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Messianic Perspectives[®]

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

**SEVEN THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT**

- HEAVEN -

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK

The Bible tells us a lot about Heaven—far more than most Christians realize. But those gems of information are buried in passages from Genesis to Revelation. We have to put on our “miner’s” hats and dig for them. It takes effort!

A study like this can confirm much of what we already know; but we also run the risk of finding that some things we always thought were true really aren’t. Even though finding and processing the information will take some effort, it will be enormously rewarding. After all, it’s where we’re going to live forever!



Before we begin, let’s be sure we understand that when the Bible uses the term “heaven,” it doesn’t always mean our heavenly home.¹ Aside from a few scattered references where it’s used in a metaphorical sense (e.g., Psalm 68:33; 69:34), “heaven” has three basic meanings in the Bible. These definitions are summarized below. As always, the correct meaning in any given occurrence is determined by the context.

- a. The *atmospheric* heaven—This is where the clouds are (Job 35:11; Isa. 55:10; Zech. 2:6; Matt. 24:31). You could say it’s where birds fly.
- b. The *celestial* heaven—This is where the sun, moon, planets, solar systems, and galaxies are (Deut. 4:19; Isa. 13:10; Matt. 24:29). It’s where spaceships fly.
- c. The *transcendent* Heaven—This is the third Heaven, the New Jerusalem, our eternal home, which God himself inhabits (Psalm 11:4; Matt. 6:10; 18:19).² It’s where angels fly.

Near Death Experiences

Some people have had near-death experiences (NDEs) and “returned” to tell about visiting the Lord and departed loved ones in the third Heaven. These accounts have varying degrees of believability and several have been completely discredited.³ The Bible, however, tells us about one credible person who had such an experience—the Apostle Paul.⁴ Some interpreters think it happened when he was stoned at Lystra and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Here’s Paul’s testimonial:

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities (2 Cor. 12:1-5).

Paul refused to boast, even though he had experienced something that was unprecedented and utterly mind-boggling. He had passed through the veil into God’s presence (i.e., Heaven) and returned to tell about it! He told the story in the third person (as though it had happened to someone else) because he didn’t want to elevate or glorify himself in any way. Besides, he said it would be “unlawful” for him to relate the things he heard while he was on the other side (v. 4). There’s a reason why God has decreed a strict separation between this world and the afterlife. If people could easily travel back and forth between the two realms, the result would be chaos and confusion. Besides, we don’t have to see Heaven with our physical eyes in order to know it’s there: *For we walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Cor. 5:7).⁵

So, those are the three “heavens” mentioned in the Bible. The third Heaven is the one we’re discussing in this study. Let’s talk, first, about where it is.

1. *Heaven is currently outside our earthly realm but will someday descend to the Middle East.*

Where is Heaven? Where are we going when we die? Where are our departed friends and loved ones right now? To answer these questions, we have to go back to the beginning—and that’s in the Book of Genesis. Another word for Heaven is “Paradise.” The notion of an original Creation, before the Fall, when the first humans lived in a pristine garden, isn’t unique to Judaism or Christianity. Strains of it show up in other religions, including several that don’t embrace the Judeo-Christian Bible.⁶ It’s as though the latent memory of an original, primeval Paradise is ingrained in the collective consciousness of the human race. The main theme of the Bible is Redemption, and the drama of Redemption began even before the Bible was written. Paradise was lost, but God has a plan to bring it back.

Messianic Perspectives®

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Heaven as “Paradise”

Paradise (Gk. *paradeisos*) (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7) . . . This word literally means “garden” or “park.” It was used with such a meaning in the Greek OT in Eccl. 2:5; Song 4:13. The Septuagint also used *paradeisos* for the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 2:8). In later Jewish thought, Paradise is the place of the righteous dead in Sheol [i.e., the unseen realm]. Jesus perhaps alluded to this idea in His story of Lazarus going to Abraham in Luke 16:19-31. And when Jesus spoke to the thief on the Cross, He promised him that he would that day be with Him in Paradise (23:43). This again seems to indicate a pleasant place for the righteous among the dead. The promise of Paradise in Rev. 2:7 speaks of the restitution of an Edenic paradise, an everlasting home for believers (compare Gen. 2; Rev. 22).

—“Paradise” footnote in *The NKJV Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), 1649.

Here’s what happened. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in *Gan Eden* (“the Garden of Eden”; Gen. 2:8).⁷ The Hebrew word *eden* (עֵדֶן) means “pleasure” or “delight”; so, their home was, literally, a Garden of Delight. In this original Paradise, Adam and Eve enjoyed a happy, blissful existence in communion with each other and with their Creator (3:8). Think of it—they had no house payments or utility bills. No taxes to pay. No crime to worry about. The weather, as far as we know, was ideal year-round. Their agricultural and zoological pursuits, just for starters, provided endless opportunities for creativity and innovation. They could organize their time any way they saw fit, and they could do anything they wanted to do—as long as they pursued God’s mandate and avoided one, solitary, forbidden tree in the Garden (2:16-17).

Adam and Eve must have had enormous intellects. Unimpeded by the deleterious effects of the Fall, they functioned at their full potential. Besides being the first farmers/ranchers, and the first landscapers, they were also the first scientists because they were tasked with studying, analyzing, and harnessing the forces of nature (e.g., physics, gravity, electricity, hydrology) for the benefit of humankind (Gen. 1:28).⁸



Then, tragically, they lost both their privileges and their Paradise when they disregarded God’s warning and fell for the devil’s ruse (3:1-7). There were probably hundreds of trees in the Garden, many of them bearing luscious, delicious fruit; but like the proverbial moth that’s drawn to the death-flame, Eve became strangely fixated on the one tree that was off-limits. The devil convinced her that God was being unreasonable. Maybe He was keeping that specific tree from them because He was afraid it would make them like Him! So, Eve believed the lie; then, she influenced Adam, and together they ate the banned fruit—and the human race fell into sin.

After the Fall, the first couple was exiled from the Garden (3:23-24). A downward spiral of decay and devolution (i.e., the opposite of evolution) was set in motion. The earthly Paradise in which God had placed them eventually disappeared.⁹ We’re not sure what happened to the Garden. Maybe it withered away from a lack of care; or, it may have been relocated to the realm of the third heaven, “far above all the heavens” (Eph. 4:10).¹⁰ In any case, God set in motion His plan for the restoration of Paradise and the Redemption of the human race (Gen. 3:15). When that plan comes to fruition, Paradise (Heaven) will once again come down and be situated here on the earth. This leads us to our next point.

2. Heaven is a City known as the New Jerusalem.

Heaven isn't just a nebulous, ethereal place where we lounge around in white robes on feathery clouds for days or weeks on end and strum dutifully on divinely-issued harps. On the contrary, it's a busy, bustling City!¹¹ We capitalize "Heaven" because the New Jerusalem is just as real and tangible as London, Paris, New York City, or the current Jerusalem. It's our eternal home.¹² We can't see it right now, but someday we will!

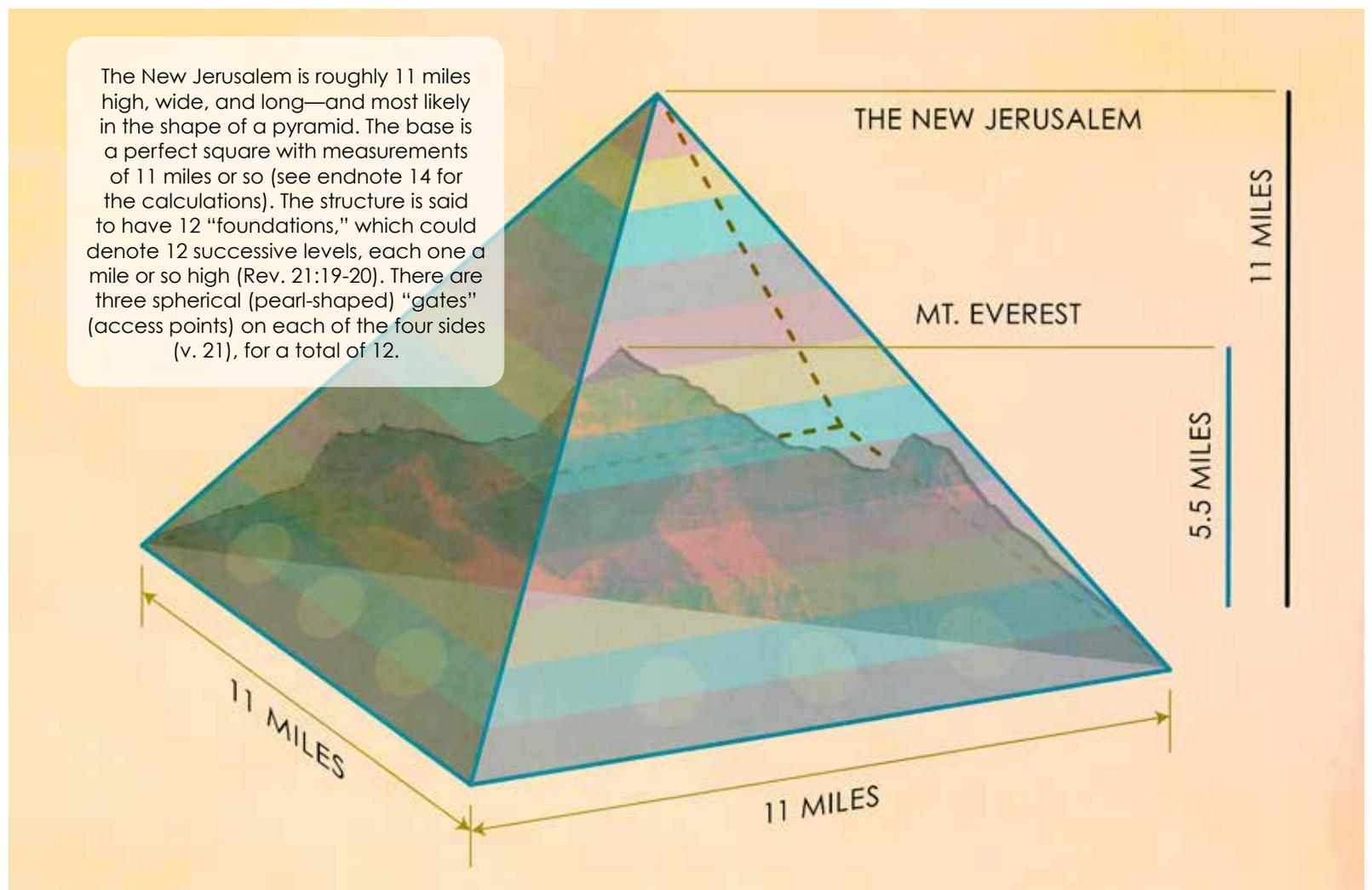
In the NT, the writer of Hebrews has quite a bit to say about the New Jerusalem. For example, he writes that Abraham "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God" (Heb. 11:10). That City, of course, is the New Jerusalem. A few verses later, he says, *But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them* (v. 16). In the next chapter, he adds, *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels* (12:22). A little later, he expands on this idea even further by contrasting present and future realities: *For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come* (13:14).

In Revelation, John refers to New Jerusalem as "The Holy City" (21:2; 22:19), "The Tabernacle of God" (21:3), "The Great City" (v. 10a), and "The Holy Jerusalem" (v. 10b). Other biblical names are "My Holy Mountain" (Joel 3:17) and "The Mountain of the LORD of Hosts" (Zech. 8:3). Someday, in the more distant future, the New Jerusalem will also be known as *Yahweh-Shammah* (Heb., "THE LORD IS THERE"; Ezek. 48:35).

A. The location of the City—now and in the future

We don't know where the New Jerusalem is right now; but we can make an educated guess. Most likely, the New Jerusalem is currently situated somewhere outside our finite, time-space universe (Eph. 4:10; Psalm 113:5), with travel between here and there enabled by a "door" (perhaps an interdimensional portal of some sort; Rev. 4:1) in a geosynchronous orbit somewhere over the Middle East.¹³ Yes, I know that's a mouthful; and, admittedly, this is conjecture on my part.

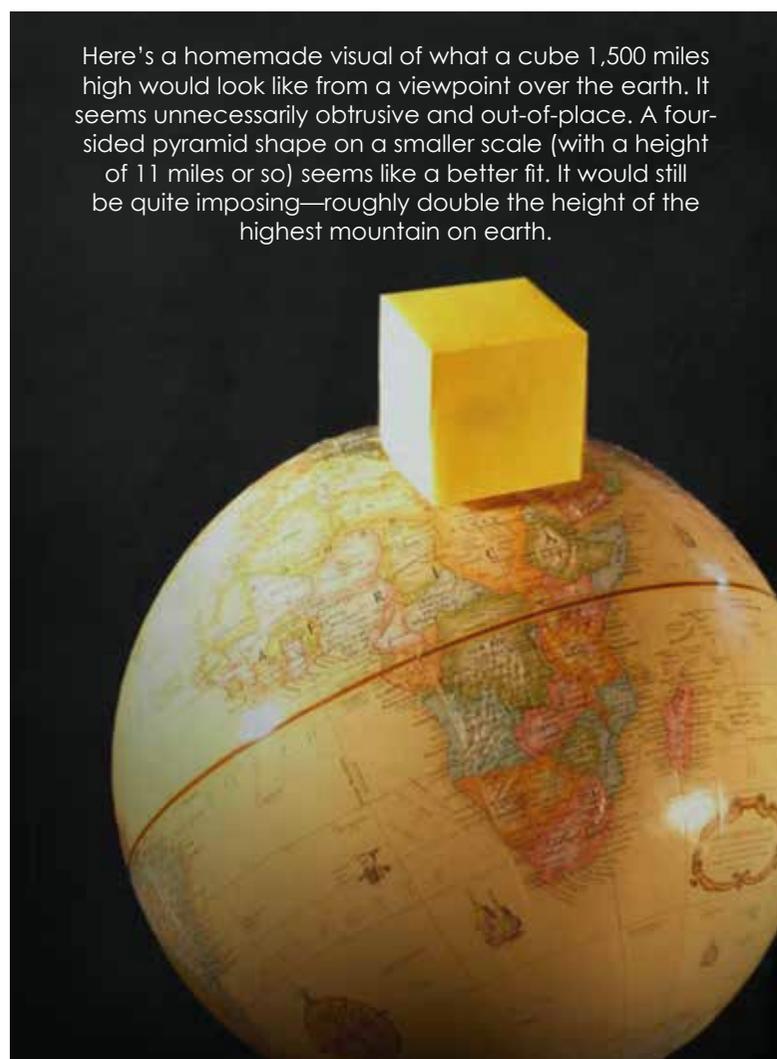
At the beginning of the future Millennium, if our view is correct, the New Jerusalem will pass through that "door," enter our space-time universe, and descend to the Middle East where the old Jerusalem is now (Rev. 21:1-3). The topography of the region will be radically transformed to prepare the site. The prophets employ majestic Hebrew phrases to let us know that valleys will be raised and mountains will be leveled (e.g., Isa. 40:4) to form a vast plateau where the New Jerusalem will alight: *All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. [Jerusalem] shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and [from] the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. [The people] shall dwell in it; And no longer shall there be utter destruction, But Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited* (Zech. 14:10-11). Many commentators take this as poetic, figurative language; and, they could be right. On the other hand, however, it may be more literal than they realize.



There will be no Temple in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22); however, the Millennial Temple (Ezek. 40—48) will be nearby, on the same elevated plain as the New Jerusalem: *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days [that] the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it* (Isa. 2:2; see also 56:7).

B. *The shape and size of the City*

Some people think the City will be shaped like a cube because the Bible says, *The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal* (Rev. 21:16). Note, however, that John did *not* say the City was 12,000 furlongs (i.e., roughly 1,300 miles) long, 12,000 furlongs wide, and 12,000 furlongs high. What he wrote was that the City “measured” 12,000 furlongs (or *stadia* in the Greek)—and its length, width, and height were equal.



Here's a homemade visual of what a cube 1,500 miles high would look like from a viewpoint over the earth. It seems unnecessarily obtrusive and out-of-place. A four-sided pyramid shape on a smaller scale (with a height of 11 miles or so) seems like a better fit. It would still be quite imposing—roughly double the height of the highest mountain on earth.

In her groundbreaking book, *What on Earth is Heaven Like? A Look at God's City: New Jerusalem* (Sebring, FL: Khesed Publications, 2015), Janet Willis points out that the measurement (12,000 furlongs or *stadia*) could be understood as referring to “a cubed measurement. If we pursue that possibility and take the cube root of 1,342 miles, we find that the city would be approximately 11 miles in length, 11 miles in width, and 11 miles in height. With this theory in mind, looking back to what Ezekiel had already revealed, we find an amazing correlation. The measurements match up” (page 38).¹⁴

Some writers worry that there may not be enough room in the New Jerusalem to house all of God's people who have lived since the Creation. They have even gone to the trouble, in some instances, of calculating the number of square miles inside the heavenly City and its 12 levels.¹⁵ However, these concerns and calculations are unnecessary. The interior of the New Jerusalem is an environment of eternity. We don't know if the traditional laws of physics and time apply there. Even if the City was the size of a phone booth, for all we know, we could step inside and find ourselves in the midst of an entire world a thousand times bigger than Planet Earth!

3. *Believers already in Heaven are in an intermediate state.*

When we die, the soul/spirit (i.e., our immaterial self) departs our lifeless body (see “death, physical” in the Glossary) and passes into the Lord's presence (Phil. 1:23). The body stays behind and isn't resurrected until later. So, we are in Heaven with the Lord while our bodies remain down here (in a grave or scattered as ashes/dust) awaiting the resurrection.¹⁶ The question, then, is what form do we have in Heaven during this in-between (intermediate) period? While we're in Heaven awaiting the resurrection of our bodies, will we have some type of temporary bodies? Or (as some people suggest) will we be disembodied, see-through spirits or ghosts? And, will we retain our distinctive appearance, or will we all look the same?



The Rich Man in Hell and the Poor Lazarus in Abraham's Lap, from *Das Plenarium*
Hans Schäufelein (German, Nuremberg ca. 1480–ca. 1540 Nördlingen)

In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul calls the resurrected and transformed body “a spiritual body” (v. 44). This doesn't mean it's immaterial; it just means the glorified, physical body is imbued with spiritual powers and properties (like immortality) that we didn't possess before. But that still doesn't tell us much about what we'll look like during the intermediate period *before* our bodies are resurrected.¹⁷

Paul mentions a period of “nakedness” before a believer is “clothed” with his glorified body (“our habitation which is from heaven”; 2 Cor. 5:1-3). This could be his way of thinking about the intermediate state. We will be “unclothed,” at least in a physical sense; but we will nonetheless “shine like the brightness of the firmament” and “like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).¹⁸ In any case, the intermediate state must be wonderful because Paul says in another passage that it’s “far better” to “depart” this present, corruptible body and go to be with the Lord rather than staying here (Phil. 1:23).

In the parable of the rich man who died as an unbeliever and went to Gehenna, he would have been in an intermediate state when this incident took place.¹⁹ The rich man’s body was “sleeping” in a tomb somewhere, but we know he retained his memories, identity, and even family relationships because he wanted someone to go warn his brothers to get their hearts right with God, so the same fate wouldn’t befall them.

In the Book of Revelation, John says the souls/spirits of the Tribulation martyrs will be “under the altar” in Heaven (Rev. 6:9-11). So, they’ll be in Heaven while their mortal bodies “sleep” in the grave (cp. Dan. 12:2).

Even now, we are primarily spiritual beings. The real “me” isn’t my head, arms, legs, and feet—it’s my soul/spirit and personality. That’s what makes me who and what I am. My body is just a “tent” or dwelling for the real me (2 Cor. 5:1). And your body likewise houses the real you!

4. *Heaven will be bustling with activity.*

When our son Michael was a little guy, our family once attended a church where the preacher got long-winded and the service seemed to drag on and on. On the way home that day, Michael asked us if Heaven was going to be a protracted church service that just went on and on for all eternity. If so, he wasn’t sure he wanted to go there!

We explained, as best we could to a four-year-old, that Heaven is going to be a busy place. No one will be bored! Not only will there be times of praise and worship (Rev. 5:8-14), but there will be work to do. We will all have jobs and responsibilities for which we are perfectly suited. The Messianic global government will require administrators, governors, mayors, clerks, and people serving in many other roles. At the onset of the Millennium, especially, there will be a lot of clean-up and rebuilding to do in the aftermath of the devastating wars of the Tribulation Period.

The mandate God gave Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was to “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over” the fish, birds, and animals (Gen. 1:28a). Part of what it meant to “subdue” the creation was to study, analyze, and learn to utilize the forces of nature (like gravity, wind, sunlight, or electromagnetism) and use them for the benefit of humankind. Science will take quantum strides during the Millennium as we harness the forces of nature here on earth, and as we reach for the stars above to explore God’s vast and amazing creation. New disciplines of science will be discovered. There’s a whole universe out there to explore and learn about.²⁰



5. *We will still be ourselves in Heaven.*

Some people think that when we get to Heaven, our personalities will be so radically changed, we won't know each other. They think we'll all walk and talk the same, like little, mindless lemmings. However, that position is difficult to reconcile with Scripture. Just look at the Creation—God loves diversity! He relishes our differences and our uniqueness, even our quirks. And, at the Mount of Transfiguration, Yeshua, Moses, and Elijah knew each other—and the disciples knew them (Matt. 17:1-8). Also, as we mentioned earlier, the rich man who died and went to Gehenna was concerned about the brothers he left behind (Luke 16:27-28). So, even in the afterlife, he remembered them and still cared about them.

So, why wouldn't we recognize each other? When we're transformed, the best parts of our personalities will be preserved, and the wounded parts will be healed (Mal. 4:2).

Sadly, however, we won't have superpowers. I'm afraid some believers have been watching too many Marvel or DC movies! They think that because Yeshua (after His Resurrection) was able to pass through closed doors, as well as disappear and reappear at will (Luke 24:13-43; John 20:24-31), we will be able to perform such feats, too, in our resurrected and glorified bodies.²¹

After all, doesn't the Bible tell us that Yeshua "will transform our lowly body THAT IT MIGHT BE CONFORMED TO HIS GLORIOUS BODY, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:21, emphasis added)? Yes, that's what it says; but what it doesn't say is that we will be able to do everything the Lord can do. More likely, our being "conformed to His glorious body" simply means we will be resurrected like Him and our new bodies will be immortal like His (i.e., not subject to decay and eventual death). Will we be able to fly like Him (Acts 1:9)? Or disappear and reappear like Him (Luke 24:31)? Probably not.²²

6. *We will be rewarded in Heaven according to our works.*

We are saved by grace, of course, and not by our works (Eph. 2:8-9). But that doesn't mean works aren't important. They are!

The sad truth is, because of their lack of godly works, some believers will barely make it to Heaven. Due to a variety of factors (e.g., carnal priorities, faulty thinking, spiritual lethargy, or failure to respond to divine correction [Heb. 12:3-11]), they will gain admittance to the New Jerusalem by the skin of their teeth: *If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Cor. 3:15).²³

Our rewards in Heaven may come in many forms; but we're told that one aspect will be our position and responsibilities in Heaven. In Yeshua's stewardship parables, for example, we find the principle that our place in the next world (i.e., the Kingdom) will be based on what we have done for the Lord during our earthly lifetimes. In the Parable of the Talents, for instance, Yeshua said, *"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'"* (Matt. 25:23).

Believers who were very prominent and well known in this life may be less so in Heaven; while others who labored faithfully in relative obscurity during their earthly sojourn will enjoy elevated stature in Heaven!

Barely Saved

(Matt. 19:28-39; 1 Cor. 3:15)

The story is told about a wealthy and successful businessman in the early 20th century who was stricken with an incurable illness. He spent a fortune on the finest medical care, but nothing worked. His doctors finally told him he didn't have long to live; so, he asked to be taken home so he could die in his own bed, surrounded by his loved ones.

As he lay there with his life ebbing away, the man regretted that he had not served the Lord well. He had trusted Jesus when he was young but had little time for Him once he had finished school and started his first business. He attended church with his faithful wife from time to time and tried to conduct his business affairs honestly and honorably. But that was the extent of his spiritual commitment. He wept over this failure because he knew there was no time now to make it right.

One day, the man's little granddaughter came into the room. Sniffling and holding back tears, she said, "Grandpa, momma says you'll be leaving us soon. I don't want you to go!" He gazed into her eyes and said, "Sweetheart, I don't want to go, either. But I have to." The little girl said, "Where are you going?" He replied, "I'm going to a place called Heaven." "Oh," she said, "I've heard of Heaven. We learned about it in Sunday School. They say it's wonderful there!" "I'm sure it is," he replied.

Then, the little girl wrinkled her brow and asked, "Grandpa, will you have a big, beautiful house there like you have here, with cars and servants and lots of nice things?" He paused for a moment and smiled weakly. "I'm afraid not, little one," he said. "But don't worry about that. I'll be glad to be there anyway, and I'll be waiting for you to join me." He went on to tell her about how he wished he had done more for the Lord. He admonished her to serve God faithfully all the days of her life. Then, he gently laid his big, rough hand on hers and said, "Someday, when we're all there together, maybe you'll be the one with the big house!"

—Source unknown

7. *There's only one way to get to Heaven.*

When we use a GPS (or a map app) to help us navigate, it very often provides us with a choice of routes. We can take one of two or three different roads and end up reaching the same destination.

Some people think this is also true of Heaven. Their idea is that there are many different spiritual paths, but they all lead to the same place—Heaven.

However, that's not what the Bible teaches. Yeshua himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Through His death and Resurrection, He became the singular way for us to be reconciled to God. No one will make it to Heaven apart from Yeshua's sacrifice on Calvary. That's where He paid the price to abolish the sin that separated us from God (Isa. 59:2).

The critics may say this is unfair or narrow-minded; however, let me ask you a question. If your school or workplace was on fire and the firemen used axes to make an opening where you could crawl out a window and escape the flames, would you do it? Or would you refuse because you don't like being told that it's the only way out?

You see, our sinfulness has placed us in a deficit position with a holy God. This debt cannot be swept under the rug without turning the whole universe upside down. It must be paid. The offense has to be offset by something of equal or greater value. There's no other way to make things right. God himself—being the only eternal, uncreated, and sinless Being—was the only One qualified to pay the debt—and that's what He did when He sent His Son to sacrifice Himself: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).²⁴

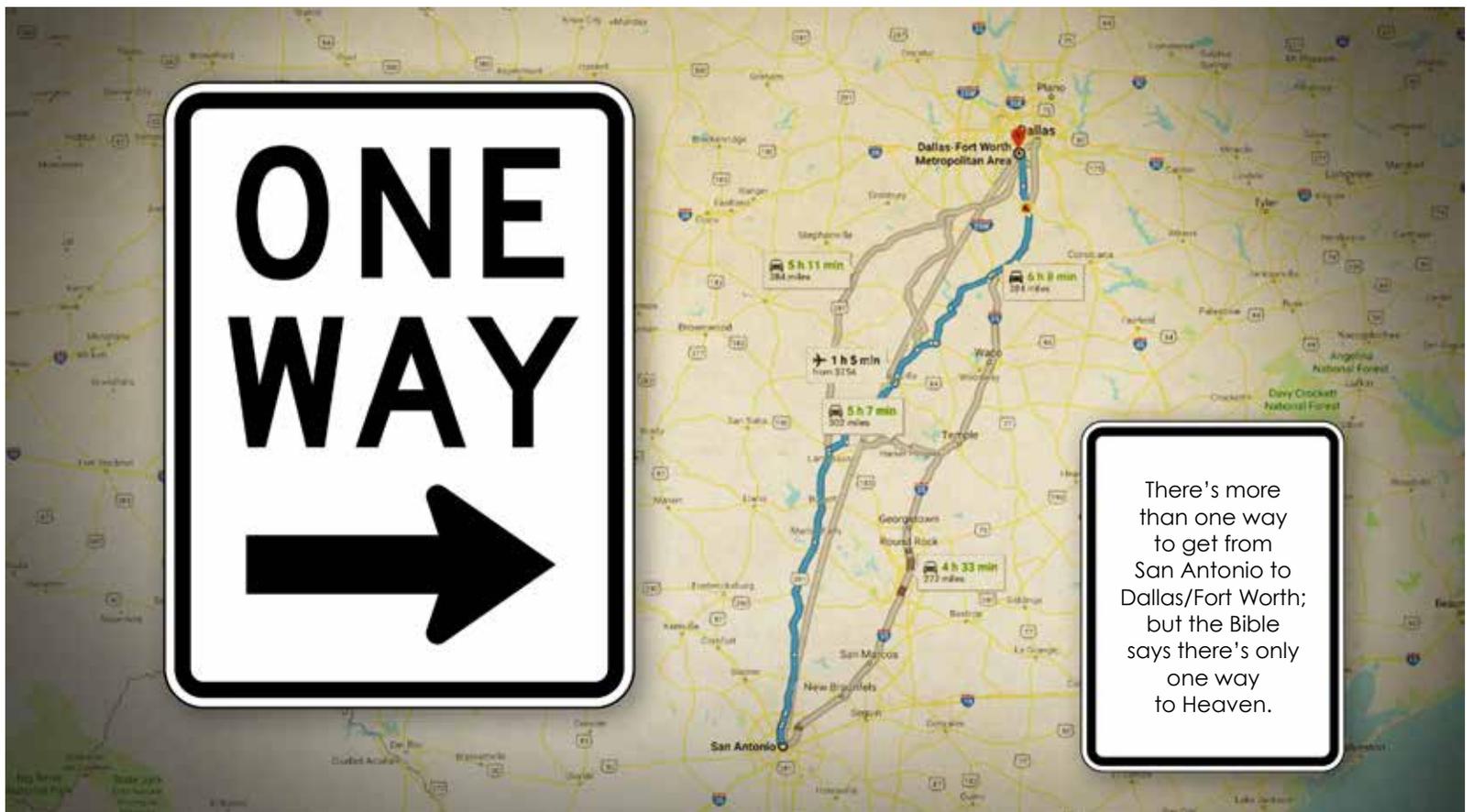
Heaven is only for God's people who have submitted themselves to His Son, trusting in Him and Him alone for salvation. It *has* to be this way. Sin and rebellion have a way of festering and spreading over time; so, if God allowed unbelievers to enter Heaven, it wouldn't be Heaven for long! The whole sad, tragic cycle would begin all over again. This exclusive policy is God's way of protecting the future new world and preventing it from ever reverting to its old, evil, destructive ways.²⁵

Maybe this is a good time for you, dear reader, to assess your own pathway forward. Are you on the right road? If not, turn to Yeshua and trust Him as your Savior and Messiah. Let Him provide for you and guide you. You'll be glad you did!

Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
Your healing shall spring forth speedily,
And your righteousness shall go before you;
The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am"
(Isa. 58:8-9).



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¹ The Greek word for “heaven” is *ouranos* (οὐρανός). In Hebrew, it’s *shamayim* (שָׁמַיִם).

² The place where God dwells is also called “heaven of heavens” (1 Kings 8:27), the “third Heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2), and (since the Resurrection) “Paradise” (v. 4). The Hebrew and Greek texts don’t utilize capitalization, so they don’t distinguish between “heaven” and “Heaven.” In English, we capitalize the third Heaven because it’s a specific place—the New Jerusalem, which is just as real as New York, Brussels, Moscow, Beijing, or any earthly city.

³ One notable example is Alex Malarkey, who wrote (with his father Kevin) *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven: A Remarkable Account of Miracles, Angels, and Life Beyond This World* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010). It sold over a million copies and was on the *New York Times* bestseller’s list for months; but Alex later recanted and admitted that he made the story up. He said the truth was that he remembered nothing from the period while he was in a coma following a tragic auto accident in 2004 that left him confined to a wheelchair.

⁴ Yeshua (1 Cor. 15:3-4), Lazarus (John 11:1-44), and the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-17), as well as the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-22), among others in the Bible, were all raised from the dead. These were not NDEs because they were dead, not merely near death. Furthermore, none of them (as far as we know) later recounted what happened to them while they were “on the other side.” Only Paul talks about his experience, and he says he’s not allowed to provide more than just a scant, few details.

⁵ “Fourteen years” before Paul penned 2 Corinthians (in AD 56) places the incident in Lystra at around AD 42, when Paul was in Antioch (Acts 11:26), not far from Derbe and Lystra. This dovetails nicely with the hypothesis that Paul was talking about himself in the third person in 2 Corinthians 12.

⁶ See *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition* by Jean Delumeau (New York City: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995).

⁷ Michael Guillen, a former Harvard physics professor, wrote an article recently about the research of two scientists—Mark Stoeckle at Rockefeller University and David Thaler at the University of Basel—showing that new DNA research has led to the “startling” conclusion that “all humans alive today are the offspring of a common father and mother—an Adam and Eve,” of sorts (“Did a Mysterious Extinction Event Precede Adam and Eve?” by Michael Guillen, PhD, in *Fox News Opinion* [Nov. 24, 2018]). Dr. Thaler says that at first, he “fought against” this hypothesis as hard as he could because it ran counter to the current scientific consensus about human origins. Finally, however, he had to acknowledge that the evidence was clear and accept the controversial conclusion. An evolutionist will say this means an “extinction event” at some point in the distant past wiped out all but two humans (a male and a female), from whom all of humanity today is descended; but a creationist will look at the same evidence and conclude that Adam and Eve, created by God, were the first humans.

⁸ Some “dominionists” take the so-called Dominion Mandate to ridiculous (and unbiblical) extremes. For some instances of excess, see “Is There a Dominion Mandate?” by Darek Isaacs in the January 9, 2013, issue of the *Answers Research Journal* (available on the *Answers in Genesis* website at answersingenesis.org). However, this doesn’t negate the fact that God tasked Adam and Eve with studying, analyzing, and utilizing the Creation (including the forces of nature) for their own advancement and benefit.

⁹ We know that Paradise (i.e., the Garden of Eden) didn’t disappear immediately from the earth because angels (i.e., *cherubim*) were assigned to guard its entrance(s) after the Fall (Gen. 3:23-24). Eventually, however, the Garden either withered away or was otherwise relocated to somewhere in the heavenly realm—perhaps where the New Jerusalem is currently situated, since the Garden and the heavenly City are closely associated in Scripture. For example, they both have a “Tree of Life” (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2), and special rivers flow from them (Gen. 2:10; Rev. 22:1). Even the minerals are similar (Gen. 2:12; Rev. 21:19-20)! The correspondence is striking.

¹⁰ This inference may be made from the fact that the Garden of Eden was referred to as “Paradise” in ancient Jewish sources like *The Apocalypse of Moses*. The same source says that after Adam’s death, his body was taken by Michael the Archangel to Paradise (in the Third Heaven) for burial. Extra-biblical narratives should always be taken with a grain of salt, however, unless there’s some confirmation or matching inference in Scripture itself.

¹¹ New York, Paris, and Tel Aviv are sometimes referred to as cities “that never sleep.” However, the New Jerusalem will be the ultimate metropolis that never sleeps because there will be no night there: *The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light* (Rev. 21:23). (We may not even require sleep when we receive our glorified bodies!) Note that the text doesn’t say there will be no more sun or moon. The nations (living outside the City and inhabiting the renewed earth) will still experience solar and lunar cycles, just like we do today; and they will see the sun and moon that God placed in the sky. But even at night, when it’s dark outside, the interior of the City will be illuminated by the radiating, shimmering luminescence of the *Shekinah* (Presence) of God (22:5).

¹² Occasionally, critics suggest that our ideas about Heaven come too close to the teachings of certain cults. Mormonism, for instance, stresses the physicality of Heaven (on a renewed earth in the Millennium) and the continuance of our earthly relationships in the afterlife (see “Heaven in Contemporary Christianity,” Chapter 10 in *Heaven: A History* by Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang [New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988], 314-317). Jehovah’s Witnesses also believe in the reality of a coming Kingdom here on earth. There are other examples, as well. For us, however, there’s an important question: are our ideas about Heaven biblical? Should a teaching be discarded simply because it bears a resemblance to something that’s taught in Mormonism, Armstrongism, Adventism, or any other offbeat -ism? Not if it’s biblical! The fact that a fringe religious group teaches something doesn’t automatically make it wrong. We should be more concerned about the fact that so many of our mainstream Christian brothers and sisters know much more about their quaint hometowns where they’ll spend a few, short years (until they die) than they do about the heavenly City where they will spend eternity!

¹³ There are examples in Scripture of angels and humans passing back and forth through that “door” between Heaven and earth—or sometimes standing on earth and looking through some sort of opening or portal into Heaven. John, for example, was invited to “come up” to Heaven in Revelation 4: *After these things I looked, and behold, A DOOR STANDING OPEN IN HEAVEN. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this”* (v. 1, emphasis added). Similarly, when the Apostle Stephen was being martyred by an angry mob, he was allowed to gaze into Heaven before he died: *But Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Yeshua standing at the right hand of God* (Acts 7:55). And, in Jacob’s famous dream in Genesis 28:12, “a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending

and descending on it.” Also, the Bible tells us that the Prophet Elijah traveled from earth to Heaven: *Then it happened, as [Elijah and Elisha] continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire [appeared] with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven* (2 Kings 2:11). Of course, it’s possible that some of these accounts were merely visions (like Daniel’s “night visions” of various heavenly scenes; Dan. 7:7ff); however, it’s equally plausible that these were actual events that they experienced or witnessed.

¹⁴ Janet Willis points out that if the unit of measurement in Ezekiel 48 is rods (and many authorities, including our longtime archaeologist friend Randall Price, agree that it most likely is), and a rod is roughly a measurement of 12 feet, then here’s how it works. If Ezekiel is including the border area around the City (v. 17), then the City would be 11.36 miles on each of the four sides of the base, which is virtually the same as John’s measurements in Revelation 21:16. If you take the cubed root of John’s “12,000 furlongs” (roughly 1,400 miles), the result is a little over 11 miles (11.2 X 11.2 X 11.2 = 1,405 miles). So, Ezekiel’s measurements match up nicely with John’s.

¹⁵ The wall of the City has 12 “foundations” (Rev. 21:14), or 12 stories. If the City is roughly 11 miles high, that means there’s almost a mile between each level of the structure. If the City is shaped like a pyramid, each successive level is slightly smaller than the one below it. Still, it’s enormous—more than twice as high as Mount Everest, the tallest mountain on earth (almost 30,000 feet), in fact.

¹⁶ Cremation, by the way, does not interfere with God’s ability to reconstitute, resurrect, and transform a believer’s body—despite claims to the contrary. Think about it—the bodies of people who died thousands of years ago have long since turned to dust and blown away. All cremation does is accelerate the process of decomposition. God can reconstruct and resurrect even bodies that no longer exist. Unbelievers, too, will be resurrected to face judgment. (News flash, unbelieving friend: you can’t escape judgment by being cremated!) Modern science tells us that every person’s DNA is unique, and every detail about our physical features is encoded on those microscopic strands of nucleic acids. It’s not hard to imagine God having a heavenly “database” of some sort containing all the minute details needed (i.e., blueprints) to reconstitute and resurrect every individual who has ever lived on Planet Earth. After all, He’s the One who made us in the first place (Jer. 1:5)!

¹⁷ The human body appears to have been originally designed to live forever. Scientists tell us that the cells in our bodies can replicate by copying themselves. Except for neurons in the brain, in fact, our bodies are completely replaced by this cellular copying process every seven years or so. So, there’s a sense in which you’re not the same person you were seven years ago! This cycle could continue indefinitely, replacing our cells every seven years, if it weren’t for the fact that the telomeres (caps on the end of each strand of DNA) become progressively frayed with each cycle until the strands are too short and our cells can’t replace themselves anymore. Maybe the Tree of Life is a literal tree in the New Jerusalem with fruit that prevents this degenerative process in the DNA (Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14). Just a thought.

¹⁸ Will we wear clothes in Heaven? We may not need them! Professor Wayne Grudem says our resurrection bodies will glow with the radiance of Messiah: “Because the word ‘glory’ is so frequently used in Scripture of the bright shining radiance that surrounds the presence of God himself, this term suggests that there will also be a kind of brightness or radiance surrounding our bodies that will be an appropriate outward evidence of the position of exaltation and rule over all creation that God has given us. This is also suggested in Matthew 13:43, where Jesus says, ‘Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.’ Similarly, we read in Daniel’s vision, ‘And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever’ (Dan. 12:3)” (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], 833).

¹⁹ We’re assuming here that Yeshua’s story is fact-based and not a parable.

²⁰ Just how vast is the universe? For help in comprehending the immense size of our physical universe, see “The Cosmic Distance Scale” on the NASA website (imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov). Just for starters, traveling at the speed of light, it would take us 2.3 million years to reach the nearest galaxy to our own (Andromeda); and there are up to two trillion other galaxies (besides the Milky Way and Andromeda) in the observable universe.

²¹ The much-revered ancient theologian Thomas Aquinas, believe it or not, spilled considerable ink wondering about the possibility of our resurrection bodies being able to teleport from one place to another: “Some say that a glorified body passes from one place to another without passing through the interval, just as the will passes from one place to another without passing through the interval, and that consequently it is possible for the movement of a glorified body like that of the will to be instantaneous. But this will not hold: because the glorified body will never attain to the dignity of the spiritual nature, just as it will never cease to be a body” (*Summa Theologiae* [Supplementum], q.84, a.3).

²² Yes, the Lord invited Peter to emulate Him and walk on water (Matt. 14:22-33). In this case, however, the Lord was teaching His disciples a specific lesson about faith (v. 31). Will we all be able to walk on water during the coming, earthly Kingdom of God? If the Lord tells us to do it, the answer is, of course, yes. But will we be able to suspend physical laws routinely as part of our normal, everyday lives? Again, I don’t think so. Note (in Matthew 14) that even Yeshua himself had never walked on water before. When the disciples saw Him coming toward them, walking deftly on the churning surface of the Sea of Galilee, they thought He was a ghost because they had never seen the real Yeshua do anything like that (v. 26)! With only a few exceptions, the Lord obeyed the physical laws of our universe (like physics, biology, chemistry, and gravity, for instance)—laws which He himself had established at the Creation (Col. 1:15-18).

²³ The imagery here is that of someone running out of a burning building just as it’s collapsing behind him; that is, there’s a sense of urgency and the person is saved just in the nick of time. In Heaven, this barely-saved individual will have little in the way of rewards, responsibility, or recognition. Nonetheless, he will no doubt feel greatly blessed to be there by the grace of God, despite those limitations! The Bible says the determining factor in salvation is faith, not works (Eph. 2:8-9). Works will be the determining factor in rewards, however (v. 10).

²⁴ Only God was qualified to pay the debt because He himself had no sin (and therefore no sin-debt to pay on His own account). Someone who’s bankrupt can’t cover another person’s indebtedness. Because God was the only completely sinless and holy Being in the universe, He alone was qualified to assume someone else’s sin-debt—namely, ours. The Bible says the One “who knew no sin” became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

²⁵ This “exclusive” (believers-only) policy is actually inclusive because it means anyone and everyone who trusts Yeshua, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, family, economic status, national origin, or social standing, can gain entrance to the Kingdom of God if they really want to (Rev. 22:17).

GLOSSARY

Biblical Terms Relating to Heaven & The Afterlife

Abraham's Bosom—Prior to Messiah's Resurrection, this was the area of comfort and bliss in *Hades* (or *Sheol*) where believers went after death (Luke 16:22). Also known as Paradise (Luke 23:43). Before the Resurrection, Paradise/*Sheol* was referred to as "below" us (somewhere in the earth's interior; Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29; 1 Sam. 2:6); after the Resurrection, it was said to be "up," far above us (John 6:33, 38; 2 Cor. 12:2-3). At some point in time, then, this area (along with its inhabitants) was transferred from *Sheol* below to the Third Heaven above. See entries below for *Hades*, *Sheol*, and Paradise.

Body (Gk., *soma*)—The material, flesh-and-blood part of human beings, in which the immaterial soul and spirit (see entries for both terms below) reside. In its current (unglorified) form, the body serves as a temporary dwelling (or "tent") for the immaterial self (2 Cor. 5:1). At death (see below), the body begins to decompose and return to the ground once the soul and spirit have departed and gone to reside with God (v. 8). The body will be reconstituted and resurrected later and reunited with the soul/spirit (see first and second resurrections below).

Death, Physical—Refers to the temporary separation of the soul/spirit from a body that has died. A soul/spirit cannot inhabit a lifeless body, so it departs (see "body" above). We say the separation is "temporary" because the Bible tells us that all bodies will be resurrected eventually—but at different times. The bodies of God's people will be raised in a series of

resurrections before, during, and after the Tribulation (1 Cor. 15:43-44, 52; Rev. 11:11), and those of unbelievers will be raised still later to face the Great White Throne Judgment (see entry below).

Death, Second—At the end of the Millennium, the wicked dead (i.e., those who have rejected God's free offer of salvation by grace) will be resurrected (see "second resurrection" below) to face the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) and will be consigned to various degrees of torment in the Lake of Fire with the devil and his followers (v. 6). The degrees of punishment will be works-based: "And the dead were judged according to their works" (v. 12).

Death, Spiritual—Spiritual death refers to eternal separation from God. The worst fate imaginable is the eternal separation of a created being from its Creator.

Door—A portal or opening allowing passage from one realm to another. Revelation 4:1 mentions a "door" through which John could "come up" into Heaven and see visions of "things which must take place after this." A similar, trans-dimensional portal might enable the New Jerusalem to leave its current location in the eternal realm and enter our space-time universe before it descends to the Middle East (21:2).

(The) Fall—Adam and Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit precipitated the Fall of the human race into sin (Gen. 3:6-7). Paradise was lost—at least, for a time.

Garden of Eden—The pristine Paradise where God placed Adam and Eve after He created them (Gen. 2:8). In Hebrew, it's *Gan Eden* (lit., "Garden of Delight"). They lived there happily and contentedly, and in daily fellowship with God, until the Fall (see the Fall above).

Gehenna—The area of *Hades/Sheol* where unbelievers go when they die because they have elected to exist in a state of everlasting separation from God. The term itself hearkened back to the ancient city garbage dump located southwest of Jerusalem in the Valley of Hinnom (Jer. 19:2, 6). So, in a macabre sense, *Gehenna* is the garbage dump of the universe. At the final judgment, *Gehenna* will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14-15).

Grave—The English equivalent of the Hebrew *Sheol* and the Greek *Hades*. The body "sleeps" in the ground (metaphorically) while the soul/spirit goes to be with other departed believers in Paradise (see entry for Paradise below).

Great White Throne Judgment—Unbelievers will face judgment at the close of the Millennium. See entries for second death and second resurrection below.

Hades—Literally, the "unseen" realm (e.g., Matt. 11:23); includes separate areas for believers (see listings for Paradise and Abraham's Bosom) and unbelievers (Hell or *Gehenna*) in the afterlife. The Greek term *hades* literally means "not seen" (negative particle + *eido*) and is roughly equivalent to the Hebrew *Sheol*—the grave or the unseen world. In Greek mythology, *Hades* was the god of the underworld; so, in describing these realities, the NT uses a term which

would have been understandable and relatable to its original, Greek (as well as Jewish) readers.

Heavens, Atmospheric—The thin, breathable bubble of air that surrounds the earth. The first heaven.

Heavens, Celestial—Interplanetary and interstellar outer space; the observable universe. The second heaven.

Heavens, Highest—The farthest reaches of the celestial heaven (see above; Deut. 10:14); it's not, however, God's abode (see the Transcendent Heaven below).

Heaven, Third—See the Transcendent Heaven below.

Heaven, Transcendent—Where God's throne is located. The divine abode. The fact that it's not described as the "highest" heaven may provide a clue that it doesn't exist right now in our time-space universe. It's in another dimension.

Hell—In English translations, this is a catch-all term for *Sheol*, *Hades*, *Gehenna*, and the Lake of Fire (e.g., Deut. 32:22; Matt. 10:28).

Intermediate State—Refers to the state of believers in Heaven (or unbelievers in *Gehenna*) before their bodies are resurrected. Some commentators think we'll be like disembodied spirits in our intermediate state, but others believe the spirit inhabits a temporary body with semi-physicality while it awaits the reconstitution, resurrection, and transformation of the body that died.

Judgment Seat of Messiah—Refers to believers standing before Yeshua to be judged “according to what [they] have done” during their earthly lives (2 Cor. 5:10). Most likely, we will stand before the Lord individually, at various times, rather than all at the same time (although the Bible nowhere specifies this). The Greek word is *Bema*, the same term used for the place where ancient Roman rulers sat to dispense judgment (e.g., Acts 25:10, 17). This *Bema* Judgment has nothing to do with salvation. It’s only for believers in Yeshua, and it’s about receiving (or not receiving) rewards. Some believers will “suffer loss” at the *Bema* Judgment (1 Cor. 3:15) while others will receive well-earned rewards and recognition (Luke 19:17).

Kingdom of God—In its primary application, this is something that’s in the future—i.e., the eternal, earthly reign of Israel’s King-Messiah from the throne of His father David in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:8-16; Luke 1:32-33). In a secondary sense, however, we are Kingdom citizens now and His kingdom principles are in our hearts (Luke 17:21), even before the Kingdom becomes a physical reality here on the earth (Matt. 6:10).

Lake of Fire—Ominous, final, eternal disposition of the Devil, the Antichrist, the False Prophet, and their followers (Rev. 19:20; 20:10-15). The believers who were in *Hades/Paradise* were transferred to the New Jerusalem after Messiah’s death and Resurrection. The remaining (unbelieving) inhabitants of *Hades* are still languishing there and will be cast into the Lake of Fire at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:14).

Millennium—The first thousand years of the eternal Kingdom of God (Rev. 20:4-6).

This thousand-year period ends with the second Battle of Gog and Magog (vv. 7-10) and the subsequent Great White Throne Judgment (v. 11).

New Heavens and New Earth—This is the Bible’s description of the renovated world (after the devastation of the Tribulation) beginning with the Millennium (see above) and continuing endlessly (Isa. 65:17-26).

New Jerusalem—This is Heaven; God’s dwelling place, the Holy City (Rev. 21:2). It’s situated today somewhere in the heavenly realm but will someday come down and settle in the Middle East. In this amazing City, the Lord has prepared dwellings for His saints (that’s us!), both Jewish and Gentile (John 14:1-3). See also Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 11:10; 12:22-24. In a sense, then, the conflict of the ages is between two cities—Babylon the Great (Rev. 17:1-18) and the New Jerusalem (21:1-27)—and the latter one wins!

Paradise—The holding area in *Hades* for OT believers. It appears (from collating the biblical data) that after the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the inhabitants of Paradise were taken from *Hades* directly into God’s presence in the New Jerusalem. See the entry for Abraham’s Bosom above.

Resurrection, First—Not a singular event, but a series of resurrection events. It begins with the Resurrection of Yeshua (the “Firstfruits”; 1 Cor. 15:20) and those who were raised with Him (Matt. 27:52-53), then continues with those who are raised at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:23) and concludes with the raising of the OT saints and Tribulation martyrs prior to the Millennium (Rev. 20:4-5). These events, collectively, constitute the First Resurrection (Rev. 20:5-6).

Resurrection, Second—The term “second resurrection” doesn’t appear in the Bible, but is implied by the existence of a first resurrection (see above). This final resurrection is for unbelievers who have died and gone to *Gehenna* prior to and during the Millennium. When their bodies are raised at the end of the thousand years, these renegades will face the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11). Multitudes of them will be insurgents who perished in the final, ill-fated Battle of Gog and Magog at the end of the Millennium (20:7-10).

Sheol—The Hebrew term for “the grave,” roughly equating to the Greek *Hades* (see entry above). Prior to Messiah’s Resurrection, *Sheol* had two distinct areas: (1) Paradise (for believers) and (2) *Gehenna* (for unbelievers). Since death is, by definition, the departure (or separation) of the soul/spirit from the body, Yeshua’s spirit presumably went somewhere during the three days when His body was lying lifelessly in the tomb. According to the ancient Apostles’ Creed, His soul/spirit “descended into hell” (Lat., *descendit ad inferos*) during that time.¹ The term “Hell,” in this context, denotes *Hades* or *Sheol* (i.e., “the grave,” or the unseen realm). This could be what Peter was referring to when he said Yeshua “went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient” in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:19-20). See *Tartarus* below.

Soul (Heb., *nephesh*; Gr., *psyche*)—The God-given life force in both humans (Gen. 2:7) and breathing animals (Gen. 1:20-21, 24). In humans, it’s the seat of emotions, affections, and other personality traits. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:23, it’s one of the three basic components of our material/immaterial makeup as

humans (i.e., body, soul, and spirit). A related Greek term is *nous*, or “mind” (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:10; 2:16; 14:14-15).

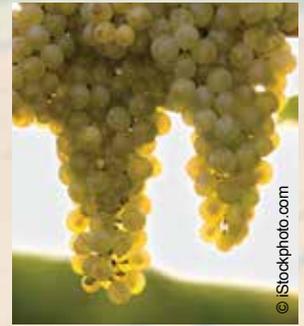
Spirit (Heb., *ruach*; Gr., *pneuma*)—In a general sense, the spirit is the breath of life that animates both humans and animals (cp. “soul” above). In a more specialized sense, in certain contexts, it represents the capacity of humans to worship their Creator and to communicate with Him (Eph. 1:17). Animals don’t pray; they don’t have a capacity for spiritual worship and divine interaction like we do.

Tartarus—In Greek mythology, *Tartarus* was the deepest, darkest, and most impenetrable region of the Abyss (the realm of the dead). It was where the most evil and vile offenders went at death to receive their just punishment. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit uses some of these same ancient Greek terms to convey spiritual realities and make them understandable. The Greek text of the NT, for instance, uses the verb form (*tartaros*; *ταρταρώσας*) in 2 Peter 2:4-5: *For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but CAST THEM DOWN TO HELL and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly (emphasis added).* Here, the NT uses a verbal form of *Tartarus* to designate a high-security holding area where certain diabolical and dangerous angels have been imprisoned pending their final judgment. These angels could be the ones who had unnatural sexual relations with mortal women in Genesis 6, part of a satanic plot to pollute the human bloodline so thoroughly, and so irreversibly, the Messiah couldn’t be born in fulfillment of God’s promise of Redemption (Gen. 3:15)

¹ It should be noted here that not all Christian traditions agree with the statement about Yeshua (Jesus) descending into Hell—and some groups have deleted it from the Creed altogether. The Apostles’ Creed wasn’t written by the Apostles (the earliest possible date for the Creed is around AD 180) and it’s not inspired Scripture; however, it presumably represents the beliefs of many early Christian leaders.

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



The Ride of a Lifetime

Richard Hill, CJFM representative (Las Vegas) and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation, relates a recent family story. Brandon, the boyfriend of his daughter, Stephanie, shared that his grandfather in California had suffered a heart attack and was on life support. Brandon, who had a close relationship with his grandfather, was concerned that his grandfather, Valentine, was not a believer. Brandon was unable to drive to California to minister to his grandfather. However, the Lord put a burden on Rich's wife, Oanh, to drive Brandon and Stephanie to California. The family was planning to remove Valentine from life support the next day, so time was of the essence. En route, Oanh also coached Brandon on how to communicate the Gospel to someone who is unable to speak by asking yes and no questions and asking the person to respond by squeezing his hand. Upon their arrival in California, Brandon shared the Good News with his grandfather. Valentine responded by squeezing Brandon's hand when asked if he wanted to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Brandon then led his grandfather in the salvation prayer. Rich writes, "Valentine survived an additional week in which he managed to confirm to Brandon his salvation before entering Heaven. At the funeral service, Brandon eulogized his grandfather and shared this blessed ride of a lifetime (Romans 8:28)."

UNLV Campus Outreach

Every morning, Rich's UNLV campus outreach team prays for the Lord to bring them people who are willing to listen to the Gospel and receive Jesus. Rich praises the Lord for the diverse people He brings to them. One day, two volunteers on his UNLV campus outreach team each led a person to the Lord; one is a student and the other is a homeless man. Please pray that they would grow in their new faith.

Israel in Prophecy, A Chronology

Richard Hill's book, *Israel in Prophecy, A Chronology*, is available for purchase at xulonpress.com. Just click on the "bookstore" tab. Although it can also be ordered online at Amazon or Barnes & Noble, Rich writes: "There is no middleman with Xulon so extra funds will go to the ministry." Also available at bethyeshualv.org are videos of his teaching from the book. Click on Facebook or YouTube to view the videos. This is a new, exciting venture for Rich.

Shalom

CJFM representative Diann Parkas (New Jersey) writes about her visits with a retired Jewish pharmacist, Allan, who is wheelchair bound and lives in a nursing home. He is a new believer and told her that a TV evangelist first

got his attention. However, he prayed and received Yeshua with a sister in the Lord who then introduced him to Diann who helps him "learn how to meditate on the Word of God and how to open his heart daily to the Word of God through prayer." Allan lives in a very challenging environment and has no family to visit him. Diann's prayer has been that he would grow in his faith, have peace in his heart, have compassion for the others in the nursing home, and even share his new faith with them. After Diann visited Allan recently, she wrote: "I am happy to report that he was much more joyful and at peace. Big difference! Before, he was constantly getting angry and annoyed, but now he is much more content. God seems to be stirring a love for His Word in him. He was remembering Bible stories and passages that he learned as a child in both Hebrew school and some from public school, back in the day when we used to read Scripture at the beginning of the day." Praise God for Allan's spiritual growth, His shalom, and Diann's faithful visits.

Apologetics

Eric Chabot, CJFM representative (Columbus, OH), leads the only apologetics ministry on both the Ohio State University campus and the Columbus State Community College campus. The population of both schools is nearly 100,000 students. Eric writes: "The need for an apologetics ministry on college campuses is greater than ever." As witnessed in the news, secular schools are not friendly to Christianity. Apologetics derives from the Ancient Greek word, *apologia*—"speaking in defense" and is the discipline of defending religious doctrines through systematic argumentation and discourse. Christian apologetics is a branch of Christian theology that defends Christianity against objections. In the past, Eric has invited James Warner Wallace, one of the most popular apologetics speakers in the country, to speak at the Columbus campus. He gave a lecture called "The Moral Evidence of God." Eric said, "We had a great turnout and our event received a write-up in *The Ohio Lantern*. This was a first, and we were delighted for the publicity." Eric was also blessed to speak, once again, at The National Apologetics Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina—one of the largest apologetics conferences in the country. Other featured speakers were Ravi Zacharias, Hugh Ross, Josh McDowell, and Norman Geisler. Eric writes: "An additional blessing was that one of our volunteers recruited a large group of students from our campus ministry to attend the conference." This year, Eric has invited Dr. Frank Turek, co-author of *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, back to Ohio State University as a guest speaker. Please pray for God's seeds that are planted in the hearts of the college students on these campuses to bear fruit.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *You and other premillennialists insist on a literal interpretation of Scripture. This would be fine with me if it weren't for the fact that some passages are reduced to absurdity if we take them literally. For instance, the Bible says when Jesus returns to earth, the armies of Heaven will follow Him on white horses (Rev. 19:14). Since when do horses have the ability to fly? They have no mechanism for flight (like wings), so the whole notion is just ridiculous. This is obviously figurative language that was never meant to be taken literally.*

ANSWER: With all due respect, I find your viewpoint rather boxed-in and myopic. Maybe we could all benefit from some additional perspective. When our children were small, Marcia and I used to take them to their grandparents' farm in Illinois during the summers. Usually, we arrived late at night. We would jump out of the car after the long drive from Texas and gaze upward, totally in awe of the view. Far from the interference of city lights, the black velvet night sky was ablaze with hundreds or even thousands of stars overhead—and those were just the ones we could see with our naked eye. If we had used a telescope, we could have found thousands more. Astronomers using powerful tools like the satellite-based Hubble Telescope can see not just thousands of stars, but thousands of *galaxies*—each of which contains millions or billions of star systems. According to some estimates, our own Milky Way galaxy is only one of approximately two trillion (i.e., 2,000,000,000,000) galaxies in the observable universe. (Note that a stack of two trillion one-dollar bills would reach from the earth to the moon and back eight times!)

The point here is that our universe is an enormous place. It's so huge and complex, it defies our powers of comprehension. There could easily be millions or even billions of other planets capable of supporting carbon-based life (like we have here on earth). There could be horse-like species that we've never seen—including some that are capable of flight. How small-minded it would be of us to assume that the 350 or so breeds of horses that we have here on earth today represent all of the types of horses or horse-like creatures that could possibly exist in the entire universe!

Interestingly, Pegasus (the famous winged horse) has long been prominent in folklore and even loaned its name to one of the largest constellations in the northern sky. Maybe—just maybe—this ancient creature isn't as mythical and imaginary as some people think! Could Pegasus represent a latent memory of an ancient reality that's been preserved in the collective consciousness of humanity? We don't know, of course, but it's fascinating to contemplate. The painting here, by the way, is the work of the much-revered Italian artist Fortunino Matania (1881—1963).

Scientists tell us that 99 percent or more of all the species that have ever lived on Planet Earth are extinct. They no longer exist. Maybe they perished in the Great Flood in Noah's time—or maybe the ravages of the Fall created otherwise unfavorable conditions for them. Whatever the cause of their demise, however, only one percent of God's original Creation survives today. Before the Fall, the earth was teeming with life. We can only imagine what creatures may have existed in those days. And, who knows what creatures may currently exist in Heaven?

One more thing. Insisting on a literal-historical interpretation of the Bible doesn't mean we don't recognize symbols and metaphors when we find them. When the Bible says God shelters us under His wings, for instance, it doesn't mean He literally has feathers (Psalm 91:4). We take the Bible in its simplest and most literal sense unless there's a clear reason in any given context to do otherwise. 



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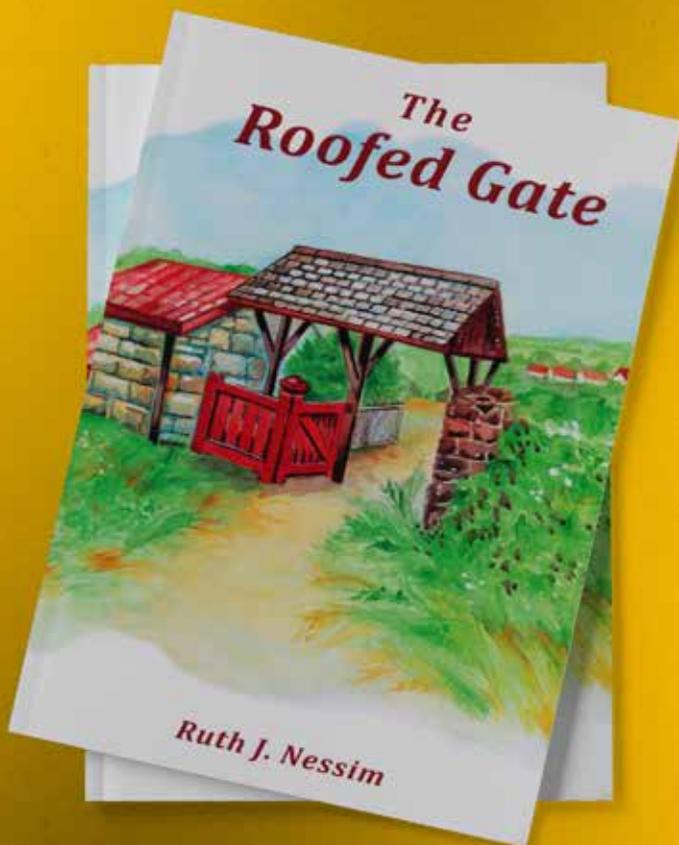
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The Roofed Gate

by Ruth Nessim

The Roofed Gate is the story of Ruth Nessim, a Jewish believer in Jesus born in London in 1936. After escaping the bombing of the city in World War II, Ruth came to faith, married, and became a nurse midwife and a CJFM-sponsored outreach specialist to the Jewish populace of northern Israel, where she continues (now in her 80s) to live and serve today. In telling her story, Ruth also offers us rare insight into the early Messianic movement in Israel and forcefully demonstrates that God loves all people, including Arabs and Palestinians!

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