

TOUCHPOINTS™

HEAVEN



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TouchPoints: Heaven

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The material in this little book is just a slice of all you can discover from Scripture about what Heaven is like and what it will be like for God's people some day. With help from my editors, Jason and Ron Beers, what you see here is taken from my larger, more comprehensive book entitled *Heaven*. I hope that after you read *TouchPoints—Heaven*, you'll be enriched and will be motivated to learn more and more about the amazing place our God of wonders is preparing for his children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Alcorn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

INTRODUCTION

In this book, we'll see from Scripture an exciting yet strangely neglected truth: God never gave up on his original plan for human beings to dwell on Earth. In fact, the climax of history will be the creation of new heavens and a New Earth—a resurrected universe inhabited by resurrected people living with the resurrected Jesus.

A pastor once confessed to me, “Whenever I think about Heaven, it makes me depressed. I’d rather just cease to exist when I die.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I can’t stand the thought of that endless tedium. To float around in the clouds with nothing to do but strum a harp . . . it’s all so terribly boring. Heaven doesn’t sound much better than Hell. I’d rather be annihilated than spend eternity in a place like that.”

Where did this Bible-believing, seminary-educated pastor get such a view of Heaven? Certainly not from Scripture, where Paul said that to depart and be with Christ was *far better* than staying

on a sin-cursed Earth (Philippians 1:23). My friend was more honest about it than most, yet I've found that many Christians share the same misconceptions about Heaven.

Jesus said of the devil, "When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Some of Satan's favorite lies are about Heaven. Satan need not convince us that Heaven doesn't exist. He need convince us only that Heaven is a place of boring, unearthly existence. If we believe that lie, we'll be robbed of our joy and anticipation, we'll set our minds on this life and not the next, and we won't be motivated to share our faith. Why should we share the "good news" that people can spend eternity in a boring, ghostly place even *we're* not looking forward to?

Fortunately, Jesus has come from Heaven to tell us about his Father, the world beyond, and the world to come. If we listen to him—which will require a concerted effort not to listen to the devil's lies—we will never be the same. Nor will we ever want to be. Satan cannot keep Christ from defeating him, but he can persuade us that Christ's victory is only partial, that God will abandon his

original plan for mankind and Earth. Because Satan hates us, he's determined to rob us of the joy we'd have if we believed what God tells us about the magnificent world to come.

By the time you finish reading this book, you will have a biblical basis for envisioning the eternal Heaven. You will understand that in order to get a picture of Heaven—which will one day be centered on the New Earth—you don't need to look up at the clouds; you simply need to look around you and imagine what all this would be like without sin and death and suffering and corruption.

So look out a window. Take a walk. Use your God-given skills to paint or draw or build a shed or write a book. But imagine our world—all of it—in its original condition: The happy dog with the wagging tail, not the snarling beast, beaten and starved. The flowers not wilted, the grass not dying, the blue sky without pollution. People smiling and joyful, not angry, depressed, and empty. If you're not in a particularly beautiful place, close your eyes and envision the most beautiful place you've ever been—complete with palm trees, raging rivers, jagged mountains, waterfalls, or snowdrifts.

Think of friends or family members who loved Jesus and are with him now. Picture them with you, walking together in this place. All of you have powerful bodies, stronger than those of Olympic decathletes. You are laughing, playing, talking, and reminiscing. You reach up to a tree to pick an apple or orange. You take a bite. It's so sweet that it's startling. You've never tasted anything so good. Now you see someone coming toward you. It's Jesus, with a big smile on his face. You fall to your knees in worship. He pulls you up and embraces you.

At last, you're with the person you were made for, in the place you were made to be. Everywhere you go, there will be new people and places to enjoy, new things to discover. What's that you smell? A feast. A party's ahead, and you're invited. There's exploration and work to be done—you can't wait to get started.

I have a biblical basis for all these statements, and for many more. After you examine what Scripture says, I hope that the next time you hear people say, "We can't begin to imagine what Heaven will be like," you'll be able to tell them, "*I can.*"

THE PRESENT HEAVEN

*What the Bible says about where
we go first when we die*



What is the “present Heaven”?

- 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13 . . . *Dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope.*
- PHILIPPIANS 1:23 . . . *I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.*

The apostle Paul considered it vital for us to know what happens when we die: “Dear brothers and

sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died.”

Most of this book will be centered on the eternal Heaven—the place where we will live forever after the final Resurrection. But because we’ve all had loved ones die, and we ourselves will die unless Christ returns first, we should consider what Scripture teaches about the present Heaven—the place Christians go when they die—and where they will live until the return of Christ and the final Resurrection.

When Christians die, they enter into what is often called the “intermediate state,” a transitional period between their past lives on Earth and their future resurrection to life on the New Earth. By definition, an intermediate state or location is temporary. “Intermediate” does not mean a halfway place that’s only sort of Heaven, but the place where we will live between our lives here and the “final” Heaven that will be centered on the New Earth.

Life in the Heaven we go to when we die is “far better” than living here on Earth under the Curse, away from the direct presence of God. Though it will be a wonderful place, the present Heaven is not

the place we are made for, the place God promises to refashion for us to live in forever. God’s children are destined for life as resurrected beings on a resurrected Earth.

Are there actually two distinct Heavens?

→ REVELATION 21:1 . . . *I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.*

Books on Heaven often fail to distinguish between the intermediate and the eternal states, using the one word—Heaven—as all-inclusive. But this keeps us from understanding important biblical distinctions.

In this book, when referring to the place believers go after death, I will sometimes use the theological phrase “intermediate Heaven,” but more often I will say the “present Heaven.” This is because the latter term seems less confusing to most people. However, both terms refer to exactly the same place.

The present Heaven is a temporary residence where departed saints live until the return of Christ and our bodily resurrection. The eternal Heaven, the

New Earth, is our true home, the place where we will live forever with our Lord and one another. The great redemptive promises of God will find their ultimate fulfillment on the New Earth, not in the present Heaven.

Once we abandon our assumption that Heaven cannot change, it all makes sense. God does not change; he's immutable. But God clearly says that Heaven will change. It will eventually be relocated to the New Earth. Similarly, what we now refer to as Hell will also be relocated. After the Great White Throne Judgment, Hell will be cast into the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15).

Do we remain conscious after death?

- ECCLESIASTES 12:7 . . . *The dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.*
- LUKE 16:22-24 . . . *Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw*

Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. The rich man shouted, “Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.”

- LUKE 23:43 . . . *Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*
- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:8 . . . *Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.*

At death, the human spirit goes either to Heaven or to Hell. Christ depicted Lazarus and the rich man as conscious in Heaven and in Hell immediately after they died. Jesus told the dying thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” After their deaths, martyrs are pictured in Heaven, crying out to God to bring justice on Earth.

These passages make it clear that there is no such thing as “soul sleep,” a long period of unconsciousness between life on Earth and life in Heaven. The phrase “falling asleep” has confused some. Given the passages that show

ongoing consciousness after death, “falling asleep” is a euphemism for death, describing the body’s outward appearance. The spirit’s departure from the body ends our existence on Earth. The physical part of us “sleeps” until the final Resurrection, while the spiritual part of us relocates to a conscious existence in Heaven.

→ REVELATION 6:9-10 . . . *When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. They shouted to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?”*

Every reference in Revelation to human beings talking and worshiping in Heaven prior to the resurrection of the dead demonstrates that our spiritual beings are conscious, not sleeping, after death. Nearly everyone who believes in soul sleep believes that souls are disembodied at death. In the first place, it’s not clear how disembodied beings could

sleep because sleeping involves a physical body, and second, the mind continues to be active while asleep, as our dreams demonstrate.

Is the present Heaven a physical place?

- REVELATION 7:9 . . . *I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.*
- REVELATION 8:6 . . . *The seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to blow their mighty blasts.*
- REVELATION 8:13 . . . *I looked, and I heard a single eagle crying loudly as it flew through the air.*
- HEBREWS 8:5 . . . *[Earthly priests] serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: “Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain.”*

If we look at Scripture, we'll see considerable evidence that the present Heaven has physical properties. We're told there are scrolls in Heaven, elders who have faces, martyrs who wear clothes, and even people with palm branches in their hands. There are musical instruments in the present Heaven, horses coming into and out of Heaven, and an eagle flying overhead in Heaven. Perhaps some of these objects are merely symbolic, with no corresponding physical reality. But is that true of all of them?

Many commentators dismiss the possibility that any of these passages in Revelation should be taken literally, on the grounds that the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, which is known for its figures of speech. But the book of Hebrews isn't apocalyptic, it's epistolary. Moses was told, in building the earthly Tabernacle, "Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain." If that which was built after the pattern was physical, might it suggest the original was also physical? The book of Hebrews seems to say that we should see Earth as a derivative realm and Heaven as the source realm. If we do, we'll abandon the assumption that

something existing in one realm cannot exist in the other. In fact, we'll consider it likely that what exists in one realm exists in at least some form in the other.

⇒ HEBREWS 12:22 . . . *You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering.*

If we know that the New Jerusalem will be a physical city on the New Earth, and we also know that a city called Jerusalem is currently in the intermediate Heaven, doesn't that suggest this present city is physical?

⇒ REVELATION 2:7 . . . *To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.*

The same physical tree of life that was in the Garden of Eden will one day be in the New Jerusalem on the New Earth (Revelation 22:2). Now, Revelation 2:7 tells us, the tree of life is (note the present tense) in the present Heaven. Shouldn't we assume the same

tree, called by the same name, has the same physical properties it once had in the Garden of Eden and will have in the New Jerusalem? If it doesn't, could it really be called the tree of life?

Do people have intermediate bodies in the intermediate Heaven?

➔ GENESIS 2:7 . . . *The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.*

Unlike God and the angels, who are in essence spirits (John 4:24; Hebrews 1:14), human beings are by nature both spiritual and physical. God did not create Adam as a spirit and place it inside a body. Rather, he first created a body, then breathed into it a spirit. There was never a moment when a human being existed without a body. We are not essentially spirits who inhabit bodies, we are essentially as much physical as we are spiritual. We cannot be fully human without both a spirit and a body.

Given the consistent physical descriptions of the intermediate Heaven and those who dwell there, it seems possible—though this is certainly debatable—that between our earthly lives and our bodily resurrection God may grant us some temporary physical form that will allow us to function as human beings while in that unnatural state “between bodies” awaiting our bodily resurrection. If so, that would account for the repeated depictions of people now in Heaven occupying physical space, wearing clothes and crowns, carrying branches, and having body parts (for example, Lazarus’s finger in Luke 16:24).

→ REVELATION 10:9-10 . . . *I went to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. “Yes, take it and eat it,” he said. “It will be sweet as honey in your mouth, but it will turn sour in your stomach!” So I took the small scroll from the hand of the angel, and I ate it! It was sweet in my mouth, but when I swallowed it, it turned sour in my stomach.*

It appears the apostle John had a body when he visited Heaven because he is said to have grasped, held, eaten, and tasted things there. To assume

this is all figurative language is not a restriction demanded by the text but only a presupposition that Heaven isn't physical and people there don't have physical forms. This Revelation 10 account of John's eating a small scroll closely parallels Ezekiel 3:1-3. Of course, there is symbolic meaning to the eating of the scrolls by both Ezekiel and John, but the eating itself appears to have been literal.

→ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:3, NIV . . . *Whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows.*

→ ACTS 1:11 . . . *"Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"*

A fundamental article of the Christian faith is that the resurrected Christ now dwells in Heaven. We are told that his resurrected body on Earth was physical and that this same, physical Jesus ascended to Heaven, from where he will one day return to Earth. It seems indisputable, then, to say that there is at least one physical body in the present Heaven.

If Christ's body in the intermediate Heaven has physical properties, it stands to reason that others in Heaven could have physical forms as well, even if only temporary ones. If we know there is physical substance in Heaven (namely, Christ's body), can we not also assume that other references to physical objects in Heaven, including physical forms and clothing, are literal rather than figurative?

- HEBREWS 11:5 . . . *It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him."*
- 2 KINGS 2:11-12 . . . *As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it . . . as they disappeared from sight.*

Enoch and Elijah appear to have been taken to Heaven in their physical bodies. Apparently Enoch's body was not left behind to bury. The Septuagint translates it as Enoch "was not found." Similarly, Elijah was taken to Heaven without dying and

without leaving a body behind. Given that at least one and perhaps three people now have bodies in Heaven, isn't it possible that others might be given physical forms as well?

To avoid any misunderstanding, I need to emphasize a critical doctrinal point. According to Scripture, we do *not* receive resurrection bodies immediately after death. Resurrection does not happen one at a time. *If* we have intermediate forms in the intermediate Heaven, they will not be our true bodies, which we leave behind at death. Continuity is only between our original and our resurrection bodies.

So *if* we are given material forms when we die (and I'm suggesting this possibility only because of the many Scriptures depicting physical forms in Heaven), they would be temporary vessels, perhaps comparable to the human-appearing bodies that angels sometimes take on. However, they would be distinct from our true bodies, which remain dead until the final Resurrection. Any understanding of people having physical forms immediately after death that would lead us to conclude that the future resurrection is unnecessary is emphatically wrong.

Will we be judged when we die?

- EPHESIANS 2:8-9 . . . *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*
- TITUS 3:5 . . . *He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.*

When we die, we face judgment, sometimes called the judgment of faith. The outcome of this judgment determines whether we go to the present Heaven or the present Hell. This initial judgment depends not on our works but on our faith, which itself is called a gift of God. It is not about what we've done during our lives but about what Christ has done for us. If we have accepted Christ's atoning death for us, then when God judges us after we die, he sees his Son's sacrifice for us, not our sin. Salvation is a free gift, to which we can contribute absolutely nothing. We have only to humbly receive the gift.

- ➔ ROMANS 14:10-12 . . . *Why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For the Scriptures say, "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God." Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.*
- ➔ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10 . . . *We must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.*
- ➔ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:13-14 . . . *On the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.*

The first judgment, of faith, is not to be confused with the final judgment, sometimes called the judgment of works. Both believers and unbelievers face a final judgment. The Bible indicates that all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of their lives. It's critical to understand

that this judgment is a judgment of works, not of faith. Our works do not affect our salvation, but they do affect our rewards. Salvation is about our recognizing Christ's work for us; rewards are about God's recognizing our work for him.

What is life like in the present Heaven?

→ REVELATION 6:9-11 . . . *When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. They shouted to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?" Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters—their fellow servants of Jesus who were to be martyred—had joined them.*

These people in Heaven were the same ones killed for Christ while on Earth. This demonstrates direct continuity between our identity on Earth

and our identity in Heaven. People in Heaven will be remembered for their lives on Earth. “They shouted to the Lord” means they are able to express themselves audibly. People in the intermediate Heaven can raise their voices. This indicates they are rational, communicative, and emotional—even passionate—beings, like people on Earth. The martyrs’ wearing white robes suggests the possibility of actual physical forms, because disembodied spirits presumably don’t wear robes. Those in Heaven are free to ask God questions, which means they have an audience with God. It also means they need to learn. In Heaven, people desire understanding and pursue it. There is also time in the present Heaven. People are aware of time’s passing and are eager for the coming day of the Lord’s judgment. God answers that they must “rest a little longer.” Waiting requires the passing of time. I see no reason to believe that the realities of this passage apply only to one group of martyrs and to no one else in Heaven. We should assume that what is true of them is also true of our loved ones already there, and it will be true of us when we die.

Do Heaven's inhabitants remember life on Earth?

→ REVELATION 6:9-10 . . . *The souls of all who had been martyred . . . shouted to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?"*

The martyrs depicted in Revelation 6 clearly remember at least some of what happened on Earth, including that they underwent great suffering. If they remember their martyrdom, there's no reason to think they would forget other aspects of their earthly lives. In fact, we'll all likely remember much more in Heaven than we do on Earth, and we will probably be able to see how God and angels intervened on our behalf even when we didn't realize it.

Memory is a basic element of personality. If we are truly ourselves in Heaven, there must be continuity of memory from Earth to Heaven. Heaven cleanses us but does not revise or extinguish our origins or our history. Undoubtedly we will remember God's works of grace in our lives that

comforted, assured, sustained, and empowered us to live for him.

→ LUKE 16:25 . . . *Abraham said to him, "Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish."*

Abraham calls upon the rich man, in Hell, to remember his life on Earth. Clearly he is capable of doing so; in fact, the context shows he remembers his brothers and the condition of their hearts, and he expresses his concern for them.

In Heaven, those who endured bad things on Earth, such as Lazarus, are comforted for them. This comfort implies a memory of what happened. If there were no memory of the bad things, what would be the need for or nature of such comfort?

→ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10 . . . *We must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.*

→ MATTHEW 12:36 . . . *I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak.*

After we die, we will give an account of our lives on Earth, down to specific actions and words. Certainly, we must remember the things we'll give an account for. Because we'll be held accountable for more than we presently remember, presumably our memory will be far better than it is now. The afterlife will not erase our memories; instead, it will enhance them.

→ REVELATION 14:13 . . . *I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from their hard work; for their good deeds follow them!"*

→ MATTHEW 6:19-21 . . . *Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.*

God keeps a record in Heaven of what people, both unbelievers and believers, do on Earth. Our righteous deeds here will not be forgotten but will follow us to Heaven. The positions of authority and the treasures we're granted in Heaven will perpetually remind us of our lives on Earth, because God will take into account what we do on Earth in granting us those rewards.

Do people in the present Heaven see what is happening on Earth?

→ REVELATION 6:9-10 . . . *When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. They shouted to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?"*

If the martyrs in Heaven know that God hasn't yet brought judgment on their persecutors, it seems evident that the inhabitants of the present Heaven

can see what's happening on Earth, at least to some extent.

⇒ REVELATION 18:20 . . . *Rejoice over her fate, O heaven and people of God and apostles and prophets! For at last God has judged her for your sakes.*

When Babylon is brought down, an angel in Heaven refers to events happening on Earth and speaks of them to people living in Heaven. Clearly these inhabitants of Heaven are aware of what's happening on Earth.

⇒ REVELATION 19:1-2 . . . *I heard what sounded like a vast crowd in heaven shouting, "Praise the LORD! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. His judgments are true and just. He has punished the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. He has avenged the murder of his servants."*

Heaven's inhabitants are shown here praising God for specific events of judgment that have just taken place on Earth. Again, the saints in Heaven are clearly observing what is happening

on Earth. Those on Earth may be ignorant of events in Heaven, but those in Heaven are *not* ignorant of events on Earth, at least some of these events.

→ LUKE 9:30-31 . . . *Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.*

When called from Heaven to the Transfiguration on Earth, Moses and Elijah seemed fully aware of the drama they'd stepped into, of what was currently transpiring on Earth, and of God's redemptive plan about to be accomplished. That they were conversing with Jesus about his coming exodus from this world shows they had a far greater grasp of what was happening, and was about to happen, than his disciples did.

→ REVELATION 3:15 . . . *I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other!*

In Heaven, Christ watches closely what transpires on Earth, especially in the lives of God's people. If the sovereign God's attention is on Earth, why wouldn't the attention of his heavenly subjects be focused here as well? When a great war is transpiring, are those in the home country uninformed and unaware of it? When a great drama is taking place, do those who know the writer, producer, and cast—and have a great interest in the outcome—refrain from watching?

➔ LUKE 15:10 . . . *There is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.*

Notice this Scripture does not speak of rejoicing *by* the angels but *in the presence of* angels. Who is doing this rejoicing in Heaven? I believe it logically includes not only God but also the saints in Heaven, who would so deeply appreciate the wonder of human conversion—especially the conversion of those they knew and loved on Earth. If they rejoice over conversions happening on Earth, then obviously they must be *aware* of what's happening on Earth—and not just generally, but specifically, down to the details of specific individuals coming to faith in Christ.

Do people in Heaven pray for those on Earth?

→ REVELATION 6:10 . . . [*The martyrs*] *shouted to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?”*

Based on the scriptural evidence, departed saints in the present Heaven do intercede in prayer—at least sometimes—for those of us still on Earth. The martyrs in Heaven pray, asking God to take specific action on Earth. They are praying for his justice on Earth, which has intercessory implications for Christians now suffering here.

If we believe that Heaven is a place of ignorance or disinterest about Earth, we will naturally assume that people in Heaven don't pray for people on Earth. However, if we believe that people in Heaven are aware of events on Earth and that they talk to God about his plan, his purpose, and his people, we will naturally assume they do pray for people on Earth. If prayer is simply talking to God, surely we will pray more in Heaven than we do now—not less.

Can it be Heaven if people are aware of anything bad on Earth?

- REVELATION 12:10-12 . . . *I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, “It has come at last—salvation and power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth—the one who accuses them before our God day and night. And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens! And you who live in the heavens, rejoice! But terror will come on the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great anger, knowing that he has little time.”*
- LUKE 16:24-25 . . . *The rich man shouted, “Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.” But Abraham said to him, “Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish.”*

Many maintain that those in Heaven cannot be aware of people and events on Earth because they would be made unhappy by all the suffering and evil; thus, Heaven would not truly be Heaven. I believe this argument is invalid. After all, God knows exactly what's happening on Earth, yet it doesn't diminish Heaven for him. Likewise, it's Heaven for the angels, even though they also know what's happening on Earth. In fact, angels in Heaven see the torment of Hell, but it doesn't negate their joy in God's presence. Abraham and Lazarus saw the rich man's agonies in Hell, but that didn't cause Paradise to cease to be Paradise. While this passage doesn't prove everyone in Heaven sees into Hell, it does suggest that God could allow this in some cases without diminishing his people's experience of Heaven.

→ ACTS 9:4-5 . . . *He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!"*

Doesn't Christ's identifying himself with those being persecuted on Earth suggest he's currently

hurting for his people, even though he's in Heaven? If Jesus, who is in Heaven, feels sorrow for his followers, might not others in Heaven grieve as well? It's one thing to no longer cry because there's nothing left to cry about, which will be true on the New Earth. But it's something else to no longer cry when there's still suffering on Earth. Going into the presence of Christ surely does not make us less compassionate.

→ REVELATION 21:4 . . . *He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.*

Christ's promise of no more tears or pain comes after the end of the old Earth, after the Great White Throne Judgment, after the old order of things has passed away and there's no more suffering on Earth. The present Heaven and the eternal Heaven are not the same. We can be assured there will be no more sorrow on the New Earth, our eternal home. But though the present Heaven is a far happier place than Earth under the Curse, Scripture doesn't state there can be no sorrow there. At the same time,

people in Heaven are not frail beings whose joy can be preserved only by shielding them from what's really going on in the universe. Happiness in Heaven is not based on ignorance but on perspective.

Will we live in Heaven forever?

- ➔ ISAIAH 65:17 . . . *Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore.*
- ➔ REVELATION 21:2-4 . . . *I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."*

The answer to the question of whether we will live in Heaven forever depends on what we mean by "Heaven." Will we be with the Lord forever?

Absolutely. Will we always be with him in exactly the same place that Heaven is now? No.

In the intermediate Heaven, we'll be in Christ's presence, and we'll be joyful, but we'll be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and permanent relocation to the New Earth. In Heaven, we'll await the time of Christ's return to Earth, our bodily resurrection, the final judgment, and the creation of the new heavens and New Earth.

In the context of Isaiah 65:17, God is not saying we will have no memory of life on the old Earth; he is saying, rather, that the former negative experiences of life here will not overshadow our happiness while living on the New Earth. Indeed, we will enjoy life on the New Earth far more because we won't forget what it was like to have lived under sin and the Curse and suffering. Warmth and light are most appreciated by people who remember what it was like to be cold and in the dark.

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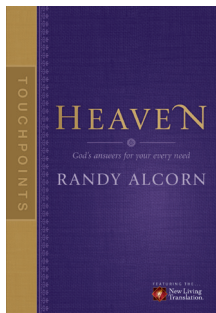
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