

Heaven Questions
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Questions on Heaven

Today I am answering your questions about heaven.
Please have mercy on me at the door after this.

These questions do not, many of them, have a definite answer so some of this is what I am gleaning and figuring out from what I know of scripture, great Christian writers and others who have grappled with some of the same questions you are asking.

And because there are so many questions that came in, I can only deal with some of them. Thank you for your emails!

The very first question that came in was – **1.Do animals go to heaven?**

I have heard many Christians say that they do not. I am not sure how they get to that conclusion as scripture doesn't say one way or the other.

When I read scripture however, it sounds to me much more likely that animals do go to heaven – except as I said last time my chihuahua.

But here is why I think they do.

First of all there is the scripture we read last week about *all creation groaning* to be restored, resurrected, made new!

Romans 8:22 - For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

It didn't just say *people* were groaning – all of *creation groans* – which says that God's promise is for all creatures to one day be set free from the curse and be resurrected.

Second, Jesus tells us quite clearly that God's eye is on the *sparrow*; this tells us that God is meticulously aware of his dearly loved creatures and is concerned when even a sparrow falls to the ground – meaning that his awareness of this little creature is somehow aimed at making things right again.

We do know that **St Francis** who was very mystical and close to God **preached to the birds**, and called creatures like the wolf “brother” wolf.

And when heaven is described in scripture animals are used... “*the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain...for the earth shall be filled with the fullness of God as the waters cover the sea*”.

That's a description of heaven...

In the book of Revelation there are countless references to animals, and to my great delight horses, and even creatures we've never heard of before are praising God. To my mind it seems very likely that animals are in heaven.

2. Do babies who die go to heaven?

Absolutely yes. There is no question on that one. Catholic theology is a little different in that a baby needs to be baptized once they are born in order to get to heaven. We don't hold that belief.

We take psalm 139 literally when it says “***My frame was not hidden from You when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.***”

Therefore, if a baby is born and dies, those days or no days at all, were already known to God ahead of time. The child is brought directly into God's presence – and reunited with the one who formed them and knew them before they had substance.

Jesus also had a very high view of children, saying that each child has their own angel...and that those angels are looking continually into the face of God.

“Let the little ones come unto me...for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus said.

Children bring heaven with them to earth, before the world gets to them. They come from heaven, and go back to heaven. Like the little guy who was two years old whose voice was caught talking to his newborn sister in the crib on the baby monitor...“Hi Amber”, his parents heard him ask the newborn over the monitor. “Can you remind me of what heaven’s like again? I am beginning to forget.”

3. Do we retain our individuality in heaven? And also the question directly related came in that asked,

4. Can we really recognize and reunite with dead loved ones when we also die and go to heaven?

Heaven is the place of perfect happiness—and one of its greatest joys will be our reunion with those who have gone there before us. Many near death experiences have people recounting seeing their loved ones again and recognizing them. God loves us, and He won’t withhold that joy from us!

How do we know this from scripture?

We know it first of all from the Bible’s explicit teaching. When **King David’s infant son was taken from him, David felt his loss very keenly—but he also knew he would see him again. David declared, “Can I bring him back again? I will go to him” (2 Samuel 12:23)**. When Jesus was transfigured (or changed) before the eyes of some of His disciples and they glimpsed His heavenly glory, we’re told that **Moses and Elijah appeared with Him—proof that we retain our individuality in heaven (see Luke 9:28-36)**.

Also **People recognized Jesus after His resurrection (John 20:16, 20; 21:12; 1 Corinthians 15:4-7)**. If Jesus was recognizable

in His glorified body, we also will be recognizable in our glorified bodies.

We may be sure that we shall not know less in heaven than we know here.

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

W.A. Criswell puts it this way...***I'll be the same person then that I am now-only with all the imperfections and limitations of sin finally removed.***

This is a wonderful thought-that the essence of who we are will remain throughout eternity-yet vastly improved by God's grace.

5. Will we be unable to sin in Heaven? If not, will we still be able to have free will? How does this paradox of free will & sin get resolved?

I got this question and I wanted to crawl under a box. Wow!

This is not an easily answered question. I do believe we have free will always to choose. God's nature is love, and love does not coerce. We must freely choose to love God back – otherwise it is not love. It's manipulation. If love is present free will must also be present.

We have the account in scripture that Satan actually started out as an angel and fell from heaven. So there is potential to choose against God it seems to me, even in the heavenly realms. And in Eden which was paradise Satan tempted and people chose against God.

However, in Christ we are now in a new place. First of all we have a deeper understanding today than ever before of God's love for us, and desire to be with us. History has shown us Jesus and the depths to which he went to reconcile us to God.

So, when the Source of all love and life and fulfillment and joy is with you - would you really want to choose to leave that fullness of joy, leave being united with those you love the most leave the presence of the One who is the Source of all goodness, and turn away?

I suppose you could choose against it all...but if you did you probably wouldn't have chosen heaven to begin with.

6. If our needs are met in heaven but time is infinite, how will we not get bored? I doubt that we will be bored, but I often heard people say, or joke at least, that Hell might be more fun or exciting or that it's where all the "cool" people will go. Take a look at the content of our entertainment/stories, there's always a conflict or problem. If there's no sin, then there's no conflict...

It is the nature of our fallen world that sin/pain/conflict produces change, innovation and challenge.

It makes life interesting. Its how we take what is wrong and cope and thereby grow stronger.

But, what if the heavenly challenge was not one based in separation from God, but the challenge came from learning to take in the goodness of God, and to experience the glory and joy of God more fully.

Now the question about boredom in eternity is a common one. Hard to answer because we are living in space/time. It is hard to grasp what eternity really is.

Eternity is not just an extension of linear time. It is something entirely different and when we understand this we get a little closer to what heaven will be like. Linear time – the word in scripture is “**chronos**” time.

However, when you read in scripture the words “**in the fullness of time**” it is referring to **KAIROS time** – God’s kind of eternal time. This is heavenly time.

The best way I have found to describe Kairos time is when you are talking with a good friend, and you are having a wonderful discussion. And you are caught up in the moment with this person and everything around you fades away.

All of a sudden you look up at the clock and three hours have passed and you say, "Where did the time go?"

That's the fullness of time...that transcends clock time. That's KAIROS time...It's when we lose ourselves in an amazing relationship, in a joyful moment, in an incredibly beautiful awe inspiring scene...that clock time seems irrelevant.

Not one of us is bored in those kinds of situations...that's the eternal kind of time scripture tells us about. No boredom, just like the old hymn Joyful Joyful says, "***Til we cast our crowns before him...lost in wonder, love and praise.***" We're lost in it...its too wonderful and makes linear time irrelevant...This kind of joy can only exist in the fullness of time and it is what we were created for.

Truly...Joy is the serious business of heaven!

Hell really means the absence of God, which means the absence of life, and the absence of love, I don't think it will be very exciting or desirable....definitely not cool...supposed to be pretty warm down there I think.....

Talking about heaven inevitably brings up that other place decidedly unpopular in our current culture...the whole understanding of Hell that Jesus by the way had a lot to say about...

Here's a question about that...

If you believe in heaven and hell, there must be some couples, say a husband and wife, who loved each other deeply, but one ended up in heaven and the other ended up in hell. So what does that mean for the spouse that entered paradise? Are they really in heaven if someone they loved is suffering eternal punishment and separation? Rather, it would seem like heaven

for the saved spouse would be worse than their prior life on Earth. To know that someone you love is being punished eternally and that there is nothing you can do about it would make a hell of heaven.

First of all, heaven is primarily about the joy and life we will have in God's presence – . This fills every vacuum in us – there is no lack in heaven. No feeling of being without.

Christ is all in all, and so there's no emptiness...or sense of loss. Every gift of love and care we have on earth is given to us by God to begin with– **the word God is linked to the word good – so the very idea that somehow that love known here on earth would not be fulfilled by God himself in heaven who is the Source of it all doesn't compute...**

Now if I read in between the lines of this question, there is another question implicit which is **How Can A Loving God Send Someone To Hell?...to inflict eternal punishment on them**

Many people have told me that they cannot believe in a God who would send someone to Hell.

And quite frankly...I believe that God would never send anybody to Hell either. We send ourselves.

The Apostle Paul says this —about people who have shut God out of their lives:

Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:21-22)

And then there is a phrase that Paul keeps using for God's response to people's rejection of him... In verse 24:

Therefore God gave them up to sinful desires. (v. 24)

And

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. (v. 26)

And

Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them

up to a debased mind to do things that should not be done. (v. 28)

What's the phrase that keeps being repeated?

God gave them up...

The words that might be used to express God's action in this pattern are:

If what you really want is existence outside Me, outside My will, outside My knowledge, I will let you have it.

A person can say to God, Leave me alone.

And God will ultimately say,

OK. God will leave you alone.

The ultimate result of that, when a person finally and utterly wants to be left

alone by God, that's Hell: the ultimate and inevitable consequence of the

persistent, subtle rejection of God's grace and God's presence.

The absence of God – the absence of joy, abundance, grace and mercy– is Hell..

C.S. Lewis put it like this:

The doors of Hell are locked from the inside.

I do believe that one way the teaching on Hell gets distorted or misunderstood is that people think about it as some kind of vindictive torture that a small-minded God inflicts on people.

This is a very distorted way of thinking about Hell.

The truth is that **Hell is what we choose when we decide against the Author of Life, who gave His very life to give us heaven.**

That's who God is.

God's not just neutral about people.

He doesn't just

sit up there in Heaven and say,

It doesn't matter to Me much which way they go.

God gave everything to make heaven possible for us.

Because the world is not divided up into bad people who deserve Hell and then superior, respectable, good people who earn their way into Heaven.

We all like sheep have gone astray...and the Lord has laid on Him (Jesus) the sin (the iniquity, the guilt, the Hell) of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

With all of these questions being answered in kind of an academic way, I want to also share with you some testimonies of people who have been to heaven and returned.

People who have had NDE's – near death experiences.

You will see that they are very similar in some ways and very unique in others.

The similarities actually astound me...

You will notice that they mention peace, feeling deeply loved and cherished, and often there are tears...as they recount the experience – it goes so deep

Often they will lack words to describe the beauty that they saw

For the sake of time we've put three snippets together leaving out all of the precipitating factors that caused them to die...and also leaving out chunks of their story. Its all on youTube...

I hope this sermon and these stories encourages you to believe a little more in the truth and beauty of heaven...I hope that those of you who are missing loved ones will find some comfort as you listen...I hope most of all that it makes you love Jesus all the more and live you life for him...

Let's listen together...(PLAY VIDEO)

Prayer

