

Inhabitants of Heaven

We can tell a great deal about people by where they live. The town, the neighborhood, the house, the members of the household all reveal facts and characteristics about a person's income, likes and dislikes, social habits and spending pattern. We can also tell a lot about the neighborhood by knowing the people who live there. Some places are more desirable than others because of the mobility of the inhabitants, the ages of the families, the kind of parties they throw, and so forth. We also learn a great deal about heaven by learning about those who live there.

Let's take a few minutes and meet the inhabitants of heaven. The first person we meet is God the Father. When Jesus prayed the Lord's Prayer he prayed to "*Our Father in heaven . . .*" While the Father is omnipresent as God, he has specially prepared heaven as the place where he is at home, where he is fully himself, where he "lives". It is the presence of God the Father in all his full glory that makes heaven heaven! All the affairs of heaven and earth are governed by God the Father from the throne of heaven. That's why we read in Acts 7:49 the words of God, "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.*"

The Bible teaches that the eternal Son of God is fully God, absolutely and completely equal with God the Father in every sense. God the Father is a Spirit. That means that he cannot be seen in an ordinary sense because he doesn't have a physical body.

Apparently, that was also true of God the Son up until that first Christmas when he came in human flesh. So, the greatest step downward in all of history is the step the Son of God took from heaven's glories to become a man. It was then that he took on himself a human name and a vocational title—the name Jesus and the title Christ. He was humiliated, crucified, buried and rose again. But that isn't the end of the story. If it were not for his

subsequent ascension and glorification he would be simply the first of many resurrections. According to what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:22, "*(He) has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*" The right is the position of honor and authority. The Son of God is the administrator of the decisions of the Godhead. He is in charge of the events that happen here on earth. He is also our intercessor. He represents us before God's throne.

The joy of heaven is summed up in the person of Jesus Christ. One of many hymns we sing describes heaven in terms of being with Jesus. Mrs. Frank Breck wrote these words in her hymn entitled Face to Face:

Face to face with Christ my Savior,
Face to face—what will it be?
When with rapture I behold him,
Jesus Christ who died for me?
Face to face I shall behold him,
Far beyond the starry sky;
Face to face in all his glory,
I shall see him by and by.

That's pretty good theology because the Bible does not teach that we will see God the Father when we get to heaven since God the Father is a Spirit, but the Bible does teach that we will see God the Son who now and for all eternity has a physical human body.

When we speak of God we have to include, of course, God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also equally, totally and completely God. He is God of Very God, completely and in every sense. Therefore, he is omnipresent. The New Testament teaches that the present ministry of the Holy Spirit is not in heaven but in the hearts and lives of all believers. Our bodies are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

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Ephesians 1:14 tells us the Holy Spirit is “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance . . .” If you have ever bought a house no doubt you were required to put down money as a deposit or promise of more to come. The Holy Spirit is the “deposit” of God for our inheritance—heaven—and all that comes with it. He is God’s down payment on heaven. Our basic understanding and experience of what heaven is all about is rooted in our understanding and experience of the person of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The way we glimpse or experience heaven in advance is through the Holy Spirit operating in our lives.

Beyond this, the Holy Spirit also is our intercessor before the Father. He represents us—as does Jesus—before the heavenly Father who is the ruler of heaven and earth. We are told in Romans 8:26-27 that “*the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*” To me, those are a couple of the most precious verses in the Bible.

Have you ever experienced a time when you have been praying about something and you literally came to the end of your words? You didn’t know what more to say. You literally could not pray any more. According to Romans 8, the Holy Spirit takes over at that point. He takes what is on our hearts and passionately presents it to God for us.

This same Holy Spirit will spend eternity with us in heaven. That makes heaven a great place because it’s where God is—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

But the list continues. Included among the inhabitants of heaven are the cherubim and the seraphim. In Hebrew “im” is an ending equivalent to an “s” in English. Usually you will find them referred to as cherubim and seraphim, occasionally as seraphs and cherubs.

There are many biblical references to them. We will touch on just a couple. Do you remember that when Adam and Eve were forced out of the Garden of Eden God sealed off? In Genesis 3:24 it says, “*After he drove the man out, he placed on the east of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*”

A more lengthy description comes in Isaiah 6. In the midst of Isaiah’s discussion of the visions and dreams he had he relates an amazing sight of heaven. In Isaiah 6:1-8 we read:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Other references include Exodus 25 and 37; 1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3 and Hebrews 9:5.

The Bible seems to characterize these heavenly creatures as intelligent and powerful beyond any of the rest of God’s creatures. They are very close to God. They are depicted as being in the immediate presence of God the Father.

But, at the same time, they are inferior to God. That’s why we read in Psalm 99:1, “*The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.*” God is above them!

They are a part of God’s heaven that has seldom intervened in the affairs of earth. So we don’t have too many instances of people having con-

tact with the cherubim and seraphim. But the little hints we have give us a tiny glimpse of their grandeur, their intelligence, their majesty and their sophistication

We are far more familiar with the next group and that is angels. “Angel” is a Greek term that means “messenger”. Angels are the supernatural messengers that are sent from God. They do the work of God. While the cherubim and seraphim are characterized primarily by intellect and power, angels are characterized primarily by holiness. Angels have been frequent visitors between heaven and earth, sent by God to intervene in the lives of ordinary men and women.

We have much information concerning the nature of angels. They are described as holy. For example, Mark 8:38 refers to the coming of the Son of Man “with the holy angels”, although we know that the holiness of the angels apparently is not absolute; they are capable of falling from that holiness. That apparently happened when angels departed from God and went with Satan in his defection. In Job 4:18 we are told that God charges some of his angels with error!

The Bible also indicates in several places that angels are innumerable. In Hebrews 12:22 it refers to “thousands upon thousands of angels.” In Matthew 26:53 Jesus said he could have called “twelve legions of angels” to help him. That’s 72,000 angels!

Angels are spirits meaning they do not ordinarily have physical bodies. But apparently they are able to take on a physical form. In Ezekiel 9:2 and Genesis 18:2 they sometimes take on the appearance of men. But, that would not be the norm.

Also, they are asexual. They are not given to normal sexual relationships, according to Mark 12:25.

What a busy place heaven must be if there is a need for innumerable angels! Angels do God’s bidding. God has a lot going on so he is constantly sending angels to work for him. But one of the primary responsibilities of angels today is ministry to Christians. In Hebrews 1:14 we read, “Are

not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”

Perhaps the jokes we hear about guardian angels may be a lot closer to the truth than we realize. In Matthew 18:10 Jesus refers to “these little ones” and “their angels in heaven”. Now there are some differences in biblical interpretation on whether the little ones are children or the disciples who were following Jesus, but the point is that specific angels apparently have the responsibility of working for specific individuals.

There are numerous biblical examples of this. In the book of Daniel you may recall that an angel was sent by God to answer Daniel’s prayer. Angels ministered to Jesus when he was in the wilderness. Angels released the apostles when they were in prison in the New Testament. In fact, do you remember when Peter got out of prison in Acts 12 the servant girl, Rhoda, answered the door and said it was Peter, but the others told her, “It must be his angel!” God uses his angels from heaven to minister to the needs and circumstances of his people on earth!

A fourth group in this list of beings that are the inhabitants of heaven are the redeemed. Admittedly, the Bible doesn’t say a great deal about what happens to people between death and resurrection, but it says enough to give us a clear indication. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on

the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus told the thief on the cross, “. . . today you will be with me in paradise.” That wasn’t a dirty trick to get him through the dying process.

Jesus meant it. That day in paradise they would be together. In 2 Corinthians 5:8 Paul talks about being “away from the body and at home with the Lord.” And in Philippians 1:23 he writes, “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. . . .” Paul isn’t talking about lying in the grave for a few thousand years waiting for the resurrection. If it’s far better than life, he expected to be with Jesus Christ in heaven immediately.

*Are you ready to some day
answer the Roll Call of Heaven?*

We don't know much about the lifestyle of those who have died and gone to heaven. The Bible does talk about the occupations of the redeemed in heaven; however, we can't be sure that these references apply to those in heaven now or just to life in heaven after the resurrection. I do believe we can be certain that the redeemed dead are in the presence of God. To many of us that makes heaven a more desirable place. For those of us who have loved ones who have died, the prospect of being in heaven with them is one of the great attractions and values of heaven.

Vernon Grounds, former president of Denver Seminary, is a dear friend. One Christmas he wrote, "It seems that more of my friends are in heaven than on earth." As he's grown older and friends and relatives have died he senses a comradeship to those who are already in heaven.

One cloudy, windy day a boy was flying his kite. It went so high that it disappeared into the clouds. A passerby playfully asked the boy how he knew his kite was up there. The boy answered, "I can feel the pull!" Those whose loved ones have gone ahead can "feel the pull of heaven" and the great anticipation of being reunited with them one day.

Let me share a paragraph that comes from the book *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* by John Eadie:

All we know is that there is no dull and satiating uniformity among the inhabitants of heaven; that order and freedom are not inconsistent with gradation of rank; that there are glory and a higher glory, power and a nobler power, rank and a loftier rank to be witnessed in the mighty scale . . . there are bright and majestic chieftains among the hosts of God, nearer in position and liker God in maj-

esty possessing and reflecting more of the divine splendor than their lustrous brethren around them. But above all, Jesus is enthroned - - - the highest position in the universe is His.

And I conclude with the words of a mother as she tells her story:

My little lad of six had been to church and they sang *When the Roll is Called Up Yonder I'll Be There*. Afterward he wanted to know what was meant by that, and so I explained it was like being at school, with the teacher calling their names to see if all the pupils were there. I asked him what he answered when they called his name, and he said, "Here." Then I told him I thought God would call out names when we got to Heaven. He will say, "Daddy Rogers", and Daddy will say, "Here." Then, "Mama Rogers", and I will say, "Here." Then "Dennis Rogers" and Dennis will say, "Here." That very day he was taken ill. After having been unconscious for several hours he suddenly called out, "Here." And when we saw that his spirit had flown we realized he had answered the heavenly roll call.

Are you ready to some day answer the Roll Call of Heaven?

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