

“Heaven”

II. “What is the Nature of the Intermediate Heaven?”

How would you describe the “Heaven” you are referring to when you make statements about your loved ones being “in Heaven right now”?

***Would it surprise you to learn that there is an Intermediate Heaven that is different from the Eternal Heaven or the New Earth?**

When a Christian dies, he or she enters into an Intermediate Heaven, a transitional period between our past lives on Earth and our future resurrection to life on the New Earth.

Only God is eternal and self-existent. All else is created. Heaven is not synonymous with God, nor is it part of his essential being. Heaven is a place God created and chooses to dwell.

Intermediate Heaven:

Better than life on earth (**Philippians 1:23**)

Temporary

Created by God: had a beginning, therefore, neither timeless nor changeless

It had a past (the time before Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection)

It has a present (where believers go when they die)

It has a future (the Eternal Heaven or the New Earth)

It will be relocated to the New Earth (**Revelation 21:1-3**)

**Hell will be cast into the eternal lake of fire (Rev 20:14-15)*

Distinguishing the Present and Future Heavens

The present or Intermediate Heaven is in the angelic realm. By contrast, the future (Eternal) Heaven will be in the human realm, on Earth.

Revelation 21:1-3 clearly states that the first heaven and first earth will go away (from its present form) and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven, and be moved to the New Earth, and God will make his dwelling with mankind.

The **Future Heaven** (or **Eternal Heaven**) will realize God’s perfect, original plan. Remember in **Genesis 3:8**, we are told that God came down to the created earth and walked with Adam and Eve. He didn’t take them up to his heavenly realm, he came

down to the realm created for mankind, the realm he made for us! The Future Heaven is God dwelling with us – resurrected people – on the resurrected Earth. As Jesus is God incarnate, the New Earth will be Heaven incarnate.

Ephesians 1:10 reminds us that Heaven and Earth will be fully compatible again, under the rule and authority of Jesus Christ, God incarnate.

John 1:14 tells us that Jesus was the Word of God and that God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. When Jesus came to Earth the first time, he was crucified, buried and resurrected. When Jesus comes to Earth again, He will make all things right, He will restore and resurrect the sin-stricken Earth, and He will make His dwelling among us for an eternity!

Do We Remain Conscious After Death?

YES. There is no “soul sleep” or long period of unconsciousness.

-Ecclesiastes 12:7 reminds us of two things when we die:

1. Our bodies (flesh) decays and returns to dust
2. Our spirit (Hebrew – *ruach*) returns to God, who gave it
 - The human spirit either goes to heaven or hell (**Luke 16:22-31**)
 - Jesus to the thief on the cross: “Today you will be with me in

paradise.” **Luke 23:43**

-Paul: To be absent from the body is to be with Jesus (2 Cor 5:8)

-Martyrs, after death, are pictured in Heaven, crying out to God to bring justice on Earth (**Revelation 6:9-11**)

Is the Intermediate Heaven a Physical Place?

As we covered in Week 1, the belief that material things are bad, while immaterial things are good, came from the Greek philosopher, Plato. This thought has crept into Christianity, and it is hard, even impossible for some, to imagine Heaven being a physical place.

Mentions of physical objects in heaven:

- The temple in Heaven is filled with smoke from the glory of God (**Rev 15:8**)
- People who wear clothes, have physical features (skin color), and wave palm branches (**Rev 7:9**)
- Musical instruments (**Rev 8:6**)
- Horses coming into and out of Heaven (**2 Kings 2:11, Rev 19:14**)
- An eagle flying (**Rev 8:13**)

Perhaps some of these objects are merely symbolic, but is that true of all of them? Some would dismiss the physical as symbolic because Revelation is apocalyptic literature, but what about Hebrews, which is not an apocalyptic writing, but an epistle, a letter.

-**Hebrews 8:5**, “They [the OT priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.”

If that which was built on earth, being physical, was patterned after the one in Heaven, would it not seem that the original (in Heaven) was also physical?

-**Hebrews 9:24** states, “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself.”

**Often our thinking is backwards. We imagine things in heaven being a copy of things on earth. But Heaven is the source, and Earth is the copy.*

Earthly realities are patterned after Heavenly realities:

-Parent/Child relationships patterned after God as our Heavenly Father

-Human marriage reveals the love between Christ and the Church, His bride (**Ephesians 5:32**)

-**Hebrews 12:22** states that, in fact, the New Jerusalem that will be brought down to the New Earth (**Rev 21:2**) is presently in the intermediate Heaven.

**Therefore, if we know that the New Jerusalem will be physically on the New Earth, and we also know that it is currently in the intermediate Heaven, does that not suggest that the New Jerusalem is currently physical?*

We tend to start with Earth and reason up to Heaven. Instead, we need to start with Heaven and reason down to Earth.

*What are some things on Earth that would be patterned after what is already in Heaven?

Does “Paradise” suggest a physical place?

Luke 23:43, Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

The word “paradise” comes from the Persian word pairidaeza, meaning “a walled park” or “enclosed garden.” In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT (OT written in Hebrew), the Greek word for paradise is used to describe the Garden of Eden. The Jewish belief that God would restore Eden led to “paradise” becoming the word to describe the intermediate Heaven.

In the Judaism of the NT, paradise was not understood as mere allegory, with a metaphorical or spiritual meaning, but as an actual physical place where God and his people lived together, surrounded by physical beauty, enjoying great pleasures and happiness.

After the Fall, God drove out mankind and stationed Cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life (**Genesis 3:24**). Eden was not destroyed, only man’s ability to live in Eden. There’s no scriptural indication that Eden was stripped of its physicality and transformed into a “spiritual” entity. **Revelation 2:7** informs us that the tree of life is

now in the paradise of God. In **Revelation 22:2** we're told that the tree of life will be located in the New Jerusalem.

The presence of the tree of life in the intermediate Heaven suggests that Heaven too has physical properties and is capable of containing physical objects.

Luke 16:19-31 - The Rich Man and Lazarus...

The story of the rich man and Lazarus has much to teach us about the physical properties in the afterlife. While components of the story may be figurative, Jesus certainly used concrete details for us to picture people in the afterlife as real humans with thoughts and capacities, and with the same identity, memories, and awareness from their lives lived on Earth.

What is Life Like in the Intermediate Heaven?

We can learn a great deal about the intermediate Heaven from three key verses: **Revelation 6:9-11**...Let's read.

-When these people died on Earth, they relocated to Heaven. (This dismisses the "soul sleep" theory or the "ghost" theory.)

-These people were martyred for their faith in Jesus and maintained their identity in heaven. Some people relocated...**Hebrews 12:23**, "**righteous men made perfect.**"

-These people were able to express themselves audibly. This could suggest they exist in physical form (vocal cords or tangible means to express themselves).

-These people raised their voices (v.10) which suggest they are rational, communicative, and emotional – even passionate – beings, like people on Earth.

-These people are fully aware of what is taking place on Earth.

-Those in Heaven are free to ask God questions, which means they have an audience with God. It also means they need to learn. People in heaven desire understanding and pursue it.

-God answers their question (v.11) suggesting that there is active communication with God.

-Heaven dwellers have a deep concern for justice and retribution (v.10). When we go to Heaven, we don't adopt a passive disinterest in what happens on earth. On the contrary, neither God nor we will be fully satisfied until His enemies are judged, our bodies are raised, sin and Satan defeated, Earth restored, and Christ exalted over all.

-The martyrs remember their life on earth and that they were murdered.

-These people are seeing and praying for God's people on earth (consider **Hebrews 12:1**...we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses)

-They wore robes, suggesting they have a physical form rather than being disembodied spirits, which wouldn't wear robes.

-God promises to fulfill their request, but says they will have to “wait a little longer” (v.11). This suggests an anticipation of greater things to come, and the promise of the eternal Heaven (**Revelation 21:4**).

-There is time in the intermediate Heaven (v.10-11). The martyrs ask God a time-dependent question: “How long, Sovereign Lord...until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

**These observations show a reality that this passage applies to ALL martyrs (150,000 die each year) and what is true of them is also true of our loved ones already there, and will be true of us when we die.*

Do Heaven’s Inhabitants Remember Life on Earth?

In addition to Revelation 6 that we just read, consider:

-**Luke 16:25**~Those who endure bad things on earth are comforted

-**2 Corinthians 5:10, Matthew 12:36**~We will have to give an account of our life lived on earth

-**1 Corinthians 3:14**~We will be given rewards in Heaven for our righteous acts

-**Matthew 6:19-21, 19:21, Luke 12:33, 19:17, 19:19, 1 Timothy 6:19,**

Revelation 2:26-28~What we do on earth will earn us rewards in heaven

**Memory is a basic element of personality. If we are truly ourselves in Heaven, there must be continuity of memory from Earth to Heaven.*

Do People in the Intermediate Heaven See What is Happening on Earth?

In addition to Revelation 6 that we covered earlier, consider:

-**Revelation 19:1-5**~There is a great roar of shouting praises to God for specific events of judgment that have just taken place

-**Revelation 19:11-14**~Inhabitants of Heaven return with Christ to do battle and set up the millennial kingdom. They would not be prepared for battle if they were blissfully unaware of what was taking place on earth.

-**1 Samuel 28:16-19**~Samuel, when he came back from the dead, remembered what Saul had done before Samuel died

-**1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Timothy 5:21, 1 Corinthians 4:9**~Angels saw Christ on Earth, and are aware of what is happening on Earth. If angels, why not people in Heaven? It seems the people of God in Heaven would have as much of a vested interest in the spiritual events happening on Earth.

-**Luke 16:23-26**~Abraham and Lazarus saw the rich man in Hell. If it is possible, at least in some instances, to see Hell from Heaven, wouldn’t it stand to reason that in some instances, at least, people be able to see Earth from Heaven?

-**Luke 15:7**~There is rejoicing in Heaven when a sinner repents

So Can it be Heaven if People are Aware of Anything Bad on Earth?

Many maintain that those in Heaven cannot be aware of people and events on Earth because it would cause sadness, thus making Heaven not truly Heaven.

Some important things to remember:

-God knows everything that happens on Earth yet it doesn't diminish Heaven for Him

-Angels see the evil on Earth and the torment in Hell (**Revelation 14:10**), yet that doesn't negate their joy in God's presence

-Abraham and Lazarus saw the rich man's torment (**Luke 16:23-26**), but it didn't cause paradise to cease from being paradise

-Jesus grieved for people when He was on Earth (**Matthew 23:37-39, John 11:33-36**). Does He no longer grieve because He is in the intermediate Heaven? **Acts 9:4-5** makes it clear that Jesus, while in Heaven, was aware of Saul's (later Paul) persecution of Christians. **Just as going to the intermediate Heaven did not make Jesus any less compassionate, going into the presence of Christ doesn't make us any less compassionate.**

In response to the argument that there can be no sadness in Heaven, **Revelation 21:4**, the verse most often quoted on the subject of sorrow in Heaven, refers specifically to the New Heaven, the New Earth.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

***Remember**, the intermediate Heaven and the Eternal Heaven are not the same. There will be NO SORROW in the New Heaven, the New Earth, but Scripture never states there will be no sorrow in the intermediate Heaven!

Happiness in Heaven is not based on ignorance, but on perspective!

So let's read and be comforted with these words from **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**, assuring us that we can be comforted when our loved ones pass from this life. They are not "lost". We know where they are. They are with Jesus, far better off, experiencing the very presence of God, and like us, anxiously awaiting God's judgment of evil and His righting all the wrongs mankind has endured!

NOTES: