

How can I get to heaven?

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Christian basics › Life after death

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Life is short and fragile. This makes many ask what will happen after this life. Will there be some sort of continued conscious existence, or is our physical death just “the end”? And if there is an afterlife, what will it look like? Will it be the same for everybody? The Bible offers some important answers here. There is life after death, and it is not the same for everybody. We either gain eternal life in God’s presence, often called “heaven”, or eternal death outside of God’s presence, also called “hell”. It is very clear that the first option is infinitely better. So, how can we get there?

What is heaven?

It’s actually not that simple to give a definition of the word heaven(s). Sometimes, the Bible uses this word to describe the sky or expanse that God created (see Genesis 1:7-8). This may explain the idea that people who die, become a star in the sky and watch the people on earth. While this may be a well-intended gesture to show

respect and love for the deceased, it is not true. The sky is not where people spend eternity. It's where the clouds are, and if you want to expand the notion of heaven to include space, it's where God assigned the stars and planets their place (Psalm 8:3-4).

The Bible also uses the word "heavens" for God's dwelling place (which is not some physical location in our three-dimensional reality). See for example Psalm 103:19, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all." Jesus affirms this when He speaks about God as "your Father in heaven" (e.g. in Matthew 5:16; 5:45; 6:9). And the apostle Paul describes how God the Father "raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:20-21).

So, the triune God, existing in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is residing in heaven. While we can't pinpoint

the “location” of heaven or what it looks like exactly, the key is that it is God’s dwelling place.

God is not alone in heaven

When the Bible describes God’s dwelling place, it makes clear that the Lord is not alone there. He is surrounded by angels, mythical living creatures and people (for example Revelation 7:11-12; compare Revelation 4, Matthew 18:10 or Mark 13:32). Jesus actually expresses the desire that all people who belong to Him, will be with Him: “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see My glory that You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24)

People won’t stay in heaven forever

Even though heaven is often spoken of as a “final destination”, the Bible says that people who are in heaven, won’t stay there forever. At the end of this world, God will create a new one. Then all believers who have already died, will be bodily resurrected and live with God on this new earth. All believers who are still alive, will join

them without even facing death (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Heaven and earth will then be united, and people will live there forever in God's presence.

Who will get to heaven?

God's Word makes clear that not everyone goes to heaven when they die. As the apostle Paul warns his readers, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Corinthians 6:9). We should take this warning seriously, for naturally "none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God" (Romans 3:10-11). Since we are all born sinners, our own righteousness will not grant us entrance into heaven. No matter how hard we work to improve our behavior, we can never be perfect enough to deserve a relationship with God and eternity in heaven with Him.

But Jesus Christ has created a possibility for us to have our relationship with the Lord God restored. He paid the price for human sin, and offers us His righteousness as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Only those who accept this

gift, can live with God forever. Their names are written in the “Book of Life”, as we read in Revelation 20:11-15,

“ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. ”

How can I get to heaven?

So, if you want to get to heaven, your name must be written in the Book of Life. How is this possible? As I said before, it’s not by your own achievements. Instead, you

need to acknowledge your own sinfulness and accept Jesus as your Savior, believing that He died on the cross to save you. Once you do that, you receive God's forgiveness for all past and future sins and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your heart.

That's all you need in order to enter heaven. Jesus says that God and His angels are longing for you to cross the boundary from your old sinful and hope-less life to a restored and blessed life in His presence: "I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

Coming to faith in Jesus Christ is not complicated. You just need to acknowledge your inability to become righteous and to earn a place in heaven through your own effort, and then to accept God's offer of salvation. But many people find this very hard. They don't like the fact that their own efforts don't count and that they are dependent on someone else. They don't want to surrender their lives to Jesus. They just want to continue living their own way, hoping that it will somehow turn out

all right in the end. Don't be like that! For God is very serious in His warnings. If you don't live with Him now, you won't live with Him in heaven either!

Instead, follow the example of people like Paul, who told his fellow believers: "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). Are you also longing to be with God forever?

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