

Homesick for Heaven: The Ultimate Camp Meeting

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May 28, 2011

Henry de Fluiter (1872–1970: 98 years)

[In 1966, at the age of 94, in a special *Voice of Prophecy* radio broadcast with his old friend H. M. S. Richards, he related the following in a voice quavering with emotion.]

Well, this is a rabbit story. It happened in Colorado when we were living in Denver. Usually on Sunday afternoons we would load our cars and some of the children from the church, and spend the day up in the mountains. And this particular Sunday that we went up there, we had quite a crowd of boys and girls; and you know, when you get up in the mountains, the first thing you think about is building a fire—especially when you’re going to eat your lunch.

And so the children gathered the wood and we found a cave—just a good place for a fire. And we built a fire in the cave, and while we were fixing the lunch there on the ground the fire burned fiercely, but the smoke all went into the cave (it didn’t come out, but it went *into* the cave; there was a draft that way).

And when the coals had all burned down (that is, the flame had stopped and there was just the red-hot coals)—out of that cave walked a rabbit. The rabbit was blinded by the smoke, and the rabbit walked right through those hot coals. It was a pitiful sight; it just sent a pain right down my spinal column. And that rabbit just walked right through the thing, and then into the open. And it just took all the desire for food out of my heart, and I wanted to be alone. I couldn’t stand it.

And I thought of all the suffering in the world today because of sin: not only human beings, but animals—innocent animals—have to suffer because of sin. And it put such a longing in my heart for Jesus to come to put an end to the suffering all over the world.

Then I told them that I wanted to be away by myself. And I went off by myself, and, thinking about this, I sat down, and these words came to me:

Longing, dear Saviour, I’m longing for Thee!
Hasten, glad moment, when Jesus I’ll see;
Longing to be, Saviour, with Thee,
Longing, I’m longing for Jesus.

[*Gospel Melodies and Evangelistic Hymns*, No. 184; Henry de Fluiter, *Songs of Victory*, No. 20; refrain; written 1925]

[Then Pastor de Fluiter added:] “And I hope that each and every one of you have that longing in your heart today.”

Reality Check

July 1967. What happened that month? If you were living in Detroit, Michigan, as Penny and I did, you know. As *The World Book Encyclopedia* puts it, “Rioters burned buildings, looted stores, and shot at police [my own father was serving bravely on that force] and fire fighters. National Guard and U.S. Army troops helped restore order. The riot lasted a week and resulted in 43 deaths and property damage of \$45 million.”

The city of Detroit hasn’t been the same since, and never can be again.

Some other insanities I have outlived:

- Hitler
 - 1933–1945, murder (mass genocide) of six million Jews
 - 1995, met survivor Martin Shlanger. Body tattoo # A 9556 at the Holocaust Memorial Center, West Bloomfield, Michigan. See films of Nazis heaving naked corpses of emaciated women, children, and men into heaps, as though they were so much cordwood-dung on the trash pile of life. If you are ever the same again upon leaving any of the holocaust memorials, you need to have your heart of stone softened!
- 1963, President John F. Kennedy assassinated
- 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated
- 1968, Robert F. Kennedy assassinated
- 1975–1979, Killing Fields genocide by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; nearly 1.4 million souls were slaughtered
- 1978, Jim Jones / Jonestown, Guyana; People’s Temple followers drink Kool-Aid laced with cyanide, and 900 souls perish
- 1991, Shoko Asahara and his cult’s poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway, killing 12 and injuring 5,000
- 1992–1995 Bosnian Genocide; nearly 40,000 souls were “ethnically cleansed”
- 1993, New York World Trade Center bombing killed seven and injured thousands
- 1993, David Koresh / Waco; the result of following this charismatic leader was the loss of 75 souls
- 1995, Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing kills 168
- 1997, Marshall Applewhite and his Heaven’s Gate UFO cult ends in 39 suicides
- 9-11-2001, resulting in nearly 3,000 deaths

Paul, eminently articulate Paul, wasn't able to describe Heaven, though he was privileged to see it in vision. Rather helplessly he confessed: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). In 1844, a young woman of just 17 was granted a similar privilege, and with similar result: "Oh, that I could talk in the language of Canaan, then could I tell a little of the glory of the better world." You sense her pain in relating this ultimate dream experience two years later: "Then an angel bore me gently down to this dark world. Sometimes I think I can stay here no longer; all things on earth look so dreary. I feel very lonely here, for I have seen a better land. Oh, that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away to be at rest! After I came out of vision, everything had changed; a gloom was spread over everything I beheld. Oh, how dark this world seemed to me. I wept when I found myself here, and felt homesick. I had seen a better world, and it had spoiled this for me" (EW 20). Little did young Ellen Harmon realize then that she must sojourn on Earth for another 70 years.

These reports differ vastly from today's jaded "Been there, done that"! Have you read the last two chapters in your Bible lately? If not, it's past time. We really, *really* want to be in that far off better world, don't we? We need to remind ourselves more often than we do, that there are more vibrant colors to behold than we have yet beheld—and more exciting and satisfying experiences than we have yet encountered, and sounds and fragrances to fill up our senses beyond imagining. My study of inspired writings provides a few splashes of color on an impressionistic canvas. Maybe they'll put a little more spring in your step; our feet may need to remain in this world, but we have to wean ourselves off this one and get our heads and our hearts fixed on that better world.

What follows is my attempt to describe that better world, which to my mind blends the best images of both Heaven and the earth made new.

Personages.

- Adam. More than twice as tall as men of modern times, yet still somewhat shorter than Jesus will appear (GC 644–5). Back in Eden, he had 20 times the vital force of modern-day man (3T 138–9), but lost Paradise by sinning; on his grand reunion day with Jesus, he'll regain Paradise, and play a very different tune . . . on a golden harp (GC 647).
- Resurrected saints. They come out of their graves the same size as at death, then "grow up" to the full stature of the primeval race (note that Eve came to just above Adam's shoulders). Bestowed by Jesus Himself: golden harps, palms of victory, star-gemmed crowns of pure gold, bearing our new names (GC 644–5, cf. Mal. 4:2; 3SG 34 [SR 21]; EW 16; GC 646); we'll sing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3).

- Individuality preserved. “We shall know our friends. . . . Though they may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured in this mortal life, yet in their resurrected and glorified (incorruptible) body their individual identity will be perfectly preserved, and we shall recognize in the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, the lineaments (features, especially facial) of those we love” (3SP 219 [6BC 1092]; 1 Cor. 13:12).
- The 144,000. Clad in white mantles (loose, sleeveless garments worn over outer clothing) from shoulder to feet; crowns vary by brightness and weight, depending on the number of stars; on their foreheads is written: “God, New Jerusalem” and a glorious star containing Jesus’ new name (EW 15–7); cf. “new name” on *crown* (Rev. 2:17) and the inscription “Holiness to the Lord” (GC 646; cf. high priestly miter’s inscription, Ex. 28:36)—when Rev. 5:10 refers to God’s people whom He has made kings and priests, it means just that!
- Martyrs. Clad in white robes trimmed in red (EW 18–9).
- Children. Not engaged in strife or discord; like adults, all faces will be bright and smiling in spotless purity (no anxious, troubled countenances) (MLT 357 [YI 8/1852]).
- Angels. They will be there. Guardian angels will be first to greet the resurrected saints and will tell the history of divine interposition in the life (Ed 305). Made a little lower than the angels (Ps. 8:5), yet, the redeemed are to occupy a place higher than the angels (COL 163).
- 24 Elders. Sit on individual thrones arranged in hollow square on the sea of glass, having been resurrected with Jesus (Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, p. 409; Rev. 4:4, 6).
- Jesus. Many crowns on His head; white, curly hair lying on His shoulders; His feet have the appearance of fire; He is somewhat taller than Adam (EW 16; GC 644); the one reminder of sin: the marks of suffering/crucifixion on His head, side, hands, and feet (GC 674); to unravel His mysteries in the new Earth (MLT 361 [Lt 242, 1908]).
- God the Father. His glory is immeasurably more brilliant than the noontide sun, yet not painfully dazzling (GC 676); He will stand at the gate, welcoming each saint to the New Jerusalem (Ms 9, 7/24/1886, in 1SAT 46).

Heavenly Sights.

- Many Mansions (Jn. 14:2). This translates to permanent abiding places, not to pretentious habitations (Lt 128, 6/25/1897, in 13MR 156).
- Sea of Glass/Crystal Sea. Before the throne of Divinity; otherwise no seas (Rev. 4:6; 21:1); as it were mingled with fire—so resplendent is it with the glory of God. The 144,000 stand upon it before entering the Holy City (GC 648).

- Mount Zion. Stood upon by the 144,000 and all overcomers (GC 646, EW 16).

The Holy City, New Jerusalem.

No temple, no night—it is lit up by God’s immediate presence and glory. Laid out in an enormous square, 375 miles (12,000 furlongs in circumference, at ¼ mi./furlong) on a side = 140,625 square miles, which nearly equal all of America’s inland (fresh) waters in total surface area, at 79,481 square miles, + 60,788 sq. mi. of Great Lakes. Think of it! Michigan alone boasts 11,000 inland and four of the five Great Lakes; Minnesota brags of 22,000 lakes and one Great Lake—just two states’ contributions in H₂O! Looking at it another way, the area would be larger than the Carolinas and Tennessee put together (Rev. 21:22, 25, 23, 16; cf. Smith, p. 763).

Walls of jasper (translucent green) soar 264’ (144 cubits of 22”) skyward; entered via three great gates on each side, each of a single pearl (Rev. 21:21).

Streets of *transparent* gold (Rev. 21:21, 18). Foundations of the massive, gleaming city are composed of 12 layers of gemstones: shades of green, blue, red, gold, and purple (Rev. 21:19, 20).

God’s great white throne (Rev. 20:11) is the focal point of the Holy City: overarched by a rainbow (Rev. 4:3), symbolizing God’s promises to never forget His people in their struggle against evil (RH 12/13/1892); the source of the river or water of life flowing through the middle of the city (Rev. 22:1, 2); therefore, God is confirmed as the Fountainhead of all life.

The tree of life appears to have two distinct trunks on either bank of the river, but is really one tree meeting in a grand arch over the river, with trunks of *transparent* gold. The yield: monthly (12) varieties of fruit — gold-colored, mixed with silver—this, along with the leaves, we will eat to sustain a never-ending life (Rev. 22:2; cf. EW 17; YI 8/1852, in LHU 156).

Descent of Holy City to Earth. The entire city of the New Jerusalem descends through the “open space” of the constellation Orion, or nebula M42, 26 light-years across and 1,625–2,000 light-years distant (Rev. 21:2; cf. EW 41), alighting on the Mount of Olives, east of old Jerusalem, which is transformed into a mighty plain (recall the City’s dimensions given earlier) (Zech. 14:5, 4, 9; GC 662–3; EW 51–2).

Outside Precincts of New Jerusalem. The Garden of Eden was withdrawn to Heaven during the time of the Flood, but will be restored more lovely than in that day (3SG 55 [SR 58]). . . . Adam beholds the very vines, trees, and flowers whose fruit he’d gathered in Eden before the Fall (GC 648).

A banquet table of pure silver is many miles long, yet our eyes can take in its entire length; laden with fruit of the tree of life, and with manna, almonds, figs, pomegranates, grapes, and many other fruits (EW 19; Rev. 3:20).

Other sights: crystal-clear streams beside which waving trees cast shadows on the path of the ransomed; wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty and lofty mountains as a backdrop for homesites (GC 675).

Glorious houses of a silver appearance, supported by four pillars set with pearls most glorious to behold, . . . in each a golden shelf to hold glittering crowns, shelved because “many saints go out into the field by the houses to do something with the earth; not as we have to do with the earth here; no, no” and while working a glorious light shines about their heads (EW 18). We’ll live the life of vineyard (Isa. 65:1, 2), garden, and field (PK 730–1).

A field of never-fading flowers (EW 18).

A field of tall grass, a living green color reflecting silver and gold as it waves proudly to the glory of King Jesus (EW 18).

Another field: lion, lamb, leopard, and wolf in peace together (Isa. 11:6; EW 18): talk about “*creature*” comforts!

Lighted-up woods whose tree branches move to and fro—a welcome spot for wilderness camping on the way to Mount Zion (EW 18; Isa. 55:12; Ezek. 34:25); cf. no need or desire for repose (GC 676).

Mount Zion is crowned by a glorious temple and flanked by seven other mountains on which grow roses and lilies. Little ones can climb/fly to mountaintops to pick flowers. Trees around the temple in Zion: box (small evergreen used as a hedge), pine, fir, oil (palm oil used for butter and has a very pleasant odor), myrtle (evergreen used for timber and spices), pomegranate, and fig (EW 19; Isa. 55:13)—straight and lofty—no deformity (YI 10/1852). Perfect atmosphere: no *disagreeable* changes or chilling winds (MLT 354).

Activities. The development of every faculty and every capacity is increased; “The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies,” the grandest enterprises are carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; “and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. . . . All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God’s redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar . . . [and] enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings” (GC 677). The saints use wings and fly (Ms 14, 10/1850, in 12MR 249).

“And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character” (GC 678); harmonious social life (Eph. 3:15; GC 677/Ed 306).

Summing Up. So closes this humble attempt by a non-artist to portray that which only the Master Artist Himself is really capable of illustrating. Even Ellen White, blessed with the most articulate pen I have read in the English language, was forced to stop short and confess her helplessness in describing the glories of “over-yonder”: “Language is altogether too feeble to attempt a description of Heaven. As the scene rises before me, I am lost in amazement. Carried away with the surpassing splendor and excellent glory, I lay down the pen, and exclaim, ‘Oh, what love! what wondrous love!’ The most exalted language fails to describe the glory of Heaven or the matchless depths of a Saviour’s love” (EW 289).

What’s Missing in This Picture? Conspicuous by their absence: Satan and his minions (angelic and human), sin, death, tears, sorrow, pain, bullies, and mourning the dead.

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Henry de Fluiter, who shared the touching rabbit story with which we opened this message, concluded that special radio broadcast with what we have chosen for our sermon title today.

This story concerns a sad experience regarding our Sister Gladys Wood, the wife of Dr. [Glenn] Wood, who was at that time a member of our church they built up in Paradise [California]. She lost her only little girl, her only child, by accident. They had a lot of children they adopted, but this was her very own. And she lost it in an accident. And it grieved her so bitterly that one night at prayer meeting she said to me, “Uncle Henry, I’m homesick for Heaven.” I said, “Gladys, so am I.” I said, “That’s going to be the title of a new song because I know what’s behind that. You lost your little girl and you’re going to have her again, and you’re going to be able to raise her under perfect conditions. What a wonderful blessing.”

We hope that these few moments together have inspired you to feel a deep longing for the life that awaits us in Heaven and the earth made new. By God’s grace, we shall enjoy the ultimate camp meeting experience in His very presence! Please take out your sheet music, as we sing “Uncle Henry” de Fluiter’s best-known hymn, “Homesick for Heaven.”

Homesick for Heaven

[written 1950]

So dear to my heart is the promise of God,
A home with the pure and blest;
Where Earth-weary pilgrims, strangers here below,
Will find their eternal rest.

'Tis Eden, fair Eden, I long to behold,
Where naught can despoil that's fair;
Where saints of all ages hold communion sweet,
The glories of Heaven share.

But chiefest of all is the thot that enthralls,
That I shall behold my King;
Rejoice in His presence, revel in His grace,
And ever His praises sing.

Refrain

I'm homesick for Heaven,
Seems I cannot wait,
Yearning to enter Zion's pearly gate;
There, never a heartache, never a care,
I long for my home over there.
[Henry de Fluiter, *Songs of Victory*, No. 2]

Benediction

May the great God of Heaven and Earth sanctify you and put within your heart such a longing for Heaven that nothing will dim that glorious hope until we shall enjoy the fellowship of all the redeemed and the unfallen beings in God's very presence for all eternity. In the name of Jesus, let all enthusiastically say, Amen!