



HEAVEN'S VEIL

What We Know About Our Heavenly
Home

VEILED

Heaven is every believer's eternal home and yet we know little of the place we will spend eternity. But, what we do know about this mysterious place will amaze you!

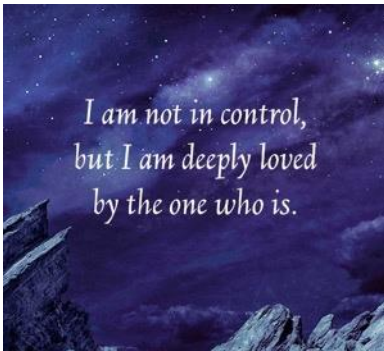
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HEAVEN

Heaven appears to have a veil over it, as if to conceal the glories from our mortal, earthly experience. Perhaps what awaits us is so breathtakingly beautiful that God purposefully gives us little information about it because if we knew how amazing it will be, we'd all want to go there before our time! There is a cry in the human heart for a kind of utopian existence, that perfect place where all the wrongs will be righted, and peace will flow like a gentle stream.

We catch sight of a bit of paradise on earth when we fall in love, see a remarkable sunset, hear the cry of our newborn baby, but often what we see and experience on earth is far from such pleasures. There are heartaches, violence, senseless loss of loved ones, pollution, destruction, and wars. Humanity's history is clouded with stories of travesty against mankind, creation and God Himself. We struggle against systems that seem to never quite work properly, no matter how many laws we create or politicians we elect. We wonder why. Why do bad things happen? Why couldn't God have created heaven on earth? May I suggest to you that that is exactly His plan! If we step back and look at His hand on history, could what awaits us in our future glory make up for suffering on earth? As Paul said to the Romans, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (8:18)



SUFFERING

Suffering is real and this statement is not meant to minimize it. In light of eternity, however, the evil experienced for a limited time on earth will seem but a moment. Saint Theresa of Avila said that the most horrible, suffering-filled life on Earth, looked at from Heaven, will seem as small as a drop of water in the

sea. Mother Teresa is often quoted comparing our suffering on earth to “one night in an inconvenient hotel.”

Many theologians believe that part of our suffering on earth is meant to cleanse our souls, a sanctification process, teaching us things that perhaps could not be learned any other way. Even Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered (Heb. 5:8). Still, it is difficult to tell a person who is currently amid suffering that this is all for their good. Sometimes we just need to listen to their pain, and not give advice but pray. Other times, we should help them look beyond their circumstances to eagerly anticipate heaven.

WHAT WE CAN EXPECT

Some don't see heaven as something to desire because of misconceptions on what it's really like. Picture millions of disembodied spirits floating around on clouds singing hymns like some long church service—that is what many people think heaven will entail! Our perspective is very temporal because we think we can't know much about heaven from verses in 1 Cor. 2:9, for example, that say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." But there are plenty of other scriptures that give us a glimpse behind the veil to see what we might anticipate in heaven.

Luke 16:22 says, “Now, the poor man died and was *carried away by angels* to Abraham's bosom...” When you die, you can expect the angels will usher you into heaven! We will then pass into what some have called an “intermediate heaven.” Between Genesis 3, and Revelation 20, you immediately go into the presence of God in heaven, a temporary place, where we await the final return of Christ to earth. Our bodies will die perishable but be raised imperishable, taking on, at first, a spiritual body (1

Cor. 15:42-44) before we get our new, resurrected one. We won't have a resurrected body until Jesus' second coming (1 Thess. 4:16). In the meantime, the present heaven is what Jesus said to the criminal dying on a cross next to Him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

PARADISE



Scripture describes this paradise as a place where believing family members are, (Heb. 12:22-24), our Father is (Matt.6), Jesus is at his right hand (Heb. 9), our names are recorded (Luke 10), we have an inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4), and our citizenship is (Phil. 3:20). We'll also eat from the Tree of Life (Rev. 2:7). This is the same tree that was in the Garden of Eden, so would it have changed into some vague thing that looks like a tree but has no physical properties? Why would God have changed it to anything but what it was originally created to be? This indicates that heaven is a tangible place.

Further on in the Book of Revelation, it says that all of our needs will be met. We won't be thirsty or hungry or sad anymore. God says He'll wipe away our tears! (Rev. 7:16-17) We will live forever in God's country.

"If heaven be our country, what can earth be but a place of exile?" John Calvin, a reformation theologian, said. Is earth a place of exile? It all depends on your perspective. The earth and all that God created is certainly good, for He said so in Genesis. When man was first placed on earth, he was put into the Garden of Eden, a place where God dwelt among man. When the choice was made, that infamous choice to go our own way, to take our life into our own hands, to steer our own course, God allowed it but didn't keep us in Eden. We were "exiled" until His ultimate plan would be fulfilled.



REWARDS

In Hebrews 11, there is a long list of faithful men and women who knew they were exiled yet longed for a better country—a heavenly one—but who died before receiving all the promises. They got their rewards in heaven! We are saved by faith alone in Christ, but how we live our life after that,

what you do *because of* your salvation, will be justly rewarded (Matt. 16:27). Some will receive different rewards than others. This theology is not “works-based.” Rewards in heaven have nothing to do with your redemption or eternal life, and everything do with *how* that eternal life will play out. Just as God gave Adam a job to take care of the garden, He’ll continue to “employ” us based on how we lived after receiving Christ. He will give us assignments in heaven, and some of us will judge angels! (1 Cor. 6:3.)

While we’re here on earth, we need to work as unto the Lord, with a pure motivation to serve mankind on behalf of God, knowing that we will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward (Col. 3:24). This should be a motivator for how we live our very short lives here on earth, especially when trials come our way, knowing that we are merely passing through on a pilgrimage to a better world.

This better world is going to be amazing! Jesus says he is going away to prepare a room in the Father’s house for you (John 14:2). This implies heaven is a real, solid place, not some misty, vaporized cloud formation. Because God loves diversity, as evidenced in His creation, no two dwellings will be alike. God knows us better than we know ourselves, so whatever Jesus is

preparing for you is going to be exactly what you could ever want. *It will be ideal.*

“All the things that have ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of it—tantalizing glimpses, promises never quite fulfilled, echoes that died away just as they caught your ear,” C.S. Lewis imagines. “Beyond all possibility of doubt, you would say, ‘Here at last is the thing I was made for!’” He goes on to suggest that we each have a secret signature on our souls that God created and implies that this may be the “key” to unlocking one of the many doors in God’s heavenly house.

GOD’S PLAN ALL ALONG

Originally, God created a separate place for humanity to live, apart from the angelic realm, in the Garden of Eden. This place was good, and He dwelt with Adam and Eve. Then paradise was lost, but God had a redemptive purpose in all of it, as He is all-knowing and good. He plans to bring heaven to earth, combine the two worlds, and once again, dwell among humanity with those who *freely chose* to love Him.

In Revelation 19 – 20, the final frontier is achieved: “They came to life and they reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” In resurrected bodies, we will live on this new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21-22). Picture earth without sin. We will be in resurrected bodies that will continually be renewed, no longer suffering from oxidation, and our DNA strands, called telomeres, will no longer get shorter and die, but our cells will constantly replicate, no longer growing old. (This is pure

speculation on how God could keep our physical bodies alive forever.) As far as how He may resurrect your body, given that most of us will see decay or be cremated, with the discover of the DNA chain, every person has what has been called a DNA Recipe. God probably has our “recipe cards” stored somewhere, maybe included in the Book of Life, with our DNA recipes written in it. He could easily recreate us as we were known on the old earth, only superior to the old body. Who knows for sure, but it is a wonderfully exciting possibility to ponder!

In the fullness of time, this was God’s plan all along. He created man with free will, knowing man could choose to embrace Him, or reject Him. God wants a heaven full of *voluntary* lovers, those who chose Him freely and *want to* spend eternity with Him. In the Garden of Eden, that freedom initially allowed evil to be birthed into the world from our desire to be independent of Him, to go our own way, to understand what the serpent said about the knowledge of good *and evil*. Oh, how our eyes have been opened wide for thousands of years to what evil not only looks like, but how dark it can become inside our souls.

Could God have created a world with free beings any other way? Perhaps not. What makes us truly free? Free will involves the ability to choose. Maybe this was the best way for God to receive as many people to Himself freely. Just think of how many people who are alive today who believe in Him—over 2.1 billion people call themselves Christians in our modern age, according to the Pew Research Center. There are more Christians alive today than ever before, and if we do our jobs, they’ll be even more to come! Revelation 7:9 says, “...there before me was *a great multitude that no one could count*, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes...”

Countless people will be enjoying this New Earth-Heaven!

Overall, the story of God's redemptive plan brings clarity to our present sufferings on earth. In the long run, the evil we experience and the pain we endure will appear infinitesimal when compared to eternity in heaven.

As Socrates pondered, "No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings."

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Heaven, by Randy Alcorn
2. Imagine Heaven, by John Burke
3. Near Death Experiences, by J. Steve Miller
4. To Heaven and Back, by Mary Neal, MD
5. The Wonder of Heaven, by Ron Rhodes
6. Heaven Observed, by Barry Morrow