

# THE HOPE OF HEAVEN

The gospel fulfilled!

*“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. . . . I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” John 14:3–6 (NKJV)*

It has been 2,000 years since the resurrection of Jesus, and a myriad of believers worldwide expectantly await his return.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, powerful super telescopes continually scan distant star systems in a futile search for evolved, extraterrestrial life.

But we were created—we did not spark into life from a primordial soup or stardust. And though the ultimate destination of Christ’s followers is heaven, that incredible and mysterious place remains sealed in a spiritual realm. Even the most impressive of telescopes cannot peer beyond the physical limits of mortality.<sup>2</sup>

Living in the confines of our terribly broken world affects what we expect of eternity. If heaven sounds boring, as it does at first to many people, we will not look forward to the incredible endlessness that begins when the effects of Adam’s fall cease.

Thankfully, the Bible reveals numerous facts about this otherwise mysterious place.<sup>3</sup>

## HEAVEN FACTS

When asked what is their biggest question about heaven and hell, most people basically reply, “How do I avoid hell and get to heaven?” On that issue, the Bible is quite clear; all who repent and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior<sup>4</sup> will live forever<sup>5</sup> in heaven with our Redeemer and the redeemed people we love.<sup>6</sup>

God sent his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to take on human form and do everything necessary to ensure that we could have everlasting life—with him in heaven.

His blood, his grace, his life for ours.

Salvation is free. We can’t earn it, and we don’t get to heaven by being good because we can’t possibly be good enough. God requires perfection, but he tells us in the third chapter of Romans that all of us have sinned and fall short. Yet we are not without hope. God made a way! The one way to heaven is by repenting of our sins and believing in the gospel of Jesus, our Creator and Savior.

So then, what do we know about “life” there? What is it like in heaven?

We will live on the perfect new earth in perfect transformed bodies. We will recognize and be reunited with redeemed loved ones. And we will apparently even be able to recognize people we have never seen before, as Peter, James, and John did when they recognized Moses and Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). Second Corinthians 5:1 tells us that our bodies will be imperishable.<sup>7</sup>

Revelation 21:4 assures us that there will be no more tears, suffering, or death.<sup>8</sup> There will be no envy or selfishness.<sup>9</sup> No injustice, no lying, no possibility of sinning ever again.<sup>10</sup>

Heaven will be even more amazing than God's original creation.<sup>11</sup> In her worship song, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," Helen Lemmel wrote of her longing for heaven where the things of life on the *present* earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.<sup>12</sup>

The Bible mentions its many dwellings, splendid music, plentiful foods, and crystal-clear water.<sup>13</sup> But heaven is not just a huge city park where we sit around doing nothing all day. For instance, there will be joy-filled work. The late evangelist Billy Graham wrote that, "In heaven, we'll never grow weary or tired, like we do here. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, from that moment on work became a burden for the whole human race (see Genesis 3:17–19). But in heaven, that curse will be lifted, and work will no longer be a burden. Instead, it will be a joy!"<sup>14</sup>

The book of Revelation shares that there will be amazing, talking creatures.<sup>15</sup> Some believe that we will be able to embark on incredible explorations.<sup>16</sup> And it is possible that every moment in heaven will be eternally fresh and new to us, like the marriage honeymoon of a strong groom and his beautifully attired bride. God may continually reveal inexhaustible splendors and details, ever stirring us to euphoric, delight-filled worship!

To understand the essentials of what happens when people pass into the afterlife, we must simply read what the Bible clearly states.

## THE PAST

During the four millennia between the fall of Adam and the resurrection of Jesus, when a person died their body went to the grave (*qeber*)<sup>17</sup> and their spirit to the place called Sheol.<sup>18</sup> Most people do not go to heaven; Jesus told us in Matthew 17 that many go to destruction but few go to life, and in Luke 13 he said that many seek to enter the narrow gate but will not be able.<sup>19</sup> So Sheol apparently had two distinct parts.<sup>20</sup> The spirits of the wicked were sent to punishment in the part called hell.<sup>21</sup> The spirits of the saved were given peace in paradise.<sup>22</sup> That was *before* Christ's death and resurrection.

## THE PRESENT

Since Jesus' ascension nearly 2,000 years ago, our Savior's home has been the present heaven.<sup>23</sup> He is at the right hand of God. The souls of all who receive him as Savior go there to be with him. But all who fail to repent and believe that God raised Jesus from the dead<sup>24</sup> suffer in hell, awaiting the final judgment.<sup>25</sup>

The Bible also reveals that the angels rejoice when a sinner repents,<sup>26</sup> but it does not state that a deceased spouse can watch a living spouse, or that deceased parents watch over their living children.<sup>27</sup> After all, heaven is a place of peace, not worry or regret.<sup>28</sup>

## THE FUTURE

Jesus told us in John 14 that, in the future, he will return!<sup>29</sup> He also told us that we would not know exactly when,<sup>30</sup> but the Bible clearly states in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 that the spirits of Christ’s followers who have already died will come down with Jesus from heaven to the clouds.<sup>31</sup> There will be a great trumpet blast and an archangel will declare the return of Jesus with a mighty shout. Every born-again<sup>32</sup> believer still alive on earth will also rise<sup>33</sup> and meet the Lord in the air. First Corinthians 15:51–53 reveals that the dead in Christ will be raised in incorruptible bodies. In the twinkling of an eye our bodies will be transformed into immortal bodies.<sup>34</sup> *(NOTE: The purpose of this article is to provide basic facts about heaven, hell, and eternity, not to endorse a particular end times view. However, as a service to the reader, the most common end times [eschatology] interpretations of events described in Revelation and other books of the Bible are summarized in the endnotes following this article.)*<sup>35</sup>

Everyone who has ever lived, from the wicked multitudes before the worldwide flood to the billions living today, will bow to Jesus.<sup>36</sup> Satan and every person whose name is not in the book of life will be cast into the eternal lake of fire.<sup>37</sup>

Second Peter chapter 3 (NKJV) tells that “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” Redeemed people from every language group<sup>38</sup> will experience an amazing new life in the perfect new heaven on the new earth.<sup>39</sup>

Theologian Dr. John Whitcomb makes the tower of Babel connection when he writes, “The curse of Babel, the division of peoples, the separation of nations, and the confusion of tongues will end forever, and the wisdom and love of our great God, even in His Judgments, will be understood in a new way by those who have put their trust in Him.”<sup>40</sup>

The Bible describes the new earth as having an immense and beautiful walled city, the New Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> And God will be worshipped forever for his glory, honor, and power.<sup>42</sup>

Imagine the joy of Adam and Eve,<sup>43</sup> whose sin brought suffering and death into the once-perfect world.<sup>44</sup> Finally, they will again eat the fruit of the tree of life, as the Creator originally designed for them in the garden of Eden.<sup>45</sup> God’s merciful restoration and redemption will be complete and the gospel fulfilled.

Indescribable and glorious joy<sup>46</sup> in heaven awaits all who repent of their sins and receive Jesus Christ as Savior!<sup>47</sup>

For more details, see the expansive endnotes that follow. This article is based on material in *The 10 Minute Bible Journey*, a chronological, apologetics-infused overview of the Bible that begins with creation and ends with a chapter all about heaven.

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## **SIDEBAR 1: Qeber, Sheol, Hades, and Gehenna; What's the Difference?**

*Qeber* – This is the Old Testament (Hebrew) word for *grave*.

*Sheol* – Upon death, the spirit separates from the body and goes to Sheol, the Old Testament word for the place of the spirits of the dead. Many believe that before Christ's resurrection, the spirits of the righteous were given peace in the part of Sheol called Paradise (Jacob in Genesis 37:35 and Samuel in 1 Samuel 28:13–14), while the spirits of the wicked went to the part of Sheol called hell (Psalm 31:17).

*Hades* – This is the New Testament (Greek) translation for the word translated as *Sheol* in the Old Testament. Since Jesus' resurrection 2,000 years ago, our Savior's home has been the present heaven at the right hand of God (1 Peter 3:22). Upon death, the spirits of all who receive him as Savior immediately go there to be with him. But all who fail to repent and believe that God raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 10:9) immediately suffer in the present hell awaiting their final judgment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:13–15).

*Gehenna* – This New Testament word is always translated as *hell*. Christians generally believe it refers to the future lake of fire, a place in outer darkness that will forever burn with brimstone. It will be the eternal recompense of Satan, his fallen angels (demons), and all humans who reject the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—and so die in their sins. However, some Christians believe Gehenna is distinct from the lake of fire. Gehenna literally means the “valley of Hinnom,” a place located on the southern end of Jerusalem's Old City that was once used for child sacrifice and the burning of garbage. Thus, Gehenna is viewed by some as a symbol of disgrace and temporal judgment awaiting the unfaithful.

## **SIDEBAR 2. Who Are the “Witnesses” of Hebrews 12?**

A popular belief is that deceased loved ones are in heaven “looking down on us right now.” Is that the case?

Hebrews 12:1 (NKJV) states, “Therefore . . . since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares

us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

Though often used to justify the idea that deceased loved ones in heaven are monitoring our daily lives on earth, that is not likely. The “great cloud of witnesses” of Hebrews 12 refers to the previous chapter, Hebrews 11 (see the *therefore*), which is about the saints and martyrs of earlier days.

These witnesses are the saints that have lived strong by faith in chapter 11. They are men and women “of whom the world was not worthy,” such as Noah and Abraham and Sarah and Moses. They are not witnesses *of* us. They are witnesses *to* us! By the witness of their enduring, triumphant faith, they are examples that inspire us to live and die strong in the Lord.

Abel—murdered by his jealous brother Cain—is in the cloud of witnesses listed in 11:4, where it says, “Through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.”

All the Hebrews 11 witnesses are cheering us on, helping us by way of the scriptural record of their lives. By faith they finished well. And we can too!

#### **SIDEBAR 4. Adam and Eve in Heaven?**

What biblical justification is there for the idea that Adam and Eve will be in heaven?

When presenting at an Answers in Genesis women’s conference, researcher and speaker Dr. Georgia Purdom shared that “Eve displayed her hope in God’s promised seed through the naming of her sons. She was looking forward to Christ and the destruction of sin and despair that Adam’s sin had brought upon the world. Just as Eve did nearly 6,000 years ago, we too have a choice concerning our own legacies. Will we choose to be like Eve at the fall and not obey God’s Word, which leads to a legacy of sin and despair? Or will we choose to be like Eve when she named her sons and evidenced hope in the Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to save us?”<sup>48</sup>

When sharing with children, apologist Ken Ham said, “Abel was Adam and Eve’s son and it seems that the only way he could have learned about God was from his parents. After all, they walked with God and talked with God. They were the first two humans ever created. They were the first to sin, and that sin started the practice of making sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sins. (Remember how God killed an animal to make clothes for Adam and Eve because they suddenly knew they were naked?) Abel knew how to offer a sacrifice that was pleasing to God. He offered that with a heart that believed in God through faith, and he probably learned that from his parents, Adam and Eve. If all that is true, then it seems as though Adam and Eve knew the truth as well, and if they did, they will be in heaven.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:11 (NKJV). “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

<sup>2</sup> Powerful telescopes continually scan distant star systems in search of evolved, extraterrestrial life. However, the Holy Bible, the written record provided by the only eyewitness account of the origin of life, clearly documents that the universe and life were designed and placed into operation by God the Creator. We did not magically come into being from a primordial soup or stardust.

<sup>3</sup> See Revelation 21–22 for hints of heaven’s greatness.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 10:9–10; John 14:6.

<sup>5</sup> John 3:16—eternal life. John 11:25–26—believe in Jesus for eternal life. 2 Timothy 2:10—chosen. Matthew 25:46—eternal punishment vs eternal life.

<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, we will apparently be able to recognize people we have never seen before, as Peter, James, and John did when they recognized Moses and Elijah at Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:3)

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:1–3—imperishable heavenly bodies.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 21:4—no more tears, death, sorrow, or pain.

<sup>9</sup> James 3:14–16—Envy and selfishness are carnal/demonic.

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 59:13–15—Injustice is in the same category as lying, oppression, falsehood, unrighteousness, and inequity, which are all “against the Lord.”

<sup>11</sup> “The curse came upon the creation at Adam’s Fall and will be removed at the Last Adam’s second coming. At that time, there will also no longer be even the possibility of sin, so it will be an even better world than the pre-Fall ‘very good’ creation.” Quoted from Dr. Terry Mortenson’s article on the Answers in Genesis website, “The Fall and the Problem of Millions of Years of Natural Evil.”

<sup>12</sup> [www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/645](http://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/645)

<sup>13</sup> John 14:2—many spacious dwelling places. Revelation 5:9, 14:3—sang a new song. Revelation 5:8—harps. Revelation 4:8, 5:12—angels voices. Revelation 22:2—ever-bearing trees with new fruit every month. Revelation 22:1—river as clear as crystal.

<sup>14</sup> What does the Bible reveal about work in heaven?

- \* “In heaven, we’ll never grow weary or tired, like we do here. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, from that moment on work became a burden for the whole human race (see Genesis 3:17–19). But in heaven, that curse will be lifted, and work will no longer be a burden. Instead, it will be a joy! The Bible doesn’t tell us exactly what it will be, but we’ll be serving God — which is the highest honor imaginable.” Answer by Billy Graham at <http://billy-graham.org/answer/our-work-in-heaven-will-be-a-joy-not-a-burden/>.
- \* “What responsibility will be given us in eternity? Scripture only reveals that ‘His servants shall serve Him’ (Revelation 22:3) in heaven and that he who has been ‘faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things’ (Matthew 25:23).” Answer by John D. Morris PhD, “Will We Have Any Work to Do in Heaven?” *Acts & Facts* 34, no. 7 at [www.icr.org/article/will-we-have-any-work-do-heaven/](http://www.icr.org/article/will-we-have-any-work-do-heaven/).
- \* “Since work began before sin and the Curse, and since God, who is without sin, is a worker, we should assume human beings will work on the New Earth [Heaven]. We should assume we’ll be able to resume the work started by Adam and Eve, exercising godly dominion over the earth, ruling it for God’s glory. . . . How will we glorify God for eternity? By doing everything He tells us to do. What will we do for eternity to glorify God? We’ll exercise dominion over the earth, demonstrating God’s creativity and ingenuity as his image-bearers, producing Christ-exalting culture.” Randy Alcorn in his book *Heaven*, p. 320–321, 2004, 6<sup>th</sup> printing.

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 5:13—Every creature (animal) praises the lamb. Revelation 4:8–9—Four living creatures with multiple wings and many eyes constantly say, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”

<sup>16</sup> “Just as Adam was to ‘tend’ the Garden, we may have the privilege of exploring and showcasing His stellar handiwork . . . all the while fellowshiping with Him and giving Him credit for His creative majesty. We will have an eternity of time to explore seemingly infinite space, giving glory to Him in all, and pleasing Him with faithful service.” By John D. Morris PhD of the Institute for Creation Research, [www.icr.org/article/will-we-have-any-work-do-heaven/](http://www.icr.org/article/will-we-have-any-work-do-heaven/), accessed February 2017.

<sup>17</sup> The Old Testament Hebrew word for grave is *qeber*. The body goes to the grave, but the soul goes to Sheol. “In the Old Testament, Sheol is the place of the souls of the dead, both the righteous (like Jacob in Genesis 37:35 and Samuel in 1 Samuel 28:13–14) and the wicked (Psalm 31:17).” Accessed March 2019 at [www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-descended-into-hell](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-descended-into-hell).

<sup>18</sup> The place called “Sheol” in Old Testament Hebrew is “Hades” in New Testament Greek. “In the New Testament, the Hebrew word Sheol is translated as Hades.” Accessed March 2019 at [www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-descended-into-hell](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-descended-into-hell).

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 7:13–14. Luke 13:23–24.

<sup>20</sup> Throughout the Old Testament it seems as though the souls of both the righteous and the wicked went to a place called Sheol. Sheol was described by Charles H. Spurgeon as “the invisible world of disembodied spirits.” Some theologians are convinced that Sheol is in the center of the earth, and some that it is deep in outer space or another dimension. Regardless, there appear to be two separate parts to Sheol—one for punishment of the wicked, one for comfort of the righteous. Some scholars, such as John MacArthur, disagree with this view (see [www.gty.org/library/bibleqnas-library/QA0272/abrahams-bosom-paradise-and-heaven](http://www.gty.org/library/bibleqnas-library/QA0272/abrahams-bosom-paradise-and-heaven)). Sheol is not a burial place. Rather, “Qeber” is the Old Testament term meaning “grave,” the place where men put dead bodies. Unlike Hades, which is the New Testament equivalent to Sheol, “Gehenna” (Greek language) is a place of burning fire (see Matthew 5:22 and James 3:6, YLT), which many believe is used as a picture of the lake of fire. Today, upon death, the spirits of the saved go directly to Jesus in paradise (which Jesus referred to on the cross). The spirits of the unsaved go to the hell part of Sheol-Hades and suffer there until the great white throne judgment, at which every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, then they will be cast into the lake of fire forever.

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\* Job 14:13—Righteous Job longs to hide from God’s wrath in Sheol (YLT).

\* Psalm 16:10—Neither the soul of the author of this Psalm, David, or the future Holy One (Jesus) would remain in Sheol.

\* Psalm 9:17—The wicked go to Sheol (hell).

<sup>21</sup> In Luke 16:19–31, Jesus confirmed this reality when he told of the starving beggar Lazarus (not the same Lazarus as the brother of Mary and Martha) and the wicked rich man. The wicked man went to hell, and he could see Lazarus with Abraham in paradise. The spirits of the dead were aware of one another in the two realms, but unable to cross a great chasm that separated them, or to warn loved ones still living (whom they remembered but did not see). The wicked man was in flames, and pleaded that Lazarus be sent back to earth to warn the wicked man’s five brothers, but Abraham said that if they would not believe based on Moses and the prophets—the Old Testament—they would not believe even if one were to rise from the dead.

<sup>22</sup> Paradise is also known as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). The Greek word *Hades* is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament/Hebrew word *Sheol*. Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27 are the same verse and demonstrate that the OT term *Sheol* is equivalent to the NT term *Hades*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Jesus is resurrected and currently resides in heaven on the throne of God, at God’s right hand (Mark 16:19). Also see Hebrews 12:2 (Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of God); Acts 1:11 (Jesus is in heaven); Acts 7:56 (standing at the right hand of God); Colossians 3:1 (seated on the right hand of God). In Daniel 7:9, God’s throne is described as having wheels and being ablaze with fire. It sounds something like a fiery chariot.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 10:9; Mark 1:15; Acts 16:31; Romans 14:9; 1 John 4:15.

<sup>25</sup> No one is in the eternal lake of fire yet. That is future. For the final reckoning (the great white throne judgment), the current temporary place of punishment known as the hell part of Sheol-Hades, will be emptied and its occupants will be judged, then sent to the eternal lake of fire (Matthew 18:8; Revelation 19:20, 20:13–15), which is a place described as being of burning sulfur and unrelenting agony. Fallen angels and all of the unsaved humans will both go there (Matthew 25:31–41, everlasting fire prepared for the man “goats” and the devil and his [fallen] angels, Mark 9:45–46).

<sup>26</sup> Luke 15:10.

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 57:1–2; Revelation 14:13; Matthew 11:28. It is not likely that loved ones in heaven are watching what is happening on earth. The “great cloud of witnesses” of Hebrews 12:1 refers to the previous chapter, Hebrews 11 (see the *therefore*), which is about the saints/martyrs of earlier days.

<sup>28</sup> Teaching that deceased friends and family can watch living people here on earth (Hebrews 12:1) is seen by most Bible scholars as an unjustified interpretation. For example, see the following:

**John Piper.** “Verse 1 says, ‘Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us . . . run. . . .’ So the first motivation I want us to see is this cloud of witnesses. Who are they and what does their witnessing mean? They are the saints that have lived and died so valiantly by faith in chapter 11. Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Sarah and Moses and all those who suffered and died, ‘of whom the world was not worthy.’ But what does their ‘witnessing’ refer to? Does it refer to their watching us from heaven? Or does it refer to their witnessing to us by their lives? The word ‘witness’ can have either meaning: the act of seeing something, or the act of telling something. Which is it here? I think it is the act of telling. The verb form of this word ‘witness’ (*martureo*) is used five times in Hebrews 11 (2, 4 [twice], 5, 39) and always refers to the giving of a (confirming) testimony rather than the mere watching of an event. So I take the witnesses of Hebrews 12:1 to be the saints who have run the race before us, and have gathered, as it were, along the marathon route to say, through the testimony of their lives, ‘By faith I finished, you can too!’ The best way to illustrate this, I think, is with Hebrews 11:4, where the writer speaks of Abel and says, ‘Through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.’ So Abel is in the cloud of witnesses, and he is witnessing to us by his life through the Scriptures. This is the way all the witnesses of Hebrews 11 are helping us. They have gathered along the sidelines of our race and they lay out their wounds and their joys and give us the best high-fives we ever got: ‘Go for it! You can do it. By faith you can finish. You can lay the weights down and the sins. By faith, by the assurance of better things hoped for, you can do it. I did it. And I know it can be done. Run. RUN!’” See [www.desiringgod.org/messages/running-with-the-witnesses](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/running-with-the-witnesses).

**Jamieson-Fausset-Brown.** “This . . . sense of ‘witnesses,’ though agreeing with the image here if it is to be pressed, is not positively, unequivocally, and directly sustained by Scripture. It gives vividness to the image; as the crowd of spectators gave additional spirit to the combatants, so the cloud of witnesses who have themselves been in the same contest, ought to increase our earnestness, testifying, as they do, to God’s faithfulness.” See <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/jfb/heb012.htm>.

**Expositor’s Greek Testament.** “The idea is not that they are running in presence of spectators and must therefore run well; but that their people’s history being filled with examples of much-enduring but triumphant faith, they also must approve their lineage by showing a like persistence of faith.” See <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/egt/hebrews/12.htm>.

**John MacArthur.** “There is not one shred of evidence anywhere on the pages of the Bible that people in heaven are preoccupied with watching what is going on down here on earth. That would actually defy the essence of heaven which is to be separated from all the sin and strife that goes on here. They are, as we know, lost in wonder, love and praise, contemplating the glory of God in the wonder of the Lord Jesus Christ and the ineffable glories of heavenly life. There is no indication that they are watching what goes on here. You hear people say that all the time, ‘So-and-so died but I know he’s up there or she’s up there watching down and looking over us,’ and there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that that is the case. There is Jesus, a great gulf fixed between those who are in the presence of God and those who are out of the presence of God in the fires of hell. And there is an equally great gulf fixed between those who are in the presence of God and anybody here still remaining on Earth. That also brings up the fact that there are no saints in heaven who are hearing prayers by people on Earth. They do not have a preoccupation with things on Earth. As far as I can tell from the Bible, they don’t even have a connection to things on Earth or to people on Earth. And so, we have something different here than what has been so often indicated. . . . Now please, get out of your mind that imagery of a stadium and all these people sitting up there cheering you on. That’s not the point. What is this cloud of witnesses? We just met them in chapter 11. That’s who we’ve just seen. And to what do they give witness? To what do they all give testimony? To the value of what kind of life? A life of faith. They’re not witnesses of us, they’re witnesses to the power of faith, to the wisdom

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of faith, to the righteousness of faith, to the blessing of faith. They are witnesses to the life of faith, whether it is Abel, or Enoch, or Noah, or Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses or the rest, better referred to without giving their names with the exception of some Rahab and those listed in verse 32. They are those who are this great cloud of witnesses who have given testimony to the great power and blessing of a life of faith. Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses to the power of faith, let's run the same faith race. All that nephele, that cloud, that mass, that body of witnesses testify to the greatness of a life of faith. The results are worth it, that's what they tell us, the results are worth it. . . . They are the witnesses to the greatness, the validity, the blessing of faith. . . . The race is run by faith, plus nothing. And anything you hang on to from past religion that is made up of pointless ceremonies and traditions and rituals and rules, will only slow you down. He's saying unload your Judaism, unload your legalism, drop all the old weights and the sin which so easily entangles us." See [www.gty.org/resources/ser-mons/90-390/the-race-of-faith](http://www.gty.org/resources/ser-mons/90-390/the-race-of-faith).

**John Gill.** "The old testament saints . . . bore a noble testimony of God and for Him and will be hereafter witnesses for, or against us, to whom they are examples." See [www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/hebrews-12-1.html](http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/hebrews-12-1.html).

<sup>29</sup> John 14:1–3—Jesus is preparing a place for us and will come again for us. Acts 1:10–11—Jesus ascended into the clouds and will come back in the same way.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 25:13—We don't know the day or the hour.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16—The Lord will descend from heaven and bring with him those who "sleep."

<sup>32</sup> John 3:1–21—"born again" defined in biblical context.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51–53—The dead in Christ will be raised, *changed* in the twinkling of an eye and "clothed" with the imperishable. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17—The dead in Christ will rise at the shout, trumpet blast, and coming of the Lord. John 5:28–29—At "his voice" the dead will be resurrected for heaven and hell.

<sup>35</sup> The purpose of this article is to provide basic facts about heaven, hell, and eternity, not to endorse a particular end times view. However, as a service to the reader, the most common end times (eschatology) interpretations of events described in Revelation and other books of the Bible are summarized below.

The discussions of the events surrounding the end times (eschatology) center around three key biblical ideas: the rapture, the tribulation, and the millennium.

**Rapture**—The saints who are alive at the return of Christ will be "caught up" to meet the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17). The Latin verb *rapio* is used to translate this phrase in the Latin Vulgate, so the term *rapture* refers to this future event.

**Tribulation**—A period of persecution of the saints on earth mentioned in Matthew 24 and Daniel 7.

**Millennium**—The 1,000-year period of the reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20:2, 7.

While there are many variations, combinations of these events and their timing are generally used to identify the various orthodox positions. These rough categories are summarized below with a basic explanation of each, including the dissenting views within each.

**Premillennialism** — Christ will return prior to the millennium to reign on the earth with the resurrected saints. Some believe the millennium is an actual 1,000 years while others believe it is a symbolic period. After the millennium, the resurrection of unbelievers will be followed by judgment before God and entering into the eternal state. The nation of Israel plays an important role in future events. There are two basic views:

— **Historic (Classical) Premillennialism**—Teaches that the kingdom of God was established on earth about 2,000 years ago, and that certain elements of Revelation have been occurring throughout the 2,000 years since it was penned. Adherents generally believe the Rapture happens after the tribulation, which is either continuous through the church age or a seven-year period.

— **Dispensational Premillennialism**—In this view, the kingdom of God does not exist yet and will not commence until Christ establishes a physical, earthly kingdom when the majority of prophecies in Revelation begin to unfold. Adherents usually reject Mid- or Post-Tribulation Rapture, favoring Pre-Tribulation rapture and a seven-year tribulation.

The events and timing of the rapture are significant in Premillennial views:

- **Pre-tribulation Rapture**—Prior to the beginning of a seven-year period known as the tribulation, Jesus Christ returns in the clouds. All Christians still living on earth are taken up (raptured) to meet him in the air, and the believers who have died previously are resurrected. Unbelievers are left behind on earth to endure the tribulation.
- **Mid-tribulation and Pre-wrath Rapture**—Halfway or a bit further through the seven-year tribulation, all Christians still living are taken up (raptured) to meet Jesus in the clouds, and all believers who have died previously are resurrected. Unbelievers are left behind on earth to endure the great tribulation.
- **Post-tribulation Rapture**—After the seven-year tribulation, all living followers of Jesus are raptured and meet Jesus in the clouds and all believers who have died previously are resurrected.
- **Great Tribulation**—This occurs in the last half of the seven-year tribulation. The Beast/Anti-Christ is revealed, and God's wrath greatly intensifies.

**Amillennialism**—In this view, the nature of the millennium is spiritual, not physical. Jesus will not have a literal 1,000-year physical reign on earth. Instead, he is currently reigning from heaven through the church. The 1,000 years is a symbolic number representing the age which began at Pentecost and extends to Christ's future return. We are currently living in the millennium, and tribulation is experienced by the saints to various degrees during the church age. The rapture happens at the return of Christ, so there is no pre-, mid-, or post-tribulation rapture. When Christ returns, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers will be followed by judgment before God and entering into the eternal state.

**Postmillennialism**—Like Amillennialism, Christ's return is after the millennium and the millennium is seen symbolically in endurance as Christ will never "not be reigning." Like Amillennialism, Postmillennialism has Christ currently reigning from heaven and the millennium is generally considered a symbolic number (not just 1,000 years). Unlike Amillennialism, the millennium did not begin at Pentecost, but



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rather when all authority on heaven and earth were given to Christ. In this view, we are currently living in the church age, and tribulation is experienced by the saints to varying degrees during the church age. As the gospel is proclaimed and the influence of Christianity grows, the Millennium is ushered in on the earth. The Rapture happens at the return of Christ, so there is no Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation rapture. When Christ returns, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers will be followed by judgment before God and entering into the eternal state.

<sup>36</sup> In the final judgment, every knee will bow to Jesus and every tongue confess to God (Romans 14:10–12). But will Jesus' hands and feet and side still bear the marks of the death he died for us on earth? We may not know for sure, but the case described by Charles H. Spurgeon in his sermon 254, "The Wounds of Jesus" at <https://answersingenesis.org/education/spurgeon-sermons/254-the-wounds-of-jesus/>, indicates that he will, and we will honor and glorify him all the more because of the reminder they are to us. One statement from that sermon stands out: ". . . since it was from these very wounds that Death sucked its own death, and that hell was destroyed; since these were the only weapons of the weaponless Redeemer, He wears and bears them as His trophies in heaven. . . . Another reason why Jesus wears His wounds is that when He intercedes He may employ them as powerful advocates. When He rises up to pray for His people, He needs not speak a word; He lifts his hands before His Father's face; He makes bare His side, and points to His feet. These are the orators with which he pleads with God—these wounds."

<sup>37</sup> Revelation 20:10—The devil and the beast and the false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire where they are tormented forever. Revelation 20:15—Those not found written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 21:8—Unrighteous people will burn in the lake of fire.

<sup>38</sup> Revelation 7:9—Great multitude from every nation in white robes

<sup>39</sup> The current separation of people into tribes and nations began at the tower of Babel when God sent scores of languages, due to the people's refusal to fill the earth. It seems likely, therefore, that everyone in heaven will either speak the same language or will effortlessly understand one another. For God is not a God of disorder (confusion), but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33, 14:40)

<sup>40</sup> Dr. John Whitcomb, in his article titled "Babel" as accessed on July 17, 2015, makes the tower of Babel connection as follows: "There will be a great multitude . . . *from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues* . . . and they will cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:9–10). The *curse* of Babel, the *division* [palag; Strong's Concordance 6385; <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6385.htm>] of peoples, the separation of nations, and the *confusion of tongues* will end forever, and the wisdom and love of our great God, even in His judgments, will be understood in a new way by those who have put their trust in Him." From <https://answersingenesis.org/tower-of-babel/babel/>, accessed February 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Revelation 21:1–4.

<sup>42</sup> The throne of God in heaven emphasizes the glory of God in the Book of Revelation 4:2–11 as well as 22:1–3. Also see Jonathan MacKinney, *Revelation Plain and Simple* (Xulon Press, 2006), p. 119–131.

<sup>43</sup> What biblical justification is there for the idea that Adam and Eve will be in heaven? "Eve displayed her hope in God's promised Seed through the naming of her sons. She was looking forward to Christ and the destruction of sin and despair that Adam's sin had brought upon the world. Just as Eve did nearly 6,000 years ago, we too have a choice concerning our own legacies. Will we choose to be like Eve at the Fall and not obey God's Word, which leads to a legacy of sin and despair? Or will we choose to be like Eve when she named her sons and evidenced hope in the Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to save us?" Dr. Georgia Purdom, "Eve's Legacy: Hope Amid Despair," originally published in *Answers* magazine 6, no. 2 (April–June 2011), online at [www.answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/adam-and-eve/eves-legacy-hope-amid-despair/](http://www.answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/adam-and-eve/eves-legacy-hope-amid-despair/). See also Ken Ham's "Did Adam and Eve Go to Heaven" at <https://answersingenesis.org/kids/adam-and-eve/did-adam-and-eve-go-to-heaven/>.

<sup>44</sup> Romans 5:17–19—Death and judgment came through Adam.

<sup>45</sup> Revelation 2:7, 22:2; Genesis 2:8–9

<sup>46</sup> 1 Peter 1:8.

<sup>47</sup> [www.answersingenesis.org/about/good-news/](http://www.answersingenesis.org/about/good-news/) See also Romans 10:9 and John 14:6.

<sup>48</sup> Dr. Georgia Purdom, "Eve's Legacy: Hope Amid Despair," originally published in *Answers* magazine 6, no. 2 (2011), available online at [www.answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/adam-and-eve/eves-legacy-hope-amid-despair/](http://www.answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/adam-and-eve/eves-legacy-hope-amid-despair/).

<sup>49</sup> See Ken Ham's more complete explanation for children, "Did Adam and Eve Go to Heaven" at <https://answersingenesis.org/kids/adam-and-eve/did-adam-and-eve-go-to-heaven/>.