

Discover Bible Studies

#9: Your Home in Heaven

When Marco Polo returned to his hometown of Venice after many years in the Orient, his friends thought his long journeys had driven him mad. He had such incredible tales to tell.

Marco had travelled to a city full of silver and gold. He'd seen black stones that burned, but no one had ever heard of coal. He'd seen a cloth that refused to catch fire even when thrown into the flames, but no one had ever heard of asbestos. He talked of huge serpents ten paces long with jaws wide enough to swallow a man, nuts the size of a man's head and white as milk inside, and a substance spurting from the ground that actually set lamps alight. But no one had ever seen crocodiles, coconuts, or crude oil. They just laughed at such stories. Years later, when Marco lay dying, a devout man at his bedside urged him to recant all the tall tales he'd told. But Marco refused: "It's all true—every bit of it. In fact, I have not told half of what I saw."

The Bible writers who give us glimpses of heaven seem to echo Marco Polo's sentiment. In vision they looked on a place so brilliant, so fantastic, that they could describe only a fraction of what they saw. And we face a challenge similar to that of Marco Polo's friends. We must try to imagine the "crocodiles and coconuts" that we've never seen, because the glimpses we do get in the Bible show us that heaven is much more than sitting on clouds and playing on harps.

1. IS HEAVEN A REAL PLACE?

Jesus is preparing a very real place for us right now in a very real heaven.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me [Jesus]. 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." -John 14:1-3, KJV. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

Jesus is coming to our world a second time to take us to a custom-made mansion in a heavenly city that is glorious beyond our wildest dreams: the New Jerusalem.

After we've lived there for a thousand years, Christ intends to bring this heavenly home down to planet Earth. As the New Jerusalem descends, fire will purify the entire world. Our renewed planet then becomes the permanent home of the saved. (Revelation 20:7-15. More about this in Guide 22.)

What does John, who wrote Revelation, picture next?

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" -Revelation 21:1-3.

After its transformation by fire, who does Jesus promise will occupy the new earth?

"Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth." -Matthew 5:5. (See also Revelation 21:7.)

Christ promises to restore His once perfect world to its original Edenic beauty, and the meek "will inherit the earth."

2. WILL WE HAVE REAL BODIES IN HEAVEN?

When Jesus appeared to His disciples in His resurrected and glorified body, how did He describe it?

"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." -Luke 24:39.

Jesus had a real body; He invited Thomas to touch Him (John 20:27). On this occasion Jesus walked into a real house, talked to real people, and ate real food (Luke 24:43).

Heaven isn't inhabited by ghosts, but by real people who enjoy a spiritual life, and who have a "glorious body."

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." -Philippians 3:20, 21.

We can be assured that our heavenly bodies will be as solid and real as Christ's resurrected body.

Will we recognize our family and friends in heaven?

"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." -1 Corinthians 13:12.

In heaven we "shall know fully." We'll understand and appreciate one another more deeply than we ever have in this present world.

Jesus' disciples recognized Him in His heavenly body, apparently because of His familiar features (Luke 24:36-43). Mary knew Him at the tomb because of the familiar sound of

His voice when He called her by name (John 20:14-16). The two disciples at Emmaus identified Him because of certain familiar gestures. When they noticed the way their guest blessed the food, they recognized Him as the Lord by His manner (Luke 24:13-35).

The redeemed are certain to experience thrilling "face-to-face" reunions in heaven. Imagine the joy of recognizing your spouse's special smile, or the familiar call of a child you laid to rest long ago, or the endearing gestures of some beloved friend. We'll have an eternity to deepen life's most precious bonds and to develop intimate friendships with the most fascinating personalities in the universe.

3. WHAT WILL WE DO IN HEAVEN?

We'll have plenty of activities to challenge us in heaven. How about designing your own dream house?

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. . . . I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. . . . They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. . . . My chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands."
-Isaiah 65:17-22.

Jesus is already preparing personalized homes for us in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (John 14:1-3; Revelation 21). These verses suggest we'll also design and construct other houses-perhaps beautiful country estates, landscaping them with heaven's rich variety of plant life. And who knows what high-tech adventures await us in God's advanced civilization? Our present scientific breakthroughs and space odysseys will seem like child's play when we begin exploring in our "Father's house."

Do you love the beauty of thundering waterfalls, quiet meadows, teeming rain forests, and delicate blossoms?

"The LORD will surely comfort Zion; . . . he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing." -Isaiah 51:3.

God will transform the earth into a pristine Garden of Eden. No more oil spills or smog or drought; the lakes stay crystal clear, the trees majestic, and the mountainsides unscarred.

Not only the beauties of the world, but also our capacity to absorb them will be greatly intensified. It will seem like that first day outdoors after a very long illness. And the first "twenty minutes of reality" will extend into a magical eternity.

Do you enjoy experiencing new things? Learning? Creating?

"There, immortal minds will contemplate with never failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. . . . Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the

*energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed." -Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, Idaho; Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), page 677.*

4. WILL EVIL EVER THREATEN HEAVEN AGAIN?

"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." -Revelation 21:27.

God is going to completely eliminate sin and its terrible results; they will never appear again. When Jesus appears, "we shall be like Him" (1John 3:2). Instead of resisting impulses to kill, steal, lie, or rape, we'll pursue heavenly graces.

"[God] 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." -Revelation 21:4.

Even the ultimate enemy, death, will vanish. In heaven's land of eternal youth the redeemed are "immortal" (1 Corinthians 15:53); no inhabitant will ever suffer the ravages of old age.

Heaven not only destroys the results of sin, it also reverses them. Imagine what it will be like for those who've struggled with lifelong handicaps:

"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." -Isaiah 35:5, 6.

5. WHAT IS HEAVEN'S GREATEST THRILL?

Imagine seeing the Lord of the universe face-to-face.

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." -Revelation 21:3.

God Almighty promises to be our companion and tutor. What a joy to sit at His feet! Think what a musician might give to be able to spend a few moments with Beethoven or Mozart. Imagine how much a physicist would treasure the chance to sit down with Albert Einstein, or how much it would mean for a painter to talk with Michelangelo or Rembrandt.

Just think, the redeemed will have an infinitely greater privilege. They will converse with the Author of all music, science, and art. They will be on intimate terms with the greatest Mind and deepest Heart in the universe. And this relationship will overflow into worship.

"From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD." -Isaiah 66:23.

In the centre of the heavenly city stands the great white throne of God. Encircled by an emerald rainbow, His face shines like a blazing sun. Below His feet a glassy sea extends in all directions. On this crystal surface reflecting God's glory, the redeemed gather to pour out their exultant praise.

"And the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." Isaiah 35:10.

Here is Someone whose goodness never misses a beat. His faithfulness and patience and compassion just keep rolling on. Praise His holy name!

6. WE MUST BE THERE!

Jesus longs for that face-to-face meeting. That's why He was willing to rescue you from sin at such great cost. You must personally take advantage of this gift. You must make a commitment to Christ as Lord and Saviour. You need the pardon that is offered from the cross, because:

"Nothing impure will ever enter [the New Jerusalem], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."
-Revelation 21:27.

Jesus delivers us from sin, not in sin. We must come to Him through His power in us and be separated from the impure and the unholy. Jesus is our password into His soon-coming kingdom.

And that kingdom can have its beginning right now in your heart. When Christ delivers us from sin, He creates a little heaven within. He can help us deal with the worry, anger, lust, fear, and guilt that plague us. The hope of heaven isn't an escape from life's problems; it helps create more heaven on earth. A recently conducted poll showed that "those who believe in life after death lead happier lives and trust people more than those who don't."

Nothing will have a more dramatic impact on your life right now than a trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. Listen to how Peter describes the impact of a living faith:

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are FILLED WITH AN INEXPRESSIBLE AND GLORIOUS JOY, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." -1 Peter 1:8, 9.

All of this-and heaven too. Have you discovered the kind of abundant life Christ wants you to experience? Please don't turn away from His gracious invitation.

"The [Holy] Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." - Revelation 22:17.

Jesus is with you now, speaking to your heart as you read these lines. He invites you to "Come!" "Come!" "Come!" He couldn't be more eager, more insistent. If you have not yet done so, this moment above all others is your opportunity to explore His offer.

Why not tell Him that you accept His gracious gift and want to spend eternity with Him? Tell Him that you love Him. Thank Him for all He has done for you and all He is still planning for you. If there is something between you and God, ask Him to make you willing to remove it. Today, while you hear His voice, while your heart is still responsive, give yourself to Him without reserve. Bow your head at this moment and say, "Jesus, my Lord, I come. I give my all to You. I will be Yours forever."

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