

Heaven

The awesome wonders of Heaven. What a wonderful final destination. A place of paradise where we will be happy all the time. Of course we cannot understand all there is to know about Heaven until we get there. Fortunately for us, God has given us enough information so that we can know without a doubt how really great our eternity in Heaven will be.

This awesome place is described in scripture by several words and phrases, such as: Heaven, Paradise, Eternal Kingdom, Heavenly Jerusalem, Kingdom of Heaven, Abraham's Bosom and My Father's house.

Aside from the word *heaven* (used 192 times) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (used 31 times, all in Matthew); all the other usages are listed below for your convenience.

Luke 16:22

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

Luke 23:43

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

John 14:2

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

2 Corinthians 12:4

was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

2 Timothy 4:18

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 12:22

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,

2 Peter 1:11

and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Revelation 2:7

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Notice that in each case, we get very little detail about this good place, other than it *is* a good place. Of course, that is the important thing. It is a desirable, happy, safe, eternal paradise. And all of this takes place in "my Father's house."

Being home again after the first time away, maybe at college, you have a special feeling of contentment, warmth and happiness. After all, "there's no place like home!" This good feeling of peace, joy, safety and comfort we know in this life is going to be the worst feeling ever experienced in Heaven, because all the rest of the *time* in

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Heaven your feeling, attitude and psyche will always be even better than anything you have ever experienced in this life.

When I think of heaven the words of an old song come to my mind.

*"O that will be, glory for me, glory for me, glory for me,
when by His grace I shall look on His face,
O that will be glory for me, glory for me, glory for me."*

What joy, peace and warmth I feel when I sing those words. It is very similar to the feeling Sharrin and I had when we were returning home from China for a rest. It was just after the First Gulf War/The Ten Day War, our jet had just landed at Metro Airport in Detroit. As the wheels touched down and we were safely on the ground our pilot's voice came over the loud speaker, "Welcome to the United States Of America!" Everyone on that airplane let out such a roar of gladness and joy, it brought tears to my eyes. We were all so glad to be home where our family and friends were. I felt like wrapping my arms around everyone and giving them a big hug. I felt like I could have laid on the ground and kissed it.

I feel confident that one day I will walk through the gates of heaven, and "O that will be, glory for me." I am looking forward to meeting you when you join me there. These thoughts alone should be enough to motivate us to follow God's instructions, but there is much, much more.

Matthew 5:12

*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your **reward** in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Great is our reward in Heaven. Jesus says in Matthew 7:11 **"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"** Our reward in Heaven is given by our God who knows how to give good gifts to His children, even more so than our earthly fathers. Jesus says *great* is your reward! Not great by our standards, but great by His standards. How great will that be? I can hardly wait to find out. But we know it will be greater than anything we have experienced here on earth. What we consider great can only be thought of as "minor" when compared to the standards of our infinite God who loves us with an unqualified, unending love.

Matthew 8:11

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Think of a feast here on the earth with all the important people sitting together for a great banquet. How much effort would have been put into the planning, preparations, quality and quantity of food? What kind of service and entertainment would you expect? In Matthew 8:11, Jesus is using this description to tell us about Heaven, therefore this great banquet atmosphere will last forever! If you have ever been to such a banquet on earth and had a wonderful time, remember it because it will be the worst feeling you will ever have in Heaven. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9b,

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

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This means Heaven is beyond the imagination of us mortals. Therefore it is going to be better than anything we can think of.

Sound unbelievable? But, it is true!!

Matthew 13:44

*The kingdom of heaven is like **treasure** hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

Heaven will be like a *treasure*. Jesus did not say Heaven is nice, acceptable or pleasant. He used the word “treasure,” something of immense value, worth everything you have or everything you will ever have! In the parable, the man had *joy* in selling *all* he had. Evidently he knew what the treasure was worth. Heaven is like that. When the time comes we will know Heaven is/will be worth more than the whole world and everything in it!

Matthew 18:4

Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Why do you suppose Jesus uses children as an example to illustrate those who are the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven? Maybe He wanted to describe those who will be in the kingdom, to let us know what kind of people will be there as our friends and companions. Children are so loving, honest, kind, gentle, and forgiving. All the people in Heaven will be the same way.

Remember what it is like to spend time with your best friend and just enjoy every minute of it, participating in and receiving the blessings of laughter, joy, love and being accepted for who you are without pretense. All the people in Heaven will give you the same feeling of comfort, peace, fulfillment all the time!! Isn't it great to know that the best feelings we have experienced on earth will be the worst feelings we will ever experience in Heaven!!

2 Corinthians 5:1

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

“A man's home is his castle.” We have all heard this saying and we believe it to be true. This is especially true if you have had many years of pleasure, joy and peace in your home. Our heavenly house is built by a better builder. There will be no leaky faucets, drafty windows, weedy lawns, nor high property taxes. There will be no shortage of guest rooms. It will be perfect. Paul only mentioned this because he knew our current house contributed to our overall comfort and happiness. He was showing us this part of our new lives would be perfect.

Philippians 3:20

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

We belong!! This is the message. My wife, Sharrin, and I have been married 53 years. In that time we have lived in nine houses and two apartments in the United States. We have also spent over two years in China and two years in Taiwan. We sometimes feel we don't belong.

In Heaven we will belong!

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How great it is to know the feeling of *belonging*. It is very satisfying to be part of the society, the neighborhood and yes, even the country, especially if it is the United States of America, where we have always had our earthly citizenship. That is one reason God designed the church, so we could, should and would have the sense of belonging in this life. If we can understand this need, desire it and benefit from it, then you know God has planned something even more beneficial for our existence in Heaven. This need, this yearning, will be met beyond our wildest dreams.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This scripture is so powerful and uplifting. It is so very informative about the blessings God has given, and is giving, to us. We need to look at it very closely. God's great love has prompted Him to show us mercy by giving us new birth: 1) into a living hope, and 2) into an inheritance.

Birth implies a complete change of surroundings. Just like our first physical birth changed everything about our environment, so this new birth (our baptism, Romans 6:1-4, 1 Peter 3:21) is into a new and living hope, experienced as a Christian in the new family of God (the church). This happens because of, and through the resurrection of Jesus.

This same new birth is also into a new and better inheritance. Much better than the inheritance you have access to through your physical birth into an earthly family. This new inheritance "can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you." What a thought! Our new inheritance is not like the earthly one from our physical family that only lasts for a short time. This new inheritance will last forever. It will never be destroyed. It will never ever spoil or go bad, like houses that rot, jewels that can be stolen, or cash - the value of which can go down, even to zero in certain circumstances. This inheritance will never be diminished to any degree -- not even fade because it is protected and saved for you in Heaven. What a tremendous thought! In Heaven we will receive our inheritance. An inheritance planned and created by the God of the universe who loves us. Therefore, this inheritance is of great worth, value and benefit. So much so, we cannot even imagine the degree of its greatness. And we will get all this in Heaven!!

There is yet one more scripture that I want to share with you. It is the one that describes Heaven in more detail than any other. Please read it carefully and meditate on it. It will give you much hope, peace, joy and comfort.

Revelation 21:2

And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. ... 7 He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

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It will be of great benefit to you if you will take the time to read the above scriptures a second time. Doing it now will put you in the right frame of mind for the following considerations.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. What a wonderful thought. God, himself will care enough for me personally to know about my tears. His love for me will motivate Him so that He personally will take action, an action that will soothe any of my discomfort. This expression from the pen of John is to show me and demonstrate to me a closeness, a personal friendship, a tenderness toward me as an individual that God will exhibit in Heaven. Not only does He care, He acts and I am the beneficiary. The closeness to God that I can now experience here in this life will seem like that of strangers when compared to my union with God in Heaven. Please reread this paragraph and put your name in the place of the words “I, me and my.” Make this thought yours; because this is the way God wants you to understand it ... personally!

and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.

Have you ever had a loved one pass away? Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember the pain, the empty feeling, the confusion, the loneliness, the lack of context for what was happening? It was a terrible experience.

Do you know someone else, a friend, who had the same experience? Knowing the feeling after losing a loved one yourself, you could in reality “feel their pain.” Yes, their loss hurt you too. There is so much pain, discomfort, loneliness for so many people every time a good person dies. But in Heaven, there will be no more death, and therefore no more pain caused by death ...ever again.

Sorrow is caused by so many things. Crying is God’s relief valve. When the stress of living gets to be too much to handle, we cry to let the pain out. In Heaven there will be no more crying because there will be no more stress, no more pain.

There are so many kinds of pain. Physical pains of all types and degrees from a seemingly infinite number of causes that are all too common. There is psychological pain caused by personal insult, rejection, loneliness and guilt. All these kinds of pain, and all the other types not mentioned here, will be no more!! Just imagine a life with no pain at all? Having never experienced a life without pain, it is difficult, if not impossible, to even consider. **But what a pleasant effort to try!!**

Think of all the exhilarating and glorious feelings you have had in this life, all the successes you have experienced, all the recognition and praise you have received, and all the blessings God has given you. Put them all together on the same day and even then you have not yet touched the hem of the garment or scratched the surface of what it will be like in Heaven. And it will be that way on ...every ... single ...day!!

On top of all this you will have a new glorified body. Never again will you have a headache, a backache, a sore muscle or be too tired to accomplish any goal you set. Your new body will always have the energy and strength you need, or just want, to complete the task ... any task.

The greatest blessings we receive from God in this life cannot outdo even the weakest (if there really is such a thing) blessing in Heaven. To put it another way, even the simplest blessing in Heaven will be far, far better than the greatest blessing we have ever enjoyed on earth.

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I believe in Heaven it will be as if each and every one of the blessings mentioned in chapter three, when talking about a loving God will, be multiplied to an unimaginable degree. These blessings and countless more will be present every single day! This heavenly environment will go on forever and ever ... and ever!

What would be a fair price to ask for this glorious *vacation*? How many years would you work at hard labor to receive this magnificent endless *retirement*? To what extent and for how long would you be willing to suffer in order to have such a wonderful *resting place*? What do you think God expects of you before He gives you this reward of Heaven?

All you have to pay, the only work you have to do, all you have to suffer, all God expects of you is ... **Just to live a joyous life here!!** For you see, a joyous life on earth is the positive result, the eventual consequence, the inevitable byproduct, of obedience to His commands.

God says if you obey His commands you will have a good, hopeful, confident, joyous life here and in the afterlife He will reward you with the joys of Heaven. How perfect is that? In colloquial terms we might say "There ain't no down side to loving God!" "*If you love me, you will obey what I command,*" John 14:15.

No amount of "good times," money, praise, recognition, power or pride experienced in this life will be important to you on the Day of Judgment if you miss Heaven.

What earthly pleasure could possibly be worth sacrificing Heaven to obtain?

After reading this chapter I hope it is obvious that our future destiny has been placed in our own hands by the all powerful and all loving God. The God who has done everything possible to give us a joyous life here and then Heaven in the Afterlife.

As you think of more or better examples to illustrate the wonders of heaven please share them with me and I will include them in the next printing of this book.

The saddest thought in all the world is this:

For all those who may end up in Hell, it will only be because their personal choices have overridden all that God has offered them or they have ignored all of God's efforts to save them. God's efforts to save us are detailed starting on page 10.

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One might wonder: Why write a whole chapter on such an unpleasant subject? That is a very good question. Consider the following reasons which, hopefully, will justify the time and space taken for this subject.

- 1) It has seldom been done. There are few, if any, examples where Hell has been defined and closely examined?
- 2) Hell is a part of the Bible, and every part of the Bible is important. We know that God desires all of us to be motivated by love, not fear. But God knows many of us will not be so motivated (maybe Saul/Paul was an example). Thus, we have God's discipline in this life and the fear of Hell in the next life to motivate us.
- 3) God's love for us and His honesty demands that we know about Hell. He tells us about Hell to complete the picture. We have a choice, God wants us to know clearly what that choice is.
- 4) Our companions while there and the duration, severity, and hopelessness of Hell plus the view from there, and memory while there demand our serious attention. There are only two possibilities after death, Heaven or Hell. We must know how bad Hell is so that we will do our utmost to avoid it.

Hopefully, these reasons are sufficient to justify the time needed to read this chapter. There may be only a few new revelations in this chapter, but the detail and the totality of the descriptions of Hell may still prove to be startling.

When reading about the horrors of Hell, remember Jesus has paid the price for our sins. Because of this free gift we have the option to spend eternity in Heaven. God has given us free will, therefore, no one *is forced to* spend eternity in Hell. It is only because we refuse to obey, or we ignore, His commands that some of us will indeed live in a permanent state of horror after this life.

Reading this will be very unpleasant. But it had to be written the way the Bible describes it. Hell is a major part of the Bible that gets little or no attention. Please read it and think about it at least for a little while. We really do need to know the details of Hell and we need to share these details so we can prevent this terrible, terrible experience from overtaking us or someone we love.

Spend some time examining the scriptures in Appendix I. There are 51 references to this *bad* place. The NIV and the ASV are shown side-by-side for comparison. The context of all these passages illustrates the utter and complete horror, and pain inducing nature of this *bad* place.

In this chapter various descriptions from the Bible will be used to try to convey the ideas recorded there. Don't draw any conclusions about the literalness of these descriptions. It is not known with certainty the exact nature of our new bodies and no effort is made here to try to establish those details. We are just trying to paint a valid picture of how bad it will be. When the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible He did not deceive us. The pain described in the Bible will be present! Because He loved us, the Holy Spirit used words everyone could understand to graphically depict the horrors of Hell to give us the maximum motivation to avoid such a place.

The one consistent attribute of this bad place is fire. A fire that is eternal, unquenchable and tormenting. A fire that produces agony and anguish forever and ever ... and ever!!

We have all burned ourselves at one time or another. It is very painful. So painful in fact that God has designed our bodies in such a way as to cause us to "black out" or lose consciousness when the pain reaches a certain level. But in Hell, we will have no way to eliminate, numb or even reduce the pain.

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Think about the kind of pain generated by a burn over a large part of our body. What words can adequately convey the degree of agony we would feel? The pain of a completely burning body is too much to contemplate, but we must at least think about it if we are to understand this part of scripture. Remember the small burns you have experienced and how much they hurt? Multiply that pain by 100 or 1000, if you can. Even that will not adequately describe the pain experienced in Hell.

Have you ever had a severe headache, or ear ache or a tooth ache? Remember how thankful you were when the medicine worked and the pain left? What would you do if the pain never left you? What if you knew the pain would endure forever? What would you be willing to do to get relief? The pain in Hell will never go away or *even be diminished*.

Add to this pain the choking sensation from inhaling sulfur. If you have ever been too close to a match when it was struck and by mistake inhaled some of the smoke, you know the terrible suffocating experience, the loss of breath, the “catch” in your breathing. The older translations of the New Testament use *brimstone* to designate this substance. The Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible says of this substance: “*formerly the common vernacular name for sulphur, ... Now chiefly used when referring to its inflammable character. ... It melts at 113° C and burns with a blue flame with the formation of noxious, suffocating sulphur dioxide gas.*” In Hell we would be breathing(?) and choking on this gas forever! Not even one normal, peaceful, relaxing deep breath of fresh air.

Can you imagine being covered with this burning noxious substance as described in Revelation 19:20? Those in Hell are *in a lake of burning sulphur*. Don’t dwell on this thought too long, but at least think about it. It is part of God’s word.

Add to this the hopelessness of the situation. We normally get through any pain or discomfort because of our hope and knowledge that it will end. The pain will leave. The job will get better. That person will change. The medicine will work. The storm will blow itself out or will pass. The economy will improve. That special person will, in time, love us. We will outlive this guilt and have a peaceful and contented life, etc, etc.

Our experience has taught us all these things. We know “All things pass with time,” “Time cures all ills,” or “All things come to him who waits.” But in Hell this is not true. Nothing will change! Nothing will get better! The pain will not lessen! A valid, uplifting hope will never ever return.

Add to this the people you will have to spend eternity with. We all like to spend time with friends, people we love and with whom we have had many pleasant hours of companionship. In Hell we will not only miss the hours spent in having a good time with our friends, we will be with the worse type of people imaginable,forever.

Revelation 21:8

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Add to this the memory we will have in Hell. This memory will be eternally tormenting (Luke 16:19 ff.). The rich man not only remembered he had brothers, but how many. *He also remembered* he loved them enough that he did not want them to join him. *He also remembered* if they didn’t change their ways they probably would be with him when they died. *He also remembered* what would make an impression on them and get them to change. *He also remembered* they would probably not listen to the current religious sources. Maybe the only thing worse than experiencing Hell personally is to think that someday your loved one(s) may be there also.

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Your memory is one of the worst things about Hell. Because your sins have not been forgiven you will probably remember them all. Every sin will be a constant thorn in your side. Thinking about all those times you violated God's law with total (or partial) indifference,... all those times when you gave God no sway in your life,... all those times when a short term pleasure was more important than God's will.

You will also be remembering all the times when you had opportunities to do good, and chose not to. All those times when some friend or acquaintance tried to talk to you about God and His love for you and you casually refused. All those invitations to do good, idly ignored. All the chances to say a kind word to someone hurting but you were uninterested. ... You *will* remember.

On top of all this there is the final, and I think, worse characteristic of Hell. If the parable in Luke 16 is correct and Christ's words in Luke 13:28 are true,

"there will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out"

you will be able to look across the great gulf and see what you missed!!

All the reasons why you denied Christ will seem *less* than unimportant. All the reasons why you spent time working for the pleasures of this life will be *less* than meaningless. All the excuses you gave for not reading your Bible will be *less* than useless. All the things you acquired in this life will be *less* than valueless. All the pleasures of this life which you enjoyed instead of going to church or helping the helpless will be *less* than fruitless. All the frivolous knowledge acquired will now be *less* than trivial.

Every second of every hour, of every day, of every year, you will see the comfort and happiness of Heaven you are missing. You will be reminded of the many, many times you chose to ignore or delay accepting the one who did all and gave His all for you.

What you see over the gulf will be a constant reminder of your mistake(s) in not becoming a Christian, or not remaining faithful "unto death." Always deciding to serve your own pleasure will then seem much *worse* than foolish.

Have you or a friend ever watched another person get married to the one who you could have had as a spouse, but because you made some stupid decisions you now had to watch as "they" go off to enjoy life together. Did you, or your friend, ever get over it? In Hell you will never get over the mistakes made in this life that caused you to miss Heaven.

Hell is everlasting; it will go on forever and ever...**and ever.**

Does all this adequately describe the horrors of Hell? No, of course not. It is impossible to adequately describe with our finite minds something that God's infinite mind created. We can however, from the scriptures in Appendix I and others get a very good idea of how terrible Hell is. The Bible describes Hell so vividly and explains how bad it will really be, so that we will do everything possible to avoid it.

In an effort to be as thorough as practical in this short chapter on Hell consider one more very important scripture. These verses are also inspired. They must be considered. Our conclusions about Hell must agree with *all* the scriptures on the subject.

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Our Lord told a parable in Luke chapter 12, starting at verse 42,

*The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. 47 "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one **who does not** know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*

Although the following thought is most difficult to consider, we simply must *try*. At times we must let our logic control our thoughts and actions. If perchance you have had someone tell you that they can't accept the Gospel because their loved one didn't, and they can't bear the thought that by accepting the Gospel they would be acknowledging that their loved one was lost. You must pray for the wisdom to know the right time and the right words to tell him in a very kind way: "I know your loved one loves you as much as you love them. If perchance they really did not live as God had directed, I know that you do not want to add to their distress. Remember what the rich man said in Luke 16:27-28,

He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

His love for his brothers was very important. The rich man did not want his brothers to come to that place of torment. Your loved one (sibling, child, parent, etc.) would not want you to join them in their agony. The greatest pain you can cause your loved one, the way to give the most severe grief to your loved one, the way to immeasurably add to their misery is... *for you to join them*. You know they would do anything to save you from their fate. Don't add to their agony by joining them. Ask yourself what they would want you to do."

Of course these descriptions are just an attempt to get us to think about Hell as a place where the pain and torment and agony are so severe that we will do everything ... repeat, *everything* possible to keep ourselves and all our friends and loved ones from having to experience it.

Will this thought cause you to share the gospel with your friends?

If you can think of more or better examples to illustrate the horrors of hell please share them with me and I will try to include them in the next printing.

Because of the greatness of our God and His infinite love for us, He has offered us an alternative plan. A life of peace, joy and happiness in Heaven for eternity can be ours! ... Please reread the previous chapter!

A loving God vs. Hell

How can a loving God who has prepared such a place as Heaven for us, also allow the horrors of Hell to exist? This is one of the most common questions asked by those who want to denigrate or marginalize God. Even some who are Christians can't seem to harmonize these two ideas.

In God's dealings with man He will always follow principles of fairness, requiring individuals to be responsible for their actions and imposing punishment with relative severity, Hebrews 12:4-29. Luke 12:42-48.

Everyone wants to be treated fairly, meaning that we all want the rules applied to everyone with the same degree scrutiny and severity. This is a human trait found in every society, in every place and in every time period. Since this trait is common in all men, it is concluded that this trait comes from God. This implies God also has this trait and will implement this policy in all His actions.

The concept that each person should accept the responsibility for his or her actions is as widespread as the desire to be treated fairly. Since this idea is universal it too can be thought of as being from God, implying that all His actions will be in harmony with this principle. The Bible teaches this concept throughout its pages. God will see to it that each individual accepts the responsibility and the consequences for his actions.

In our effort to understand how God, who loves us, can also prescribe the punishment of Hell, we must consider several facts that prove God has done everything He possibly can to *tell* us, *guide* us, and *help* us stay out of Hell. If we can prove this beyond a reasonable doubt then we can confidently affirm our trust in God's infinite love, wisdom, justice and level of punishment.

What, then, has God done to help us avoid Hell?

First, God also prescribed the blessings of Heaven if we follow His will. Then He set up the laws of nature and human nature so all of us have the opportunity to spend eternity in Heaven. God wants everyone to be saved, John 3:16, Acts 17:30, 1 Timothy 2:4. He makes the realities of Hell so extremely horrendous (see last chapter) and the realities of Heaven so awesomely wondrous (see chapter 1) and both so perfectly clear in order to motivate us to obey him. God also gave us free will so that we can choose our final destination. God does all these things to underscore the benefits of following and the consequences of rejecting His laws.

Second, during the entire time of human existence God communicated to the people how to be happy in this life and have Heaven in the next life, by obeying Him. The prophets warned of disaster for disobedience, Jeremiah 22. God gave us examples to help us understand the severity of the punishment, i.e. the flood in Noah's time (Genesis 6-9), Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's time (Genesis 18-19). We also have Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and Hebrews chapter 12 in the Christian era. The Old Testament examples are referred to several times in the New Testament. I give only two verses for your consideration,

2 Peter 2:5

if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

Jude 1:7

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

The severity and clarity of these examples are a warning from God to us. God has always blessed His followers and punished His enemies. This consistency on His part should teach us that retribution, with its appropriate severity, will always follow disobedience.

Third, knowing we were a forgetful people, He wrote it all down for us to ponder and apply to our lives. He even inspired the writings so The Book would be perfect in every word. He even protected the manuscripts so there would be plenty of evidence to convince every open-minded person that the writings were in fact from God. He saw to it that this book was complete and would give us all the information we needed for every good work, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Any question about God, how to live in this life, or how to prepare for the next life was given in such a manner that we could understand it, 2 Corinthians 1:13. This Book plainly tells us the details about Heaven *and* Hell.

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Fourth, He put His Spirit in us to help us understand, 1 Corinthians 2:12-14. His indwelling Spirit helps us as we strive to serve Him (Romans 8). This assistance from the Spirit is just another way God helps us to have a joyous life here and instills in us the hope of Heaven. This indwelling Spirit is a guarantee of what is to come, encouraging us to obey God to guarantee our position in Heaven and the avoidance of Hell.

2 Corinthians 1:22

set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

2 Corinthians 5:5

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Ephesians 1:13

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession— to the praise of his glory.

Fifth, Prayer. We can talk to God anytime, and for as long as we want. He is always there for us. Not only will He listen, He will answer. This idea is so important we must read, believe and meditate on the following scriptures.

John 14:13

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:14

If ye shall ask anything in my name, that will I do.

John 15:16

Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

John 16:23

And in that day ye shall ask me no question. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name.

John 16:24

Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be made full.

John 16:26

In that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for You;

Please note: these are just the verses from John. There are many other scriptures telling us God will answer our prayers. Think about how important this one attribute of God is for our peace of mind, confidence, hope, encouragement, and guidance on our way to Heaven.

He promises to give us wisdom if we ask in faith, James 1:5-8. This wisdom will assist us in understanding His word and help us as we decide how to live our lives and serve him, constantly looking forward to our home in Heaven and the avoidance of Hell.

When God decides to answer “yes” to a prayer request, *at least one* of the following things must happen:

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- 1) Something happens (rain, good health, etc.) that would not have happened without the prayer,
- 2) Something does not happen (drought, sickness, death, etc.), that would have happened without the prayer,
- 3) Someone does, thinks, or says something that the person would not have done, thought or said without the prayer, or
- 4) Someone does not do, think, or say something that the person would have done, thought or said without the prayer.

Prayer is another way in which God helps us to remain faithful in this life and stay out of Hell in the next life.

Sixth, God's many promises are very encouraging and they help to guide us as we live this life.

He tells us not to worry! He will take care of us!!

Matthew 6:31

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

You simply must meditate on this passage to realize its importance. If we but put Him first He will take care of our physical needs. Taking care of our physical needs in this life is but one more way God is assuring us He keeps His promises and will also take care of us in the afterlife.

Another great promise is God will forgive us of all our sins. No matter how bad we have been, if we repent and obey Him, He will forgive us! Afterwards He holds no grudges, takes no revenge, "will remember our sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12, 10:17), and gives great rewards... all of these things in this life and Heaven in the next!!

Another great promise is God will protect us from the evil one. We don't need to fear that the devil will "get us" and force us to do wrong. Paul says God will protect us,

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it

Another great promise is that his commands are not burdensome. Yes, we must obey His commands, but, all his commands are designed only for our good.

1 John 5:3

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.

This doesn't mean all His commands are easy to obey. This verse teaches that each and every command is designed for our benefit. Our obedience to each command contributes to the hope, purpose, confidence and comfort in our lives so we can have the joyous life He desires for us on earth. This same obedience will be rewarded with Heaven and assure our absence from Hell.

Seventh, both Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede to God on our behalf.

Romans 8:26

And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; ...34 who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

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Both Christ and the Holy Spirit are our advocates, pleading our case before the Father. They ask for God's blessing to help us in this life, and correct the imperfections in our prayers. All of this makes up the difference between what we should be and what we are, assisting us in attaining Heaven.

Eighth, the church. God created us. God knew and knows what we need. We need a group support system. The church is it. The church is our new family in Christ. Each of us is a member of it. Just like each part of our physical body is a part of our one body, each member of the church is a part of our spiritual body. Together Christians form one spiritual body as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:11-31.

In this passage Paul points out how we all belong to the one body of Christ. This body meets the psychological and spiritual needs of everyone. We need to belong to some group whose purpose is bigger and greater than ourselves. Each member of the group can offer support and encouragement in times of need. Without the church we would be alone and we simply couldn't make it in this world of "sin, sickness and sorrow" without the guidance, companionship, and kindness of our brothers and sisters in Christ. All of this is yet another demonstration of God's love, helping to guide us in this life and reward us in the next.

Ninth, God shows His love for us even in how He created the universe. He created it as a sign, a flag, a demonstration of His intelligence so that even an uneducated person could know His divine qualities by just looking at the world around him. No reasonable person can observe the universe and conclude that it all happened by chance. Paul puts it this way:

Romans 1:18

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Tenth, He disciplines us. He loves us so much that He watches over us and guides us and disciplines us so that our life will produce in us the peace of mind and confidence that are needed to have a joyous life here on this earth and heaven in the next life, Hebrews 12:4-11

4 ¶ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Notice verse 6 "***because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.***" God loves us so much and He does everything He can to help us live this life so as to avoid Hell.

He does not just leave us to our own devices. When He sees us do anything that threatens our heavenly home He disciplines us to guide us back to the straight and narrow. This discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace *if* we are trained by it, verse 11.

This constant care and intervention, His discipline, is just another way in which He is involved in our lives. This involvement is to help us and to steer us with a gentle, yet firm, hand towards the fruitful and meaningful life of service to Him which will result in heaven after our life here is over.

Eleventh. The greatest proof of all that God has done everything possible to help us attain Heaven and avoid Hell in the afterlife: -- Jesus, His only son!!! Probably the best known and most loved scripture in all the Bible is:

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John 3:16,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life

The very reason He gave His son was so that “whoever” (anybody at all) may not perish! Think of that. God did this for us... for the very purpose of keeping us out of Hell! Just think of all Jesus did for us. Think of all the ways Jesus helped, and is helping, us. Consider these points:

1) He gave up his equality with God. In Philippians chapter 2, Paul says,

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

This sacrifice was not just for the 33 years that Jesus spent on earth, but was forever,

1 Corinthians 15:27, 28

“For he "has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

We cannot even imagine what a great sacrifice this was. To be equal to God the father and to give up some part of that equality just for *me* is almost beyond human ability to comprehend. Colloquially we might say “It blows my mind!” And Jesus did this just so that *I* can have the hope of Heaven and avoid Hell. (To emphasize this thought, reread this paragraph replacing the pronouns *me* and *I* with your name.)

A story is told of a father and his young son taking a walk through the woods on a beautiful fall day. As they were enjoying the beauty of nature, they accidentally stepped on an ant hill. The young boy noticed all the ants scurrying around, some injured, some dead. The boy said, “Dad, let’s help them ...I want to help them!”

“But son, we can’t.”

“Why dad, why can’t we help them?”

“Well son, we can’t help ... because ...well ... We are just too big. To help them now with their injuries, we would have to become small, like them.”

This story illustrates a point. God decided the best way to help us was to become like us, physically so *we could see and believe*. Since even this did not convince everybody, can you imagine what it would have been like if Jesus had not come to earth?

2) Jesus paid the price as if He were guilty of our sins. He suffered the agony of the cross, the grief of being separated from God and the humility of rejection by the very ones He loved and the very ones for whom He was dying.

God, being just, required death as payment for sin, Romans 1:32,

Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things [the sins listed in the previous verses - cb] deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Who could pay the price for our sins? After all they are *our* sins and therefore we should have to pay for them. Thankfully, God loved us enough to have the price for our sins paid by another. But who would be able to do such a thing? No human could do it because we all deserve to die for our own sins. It had to be a sinless person. It had to be a *perfect* person to die for the sins of others. It also had to be a great person, a person equal to the task, a person whose importance matched the magnitude of all the sins of all those who have ever lived or will live. It had to be God incarnate. Jesus was willing!

Paul put it this way in Romans 5:8,

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But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,

3) Jesus demonstrated **and** taught us with a great supernatural wisdom never before seen on earth. He showed us how to live a life of joy, peace, confidence and hope. If we lead this lifestyle, it will produce an afterlife of ecstasy in Heaven, thereby avoiding Hell. He not only talked the talk, He walked the walk, consistently demonstrating His great love for us by His life and His death. Thereby offering us a choice.

4) Jesus performed miracles to prove He was the son of God and therefore had the power to keep His promises of an awesome reward in Heaven or an agonizing punishment in Hell.

5) God watched as Jesus suffered. We never focus much on what God was doing as Christ was on the cross. He watched. Imagine what it must have been like. To watch your only beloved son suffering, knowing you could stop it with just a thought. Knowing He was suffering for those who did not even know Him, some who did not believe in Him, and yes, even for those who were causing the suffering. Why did God just watch (and maybe cry) as Jesus agonized on the cross? The same reason Jesus voluntarily died, simply because they loved/love us. Their love for us is proof that their promises are true and the promised afterlife as recorded in the Bible is a certainty.

All of these facts are just God's way of doing His best to inform us, encourage us, guide us, command us, plea with us, promise us, forgive us, and show us the way to Heaven and the way to avoid Hell.

Every single characteristic of God or Jesus mentioned above, every single promise listed, every single action described in this section demonstrates the effort of God to **help** us achieve a joyous life while on earth, and ecstasy in Heaven, not the terror of Hell, when we leave here.

No claim is made that the above material is in any way exhaustive. It should, however, give us enough evidence to prove God has done everything possible to prevent our imprisonment in Hell.

What more could He have done? How much more help could He have given us? How many more incentives could He offer? How much greater the reward or more severe the punishment, in order to get us to live righteously? How much more love could He have shown us? How many more sins could He have forgiven to prove His love?

How much longer should He wait for our repentance?

How could He have made our choices more clear? How much more evidence could be offered to prove the finality and fairness of the afterlife?

There is only one other thing He could have done!

**He could have eliminated free will!
Thereby making us robots!**

Is that what He should have done?? Do you really think being a robot would be a better life than the current one, the way God planned it? Surely not! Surely not even the most arrogant among us, not even the most prideful of mankind could ever think he, a mere man, could improve on how God created man. At least, I hope not.

Sin is a violation of God's law. All sin deserves death (Romans 1:32). Yet we keep on sinning, every hour, every day and sometimes more often. We all know the "big" sins like drunkenness, adultery, lying, stealing, and murder, but what about all the other sins? Carefully consider the following list of sins:

Ephesians 5:3

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse

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joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person— such a man is an idolater— has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things.

James 4:17

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Matthew 5:27

You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery: 28 But I say to you, That whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Matthew 12:36

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

These are but a few examples that could be multiplied to show we sin continually. Note two things about this short list of sins: 1) We violate these instructions all the time, thereby, sinning and 2) We are not forced to do these things. Our free will allows us to decide not to sin, but we fail. Often.

These scriptures show, illustrate and demonstrate how much God loves us. He loves us enough to forgive us of each and every sin!! Think about how often we sin as you read the next scripture. John's message here is beyond awesome!

1 John 1:5-7

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleans us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

What should the just punishment be for one who ignores or rejects God and all He has done for us?

With all the above evidence we have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that God has done everything possible to assist us in our efforts to stay out of Hell. Importantly, these efforts **are** enough. We know this is so because many are now in heaven (see chapter 5 and Appendix M) and many more will, indeed, be there. Because God loves us we know we all *can* be there, if we but follow His instructions.

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If the evidence presented is not enough to substantiate this conclusion, how much more is needed? How much evidence would be required to prove any alternative position? Is that much evidence available now? When enough evidence is available to prove any other alternative position, please share it. Until then this position must stand.

Also consider that any alternative position must harmonize with:

Hebrews 6:4

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Hebrews 10:26

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 12:25

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken— that is, created things— so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

Because of all these great efforts on God's part we can have a joyful life here on earth and ecstasy in the afterlife.

But what if we ignore all this evidence and refuse to follow Jesus? How bad will it be in Hell? Surely it can't be all that bad,can it?? Reread chapter 2.