

Heaven
is a
Place

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Heaven Is a Place

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Preface

WHERE DO YOU GET your information about Heaven? Movies, television, novels, friends? A lot of information about Heaven is out there, but most of it is nothing more than the figment of someone's wild imagination. Thankfully, that doesn't mean there is no information about God's Heaven! A great deal of reliable information simply isn't considered by believers or unbelievers. The Bible contains the only description of Heaven written by people who have actually been there and have come back to tell about it. It is a happy, busy place where people live!

The Biblical account of God's Heaven is mocked, distorted, and concealed by a world that rejects God's Word and authority. The words of George Bernard Shaw, a famous playwright who lived in Victorian England at the turn of the century, are still quoted and applauded today. He said, "Heaven, as conventionally conceived, is a place so inane, so dull, so useless, so miserable, that nobody has ever ventured to describe a whole day in heaven, though plenty of people have described a day at the seaside; and that the genuine popular verdict on it is expressed in the proverb 'Heaven for holiness and Hell for company.'"¹ Sadly, Mr. Shaw didn't get his information from the Bible. He also completely misjudged God, Who created all that is truly worthwhile, beautiful, and pleasurable—which includes the seaside.

There is a place—a very real place—called Heaven. It is every bit as real and concrete as the place we call earth. God hasn't revealed a lot of details, but He has sprinkled tiny glimpses of Heaven throughout the Scriptures for us to discover and enjoy. When we collect the many small pieces of the puzzle and fit them all together in one place, a fabulous real estate brochure emerges. We recognize things that are familiar

to us, things that are wonderfully perplexing, and things that excite our imagination and arouse a longing we did not know before. The descriptions we discover in God's Word paint a picture of fabulous beauty and delight, yet it is only a glimpse of that place where we will someday live. Whatever joy or beauty we might be able to conjure up in our minds falls miserably short of Heaven's reality, for God has said that our mortal minds cannot even imagine or comprehend the glory of the things that He has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9).

We who are God's children "see" Heaven by faith. None of us has ever been there, yet we long for it and look forward to seeing it, because it is described in God's Word and promised to us by God Himself. Though we have no tangible snapshot of Heaven's splendor, we are persuaded that one day we will behold its beauty with our eyes and touch it with our hands. We will hear the sweet melodies of Heaven's music, taste the rich assortment of Heaven's food, and smell the aroma of Heaven's trees. Best of all, we will experience the love of our Heavenly Father and enjoy His physical presence forever. As thousands of believers have done before us, we confess that we are strangers and pilgrims on this place called earth, and we are not ashamed to say that our "real home" is in Heaven, a place prepared by God for those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Endnote

1. George B. Shaw, *Misalliance* (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1914), xlv.

Heaven Is a Place!

*“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”
(John 14:3).*

SOME OF THE most beloved words about Heaven were spoken by Jesus Himself to His disciples the night before His crucifixion. The group was gathered in a quiet, private place. Judas had just left to secretly meet with the scribes. Jesus then turned to His eleven loyal disciples and began to describe His departure and the horrible events that lay ahead. The disciples' hearts were troubled, and their minds were spinning with confusion as their beloved Lord spoke of death, betrayal, and separation from them. This wasn't what they had imagined the evening would be like. It didn't fit with their hopes and dreams for their future. The words they were hearing were heavy, and the full implication of Jesus' message to them was lost in the dread and fear that flooded their breaking hearts.

If you have lost a loved one, you know how difficult it is for the human mind to quickly absorb something so incomprehensible and life-altering as the news of death. At this low point, we, like the disciples, find comfort in the compassionate words of our loving Lord, Who understands the depths of our sorrow as no one else can. Jesus turned the subject of His conversation with His disciples to a future much brighter than anything they could imagine. He told them about a place much better than any kingdom on earth.

Jesus said,

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:1-6)

Twice Jesus referred to Heaven as a real, literal place. The notion that Heaven is everywhere or nowhere is not found in Scripture. Neither is the idea that Heaven is a vague, spooky place that cannot be described. Heaven is not an idea or a place in someone's spiritual imagination. Heaven is a real, literal place as solid and touchable as the city you live in on earth. The Bible clearly speaks of Heaven as a place that is God's habitation and the eternal home of those who believe the gospel. We read, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15).

Jesus comforted His disciples before His death with assurance that they would live with Him in a place and would see Him again. He urged His disciples to trust His words and take comfort in His promises. He assured them that their sorrow would be temporary. He turned their attention from their problems to something concrete and glorious. He wanted them to see Heaven by faith, for such faith has the power to put grief and problems into the background and eternal hope in the foreground, where it comforts and strengthens the soul. Present-day believers, as well as the disciples, find comfort

and strength for their journey, just as Abraham found strength by looking forward to that heavenly City “whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

1. Look closely at John 14:1–6. Can you find at least three promises that are able to bring joy and comfort to a grieving Christian’s heart?

Three Heavens?

The word translated “heaven” in the Bible might refer to one of three things. It sometimes refers to the atmosphere around the earth, or the air we breathe. It might refer to the planets and universe that we observe from earth. And last, it might be used as the name of a specific place, just as we say “New York” when referring to the city or state of New York. When we refer to the place called “Heaven,” you will see it capitalized as a proper noun, because Heaven is a specific, literal place.

2. Read the following verses and tell whether they are speaking of the atmosphere, the universe, or a place.

- 2 Chronicles 20:6

- Isaiah 55:9

- Genesis 1:14–17

Different Descriptions for Heaven

The New Testament refers to Heaven in many different ways: as a city, a country, a kingdom, Paradise, and a house. But it is the same place, not different places. For instance, I live in the city of San Dimas, but I also live in a section of the city of San Dimas called Via Verde. Furthermore, I live on some hills people sometimes refer to as the Bonneli Hills, because we are located near a park called Bonneli. I might tell someone I live in Via Verde, the Bonneli Hills, or San Dimas, depending on the context. Do they want a mailing address or a city for their GPS, or do they want to know which part of San Dimas I live in? How I answer might depend on who I'm talking to, how familiar they are with the area, or how specific I want to be. Maybe they just want to know the name of the subdivision we live in (yet another name!), or that I live in California or the United States of America. If I told you I lived in any one of these places, I would be describing one place—I don't live in multiple houses or places.

If the whole world were one country with one king, we might say we lived in the country of Earth. Someone might then ask, "What is the capital city of Earth, the place where the king rules and dwells?" Suppose we then say, "It is Jerusalem." Jerusalem is located in the country of Earth (on the planet known as Earth). So then, Earth would cover a vast expanse of land, but it would have a smaller capital city as well. Your house might be in Jerusalem, but you would have access to and live in the country of Earth.

Think of Heaven the same way. Heaven is a vast expanse that is and always will be the dwelling place of God. We do not know how big the country—or perhaps the planet or galaxy—of Heaven is. We have hints about Heaven scattered throughout the Bible. We know familiar things are there, such as palm trees, as well as unfamiliar things, such as the tree of life that

bears twelve kinds of fruit. We read of horses in Heaven, which are familiar, but we also read about creatures there that we find hard to imagine. We know that people live in Heaven, just as they live in the world as we know it. But there is far more that we don't know or understand about Heaven than what we do! The important thing to remember is that Heaven, as the Bible speaks of it, is far more than a city—it extends far beyond city limits! The New Jerusalem, on the other hand, is a city that is presently located in Heaven and will one day descend upon the new earth. We are told exactly what size it is!

One of the most interesting synonyms used for Heaven is the term Jesus often used, “my Father’s house,” or “the house of the Lord.” This very personal description implies Heaven is the place where God lives and where we, too, will live with Him. A house speaks of the habitation or dwelling place of individuals who have an intimate relationship with one another. It is a place of fellowship and refreshment. In contrast to the temporary nature of our earthly house in which we live with our family, our heavenly “house of the Lord” is permanent.

3. Read the following passages and tell where each house of the Lord is, or was, located and what it is or was.

- John 14:2

- Joshua 6:24

- 1 Samuel 1:7

- 1 Kings 7:51

- Ezra 3:11

- Psalm 23:6

4. Read Revelation 21:22–23. There is no temple or place of worship in Heaven. Why is this?

5. What is Heaven called in Hebrews 11:16; 13:14; Revelation 22:14; James 2:5; and Luke 23:43?

The Most Beautiful Place?

National Geographic explorers were asked, “What is the most beautiful place you’ve ever seen?” They enthusiastically described the most majestic places they had witnessed during their exploration of the earth. One described the breathtaking views from a hot air balloon, another the green trees of a rain forest. Others talked about majestic mountains, spectacular sunsets in the Arabian Desert, the depths of the ocean with its fascinating creatures, or a sunrise on a lush valley sparkling with fresh dew and filled with grazing wildlife. Each tried to paint a word picture that would adequately convey the beauty of what he saw, but none could duplicate with mere words what has to be seen to be understood. If earthly things such as these are able to take our breath away and fill us with so much wonder and awe that we cannot adequately express our

wonder, can you imagine trying to describe Heaven to those who have never been there?

How would you describe color to one who was born blind? Or music to one who was born deaf? At best we could only stir the imagination. What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen? Heaven is more beautiful than that! What is the greatest joy you have experienced? Heaven is filled with more joy than that! What are the sweetest moments you have experienced? The greatest love you have ever known, the greatest spiritual high points, the most astounding victories, the strongest moments of faith? Heaven is better than all of them. We taste just a little of Heaven's sweetness when we experience the fruit of God's Spirit here on earth—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, self-control. Heaven is a place where these things will be a way of life without any struggle with our sinful human desires.

6. Read 1 Timothy 6:17. Why does God give good things to us on earth?

7. Read Psalm 16:11. What does the psalmist say we will enjoy in God's presence in Heaven?

8. How do 1 Timothy 6:17 and Psalm 16:11 teach about God's heart toward His own and what they might expect in Heaven?

Heaven Leaves Us Speechless!

While God does give us little descriptions of Heaven, no words are able to paint an accurate picture of Heaven's extraordinary beauty or the joys that await true believers in eternity. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” All that we can see around us will never enable us to fully understand or picture Heaven as it is. Many mysteries about our relationship with Christ and our future in Heaven can be perceived only by faith as the Holy Spirit reveals them to us in His Word, and most of these we will not know until we enter Heaven's gates. Now we see only glimpses of Heaven's joys in the pages of God's Word; but when we arrive there, we will see Heaven's landscape and hear its songs.

Heaven is a place, and like every place, it has characteristics that make it unique, unlike any other place. If you were to rent a vacation home on the shores of some distant country without actually seeing it, you would intently study the brochure, poring over the pictures and reading every detail provided. The more details you could collect, the more exciting and real this vacation place would seem. Heaven is a place that is far more than a luxurious vacation home! It is the permanent home of every believer. We are going to live there! It is reasonable to study every detail provided for us in God's Word and to anticipate the joys that await us there. No real estate brochure should be more interesting or exciting to God's children than the descriptions of Heaven that God has provided for His own.

9. Read the following passages, looking for adjectives that describe Heaven. What kind of place is Heaven?

- Revelation 21:27; Psalm 46:4; 2 Peter 3:13

- Psalm 50:2; Revelation 21:10–11, 18–21
- Ephesians 1:10; 4:13; John 17:23
- 1 Corinthians 13:9–13; Proverbs 4:18
- John 10:28; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; 2 Corinthians 5:1;
1 John 5:11

Three Reasons to Study Bible Facts about Heaven

Why study what the Scriptures reveal about Heaven? There are many reasons, but perhaps the most significant is that it arouses faith and helps us understand that earth is not our final home. It puts eternity in its proper perspective and encourages us to keep our focus on the reality of eternal things. The Bible teaches us to look beyond what we see and to contemplate that which we have not yet laid our eyes upon. We are to live as people who are passing through this life on our way to a very real place where we will live forever.

10. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. In your own words, write what we Christians need to do so that we do not give up, faint, or lose heart as we live in this difficult world.

Peter wrote to believers who were suffering great persecution. In just five short chapters in 1 Peter, he turned his readers' attention toward eternal things no less than six times. In Hebrews 12:2, we read that Jesus was able to endure the pain of the cross because He focused on the joy that was set before Him in Heaven.

11. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:17–18. What did the apostle Paul instruct believers to remember and why?

12. Read Matthew 6:19–20 and 1 Corinthians 2:9. How are we motivated by the truth contained in these verses?

13. Read 2 Peter 3:13, Hebrews 11:13–16, Philippians 3:20, and John 11:25–26.

(a) What do these passages direct us to keep as our main focus?

(b) Why do they remind us who we are and where we are going?

(c) How does this encourage you?

Closing Thoughts

The Bible has more than five hundred references to a place called Heaven! It is described as a place of incomparable beauty and delight, but most importantly, it is a place where the Lord Jesus Christ resides with those who have put their trust in Him. Jesus prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Christians throughout the ages have found tremendous delight, comfort, and strength in the Bible’s descriptions of Heaven and the reality that we will one day see Christ in all His glory and live with

Him forever in Heaven. True believers long for their heavenly Home and openly declare that they are just passing through this world. Heaven is not “pie in the sky” wishful thinking—it is a reality to be cherished and anticipated with great joy.

Matthew Henry was a profound Bible commentator and theologian who carefully pored over each Bible reference to Heaven, the sweet home of believers. Before his death, he wrote a statement that he wanted read after he died. He expressed well the sentiment of countless other Christians who are already living in Heaven at this moment. Matthew Henry said,

Would you like to know where I am? I am at home in my Father’s house, in the mansions prepared for me here. I am where I want to be—no longer on the stormy sea, but in God’s safe, quiet harbor. My sowing time is done and I am reaping; my joy is as the joy of harvest. Would you like to know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness. Grace is swallowed up in glory. Would you like to know what I am doing? I see God, not as through a glass darkly, but face to face. I am engaged in the sweet enjoyment of my precious Redeemer. I am singing hallelujahs to Him who sits upon the throne, and I am constantly praising Him. Would you like to know what blessed company I keep? It is better than the best on earth. Here are the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am with many of my old acquaintances with whom I worked and prayed, and who have come here before me. Lastly, do you want to know how long this will continue? It is a dawn that never fades! After millions and millions of ages, it will be as fresh as it is now. Therefore, weep not for me!