

The Residents of Heaven

Who's There Now and Who Will Be?

Ask anybody where their home is, and the answer is often very concise. Names of countries, cities or communities, and perhaps even addresses or directions, are given to answer your curiosity. Ask them to describe their home, and they begin to list the natural surroundings or the style and materials of the building. Sentimental people may use vivid descriptions of sights, sounds, and smells to convey the feelings of home. The familiar hues of wall coverings, the chatter of children playing or the sweet aroma of cookies baking all remind them of the place they are most comfortable. However, to most of us, the location, material and physical cues are secondary details to the more important ingredients in a home: the people who live there.

The scriptures remind us that, for believers, heaven is not just a destination; it is our home. (2 Cor 5:8, NET). Not surprisingly, then, we love to study Bible passages describing heaven. Other articles in this issue focus on the location of heaven and the surroundings that delight the senses. From dazzling thrones, crowns and precious jewels to the chords of praise and the odours of burning lamps and incense, all will mark the splendour of what Paul called “the third heaven.” (Rev 4; Rev 5 etc.). But to us, what will make heaven home has less to do with the location and surroundings and more with the persons present.

But who should we expect to see there when we arrive, and who will be coming after us? God’s kingdom work is so vast that it would be narrow-minded to adopt the colloquial view of heaven as a mere family reunion. On the other hand, while a diverse multitude is destined for heaven, the Biblical descriptions never seem to lose their personal warmth and sense of connection. The following lists may help us as we look forward to being “at home.”

Who is currently in heaven?

1. Our Heavenly Father:

While this may seem obvious, we carefully note that God Himself is in heaven. His omnipresence is taught throughout the scriptures, but in a specific way, heaven is called His “dwelling place.” (1 Kings 8:30). That He continues to dwell in heaven into the future is seen in the throne scene of

Revelation chapter four.

2. Our Lord Jesus Christ:

We know the Lord Jesus existed in heaven before creation and His incarnation. (Jn 1:1, 17:5). While we again acknowledge omnipotence, we are told that in a resurrected body, our Saviour has been exalted and sits at the right hand of God. (Col 3:1, Heb 1:3). A real man seated in heaven who has been known to stand as He welcomes His own into His presence. (Acts 7:56).

3. Angels:

These spirit creatures are quite clearly messengers and servants sent by Jehovah to accomplish certain tasks. While their service seems to be primarily on earth, their “home base” is in heaven. Gabriel is said to “stand in the presence of God.” (Luke 1:18), and the ministers for the little ones “always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Mat 18:10). Luke 15 reinforces this truth by equating “joy in heaven” with “joy in the presence of the angels of God.” Again, the worship of the Lamb as He takes the scroll in Revelation 5 shows that heaven remains the home of the angels into the future.

4. Old Testament Saints:

While focusing on earthly dominion and blessing, Moses and the prophets only vaguely reference heaven. However, the New Testament gives us more light. We are told that these faithful ones desired a better, heavenly country. (Heb 11:16). In Luke 16, the Lord Jesus describes a paradise where Abraham and Lazarus enjoyed comfort and, in a heavenly context, we are told about the spirits of the just ones already there. (Heb 12:23)

Questions are raised about whether or not these saints currently have bodies, and debates are had about the existence of a “two compartment hades” where they dwelt until the resurrection of Christ. We would reject these points. Wholly considered, one can ascertain that the spirits of Old Testament believers went immediately into heaven upon their death and remain there until their bodily resurrection at the end of the great tribulation.

5. Saints of the Church age who die:

The ultimate day of personal triumph for us will be when we receive our changed bodies. (2 Cor 5:1-2) But what happens to those who die before that victorious rapture? In 2 Corinthians 5, we read that a believer is immediately “at home” with the Lord upon death. Again, we are dealing with what most believe to be our spirits without our bodies. In comparison to life on this cursed earth, the prospect of departing this world and being with Christ is “very much better.” (Phil 1:23, DARBY).

Who will be there in the future?

1. Members of the Church who will never die:

The day will soon come when those New Testament saints who have died will be “clothed upon” with resurrection bodies, and those who have never died will be changed. (2 Cor 5:4 and 1 Cor 15:51). Then the Church will be together in heaven, each of us having an immortal and incorruptible body.

2. Tribulation Martyrs: A careful study paints the first half of the tribulation as a specific time of martyrdom. The Lord Jesus emphasizes that in “the beginning of sorrows,” many faithful Israelites will be afflicted and killed. (Matt 24:9). But where do the spirits of those believers go? Revelation chapter 6 shows these souls in heaven pleading for justice and being told to rest until the fulfillment of the number of martyrs. They remain in heaven until their bodily resurrection at the end of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.

3. Two Witnesses: Our final consideration is this pair of witnesses, spoken of in Revelation chapter 11 and set in the Tribulation. After 1240 days of testimony, their corpses lie slain in the street for 3 1/2 days. Then, in the power of God, they are resurrected and called up into heaven, striking fear in all those who look on.

Other articles will deal with this celestial topic as God’s program for the universe will continue to unfold. Heaven will become more closely connected with the earth as Christ’s kingdom is set up and the eternal state is eventually established. But for us, beloved, be reminded; if our heart is truly set on Him in glory, then surely our home is where the heart is. (Col 3:1-2)