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IN PRINT



RANDY
ALCORN

Chapter 39

Will Animals Inhabit the New Earth?

People often ask me whether animals will be in Heaven. Their second question, which is discussed in the next chapter, is whether they'll ever see their pets again. To some people, these are merely sentimental questions. To others, they are very important. Children especially want to know the answers. What do we tell them when they ask?

Scripture says a great deal about animals, portraying them as Earth's second most important inhabitants. God entrusted animals to us, and our relationships with animals are a significant part of our lives.

Isaiah 11:6-9 speaks of a coming glorious era on Earth when "the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Some interpreters contend that this passage speaks only of the Millennium, but as we've seen, Isaiah anticipates an *eternal* Kingdom of God on Earth. Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 specifically speak of the New Earth. Sandwiched between them is a reference very similar to that in Isaiah 11: "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. . . . They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord" (65:25).

When will there be *no more harm* on the earth? Not on the old Earth or even in the Millennium, which will end in rebellion and warfare, but on the New Earth, where there will be no more sin, death, or suffering (Revelation 21:4). These descriptions of animals peacefully inhabiting the earth *may* have application to a millennial kingdom on the old Earth, but their primary reference appears to be to God's eternal Kingdom, where mankind and animals will enjoy a redeemed Earth.

Do Animals Have Souls?

When God made the animals, he made "the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:25). Animals were important in Eden; therefore, unless there's revelation to the contrary, the principle of continuity suggests that they'll be important on the New Earth.

Like humans, animals were formed from the ground. "Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air" (Genesis 2:19). When God breathed a spirit into Adam's body, made from the earth, Adam became *nephesh*, a "living being" or "soul" (Genesis 2:7). Remarkably, the same Hebrew word, *nephesh*, is used for animals and for people. We are specifically told that not only people,

but animals have “the breath of life” in them (Genesis 1:30; 2:7; 6:17; 7:15, 22). God hand-made animals, linking them both to the earth and humanity.

Am I suggesting animals have souls? Certainly they do not have *human* souls. Animals aren't created in God's image, and they aren't equal to humans in any sense. Nonetheless, there's a strong biblical case for animals having non-human souls. I didn't take this seriously until I studied the usage of the Hebrew and Greek words *nephesh* and *psyche*, often translated “soul” when referring to humans. (*Nephesh* is translated *psyche* in the Septuagint.) The fact that these words are often used of animals is compelling evidence that they have non-human souls. That's what most Christians in the past believed. In their book *Beyond Death*, Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland point out, “It wasn't until the advent of seventeenth-century Enlightenment . . . that the existence of animal souls was even questioned in Western civilization. Throughout the history of the church, the classic understanding of living things has included the doctrine that animals, as well as humans, have souls.”²⁹³

I cannot emphasize strongly enough that humans and animals are different. Humans continue to exist after death, but that may not be the case for animals. However, to do justice to Scripture, we need to recognize that people and animals share something unique: They are living beings. Because God has a future plan for both mankind and Earth, it strongly suggests that he has a future plan for animals as well.

Why Did God Save Animals from the Flood?

One of the most revealing Old Testament pictures of God's redemptive work is the Flood and Noah's ark. When God saved people from the destruction of the Flood, he also took great care to save the animals, the people's companions and helpers. God commanded Noah, “You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive” (Genesis 6:19-20).

After the Flood, God made a covenant with Noah, and in that new covenant God included animals. Notice the repeated emphasis on animals:

God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and *with every living creature* that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—*every living creature* on earth. . . . Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and *every living creature* with you, a covenant for all generations to come. . . . I will remember my covenant between me and you and *all living creatures of every kind*. . . . Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and *all living creatures of every kind* on the earth.” So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and *all life on the earth*.” (Genesis 9:9-17, emphasis added)

God's plan for a renewed Earth after the Flood emphatically involved animals. Wouldn't we expect his plan for a renewed Earth after the future judgment to likewise include animals? If the rescue of mankind in the ark is a picture of redemption, doesn't

the rescue of the animals in the ark also anticipate their restoration as part of God's redemptive purposes?

In 2 Peter 3:5-7, we see a direct parallel between God's past judgment of the earth with water and his future judgment with fire. Mankind was judged in the Flood, and on his coattails most animals also perished. Eight human beings were rescued from the Flood to inhabit the new post-Flood Earth, but God didn't limit his rescue to people. He rescued representatives of every animal species to also occupy this new Earth. This is a powerful picture of what Romans 8 states—mankind and animals and all creation are linked together not only in curse and judgment but also in blessing and deliverance. Together they will experience life on a New Earth.

Selected humans, animals, vegetation, and geographical features (including mountains) were preserved by God in his judgment by water. Shouldn't we expect the same in his judgment by fire?

What Does God Show Us about Animals' Importance?

God uses animals to fulfill his purposes. He ordered ravens to feed Elijah (1 Kings 17:4, 6). He "provided a great fish to swallow Jonah" (Jonah 1:17). He sent a fish with a coin in its mouth to teach his disciples a lesson (Matthew 17:27).

Consider the story of Balaam and his donkey (Numbers 22). God sends an angel to stop Balaam from doing evil. Balaam doesn't see the angel, but the donkey does. She veers off the road, and Balaam beats her. The donkey sees the angel twice more. Each time she veers off, and each time Balaam beats her. "Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?'" (v. 28). Significantly, the wording doesn't suggest God put words in the donkey's mouth, as in ventriloquism; he "opened the donkey's mouth," permitting her to verbalize what appear to be actual thoughts and feelings.

Finally, God opens Balaam's eyes to see the angel, who asks him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? . . . If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her" (Numbers 22:32-33).

Note that the angel says the donkey saved Balaam's life. If she hadn't, the angel would've killed Balaam while saving the donkey. God sometimes protects animals while judging their human masters. Animals, it appears, can have thoughts and feelings and can be responsive to realities in the spiritual realm that people are blind to. Furthermore, God cares about the welfare of his animals and holds us accountable for them.

When God sent Jonah to rescue Nineveh, God expressed his concern not only for the people in Nineveh but for its "many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:11). After Jonah warned Nineveh of coming destruction, the king commanded his people: "Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God" (Jonah 3:7-8). Both people *and* animals were commanded to fast and put on sackcloth—explicitly spiritual rituals.

God's care for animals appears even in the Ten Commandments: "Six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your

livestock, and any foreigners living among you” (Exodus 20:9-10, NLT). Animals also need rest. God carved into stone his care for them.

Some people accuse God of disrespect for animals because of the sacrificial system. But it was only because animals, created with the breath of life, are so loved by God and mankind that they qualify for the highest representative role imaginable: symbolizing God’s messianic Redeemer. Lambs were often beloved pets (2 Samuel 12:3). It was because of their value that their sacrifice revealed sin’s horror and the exorbitant cost of redemption. Millions of lambs were slaughtered in Israel’s history, each pointing to Christ’s redemptive work.

How Will People and Animals Relate?

In the Genesis account of creation, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18). God then brought animals and birds to the man. Only afterward did God create the woman as a more suitable helper.

God placed animals under the man’s benevolent care: “Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28). This relationship is celebrated: “You made [mankind] ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas” (Psalm 8:6-8).

God created us to be stewards of animals. He holds us accountable for how we treat them. “The godly are concerned for the welfare of their animals” (Proverbs 12:10, NLT). We are caretakers for the animals, but they belong to God, not us: “For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills. Every bird of the mountains and all the animals of the field belong to me” (Psalm 50:10-11, NLT).

Some people regard emotional attachment to animals as a modern development. But many cultures’ historical records demonstrate otherwise. The prophet Nathan spoke to King David of the poor man who had a little lamb “who shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him” (2 Samuel 12:3). There’s no suggestion this man’s affection for his pet was inappropriate. David, unaware the story was told to expose his own sin, angrily responded that the man who stole the precious pet deserved to die.

We needn’t speculate how God might populate a perfect Earth. He populated Eden with animals, under the rule of people. God doesn’t make mistakes. There’s every reason to believe he’ll restore this self-proclaimed “very good” arrangement on the New Earth. We should expect the New Earth to be a place where we’ll fulfill our calling to be faithful rulers and stewards of animals.

God directed Adam to name the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). The process of naming involved a personal relationship with the name-bearer. Note that Adam wasn’t instructed to name the plants, only his wife and the animals, indicating their special relationship.

Eden was perfect. But without animals Eden wouldn’t be Eden. The New Earth is the new Eden—Paradise regained, with the curse of the first Adam reversed, transformed into the blessing of the second Adam (Romans 5:14-15). Would God take away from us in Heaven what he gave, for delight and companionship and help, to Adam and Eve in Eden? Would he revoke his decision to put animals with people, under their care? Since

he'll fashion the New Earth with renewed people, wouldn't we expect him also to include renewed animals?

Will Animals Praise God?

Throughout Scripture we read that animals praise God. I don't know exactly how animals praise God, but our inability to understand it shouldn't keep us from believing it.

Consider the psalms. Psalm 148 commands all of creation to praise the Lord, including the animals: "Wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens" (vv. 10-13). If in some sense fallen animals, shadows of what they once were, can praise God on this fallen Earth, how much more should we expect them to do so on the New Earth? "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6). Since animals are said to have breath, they are included among those directed to praise God.

Passages in Revelation also indicate that the animals will praise their creator: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!'" (Revelation 5:13). What are these "creatures" said to do? To sing praises to God in worship. If "every creature in heaven and on earth" includes animals, then animals praise God.

The most striking example of animals praising God in Heaven is often overlooked because of word selection in our Bible translations. We're told eight times in Revelation of "living creatures" in the intermediate Heaven: "Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.' . . . The living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne" (Revelation 4:8-9).

The word translated "living creatures" is *zoon*. Throughout most of the New Testament the word is translated "animal" and is used to indicate animals sacrificed in the Temple and wild, irrational animals (Hebrews 13:11; 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 1:10). In the Old Testament, the Septuagint used *zoon* to translate the Hebrew words for animals, including the "living creatures" of the sea (Genesis 1:21; Ezekiel 47:9). In extrabiblical writings, *zoon* commonly referred to ordinary animals and was used of the Egyptians' divine animals and the mythological bird called the Phoenix (1 Clement 25:2-3). In virtually every case inside and outside of Scripture, this word means not a person, not an angel, but an *animal*.

The King James Version translates *zoon* "beasts" in Revelation, but the negative connotations of that word led subsequent translators to settle on "living creatures." The most natural translation would be simply "animals." That word would likely have been chosen by translators if it didn't sound so strange for readers to envision talking animals praising God around his throne! The "living creatures" look like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle (Revelation 4:7). They appear to be the same creatures of Ezekiel 1:5-14 and Ezekiel 10:10-14, also called the cherubim, who are distinguished from angels (Revelation 15:7). The cherubim are first mentioned in Genesis 3:24, as Eden's guardians. Their images were carved out of gold and placed on the Ark of the Covenant, indicating their closeness to God.

Somehow we have failed to grasp that the “living creatures” who cry out “Holy, holy, holy” are *animals*—living, breathing, intelligent and articulate *animals* who dwell in God’s presence, worshiping and praising him. They preexisted and are greater than the animals we know. Perhaps they’re the prototype creatures of Heaven after whom God designed Earth’s animals. But even though they’re highly intelligent and expressive, they’re still animals; that’s what Scripture calls them.

When we grasp these passages, we’ll see the error of one writer’s statement, “Clearly animals do not fit into the main purpose of heaven, which is the articulation of God’s praise.”²⁹⁴ On the contrary, the *primary* beings shown articulating God’s praise in Heaven, along with angels and humans (the elders), are animals!

Although earthly animals aren’t capable of verbalizing praise as these animals in Heaven do, the passages speaking of earthly animals praising God and the story of Balaam’s donkey clearly suggest that animals have a spiritual dimension far beyond our understanding. The Bible tells us that animals, in their own way, praise God. By extending to them the blessings of mankind’s redemption, just as he extended to them the curses of mankind’s sin, God will grant them an important role on the New Earth.

Once we recognize that the living creatures are animals, we need not see other references to animals in the present Heaven as figurative. For instance, Elijah was taken up to Heaven in a chariot pulled by horses (2 Kings 2:11). Revelation suggests there are horses in the intermediate Heaven (Revelation 6:2-8); in fact, there are enough horses for the vast armies of Heaven to ride (Revelation 19:11-14). There are also invisible horses in angelic armies dispatched to Earth (2 Kings 6:17).

These horses could be symbolic, but as we saw in chapter 6, we find many other references to physical objects in the intermediate Heaven, including Christ’s resurrection body. It’s therefore possible that besides the “living creatures,” horses as well as other animals could be in the present Heaven. Even if this isn’t the case, however, we have every reason to expect animals will find their ultimate home on the New Earth.

Will We See God’s attributes in Animals?

“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” (Romans 1:20). Often this verse is understood to refer to stars, mountains, lakes, and natural wonders. But we shouldn’t overlook God’s supreme creation besides mankind: animals. God’s invisible qualities, his divine attributes, are evident in animals.

If this is true even now, how much more will it be true on the New Earth? What will it be like to look at lions, study them, touch them, and see their power, nobility, and royalty—*and see God in them?* What will it be like to look at lambs and see their loving gentleness, meekness, and servanthood, to ponder their role in first covenant sacrifices—*and see God in them?*

In the Old Testament God asks Job, “Do you give the horse his strength . . . ? Do you make him leap like a locust . . . ? He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength. . . . He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing” (Job 39:19-22). The horse’s strength, courage, and determination testify to those virtues in its Maker.

What qualities of loyalty, devotion, ingenuity, and single-mindedness will we see in animals on the New Earth? What will we learn from mice, iguanas, or armadillos? Certainly we’ll praise God for his creativity and humor (consider the duckbill platypus).

Once the Curse is lifted, we'll see more attributes of God in animals than we've ever thought about. Consider what's visible in otters, dogs, and countless other animals: God's playfulness. (Did you think human beings invented play on our own?) I for one have praised God for and been drawn to him by the playfulness, exuberance, love, and devotion in the dogs I've had over the years. They communicate the beauty of their Maker.

Adam, Noah, and Jesus are the three heads of the three Earths. When Adam was created, God surrounded him with animals. When Noah was delivered from the Flood, God surrounded him with animals. When Jesus was born, God surrounded him with animals. When Jesus establishes the renewed Earth, with renewed men and women, don't you think he'll surround himself with renewed animals?



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with author Randy Alcorn

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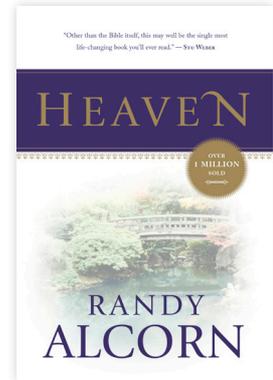
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About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.

Randy resides in Gresham, Oregon with his wife, Nanci. They have two married daughters and five grandsons. He enjoys hanging out with his family, biking, tennis, research, and reading.



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Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God’s Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, unreconciled, and unsupported people around the world. The common element in all of our writing and teaching ministry is an emphasis on seeing life through the eyes of eternity, and thereby learning to live now to the glory of God.

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