

Heaven: A Five-Star Review

By Deaconess Deb Lennox

Opening Hymn

Sing verses 1–4 of “Jerusalem, My Happy Home” (*LSB* #673; *LW* #307; *TLH* #618).

Prayer

Dear Father, we ask You to send Your Holy Spirit among us to open our hearts and minds as we think, read, and talk about what it will be like to finally be home with You in heaven. Help us in our uncertainty about all the details of heaven to rest certain in Your promise of eternal life. We ask all this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

When someone visits a restaurant, travels for business or pleasure, or does business with a company, often he or she is given the opportunity to review or rate the experience. For people on social networking sites such as Facebook, there is the ability to “Like” a particular comment, video, or website. When it comes to heaven, however, we don’t have any first-hand reviews or a meter measuring how many people “Like” the place or the experience. Those that have gone there don’t come back to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down to describe what they saw or did. There’s no star rating on what we can expect when we go there. As a popular song says, “I can only imagine when all I will do is forever, forever worship You.” We can only imagine. But we do have someone who did come and tell us and show us some things about heaven — Jesus.

Thinking About Heaven

What images come to mind when you hear the word “heaven”? Angels playing harps? Pearly gates?

Where do you think these images about heaven come from?

There are many popular books that seek to describe near-death experiences and to relate stories of people who have reportedly “visited” heaven. Why do you think people are so interested in hearing the details in these accounts?

Our human minds try to puzzle out things we don’t know. It is human nature to want to know all there is to know about something before we experience it. When we plan a

trip, we research hotels, restaurants, and sightseeing spots. We make reservations, gather maps, have the car checked over, and carefully pack all we’re going to need. We want to ensure we’re prepared. But have you ever had to make an unexpected trip to a place with which you were unfamiliar? What was that experience like? What feelings and emotions did the uncertainty cause?

Learning About Heaven

If you are Internet-savvy, go to a search engine and type: “What is heaven like?” One popular site returned over 190 million pages that presumed to describe, explain, and answer questions about heaven. As Christians, though, we have the best and most authoritative site of all — Holy Scripture. Let’s look at what details about heaven we can learn from God’s Word.

How did heaven come to be? (Read **Genesis 1:1**; **Jeremiah 32:17**.) Divinely created? Sounds pretty good so far . . .

Who will be in heaven? (Read **Psalms 102:19**; **Acts 7:56**; **2 Thessalonians 1:7**; **Revelation 7:9, 14–15**.) All of these different people? It should be a wonderful gathering!

In Scripture, heaven is represented as a place. In **John 14:2**, Jesus likens heaven to a mansion with many rooms. **Revelation 21** describes a vast city made of precious metals and stones. The image of heaven as God’s throne, with Earth being His footstool, is found in **Acts 7:49**. What do you think heaven will look like?

The Bible also gives us glimpses of what will take place in heaven. What do the following passages have to say about what we will experience in heaven: **1 Corinthians 15:35–40**; **Philippians 3:20–21**; **Revelation 7:15–17**; **Revelation 21:4**? How will it be very different from what we experience here on Earth? Continual praise and worship? No sickness or sorrow? A new, heavenly body? All of this sounds wonderful!

But questions may remain: “Will my pets be in heaven?” “Will I know my family members who have died many years ago?” “Will I be able to see my loved ones still on Earth?” and many more. What questions do you have about heaven? Can we know everything there is to know about heaven? Why or why not? What does Paul say about this in **1 Corinthians 13:12**?

We're not going to have all the answers before we get there. So how can we plan? How should we prepare?

Living in Anticipation of Heaven

In his book, *Heaven Better by Far*, author Oswald Sanders states: "God has not told us all we'd like to know, but He has told us all we need to know" about heaven. We can rest secure in the knowledge that has been revealed to us. What promises do we have from God about our eternal life? (Read **John 10:27–28**; **1 Corinthians 15:53–57**; **Philippians 1:23**; **1 Peter 1:3–4**.)

Heaven will be better than anything on Earth. Death is not the end and has no power over us. God knows our names and will shepherd us into His presence. We are heirs of the Kingdom of God. How can these promises help relieve our uncertainties?

We can be certain of where we're going. Despite our sin, God has provided the means of grace by which we will spend eternity with Him. While we wait, how should we live our lives in anticipation of heaven? (Read **Matthew 6:19–21**; **1 Corinthians 15:58**; **2 Corinthians 4:17–18**; **1 John 2:15–17**.)

The Bible provides us the map we need with the preparations we should make and tells us what our destination will be. We can invite others to join us on this journey — there will be plenty of space available for them. When our lives

reflect the hope we have because of Jesus, others will be drawn to find out more. How does **1 Peter 3:15** encourage you to be ready to tell about the source of that hope?

Closing

Even though we don't have the full picture of the glory of heaven, we do have God's promise that when we die, we will be with Him in paradise (**Luke 23:43**). We don't need a Facebook page or a top ten travel destinations guide to know that we will be welcomed into God's presence and told, "well done, good and faithful servant" (**Matthew 25:23**). The joy that this knowledge brings gives us peace, comfort, and hope. We can be secure that heaven will be better than any five-star resort ever could be!

Sing verses 5 and 6 of "Jerusalem, My Happy Home."

Closing Prayer: Good and gracious God, thank You for Your promise of eternal life. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for my sins so that I may live in paradise with You. Help me to live in that hope and by doing so, to show others the way to You. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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