

What It's Like!

Heaven, Part 1

Summary for Teachers

Theme

Anticipate our Heavenly future!—The basics of what we know about Heaven from the Bible and from the experiences of those who have been given glimpses.

Aim

To inspire the students with what the Lord has in store for the saved—Heaven, our wonderful Home for eternity! To help them grasp that Heaven is real and increase their knowledge of what it is like, through seeing what the Bible says about it and also from the accounts of people who have had Near Death Experiences. To help them appreciate the beauties of Heaven, of which the very best is the presence of the Lord!

Roundup

Prayer and Opening Activity

 Prayer

 [Optional] Songs

 Discussion

Class Section 1: Introducing Heaven

 Heaven awaits us!

Class Section 2, alternative #1: Video Clips

 Video viewing

Class Section 2, alternative #2: Songs and Pictures

 [Optional] Songs

 Look at posters

Class Section 3: Why Learn About Heaven?

 The Grand Finale

 Why learn about Heaven?

 Nothing to fear

 Let's think about Heaven

 Prayer

Class Section 4: Our Heavenly Home! (40 minutes)

 The Bible's picture of Heaven

 Eternity with the Lord

 No more tears

 Our inheritance

 Reunion with loved ones

 Our Heavenly Home's divine design

 Many mansions

Jesus, the glorious Light of Heaven
If you die before the Rapture, straight to Heaven you go
Closing Activity and Prayer (10 minutes)
Letting people know about Heaven
Prayer

Get Prepared

- This class contains lots of good news about the wonderful Home for eternity that the Lord is preparing for us, so do your best to show your enthusiasm in the way you teach this. Be excited and happy!
- What is Heaven like? Many people ask themselves this question. They wonder and they muse on this thought. They have their theories and ideas. It's important that when you teach this class you don't get dogmatic about some things that cannot be directly proven from the Word. You can present them with theories and the way that you believe it will be, but make sure not to get dogmatic. Stick to the basics and the main points.
- Remember when teaching about Heaven that although the physical characteristics of Heaven (the buildings and so on) are very inspiring, they are not the most important thing. The most important part is the people who will be there. For a start, Jesus will be there!—And then our (saved) loved ones and the saved of all ages. There is so much to rejoice about regarding the life to come—no more pain, no more sorrow! These are the aspects of Heaven that you'll want to emphasize, and for this reason, we've marked some of the explanatory sections from Revelation 21 and 22 that describe the walls, gates, and so on, as "optional," which you may choose whether to read or not, as the Lord leads you and as time permits.
- There are two options of how to present the section "Glimpses of Heaven." One is based on video clips. The other is based on songs and pictures. Depending on what you have available, you can pray beforehand as to which would appeal more to your particular set of students. Be sure to check out the material beforehand so you can decide what is appropriate for them.
- It is likely that your students will have questions about Heaven, so leave some time at the end of the class to allow for discussion.
- You should also familiarize yourself with the contents of the following class (9), which majors on what our eternal bodies are like in Heaven and the people who inhabit Heaven. Some questions the students may have during this class may be answered in the next. If they ask about subjects that will be covered in the next class, you should encourage them to come next time to find out the answers!
- The class contains the accounts of a variety of Near Death Experiences (NDEs) that were published in books, on the Internet, and elsewhere. You can explain the story of what happened, or you can read the stories from the text. You aren't expected to read all of these examples. Try to take note of any stories you don't read or explain, so that if you have more time in the second class, you could share them then. Some of the examples are also in the Study Notes book.
- You'll also need to explain what a Near Death Experience is: This is the experience of someone who has died and been revived. Thousands of people have given testimonies of their experiences after being clinically dead for a length of time. This explanation is expanded on in the section "Nothing to fear."
- Songs in this class are from the "Heaven Song Sheet."
- You should bring a stack of tracts to the class to give to the students to distribute. (This is explained in the last section of the class. Recommended: "What Heaven is Like" tract or any of the Heaven posters.)
- Here are excerpts of what the Lord said about the delivery of the two classes on Heaven:
(Jesus:) Heaven is full of sinners, people just like them. Carry on from the last class. You talked about Jesus forgiving their sins, and now what happens? What's the gift and reward for being a Christian? The gift is Heaven! Being with Me!
You don't want to get too much into the buildings and the physical description, because that is not the most

important. Most important is the people who will be there, starting off with Me, and going on to their loved ones, then the saved of all ages. There is so much to rejoice in about the life to come. No more pain, no more sorrow.

...
What a wonderful future I am preparing for those who love Me! Let them rejoice and be glad to know what I have in store!

Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. Remind them again of My great love. If they want to come to be with Me in Heaven, if they have received Me into their hearts, that's all that counts as far as that is concerned. They're saved! But if they want Me to rejoice at their arrival and if they want rewards, then they need to do the things that please Me. That is a little message, that's the meat or the hook or the "do something about it" that goes at the end of this set of classes. They need to get ready. They have already prepared by receiving Me. Now their life needs to show and manifest their faith.

■ **Optional extra activity:**

If you have either of these videos available, you can invite the students for a viewing of "Life after Life" (based on the book by the same name by Raymond Moody) or "Touched by the Light." (This video features Raymond Moody, Melvin Morse, M.D., Larry Dossey, M.D., Dannion Brinkley, and Grace Bubulka. Contact for details: Penny Price Media, 63 Mountain View Road, Rhinebeck NY 12572, Tel. No. (914) 876-0239; "Touched by the Light" video also available at amazon.com)

■ Related material in *Activated* magazines:

Activated Issue #7, pages 8-9—"Tomorrow's Wonderful World"

Student Reading Material

Basic: *Glimpses of Heaven* (Aurora booklet)

Optional: Tracts (that the students can be given to distribute)

Prayer and Opening Activity

10 minutes

► **Prayer**

① *Short prayer to start the meeting.*

► **[Optional] Songs**

↗ *Select and sing several songs from the "Heaven Song Sheet."*

► **Discussion**

① *Here are a few discussion questions to choose from:*

➤ *Have you ever wondered what happens when we die?*

➤ *What's your idea of Heaven?*

➤ *What do you picture when you think about Heaven?*

Class Section 1: Introducing Heaven

15 minutes

► Heaven awaits us!

Jesus wants us to understand both the love that is in Heaven, and the place that those who love Him go to, when they pass beyond the veil. The distance beyond the veil is not so great, and what happens on the other side is not totally different to what happens on this side, on the earth side. But in Heaven there is the joy, the love, the peace, and the contentment that we who are saved have a taste of here, but which there we will experience in abundance.

He wants us to understand what it is like when we come into the fullness of His love and the fulfillment of the promises that He has made. Heaven is real; death is just the door through which we pass from the life we now live into eternity!

1 Corinthians 13:12—For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Many people in the world say that when you pass through the doors of death, it is over, it is finished, it is the end. They are wrong! You enter into a new life: The life on the other side of the veil. You are still you. You retain your individuality. You continue to live and to mature and to learn. Your spirit carries on.

■ What we are studying today

In today's class, we're going to look at what the Scriptures say about Heaven, and we're also going to hear some testimonies of those who have had glimpses of Heaven through "Near Death Experiences." Through testimonies, through the Bible's teachings, and through prophecies and other revelations, we know a great deal about what awaits us! And we want to share at least a portion of this today.

■ The most important point to grasp from this class is that Jesus has prepared a wonderful place for us in the life beyond

Jesus told us:

John 14:2–3—In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

When we are called from this life, when we are brought to the threshold and we are called across, we leave the things of this life behind—our flesh, our material belongings. We shed these things as one sheds a garment. But our spirit, that which is truly "me" and truly "you," steps across the veil and lives on forever. Our experience and knowledge—and mainly the things that we have learned of the spirit, the matters of love, of kindness, and of truth—these things remain with us and benefit us throughout eternity. Therefore this class, and the one following, is also a challenge. Will we learn the lessons we need to learn in this life and apply them?

In God's wonderful kingdom of love, all is love. There we will have and experience all of those things that we seek. No matter what our limitations here, there we will have peace of heart and mind and contentment of spirit; there we will have no fear; there our needs will be filled abundantly; there we can be creative; there we can find true love, and fill the empty spaces in our lives, our hearts, our minds, and our spirits.

Jesus is the door to Heaven, and by coming into it through Him, your life in this world, and in the world beyond, will be much greater than anything you ever imagined! You've received Jesus, so you are going to live with Him in His loving, exciting, wonderful, fulfilling, peaceful kingdom—for ever!

- But don't get too impatient!

The Lord will bring us to Heaven in His own time:

Psalm 31:15a—My times are in Your hand.

Psalm 48:14—For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.

We're studying about Heaven because that's where we're going to eventually go!—But in the meantime, the Lord has a lot for us to do, including bringing as many other people with us as we can.

Class Section 2, Alternative #1: Video Clips

15 minutes

► Video viewing

- ① Show the following video song clips from the Final Stand video

- “Forever”
- “New Jerusalem”

Class Section 2, Alternative #2: Songs and Pictures

15 minutes

► [Optional] Songs

- ♪ Sing a variety of songs from the “Heaven Song Sheet.”

► Look at posters

- ① Have any of the following posters available to pass around or to put up for people to look at between songs. Select those that are appropriate for the local culture.

■ Recommended posters

- “The King’s Return”
- “Life in Paradise”
- “Inside the Heavenly City”
- “The Pearly Gates of Heaven”
- “The Magic River of Life”
- “A Heavenly Picnic!”

Class Section 3: Why Learn About Heaven?

25 minutes

We are going to study what the Bible has to say about Heaven, and we're also going to hear the accounts of people who have had a "Near Death Experience" (NDE). They died, perhaps following an accident or during a medical procedure, but then were revived. During the time they were clinically dead, they experienced something for which there was no other explanation than they had been given a glimpse into what it will be like to make the transition from this life to the next world.

► The Grand Finale

Heaven is such a wonderful, almost unimaginable "Happy Ending" that the final chapters of the Bible are devoted entirely to it!—Revelation chapters 21 and 22's description of Heaven is the Grand Finale of the Bible, the thunderous climax of the symphony of God, and reveals a place of such resplendent beauty that just reading about it will lift you into the Heavencies, beyond the imagination of man! We'll look at those chapters in a minute.

The most stupendous things that you never even dreamed of are already in existence in that way-out home of the children of God—that Heavenly City whose Builder and Maker is God, and which our departed friends and saints are already enjoying!

Hebrews 11:13–16—These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (14) For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. (15) And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But now they desire a better, that is, a Heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

It is such a beautiful place that you can hardly even possibly imagine it!—But the Lord in His great love for us has been telling us a lot about it.

1 Corinthians 2:9–10—But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (10) But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

► Why learn about Heaven?

They say that anticipation is 50% of enjoyment, so why not enjoy half of Heaven now? We're halfway to Heaven here in spirit, and we can get half of the enjoyment ahead of time just by thinking about it, praising the Lord for it, thanking the Lord for it, reading about it, dreaming about it, and anticipating it! We can have 50% of our enjoyment right now just by looking forward to it!

That's one reason it's good to talk about Heaven and think about Heaven and read about Heaven. After all, that's where we're going to spend eternity, so it's a pretty important place, don't you think? It's our eternal Home, the place that Jesus has gone to prepare for us to live forever, so we certainly ought to be interested in it and want to know what it's like and what we're going to be like when we get there!

All God's children of faith since the beginning of time have been looking for "a city which hath foundations"—eternal foundations—"whose Builder and Maker is God!" They were not satisfied with being citizens of this world, with its earthly, carnal, flesh-and-blood kingdoms of evil men and evil spirits. But rather they looked for a country made by God, a Heavenly country, a Heavenly City, built by the Lord!

Hebrews 11:10—For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

If you're looking for the perfect city and the perfect government in the perfect country with perfect people, just wait a little while longer—it's coming! Jesus promised that He's preparing a place for us (John 14:2–3).

Heaven is a great place to look forward to, and we hope you will get thrilled and excited about it too, as it will help you to bear some of the burdens and trials that you're going through now when you realize the wonderful things that God has in store for you!

Romans 8:18—For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

► Nothing to fear

Fear of death is one of the greatest fears that grips people, but the Bible tells us that Jesus can set us free from those fears. He conquered death! There is nothing to fear, only a joyful and patient waiting to meet our Savior face-to-face.

Hebrews 2:15—And release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

1 Corinthians 15:55–57—O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? (56) The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. (57) But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 22:3–4—And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. (4) They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

■ Near Death Experiences almost always result in a loss of fear of death

One of the outstanding characteristics of someone who has had an NDE is that he or she no longer has any fear of death. They've been given a glimpse into the world beyond, and they know there is nothing to fear.

[Optional] NDEs are real!

The research on NDEs offers quite compelling evidence that these experiences are genuine. For instance, Dr Melvin Morse, author of *Closer to the Light*, wrote:

Michael Sabom, an American cardiologist, has done some fascinating work on out-of-body experiences and people who almost died of cardiac arrest. In these experiences, a person in a near-death crisis claims to leave his body and watch his own resuscitation as the doctor performs it in the emergency room or during surgery.

Sabom had 32 such patients in his study. Sabom asked 25 medically knowledgeable patients to make educated guesses about what happens when a doctor tries to get the heart started again. He wanted to compare the knowledge of "medically smart" patients with the out-of-body experiences of medically unsophisticated patients.

He found that 23 of the 25 in the control group made major mistakes in describing the resuscitation procedure. On the other hand, none of the near-death patients made mistakes in describing what went on in their own resuscitations. This presented very strong evidence that these people were actually outside their bodies and looking down as they said they were.

[Optional] NDE: Jerry's story

① Also in Study Notes book.

In 1997 (at age 47), I was involved in a serious car crash with many major injuries. When I was trapped in the car, I felt no pain even though I had my pelvis broken in two places, a fractured tailbone, a rib that had punctured my lung, a fractured skull, lacerations to my face, and part of my ear was severed.

I saw a place of warmth, love, and friendship. It was something like a tunnel but not round. It was a walkway type tunnel that you see joining buildings or stores together, the type that goes over a street, not narrow, but wide. I walked along it, or it felt like I was walking but I don't remember my feet moving. It was not bright on the sides of the walkway, but it was not dark either.

When I reached the end of the tunnel, I could see people. It appeared to be only from their waist up. It was not scary at all. Everyone was smiling and happy.

I saw faces that I recognized. I saw both my grandfathers and my father. It was very dark behind their bodies and I felt the presence of multitudes of others behind them.

Someone was shaking my hand as if to greet me. I think it was my father. He died of Alzheimer's disease and was a mess when he died. But now he was upright and looking healthy and I realized just how short he really was. All these people were so very happy to see me.

At that point I felt the need to go back to the living. It was not a horrifying feeling but just a point where it was time to decide. I still don't think the decision to go back was mine. I feel someone decided it for me.

My hand was still holding (not shaking anymore in greeting) the person who I first started shaking hands with. The hand was very warm and soothing. My hand slowly and gently slipped away as I floated backwards to the living world. Then it was over. I was back. In retrospect, I am not afraid of dying now.

► Let's think about Heaven

All of those wonderful Bible heroes who are memorialized in God's hall of fame, the 11th chapter of Hebrews, considered themselves pilgrims and strangers here because they all looked for that Heavenly City which hath Foundations, the one country that really belonged to them and that they belonged to. They were able to endure all kinds of tribulation on Earth and suffering and hard work and even torture and death because they looked forward to that City.

2 Corinthians 5:1—A building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.

So it pays to think about Heaven and talk about Heaven and try to visualize Heaven and what you have to look forward to—knowing that the suffering of this present time is nothing compared to the glories that we are going to share in the near future.

2 Corinthians 4:17–18—For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Colossians 3:1–2—If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. (2) Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Hebrews 13:14—For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

The Heavenly City, which will come down from God out of Heaven and dwell with men! This is the hope of all ages: That now-unseen Eternal World where we shall dwell with Him forever! That's what we're all looking forward to!—Not pie in the sky, but Heaven on Earth!—A New Heaven and a New Earth with its Eternal City!

[Optional] Another destination: Hell

Of course, not everyone who dies is heading for Heaven. All do, however, pass on into the unseen world of the spirit and some go to Hell. What is Hell? It is the antithesis of Heaven. In every way that Heaven is beautiful, Hell is devoid of beauty. Imagine your worst nightmare and you have a taste of Hell. (You could read Luke 16:19–26, the parable of Lazarus the beggar and the rich man, for a description of Hell.)

► Prayer

Paul the Apostle, when writing to some of his followers about heavenly things, told them that he prayed continually,

Ephesians 1:17–18—That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, (18) the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

- ① Stop briefly to pray as expressed in this verse, asking the Lord to open everyone's eyes and thrill their hearts as they read about the wonders He has in store for them!

Class Section 4: Our Heavenly Home!

40 minutes

► The Bible's picture of Heaven

Revelation chapters 21 and 22 offer the most detailed, specific description in the Bible of what Heaven is like, so we are going to now have an in-depth, verse-by-verse study of the marvels of these chapters. Come with us now, as we swing out into space and travel far into the future! In fact, in these marvelous chapters we'll travel even beyond the realms of space and time, into the amazing realm where God Himself dwells, the Eternal Now!—Are you ready?—Here we go!

► Eternity with the Lord

Revelation 21:2–3—Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from Heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

The place we're going to dwell with the Lord forever hereafter is not some fanciful dreamland way off in outer space, but an even more amazing Dream City that's going to come down from God, out of Heaven. God's going to come down and live with us, and us with Him, in that beautiful Dreamtown.

[Optional] Dwelling forever with Jesus

- ① Also in Study Notes book.

Revelation 7:9, 16–17—After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, (16) "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; (17) for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Ezekiel 37:26–27—Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. (27) My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Psalm 16:11—You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

► No more tears

Revelation 21:4—And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Isn't that beautiful? If you'll read carefully, you'll see that it doesn't say there aren't going to be any tears! I think a lot of people, when they get to Heaven and face the Lord, are going to be ashamed and cry and weep over their sins and their failures.

But isn't the Lord wonderful and loving and merciful? He says He's going to wipe away all those tears, and there will be no more pain, no more death, no more sorrow!—Only eternal, wonderful happiness!

It's going to be so wonderful that you're going to forget about all your troubles of the past.

Isaiah 35:10—And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

► Our inheritance

Revelation 21:5–7—Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new. ... (6b) I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. (7) He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

In this wonderful Heavenly City, His overcomers shall "inherit all things!"

1 John 5:4–5—For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

The Lord loves faith and He loves His faithful children and He is going to reward them greatly! They'll inherit all things, anything they ever wanted or ever desired!—For it is God's delight to give us the desires of our own hearts, if we love Him and delight ourselves in Him! He says,

Psalm 37:4—Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Luke 12:32—Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

[Optional] NDE: John's Preview

① *Also in Study Notes book.*

(Written by his doctor:) John was an eleven-year-old patient of mine who was dying of lymphoma. In his last days, he was hospitalized with severe, untreatable pneumonia. Though he was having difficulty breathing and was in constant pain, he was given very few drugs such as morphine and Valium because they make breathing more difficult. Three days before John died, a circle of loved ones gathered around his bed. They were startled when John suddenly sat upright and announced that Jesus was in the room. He then asked for everyone to pray for him.

At about three a.m., John sat up again, startling the four people who had gathered around the bed to pray. "There are beautiful colors in the sky!" he shouted. "There are beautiful colors and more colors. You can double jump up here, double jump!"

By dawn, it seemed that life was almost over for John. His breathing was labored, and his heart was pounding like that of a marathon runner's. Even then, little John had more to communicate. Opening his eyes wide, he asked his grieving parents to "let me go."

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I've seen God, angels, and shepherds. I see the white horse." As sick as he was, John still begged his family not to feel sorry for him. He had seen where he was going, and it was a joyous and wondrous place. "It's wonderful. It's beautiful," he said, his hand held out in front of him. Soon he laid back and fell asleep. John never regained consciousness and died two days later.

► Reunion with loved ones

Another wonderful thing about Heaven will be a reunion with our loved ones! It'll be the greatest family reunion ever known, with your loved ones and relatives and children and parents and ancestors and descendants and fellow laborers and loves. There we will all be together in one place at the same time, rejoicing and praising the Lord all together in one great, grand Heavenly fellowship meeting. So that's another thrilling aspect of Heaven to look forward to.—We'll all be together at last!

Everyone there is going to be so good and loving and kind and helpful and gentle and tender and cheerful and faithful, really loving the Lord and caring for each other.—Just beautiful!—The perfect society, the perfect community, in perfect fellowship with each other and the Lord. There will be no hate or jealousy or selfishness or cruelty or any of those bad things.—Everybody's going to be

just lovely!—So sweet and kind!—Just beautiful, just perfect!—Like angels! It will be wonderful!—You'll love it!

[Optional] NDE: Irma's Story

① *Also in Study Notes book.*

(A Christian worker in Russia passed on this testimony. Irma, a teenager, has been suffering from cancer and has been hospitalized, barely able to even sit in a wheelchair. During her sickness she was declared clinically dead two times. She told us about how it was over "There.")

The first time I died, I found myself in a garden, full of beautiful, colorful flowers and blossoming trees. There was peace and quiet all around and I felt completely secure. Walking on I came to some kind of building like a castle that was made out of pure gold. I walked in and found myself in one of the rooms. Some people came and started to take care of me. They put me on a bed and then an old man came to see me. His hair was white and he was dressed in white garments. It looked like he was somewhat in charge as he said, "Now let her go. It's too long for her. It's not her time yet. Let her go!" Then I came back and it was the end of my first operation.

While I had my second operation again I went to a similar place. It was almost the same, the same peace and secure feeling and beauty. This time I was also in a beautiful garden playing with children. They were very happy and we had fun together. Then I noticed that not so far away there were a few adults working on building some houses. They called me to come to them, but the children didn't want to let me go and they were asking me to play with them some more. Then I noticed one boy that I knew on earth. Though I only knew him from pictures (he died when he was five) I could recognize him. All of a sudden I remembered my mother and heard her talking to me and bidding me to come back. I never wanted to leave this beautiful place, but I felt sorry for my mother so I decided to go back. I walked slowly looking at all that I was going to leave behind when I found myself in the operating room and could see myself on the table and everyone around. After that I woke up in my own body after the operation.

Afterwards I wrote one of my friends (the mother of the boy who died when he was five) telling her of my experience and of her little boy who I met in the place where I went during my clinical death. I remembered how he was dressed, so I included the details in my letter. I was really amazed when I received a letter from her telling me that when they were burying him, they dressed him in exactly the same clothes as I saw him wearing.

[Optional] NDE: Sammy's story

I had been having flu-like symptoms accompanied by some minor aches radiating out from the chest into both arms and up into the jaw. I gave the doctors two picture-perfect EKG tests and the symptoms were written off as a nasty virus. After a couple of weeks of no improvement and another EKG it was decided to give me a cardiac stress test. This involves walking on treadmill at various levels of difficulty while wired to an elaborate EKG machine. During the first stage of my test I felt a crushing pain in my chest. It was as if someone had placed a giant vice on my chest. I remember the doctor asking me if I was okay and beginning to fall, but I don't remember landing on the treadmill or floor.

After that my memories are bits and pieces of images and feelings. I remember going through a tunnel or tubular passage with a loud rushing noise in the background. I do not remember entering or exiting the tube.

The next thing I remember was being drawn toward a magnificent light of immeasurable brilliance. As I moved toward the light, my first wife [his first wife was deceased] intercepted me. She was happy to see me but concerned because it was not time for me to be there. I knew she was happy and contented in her present form. I don't remember her telling me any of that. I just knew it.

It was as if we made a right turn. The next thing I remember is sitting in a warm green pasture-like setting with a brilliant blue sky. I can't clearly remember if there were grass, flowers, or other plants there. I spoke with someone there. We talked for hours about why we are all here and my plans for this life. At that time I knew it all—the whole meaning of life and what it is all about.

I cannot remember any of what we discussed except the last sentence. It is clear to me I am not supposed to remember. To this day, I still dream of the conversation in great detail. When I wake up, I still can't remember it. I do not know who or even what I spoke with. I can tell you I felt unconditional love and limitless wisdom.

As I said, the only thing I remember from that conversation is one sentence. I remember it as clear as if I just heard it. A deep male voice said, "Then it's decided, you're going back."

At the end of that sentence the medical personnel defibrillated me the second time. I was slammed back into my body and I felt the shock with a vengeance. It was as if somebody set off a small bomb in my chest. My eyes popped open and I saw the back of the head of the man who did it. I heard him say "conversion" which is the medical term for re-establishing a cardiac rhythm. They tell me it was the second shock. The doctor who administered the stress test said they shocked me twice. The first time I did not convert.

My eyes closed again. The next time they opened I was in cardiac care.

The memories I can recall of my NDE are very sharp and clear. What I do remember is clear with no dream-like qualities. I recall traveling at a very high speed through a dark tubular passage. I saw a very bright, indescribably beautiful full-spectrum light. As bright as the light was, it was not unpleasant or painful to look at. I met my deceased first wife. I spoke with a superior entity about why we are here and what my mission in this life is.

► Our Heavenly Home's divine design

John gives us an amazing, specific, detailed description of our future Heavenly home itself, the great Space City, New Jerusalem!—Including its exact measurements, colors, materials, etc:

Revelation 21:9–11—Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." (10) And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, (11) having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Like a diamond, in other words. The city is so beautiful that God likens it unto His crowning creation, a beautiful woman! Earlier in verse 2, John said that he saw the Holy City descending "as a bride adorned for her Husband," so we know this reference to the City as "the Bride" is symbolic, as it's obvious that this marvelous City which He has prepared for His true Bride, His Church, is a very literal, down-to-Earth, Heavenly Home with literal walls and mansions and a river and trees and gates and exact physical measurements and dimensions.

Revelation 21:12–14—Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

On each of the gates is a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. John also says that the names of the twelve original apostles are on the wall. That doesn't mean that they are the walls or that they are the gates!—This is simply God's way of honoring them.

Revelation 21:15–16—And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

Do you have any idea how long 12,000 Biblical furlongs equal in modern measurements?—There isn't a clear consensus on exactly how long the furlongs referred to in Bible times were, but it's roughly equal to 185 meters. Thus 12,000 furlongs would equal about 2,200 kilometers [1,500 milkes]! And that is a very big City!—2,200 kilometers in each direction—wide, long, and high! It's almost beyond comprehension!

[Optional] NDE: Visions of Heaven

① Also in Study Notes book.

Psychologist Kenneth Ring has written two books about his study of NDE, or Near Death Experience. He says, "From what people who have been there say—and their reports are highly consistent—death is one of the most beautiful experiences one can have, and Heaven is all that a human could wish for."

One young man who nearly died as a result of complications during a minor operation describes his experience, which Ring presented in his book *Life at Death*. "I took a trip to Heaven," says the man. "I

saw the most beautiful lakes! Angels were floating around like seagulls! Everything was white! There were the most beautiful flowers! No one on Earth ever saw such beautiful flowers!"

Ring adds that visitors to Heaven often report seeing impossibly beautiful countryside. It was the most wonderful thing they had ever seen! Says a woman who had clinically died due to respiratory failure, "I was in a field, a large empty field, and it had high, golden grass that was very soft, and so bright! I was really very happy in that place—soft, silky, very brilliant gold! The grass swayed. The grass was so outstandingly beautiful I will never forget it!"

One woman who suffered a massive haemorrhage following surgery, described Heaven as an immense city that seemed to float without any support at all: "The flowers and flower buds along the street were all like precious rubies, diamonds, and sapphires! Heaven also has super-modern buildings, much better constructed than ours. The lush vegetation in Heaven is not all green as here, but gold with varying shades of pink, orange, and lavender, like the rainbow!"

[Optional] Heaven in the shape of a pyramid

① Also in Study Notes book.

We think that that the Heavenly city is going to be in the shape of a pyramid. Now, the Bible doesn't specifically say it's pyramidal, but it definitely says it is foursquare (Revelation 21:16).—The base is a square. Well, what kind of a building could you build on a square, besides a cube or a pyramid or some very odd-shaped thing, if it's going to be just as high as it is wide?

Perhaps this is what the ancient Egyptians were trying to imitate with their pyramids! They had some inside information from the spirit world that that was the shape of the world to come, so they were trying to imitate it and make sure their kings were introduced into that world in proper form and proper shape.

Although we can't prove from the Bible that it is pyramidal, there are some scriptures about Heaven which seem to indicate that it is so.

Hebrews 12:22—But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.

So it sounds as though it is mountain-shaped. And several other Scriptures speak of "the Mountain of the Lord's House" (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1).

And if there's anything that would look like a mountain, imagine a 2,200 kilometer-high pyramid! And since we are comparing these verses with the specific description of that "House" in Revelation, I think we can pretty well correlate the two and assume that that's what He's talking about!—A pyramid!

[Optional] Would we all fit?

① Also in Study Notes book.

Some unbelievers, trying to disprove the Bible, say, "Oh, it doesn't matter, even if He made it that big there still wouldn't be room enough even to hold all the real born-again Christians, much less anybody else!"—That's ridiculous! Just take out your pencil and paper, or your calculator, and do some figuring!

Being about 2,200 kilometers square means that the base area is around 5,000,000 square kilometers!—Or three-fourths the size of the continent of Australia! And with a height of about 2,200 kilometers from the bottom to the apex of the Pyramid, it has a total volume of over 3.5 billion cubic kilometers! Scientists say that approximately 70 billion people have lived on Earth until now. So if even one-third of them were saved, that would mean that there would be about 23 billion people in the Heavenly City, or less than 7 per cubic kilometer!—About the roomiest place on Earth!

► Many mansions

From the measurements we read in Revelation 21, the Heavenly City is an immense size! The tremendous capacity of this marvelous, final, great, Heavenly City that Jesus has gone to prepare for us is simply amazing!

Remember what Jesus said in John 14:2:

John 14:2a—In My Father's House are many mansions.

Just think, one of these days you're going to live in a beautiful place that isn't going to cost you anything!—No upkeep, no expenses, absolutely nothing except what it's already cost Jesus!—And it will be commensurate with your works on Earth, what you already paid for it down here. There are some things that you're working for right now that you're not going to receive till you get there, but you'll find that whatever you've paid here is not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed there!

Whatever place Jesus has gone to prepare for you will be fantastic! I'm sure that when you see what He has for you there, you'll be amazed!

► Jesus, the glorious Light of Heaven

Revelation 21:23—The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

It doesn't say there'll be no moon and no sun, but it says in the City they won't need the moon and the sun, because it will have its own light, the Light of God and His Son Jesus! But the sun and moon will still continue on in the world outside the City on the planet Earth, which will still exist with its new Garden-of-Eden-like surface.

But inside this Heavenly City we won't need these earthly lights, because the Lord is the light thereof and it will be light all the time, all day and all night, and we'll never have to go to bed, we'll never have to sleep, because we'll never get tired or weary. And even for those on the outside, it will be a blessing just to live anywhere within view, within sight of that City, just to be able to see it at night and thrill to its gorgeous splendor, resplendent with the golden, supernatural, miraculous Light of God! God's Word says that even the sun and the moon shall be ashamed in comparison to the glory and the beauty and the light of that Holy City here on the surface of the Earth!

Isaiah 24:23—Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.

God's city is going to be perfect and pure and governed by God himself! It's going to be so beautiful! In fact, it's not going to be beautiful, it's already beautiful! Jesus has been working on it ever since He left!

[Optional] NDE: Rob's story

① *Also in Study Notes book.*

When I was nine years old, my twin brother, a friend and myself were playing along the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It didn't seem to be unusual; we often did so. What made this time out different, though, was that it was February, and the river appeared to be frozen over.

We walked along the ice for a time. My brother was wary about doing so. I tried to tell him that the ice was "...real strong here" so I jumped up and down. On my third jump, I went through the ice.

All was panic. The water was very cold. My heavy winter clothes were making it difficult to stay afloat. Since we were in the middle of winter, the water level had dropped a bit, and there was a layer of air between the water and the ice above. The river also maintained a current, so I was moving downstream. I continued to struggle mightily, thinking "I'm only nine. That's too young to die." The longer I was under the ice, the less significant time became. It was as if time had no meaning. Everything happened sequentially but simultaneously. I became very tired. I noticed that I could no longer feel the cold. My hearing was heightened. I could hear the movement of the water. I could hear the traffic on the bridge overhead and behind me. I could see clearly, even though it was dark and I was under the ice and moving downstream.

Then, a complete calm and serenity overtook me. I was at total peace. I began to come into an awareness that all was not over. I could sense a light. It was brilliant, but caused no discomfort when looking at it. In fact, I gained strength by looking into the light. I then sensed a presence. I had the knowledge that this was Jesus, and He was assuring me that everything was fine. I felt total love from this presence. I was home. More so than I was ever home before. I was presented with a sense that all questions were to be answered if I stayed.

He then presented me with an option—I could continue toward the light. It was becoming a part of me, and I was becoming a part of it. While the light seemed to be a single entity, there were also noticeable individuals within it. The second choice I had was to return. I wanted to stay. All was calm; all was love. I knew that whichever route I chose, it would be the right one; there was no wrong choice.

At that moment, my brother and friend broke through the ice, precisely where I was. The odds of this seemed staggering to me; I was under the ice—they couldn't see me. I was moving downstream. How could they find me? I felt resentment at them for coming for me. But I still grabbed the large stick they placed in front of me. I was assured that this was fine; that there were still things to do before joining with the light. I allowed myself to be pulled back into my body, and then out of the water. The cold returned instantly. The heightened sense of hearing and sight gradually diminished. It was as if I had experienced what we are truly capable of, and I was returning into a form that was inherently limiting of all that is possible. My memory seemed to change, too. Even though I had just experienced the most extraordinary event of my short life, it seemed surreal. Did it happen? Was I hallucinating? No. It was real. The memory of the event is not like other memories. Whenever I think about it, the same emotions come flooding back, along with an overwhelming sense that everything is "right," that this is the way things are supposed to be.

[Optional] NDE: Donna's story

It was 1973 and I was 17. I was in the hospital. I had lost massive amounts of blood and had bad cramping of the stomach due to a miscarriage. I remember being in the emergency room and then they admitted me to a private room. When I was there and the doctor was examining me my heart stopped, my fever was off the thermometer, and he called in more doctors and nurses.

I distinctly remember starting to feel myself leaving my body and floating up to the top of the room. As I looked down there were five doctors, three nurses, IV's being put in both arms and a heart machine all trying to bring me back! I just looked down on them and it felt so good to be up there that it was quite beautiful and I really didn't care to go back.

The next thing I recall was floating way up to a place in a bright illuminous light that I have never seen in this world—words could not describe the warmth, love, and peaceful feeling that was in this light.

I saw a huge three-dimensional screen come up bigger than any movie screen I had ever seen in my life! I just stood there watching my whole entire life pass before my eyes on this screen. Everyone I had ever encountered in my 17 years of life was on this screen; every emotion and feeling was also played too! It was surreal!

After that I started floating toward a tunnel. It was very long but the light on the other end was unbelievable. I was in so much bliss going toward the light. The feelings I had were so loving and peaceful, nothing like I ever felt on earth. I really wanted to go and never come back here! It was pure joy, peace, and bliss, but I was told I had to come back, my purpose was not fulfilled here.

I started floating back. Next thing I remember looking down at my body with all those doctors trying to bring me back and fighting for them not to! I could not move a muscle in my body yet as my spirit body was moving back into my physical body. I kept saying "No, no, don't do this to me! Let me go! Don't save me!" I was really hoping they wouldn't bring me back!

I learned one thing when I was there I will always remember. The message was to love each and every one and judge no one or nothing! Just that simple!

Isaiah 60:20—The Lord will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.

[Optional] The River of Life

① Also in Study Notes book.

Revelation 22:1–2—And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The Prophet Ezekiel also caught a glimpse of this wonderful river and these heavenly trees and described them thus:

Ezekiel 47:12—Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.

[Optional] Reading Revelation 22

- ① *Teachers: If time permits and you feel it would be helpful, you can read the rest of Revelation 22 with the class.*

► If you die before the Rapture, straight to Heaven you go

As we've been reading Revelation 21 and 22, we've been focusing on the description of Heaven from the point of view of the final destination—after Jesus has returned to reclaim the world for God, after the Millennium, the Heavenly City is our eternal home.

But what about the believers who die now? Where are they now? Do they have to wait until some time in the future to enjoy the pleasures of paradise? No! Those who die now do not have to wait until Jesus' Second Coming before being raised from the dead. Paul said,

2 Corinthians 5:8—To be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

So this wonderful place we've been reading about is already filling up with the saved of all ages. They are already enjoying the wonders of God's Heavenly Home! They are already in the presence of Jesus.

Perhaps you're wondering what it is like for them, and what they are like. So far we've talked a lot about what Heaven is like, and in the next class we'll talk about Heaven's inhabitants—us!—and what we will be like.

Closing Activity and Prayer

10 minutes

► Letting people know about Heaven!

- ① *Discuss the importance of giving people the opportunity to "book their reservation in Heaven" by receiving Jesus. People need to know how to be saved, and how will they know if we don't tell them?*
- ① *Give each student 1–5 copies of the "What Heaven Is Like" Tract (or any of the color Heaven posters, or other tracts).*
- ① *Encourage them to give the tract to someone who needs this message.*
- ① *As time permits, you could let the students ask any questions they have about Heaven.*

► Prayer

- ① *Pray for everyone's safekeeping as they leave, also including these thoughts:*

† *Dear Jesus, we thank You that we will be able to spend all eternity with You and with our loved ones who have received You, that we will never be apart. We will never be alone, and with each passing day we will grow to know You more and more, and see You more clearly and understand You more deeply. Amen.*