that ‘His servants shall serve Him’ (22:3), and that their service is ‘day and night’ (7:15). We talk too much about rest—our rest will be

found in serving God.”

In heaven we will be freed from our present fragmented intellectual knowledge, and see truth and beauty with greatly expanded vision. “Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Heaven will be supremely beautiful. The biblical descriptions include walls of precious stones, gates of pearl, streets of gold. (My mother used to say that she didn’t find any particular attraction in golden streets. I had no answer for her until I read a comment by F. B. Meyer, that in heaven all earth’s values are turned upside down. “What do we count most valuable on earth?” he asked. “Gold. Men live for gold, kill for it. But in heaven gold is so plentiful that they pave the streets with it”)

“But,” someone says,

“how could I enjoy such a place? I’m not made for it.” Neither is the fetus made for earth until he goes through the tunnel. Is there another place? Yes, but if the reality of heaven is questioned today, the reality of a place of eternal separation from God (hell, as it is usually called) is ignored. I accept its reality by faith, on the authority of Jesus Christ: “I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (Lk. 12:4-5).

Jesus Christ described it as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 25:30), of remembering the past with its lost opportunity to repent and turn to God, of the loss of those gifts men enjoyed on

earth without a thought of their Source: “From him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (Mt. 25:29).

“But,” someone says, “how could I enjoy such a place? I’m not made for it.” Neither is the fetus made for earth until he goes through the tunnel.

Jesus Christ defined hell’s reality in stronger language than any other person in the Bible. But He also had compassion on the multitudes, wept over an unbelieving city, and defined His mission as coming not to condemn, but to bring life.

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LOOKING AHEAD

Do you know where you are going after you die? Or are you like the pilot who lost his navigation equipment, became disoriented, and then announced to the passengers, “Ladies and gentlemen, the bad news is that we don’t know where we are going. The good news is that we’re making great time.”

Is your life flying by without real direction and purpose? Do you have serious doubts about where you will spend eternity? If so, remember these words of Jesus: “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn. 6:37). The choice is yours. If you seek God’s forgiveness through Christ, you will be forgiven. You will spend eternity in heaven. You will no longer

have to fear the grave.

But what if you are sure that you are headed for the resurrection of the righteous? Then you must remember the judgment seat of Christ. You must so live that you will reap a harvest of eternal gain rather than loss. You must immerse yourself in God’s Word to know what He values most. You must even now be concerned about imitating Christ in your attitudes and actions (Eph. 5:1-7).

Christ wept over the lost condition of mankind. He gave His life for sinners. His love and compassion were obvious to all who came in contact with Him. What about you? Do people sense your concern for the lost? Are you willing to give of yourself that others may come to know God?

May God help us know where we are going when we die—and to be faithful until we arrive.

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