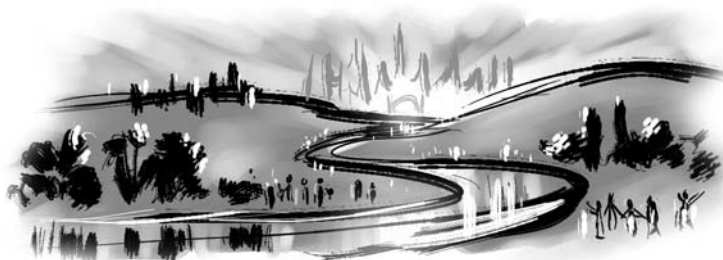


Heaven



SABBATH—MAY 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; Colossians 1:10–14; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelation 21:1–4, 8.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘There are many rooms in my Father’s house. If this were not true, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come back. And I will take you to be with me’ ” (John 14:2, 3, NlrV).

FOR MANY PEOPLE, THE WORD *HEAVEN* has become meaningless. It is an idea that belongs to fairy tales. We fool ourselves, they say, if we think there is some kind of life beyond this earthly life. Some people say that it is wrong to tell others that there is a heaven. They argue that it keeps people from doing their best in life here and now.

Even many Christians struggle with the idea. They are not so sure that heaven is a real place. They wonder if heaven is just in our imagination. On the other hand, there are many people who believe that at death the soul is freed and enters heaven to live with God. They believe that their father, mother, husband, wife, or child, who has died, is now with God in heaven. They also think that a few years at most separate them from joining again with their loved ones.

What is the truth on this important topic?

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Why is the promise of heaven so important to us? What will life be like there? How can we now experience what heaven is like? What future awaits those who choose not to be in heaven?

SUNDAY—MAY 24**WHEN DO WE GET TO HEAVEN?
(John 14:1–3)**

It is quite surprising that most Christians strongly believe that an immortal¹ soul can be separated from the body at death and then go to heaven. Satan's lie in Eden was, " 'You will not surely die' " (Genesis 3:4, NIV).

What do 1 Kings 11:21; Psalm 13:3; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; and 1 Corinthians 15:51 teach us about the true nature of death?

When we die, we enter into a world of nothingness. The Bible calls it sleep. Knowing nothing of what happens in the world, we wait until the morning of the resurrection.² Only then will the great crowds of the saved enter heaven to join the very few, such as Enoch and Elijah, who have already gone to heaven! But it is not going to be a long wait. The moment we close our eyes in death, the next thing we know will be Christ at His second coming. Those who die in Christ know that it will make no difference whether it was 3,000 years ago or the day before Christ returns. They close their eyes in death, and then they will wake up and see Jesus returning to get them. It will seem very quick to them.

According to John 14:1–3 and

1. immortal—eternal (without end); lives forever.

2. resurrection—return to life from the dead at the second coming of Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, what is the glorious truth about our future entrance into heaven?

"In the New Testament, the blessed hope never focuses on death. Instead, it always looks forward to the return of Christ and the resurrection and the gathering of the living saints to meet Him together, at the same time. It is in this future, and not what happens at death, that saints can find comfort." —Adapted from Norman Gulley, *Christ Is Coming* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), pages 293, 294.

Why is the promise of heaven so important to us? If there were no heaven and this life were all there was, then what hope does anyone have at all?**MONDAY—MAY 25****HEAVEN OR HELL?
(Matthew 25:46)**

Not all people will be saved. Some will be eternally (forever) lost. Human beings have been created with a free will. Someone once explained it this way: there are just two kinds of people, those who say, "Lord, Your will be done," and those to whom the Lord says, "I have to respect your choice. Your will be done!" In the end, no one asked to be born. We are here only because we have been created without our permission. God offers us the hope

of eternal life, if we choose it. If we do not, then we will go back to nothingness. In the end, it is our own choice.

All people wait for one of two kinds of future. According to Matthew 25:46; John 5:29; and Revelation 21:1–4, 8, what are they?

Heaven is real. It is a place. It is where God lives together with the other Members of the Godhead and a group of unfallen angels. It also is where we will live if we remain on God's side. When Christ returns and the first resurrection takes place, the resurrected saints will go with their Lord to heaven. There they will remain for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4–6). After the thousand years, a series of events will happen, leading to the creation of a "new heaven" and a "new earth" (Revelation 21:1). There the saved will live forever.



Heaven is where we will live with God and His angels if we remain true to Him.

But hell also is real. The popular belief in a place where sinners will suffer and burn for all eternity does not have any support from the Bible. But the popular idea that in the end all people are going to be saved also has no support from the Bible. Those who refuse to accept the good news of salvation and be obedient to God will be judged and punished. They will face a death from which there is no resurrection ever. Those who believe that all people will be saved argue that a God of love will not let anyone lose out on eternal happiness. They argue that God is love and wants to save all men and women. But sadly, not all people want to be saved. Christ made this very clear: " 'What I'm [I am] about to tell you is true. Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He will not be found guilty.' " But He also adds that " 'those who have done evil will rise and be found guilty' " (John 5:24, 29, NIV).

It remains our choice. Heaven can be ours if we choose to believe in God and are willing to become disciples (followers) of His Son, Jesus Christ.

TUESDAY—MAY 26

**THE KINGDOM—NOW AND THEN
(Luke 17:21)**

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we enter into a new kind of life. We still suffer from the results of sin—aging, sickness, and the temporary "sleep" of death. But we have

already received eternal life. It is important never to forget that important fact. We have been born again and have a new life “in Christ.” Those who have announced their loyalty to Christ are “children of God” (1 John 3:2, NIV). They have “crossed over,” Jesus said, “from death to life” (John 5:24, NIV). They have become citizens of God’s kingdom. This is because they have accepted God’s law into their lives. They now have a different Master. And their greatest focus (goal) is no longer on the things of this world but on the eternal city.

How did Jesus show in Luke 17:21 and John 14:27 that the citizenship of the kingdom of heaven is real for His followers even in this world?

What support of this truth do we find in the words of Paul in Romans 14:17 and Colossians 1:10–14?

We may experience the heavenly kingdom while we are still on earth. But this is only a foretaste (small sample) of the “inheritance”³ that is to come. It makes us want more. When Jesus comes in His glory, “all the nations [peoples]” will be gathered before Him (Matthew 25:32, NIV). “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’” (verse 34,

NIV). That is what God’s children have been waiting for. They will be home at last!

“Better than all the friendship of the world is the friendship of Christ’s saved people. Better than a title to the noblest palace on earth is a title to the mansions [homes] our Lord has gone to prepare in heaven. And better than all the words of earthly praise will be the Savior’s words to His faithful servants, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit [receive] the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation [beginning] of the world.’ Matthew 25:34.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 374.



Living in heaven with Jesus is better than the noblest mansion on earth.

Go back over the verses for today. Have you experienced how real the promise in these verses is in your life? What choices are you making that could be blocking you from enjoying what Christ offers you even now?

3. inheritance—the belongings of a dead person that are given to a living person; Christians expect to receive a heavenly reward when Jesus comes to take them home to heaven with Him.

WEDNESDAY—MAY 27**BEYOND OUR WILDEST EXPECTATION (Matthew 22:23–28)**

Have you never wondered how it will be in heaven and on the new earth? Will we recognize each other? Will we have eternal youth? What will we do when there? Will we have work to do? Or will we only sing God's praises? Will we travel to other places in the universe?⁴ How much will we remember of our life on earth? We are not the first ones to ask such questions!

What did the Sadducees⁵ want to know in Matthew 22:23–28 about the future life in heaven?

What did Jesus answer in Matthew 22:29, 30?

Jesus' answer is given in Matthew 22. It was part of a discussion with the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a group of Jewish leaders who did not believe in a bodily resurrection. It was not Jesus' plan to give a full description of the conditions of eternal life. Jesus' message makes clear that death has been conquered. Those who die are safe in His memory. So He still can be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus' answer also clearly shows that we will be raised with some of the same features and

traits that we had on this earth. But there also will be many things that are different.

According to Revelation 21:1, 4, 22–27 and Revelation 22:5, what are some of the things we will no longer experience in the earth made new?

Those of us who love vacationing at the seaside may be disappointed to learn that the sea will be "no more." But, to the people who first heard these words, the sea was a threat. Israel never was a sea-loving nation. For good reasons, the people of Israel feared the dark oceans. And we know from several Gospel⁶ stories that even crossing the Sea of Galilee could be a scary experience. John, the writer of Revelation, tells us that in the new world that God will create, all threatening things will have been removed. Everyone who could be a threat to us will be absent. We will be eternally safe!



There will be no more sea in the earth made new.

4. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

5. Sadducees—one of the two religious groups of Israel. The other is the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead while the Sadducees did not.

6. Gospel—one of the first four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

Try to imagine a world without sickness, death, fear, or loss. This will be a world where we only keep growing in knowledge and love. What things here give us hints at what it will be like there? Let your imagination grasp what this new life will be like. What are you expecting?

THURSDAY—MAY 28

MEETING THE LORD OF HEAVEN (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)

We believe that on the new earth we will be able to recognize those we knew in this life. Our resurrected bodies will be almost the same as the body of the risen Lord. When Jesus appeared to His followers after His resurrection, He clearly was recognized by those who had been with Him before His death. What a wonderful joy it will be to be reunited (joined again) with those we lost in death. But the greatest experience will be to meet the Lord of the universe. Our song will come true: “Face to face shall [we] behold [see] Him, far beyond the starry sky!” What an honor it will be to stand before the Creator and Savior of the universe.

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 and Revelation 21:22, 23, what promise do we have that we will meet the Lord of lords?

We still cannot imagine what it will

be like to meet our Savior. How many questions will we want to ask! Many “why” questions that we have had on our minds finally will receive their answers. We at last will understand why God permitted troubles and temptations⁷ into our earthly life. Never again will we doubt God’s wisdom and goodness. All distrust will go away as we learn why God let certain things take place. And only then will we understand fully how we have been protected from all kinds of dangers.

According to Romans 14:11; 1 Timothy 1:17; and Revelation 5:13, what will be an important part of eternal life?

Eternal life is singing eternal praises and worshiping the King. Why? Because He is worthy of our worship. “That the Maker of all worlds and the Planner of all future events should put aside His glory and make Himself humble before us will ever excite the wonder and worship of the universe. The nations of saved people see the eternal glory of the Father shining in their Savior’s face. They also see His throne, which is from everlasting to everlasting and know that His kingdom is to have no end. Then they sing a song of joy: ‘Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was murdered. And He has saved us for God by His own blood!’ ” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 651, 652.

What will it be like when you

7. temptations—things that can turn us away from God and that try to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.



Eternal life is singing praise to Jesus and worshipping Him as our King.

meet Jesus face-to-face? What do you think you will say to Him, and why? What do you think He will say to you?

FRIDAY—MAY 29

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White has written a lot about heaven and how we will enter into the heavenly kingdom. The final chapters of *The Great Controversy* are a beautiful description of what will be ours. But *The Story of Redemption* also captures this topic very well. Read the last four chapters, pages 418–433.

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth were completely gone.’ Revelation 21:1, NIV. The fire that destroys the wicked makes the earth pure. Every hint of sin is removed. No eternally burning hell will keep the fearful results of sin before the saved people. Only one reminder remains: our Savior will ever always have the scars of His crucifixion.⁸ Upon Jesus’ wounded head, His hands and feet, are the only

8. crucifixion—the death of Jesus on the cross.

9. “near-death” experiences—experiences of dying people who claim that their souls have separated from their bodies and that they have seen loved ones mourning over them before they (the dying) are brought back to life.

clues of the cruel work that sin has done.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, page 430.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ How do we deal with the question of salvation for those who have never heard the name of Jesus? Jesus died for the sins of all people. Then, how should this fact help us trust that God has not forgotten the people who never heard of Him?

❷ The Bible describes death as a sleep. How can one then explain “near-death” experiences?⁹ Many people claim to have seen heavenly beings in bright light or dead friends and relatives. How can we help these people understand that they are not real experiences? In other words, how can we help them realize that what they saw could not be real?

❸ How have people abused the promise of eternal life by using others for personal or political gain? What are some ways we might be guilty of doing the same thing?

SUMMARY: We are people with a future that goes far beyond our short life in this present world. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. This kingdom is both present and future. It already is with us but will become real with all its glory when Christ comes again to take us home. Then eternal life in God’s presence will be ours.