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life-changing book you’ll ever read.” — STU WEBER

# HEAVEN

OVER  
750,000  
IN PRINT



RANDY  
ALCORN

# Heaven

By Randy Alcorn

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# Preface

## About This Book

Bookstores overflow with accounts of near-death and after-death experiences, complete with angels giving guided tours of Heaven. A few of these books may have authentic components, but many are unbiblical and misleading.

We Christians who believe God’s Word are partly to blame for this. Why? We have failed to explore and explain the Bible’s magnificent teachings about Heaven. No wonder a flood of unbiblical thinking has rushed in to fill the vacuum. Because the human heart cries out for answers about the *afterlife*, our silence on Heaven is particularly striking.

The truth is, in our seminaries, churches, and families, we have given amazingly little attention to the place where we will live forever with Christ and his people—the New Earth, in the new universe. This eternal Heaven is the central subject of this book. It’s a subject I’ve found to be fascinating, thrilling, and life-changing.

### Test This Book by Scripture

From the beginning, I want to make it clear that it’s vitally important that this book be true to Scripture. I believe that most of my conclusions, even those that significantly depart from current evangelical thinking, will stand up to biblical scrutiny. Inevitably, however, some may not. In the context of prophetic statements, the apostle Paul says, “Test everything. Hold on to the good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It’s up to you to test by God’s Word what I say, hold on to the good, and reject the bad.

Through biblical study and extensive reading, dialogue, and critique, I’ve tried to detect any conclusions that don’t pass Scripture’s test, to eliminate them before this book was published. But despite my best efforts, some errors undoubtedly have slipped through. I call on readers to be like the Bereans, who “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). Don’t throw out the baby of truth with the bathwater of what you regard as my mistakes—but, by all means, *do* throw out the bathwater!

I invite you to contact me if you believe you have biblical grounds for disagreeing with anything in this book. I am open to correction—in fact, I *seek* it, and I will make any warranted changes in future editions. (Keep in mind, though, that “I’ve never heard this before . . .” and “I’ve always thought that . . .” and “Our denomination teaches . . .” are not biblical arguments.)

Many things in this book will be new even to readers who are veteran students of Scripture. New ideas are rightly suspect because they are often heretical. However, when biblical truths have been long neglected or ignored, attempts to present them may sound far-fetched. They may appear to be adding to or misinterpreting Scripture, when in fact they are simply portraying what Scripture has said all along but we’ve failed to grasp. In

these pages I will introduce some biblical truths that I believe have been long ignored or spiritualized and thereby stripped of their richness and significance.

## Structure and Content

Examining the table of contents will give you a good feel for this book. In part 1, “A Theology of Heaven,” I will explain the difference between the present, or intermediate, Heaven (where Christians go when they die) and the ultimate, eternal Heaven (where God will dwell with his people on the New Earth). Don’t be afraid of the word *theology*—it simply means a study of God’s relation to the world—and don’t underestimate your ability to understand what God has revealed to you in his Word. We’ll discuss whether the current Heaven is a physical place; whether people there remember life on Earth; whether they pray for loved ones on Earth and can actually see what’s going on here; and we’ll answer the question, If people in Heaven are aware of events on Earth, including suffering, how could it be Heaven?

The backbone of part 1 is a discussion of the book’s central subject, the New Earth. I’ll present foundational biblical truths concerning God’s larger plan in redemption, especially in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and what that means for the New Earth. I will answer questions such as, What will it mean to see God? What will our relationships with people be like? What will it mean to rule the earth with Christ?

Part 2, “Questions and Answers about Heaven,” addresses specific questions about life on the New Earth that arise out of the foundational teachings in part 1—questions such as, Will the New Earth be like Eden? Will there be animals on the New Earth? What kind of city is the New Jerusalem? What will our bodies be like? Will we eat and drink? Will we work? use machinery? play? study and learn? create art and music and culture?

You may find that the material in the first part of the book is paradigm shifting. If you don’t understand the foundational principles, however, you will come to the second half with a different set of assumptions, and what I’m saying may not make sense. The soundness of my conclusions in the question and answer section depends on the biblical basis I present in part 1.

I sometimes skip around when reading a book, going straight to the chapters that deal with what interests me most. If you do this, I hope you’ll then go back to the foundational chapters to see what the book’s logic is built upon. If you are patient enough to read this book consecutively, I think you’ll be rewarded. Part 3, “Living in Light of Heaven,” encourages us to let the doctrine of Heaven transform us and fill us with joyful anticipation.

If I were dealing with the subject of Heaven in order of *importance*, I would begin with a discussion of God’s presence in Heaven and our relationship with him, because being with God and seeing his face is the central joy of Heaven and the source of all other joys. But there’s a major obstacle: Because of our wrong assumptions about the eternal state, we bring misguided perspectives to what it will mean to see God or be with him. We succumb to the vague, ethereal notions of eastern religions rather than build our understanding on the concrete, physical depictions of biblical and historical Christianity. We fail to envision God as forever incarnate

in the risen Christ, and we fail to recognize the New Earth as a physical environment, civilization, and culture in which God will dwell with us. Consequently, I must lay the biblical groundwork before I discuss what it will mean to live with God forever and answer other key questions about Heaven.

### **“I’ve Never Thought This Way Before”**

A friend asked me the central premise of this book. When I explained it briefly, he looked at me wide-eyed, incredulous. I rephrased it, using different Scriptures and illustrations. Suddenly, the light went on for him. He said, “The more you restate it in different ways, the more Scripture you use, the more it makes sense. But I’ve *never* thought this way before. I don’t think many people have. You’ll need to make your case carefully, or people just won’t believe it.”

I will try to make the case carefully and biblically. There is plenty in this book for everyone to disagree with. But I hope you’ll find that most of it rings true to Scripture and opens up exciting doors to imagining and anticipating everything that awaits God’s children in the magnificent world to come.

# Introduction

## The Subject of Heaven

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

*John 14:1-3*

The sense that we will live forever *somewhere* has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured Heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was an island in the faraway east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death.<sup>1</sup> Native Americans believed that in the afterlife their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo.<sup>2</sup> The *Gilgamesh* epic, an ancient Babylonian legend, refers to a resting place of heroes and hints at a tree of life. In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies had maps placed beside them as guides to the future world.<sup>3</sup> The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian fields while their horses grazed nearby. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, said, “The day thou fearest as the last is the birthday of eternity.” Although these depictions of the afterlife differ, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in life after death. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is.<sup>4</sup>

### Early Christians' Preoccupation with Heaven

The Roman catacombs, where the bodies of many martyred Christians were buried, contain tombs with inscriptions such as these:

- In Christ, Alexander is not dead, but lives.
- One who lives with God.
- He was taken up into his eternal home.<sup>5</sup>

One historian writes, “Pictures on the catacomb walls portray Heaven with beautiful landscapes, children playing, and people feasting at banquets.”<sup>6</sup>

In AD 125, a Greek named Aristides wrote to a friend about Christianity, explaining why this “new religion” was so successful: “If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.”<sup>7</sup>

In the third century, the church father Cyprian said, “Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us from this place and sets us free from the snares of the world, and restores us to



paradise and the kingdom. Anyone who has been in foreign lands longs to return to his own native land. . . . We regard paradise as our native land.”<sup>8</sup>

These early Christian perspectives sound almost foreign today, don't they? But their beliefs were rooted in the Scriptures, where the apostle Paul writes, “To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. . . . I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Philippians 1:21, 23). He also wrote, “As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. . . . We . . . would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8).

When Jesus told his disciples, “In my Father's house are many rooms. . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2), he deliberately chose common, physical terms (*house, rooms, place*) to describe where he was going and what he was preparing for us. He wanted to give his disciples (and us) something tangible to look forward to—an actual place where they (and we) would go to be with him.

This place is not an ethereal realm of disembodied spirits, because human beings are not suited for such a realm. A *place* is by nature physical, just as human beings are by nature physical. (We are also spiritual.) What we are suited for—what we've been specifically designed for—is a place like the one God made for us: Earth.

In this book, we'll see from Scripture an exciting yet strangely neglected truth—that God never gave up on his original plan for human beings to dwell on Earth. In fact, the climax of history will be the creation of new heavens and a New Earth, a resurrected universe inhabited by resurrected people living with the resurrected Jesus (Revelation 21:1-4).

## Our Terminal Disease

As human beings, we have a terminal disease called *mortality*. The current death rate is 100 percent. Unless Christ returns soon, we're all going to die. We don't like to think about death; yet, worldwide, 3 people die every second, 180 every minute, and nearly 11,000 every hour. If the Bible is right about what happens to us after death, it means that more than 250,000 people every day go either to Heaven or Hell.<sup>†</sup>

David said, “Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath” (Psalm 39:4-5). Picture a single breath escaping your mouth on a cold day and dissipating into the air. Such is the brevity of life here. The wise will consider what awaits us on the other side of this life that so quickly ends.

God uses suffering and impending death to unfasten us from this earth and to set our minds on what lies beyond. I've lost people close to me. (Actually, I haven't *lost* them, because I know where they are—rather, I've lost *contact* with them.) I've spent a lot of time talking to people who've been diagnosed with terminal diseases. These people, and their loved ones, have a sudden and insatiable interest in the afterlife. Most people live unprepared for death. But those who are wise will go to a reliable source to investigate what's on the other

side. And if they discover that the choices they make during their brief stay in this world will matter in the world to come, they'll want to adjust those choices accordingly.

Ancient merchants often wrote the words *memento mori*—"think of death"—in large letters on the first page of their accounting books.<sup>9</sup> Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, commissioned a servant to stand in his presence each day and say, "Philip, you will die." In contrast, France's Louis XIV decreed that the word *death* not be uttered in his presence. Most of us are more like Louis than Philip, denying death and avoiding the thought of it except when it's forced upon us. We live under the fear of death.

Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death, "so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

In light of the coming resurrection of the dead, the apostle Paul asks, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

What delivers us from the fear of death? What takes away death's sting? Only a relationship with the person who died on our behalf, the one who has gone ahead to make a place for us to live with him. If we don't know Jesus, we *will* fear death and its sting—and we should.

## Seeing the Shore

Perhaps you've come to this book burdened, discouraged, depressed, or even traumatized. Perhaps your dreams—your marriage, career, or ambitions—have crumbled. Perhaps you've become cynical or have lost hope. A biblical understanding of the truth about Heaven can change all that.

In 1952, young Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island, determined to swim to the shore of mainland California. She'd already been the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. The weather was foggy and chilly; she could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still, she swam for fifteen hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water along the way, her mother, in a boat alongside, told her she was close and that she could make it. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, she stopped swimming and was pulled out. It wasn't until she was on the boat that she discovered the shore was less than half a mile away. At a news conference the next day she said, "All I could see was the fog. . . . I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it."<sup>10</sup>

Consider her words: "I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it." For believers, that shore is Jesus and being with him in the place that he promised to prepare for us, where we will live with him forever. The shore we should look for is that of the New Earth. If we can see through the fog and picture our eternal home in our mind's eye, it will comfort and energize us.

If you're weary and don't know how you can keep going, I pray this book will give you vision, encouragement, and hope. No matter how tough life gets, if you can see the shore and draw your strength from Christ, you'll make it.

I pray this book will help you see the shore.

# Part I

## A Theology of Heaven

### Section One

#### REALIZING OUR DESTINY

#### CHAPTER 1

### Are You Looking Forward to Heaven?

The man who is about to sail for Australia or New Zealand as a settler, is naturally anxious to know something about his future home, its climate, its employments, its inhabitants, its ways, its customs. All these are subjects of deep interest to him. You are leaving the land of your nativity, you are going to spend the rest of your life in a new hemisphere. It would be strange indeed if you did not desire information about your new abode. Now surely, if we hope to dwell for ever in that “better country, even a heavenly one,” we ought to seek all the knowledge we can get about it. Before we go to our eternal home we should try to become acquainted with it.

*J. C. Ryle*

Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan preacher, often spoke of Heaven. He said, “It becomes us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven . . . to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness?”<sup>11</sup>

In his early twenties, Edwards composed a set of life resolutions. One read, “Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can.”<sup>12</sup>

Some may think it odd and inappropriate that Edwards was so committed to pursuing happiness for himself in Heaven. But Pascal was right when he said, “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.”<sup>13</sup> And if we all seek happiness, why not do as Edwards did and seek it where it can actually be found—in the person of Jesus and the place called Heaven?

Tragically, however, most people do not find their joy in Christ and Heaven. In fact, many people find no joy at all when they think about Heaven.

A pastor once confessed to me, “Whenever I think about Heaven, it makes me depressed. I’d rather just cease to exist when I die.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I can’t stand the thought of that endless tedium. To float around in the clouds with nothing to do but strum a harp . . . it’s all so terribly boring. Heaven doesn’t sound much better than Hell. I’d rather be annihilated than spend eternity in a place like that.”

Where did this Bible-believing, seminary-educated pastor get such a view of Heaven? Certainly not from Scripture, where Paul said to depart and be with Christ was *far better* than staying on a sin-cursed Earth (Philippians 1:23). My friend was more honest about it than most, yet I've found that many Christians share the same misconceptions about Heaven.

After reading my novel *Deadline*, which portrays Heaven as a real and exciting place, a woman wrote me, "I've been a Christian since I was five. I'm married to a youth pastor. When I was seven, a teacher at my Christian school told me that when I got to Heaven, I wouldn't know anyone or anything from earth. I was terrified of dying. I was never told any different by anyone. . . . It's been really hard for me to advance in my Christian walk because of this fear of Heaven and eternal life."

Let those words sink in: "This *fear* of heaven and eternal life." Referring to her recently transformed perspective, she said, "You don't know the weight that's been lifted off of me. . . . Now I can't wait to get to Heaven."

## Our Unbiblical View of Heaven

When an English vicar was asked by a colleague what he expected after death, he replied, "Well, if it comes to that, I suppose I shall enter into eternal bliss, but I really wish you wouldn't bring up such depressing subjects."<sup>14</sup>

Over the past fifteen years, I've received thousands of letters and have had hundreds of conversations concerning Heaven. I've spoken about Heaven at churches and conferences. I've written about Heaven and taught a seminary course titled "A Theology of Heaven." There's a great deal I don't know, but one thing I *do* know is what people think about Heaven. And frankly, I'm alarmed.

I agree with this statement by John Eldredge in *The Journey of Desire*: "Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service. . . . We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks. *Forever and ever? That's it? That's the good news?* And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more 'spiritual.' We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can."<sup>15</sup>

Gary Larson captured a common misperception of Heaven in one of his *Far Side* cartoons. In it a man with angel wings and a halo sits on a cloud, doing nothing, with no one nearby. He has the expression of someone marooned on a desert island with absolutely nothing to do. A caption shows his inner thoughts: "Wish I'd brought a magazine."

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain portrays a similar view of Heaven. The Christian spinster Miss Watson takes a dim view of Huck's fun-loving spirit. According to Huck, "She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. . . . I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go

there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.”<sup>16</sup>

The pious Miss Watson had nothing to say about Heaven that appealed to Huck. (And nothing, if we’re honest, that appeals to *us*.) What would have attracted him was a place where he could do meaningful and pleasurable things with enjoyable people. In fact, that’s a far more accurate depiction of what Heaven will actually be like. If Miss Watson had told Huck what the Bible says about living in a resurrected body and being with people we love on a resurrected Earth with gardens and rivers and mountains and untold adventures—now *that* would have gotten his attention!

When it came to Heaven and Hell, Mark Twain never quite got it. Under the weight of age, he said in his autobiography, “The burden of pain, care, misery grows heavier year by year. At length ambition is dead, pride is dead, vanity is dead, longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; where they achieved nothing; where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness.”<sup>17</sup>

What a contrast to the perspective that Charles Spurgeon, his contemporary, had on death: “To come to Thee is to come home from exile, to come to land out of the raging storm, to come to rest after long labour, to come to the goal of my desires and the summit of my wishes.”<sup>18</sup>

We do not desire to eat gravel. Why? Because God did not design us to eat gravel. Trying to develop an appetite for a disembodied existence in a non-physical Heaven is like trying to develop an appetite for gravel. No matter how sincere we are, and no matter how hard we try, it’s not going to work. Nor should it.

What God made us to desire, and therefore what we *do* desire if we admit it, is exactly what he promises to those who follow Jesus Christ: a resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected Christ on a resurrected Earth. Our desires correspond precisely to God’s plans. It’s not that we want something, so we engage in wishful thinking that what we want exists. It’s the opposite—the reason we want it is precisely because God has planned for it to exist. As we’ll see, resurrected people living in a resurrected universe isn’t our idea—it’s *God’s*.

Nineteenth-century British theologian J. C. Ryle said, “I pity the man who never thinks about heaven.”<sup>19</sup> We could also say, “I pity the man who never thinks *accurately* about Heaven.” It’s our inaccurate thinking, I believe, that causes us to choose to think so little about Heaven.

## **Theological Neglect of Heaven**

John Calvin, the great expositor, never wrote a commentary on Revelation and never dealt with the eternal state at any length. Though he encourages meditation on Heaven in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his theology of Heaven seems strikingly weak compared to his theology of God, Christ, salvation, Scripture, and the church. This is understandable in light of the pressing theological issues of his day, but surprisingly few

theologians in the centuries since Calvin have attempted to fill in the gaps. A great deal has been written about eschatology—the study of the end times—but comparatively little about Heaven. (Only a small number of the books on Heaven I’ve collected are still in print.)

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote an in-depth two-volume set titled *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Remarkably, he had nothing to say about Heaven.<sup>20</sup>

William Shedd’s three-volume *Dogmatic Theology* contains eighty-seven pages on eternal punishment, but only two on Heaven.<sup>21</sup>

In his nine-hundred-page theology, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones devotes less than two pages to the eternal state and the New Earth.<sup>22</sup>

Louis Berkhof’s classic *Systematic Theology* devotes thirty-eight pages to creation, forty pages to baptism and communion, and fifteen pages to the intermediate state. Yet it contains only two pages on Hell and one page on the eternal state.

When all that’s said about the eternal Heaven is limited to page 737 of a 737-page systematic theology like Berkhof’s, it raises a question: Does Scripture really have so little to say? Are there so few theological implications to this subject? The biblical answer, I believe, is an emphatic *no!*

In *The Eclipse of Heaven*, theology professor A. J. Conyers writes, “Even to one without religious commitment and theological convictions, it should be an unsettling thought that this world is attempting to chart its way through some of the most perilous waters in history, having now decided to ignore what was for nearly two millennia its fixed point of reference—its North Star. The certainty of judgment, the longing for heaven, the dread of hell: these are not prominent considerations in our modern discourse about the important matters of life. But they once were.”<sup>23</sup>

Conyers argues that until recently the doctrine of Heaven was enormously important to the church.<sup>24</sup> Belief in Heaven was not just a nice auxiliary sentiment. It was a central, life-sustaining conviction.

Sadly, even for countless Christians, that is no longer true.

## Off Our Radar Screens

“An overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death and that heaven and hell exist,” according to a Barna Research Group poll.<sup>25</sup> But what people actually believe about Heaven and Hell varies widely. A Barna spokesman said, “They’re cutting and pasting religious views from a variety of different sources—television, movies, conversations with their friends.”<sup>26</sup> The result is a highly subjective theology of the afterlife, disconnected from the biblical doctrine of Heaven.

I attended a fine Bible college and seminary, but I learned very little about Heaven. I don’t recall a single classroom discussion about the New Earth. In my Hebrews-to-Revelation class, we never made it to Revelation 21–22, the Bible’s most definitive passage on the eternal Heaven. In my eschatology class, we studied various

views of the Rapture and the Millennium, but almost no attention at all was given to the New Earth. In fact, I learned more about the strengths and weaknesses of belief in a mid-Tribulation Rapture than about Heaven and the New Earth combined.

Heaven suffers as a subject precisely because it comes last, not only in theological works but in seminary and Bible college classrooms. Teachers often get behind in their eschatology classes, enmeshed in the different views of Hell, Israel and the church, the Tribulation, and the Millennium. No time is left for discussing the new heavens and New Earth.

Imagine you're part of a NASA team preparing for a five-year mission to Mars. After a period of extensive training, the launch date finally arrives. As the rocket lifts off, one of your fellow astronauts says to you, "What do you know about Mars?"

Imagine shrugging your shoulders and saying, "Nothing. We never talked about it. I guess we'll find out when we get there." It's unthinkable, isn't it? It's inconceivable that your training would not have included extensive study of and preparation for your ultimate destination. Yet in seminaries, Bible schools, and churches across the United States and around the world, there is very little teaching about our ultimate destination: the new heavens and New Earth.

Many Christians who've gone to church all their adult lives (especially those under fifty) can't recall having heard a single sermon on Heaven. It's occasionally mentioned, but rarely emphasized, and *almost never* is it developed as a topic. We're told how to *get* to Heaven, and that it's a better destination than Hell, but we're taught remarkably little about Heaven itself.

Pastors may not think it's important to address the subject of Heaven because their seminary didn't have a required course on it—or even an elective. Similarly, when pastors don't preach on Heaven, their congregations assume that the Bible doesn't say much about it.

In 1937, Scottish theologian John Baillie wrote, "I will not ask how often during the last twenty-five years you and I have listened to an old-style warning against the flames of hell. I will not even ask how many sermons have been preached in our hearing about a future day of reckoning when men shall reap according as they have sown. It will be enough to ask how many preachers, during these years, have dwelt on the joys of heavenly rest with anything like the old ardent love and impatient longing."<sup>27</sup>

If this was the case then, how much truer is it now? Heaven has fallen off our radar screens. How can we set our hearts on Heaven when we have an impoverished theology of Heaven? How can we expect our children to be excited about Heaven—or to stay excited about it when they grow up? Why do we talk so little about Heaven? And why is the little we have to say so vague and lifeless?



## Where Do We Get Our Misconceptions?

I believe there's one central explanation for why so many of God's children have such a vague, negative, and uninspired view of Heaven: the work of Satan.

Jesus said of the devil, "When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Some of Satan's favorite lies are about Heaven. Revelation 13:6 tells us the satanic beast "opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven." Our enemy slanders three things: God's person, God's people, and God's place—namely, Heaven.<sup>†</sup>

After being forcibly evicted from Heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15), the devil became bitter not only toward God, but toward mankind and toward Heaven itself, the place that was no longer his. It must be maddening for him that we're now entitled to the home he was kicked out of. What better way for the devil and his demons to attack us than to whisper lies about the very place on which God tells us to set our hearts and minds?

Satan need not convince us that Heaven doesn't exist. He need only convince us that Heaven is a place of boring, unearthly existence. If we believe that lie, we'll be robbed of our joy and anticipation, we'll set our minds on this life and not the next, and we won't be motivated to share our faith. Why should we share the "good news" that people can spend eternity in a boring, ghostly place that even *we're* not looking forward to?

In *The Country of the Blind*, H. G. Wells writes of a tribe in a remote valley deep in a towering mountain range. During a terrible epidemic, all the villagers lose their sight. Eventually, entire generations grow up having no awareness of sight or the world they're unable to see. Because of their handicap, they do not know their true condition, nor can they understand what their world looks like. They cannot imagine what realms might lie beyond their valley.

Spiritually speaking, we live in the Country of the Blind. The disease of sin has blinded us to God and Heaven, which are real yet unseen. Fortunately, Jesus has come to our valley from Heaven to tell us about his father, the world beyond, and the world to come. If we listen to him—which will require a concerted effort not to listen to the lies of the devil—we will never be the same. Nor will we ever want to be.

Satan hates the New Heaven and the New Earth as much as a deposed dictator hates the new nation and new government that replaces his. Satan cannot stop Christ's redemptive work, but he can keep us from seeing the breadth and depth of redemption that extends to the earth and beyond. He cannot keep Christ from defeating him, but he can persuade us that Christ's victory is only partial, that God will abandon his original plan for mankind and the earth.

Because Satan hates us, he's determined to rob us of the joy we'd have if we believed what God tells us about the magnificent world to come.

## Resisting Naturalism's Spell

C. S. Lewis depicts another source of our misconceptions about Heaven: naturalism, the belief that the world can be understood in scientific terms, without recourse to spiritual or supernatural explanations.

In *The Silver Chair*, Puddleglum, Jill, and Eustace are captured in a sunless underground world by an evil witch who calls herself the queen of the underworld. The witch claims that her prisoners' memories of the overworld, Narnia, are but figments of their imagination. She laughs condescendingly at their child's game of "pretending" that there's a world above and a great ruler of that world.

When they speak of the sun that's visible in the world above, she asks them what a sun is. Groping for words, they compare it to a giant lamp. She replies, "When you try to think out clearly what this *sun* must be, you cannot tell me. You can only tell me it is like the lamp. Your *sun* is a dream; and there is nothing in that dream that was not copied from the lamp."

When they speak of Aslan the lion, king of Narnia, she says they have seen cats and have merely projected those images into the make-believe notion of a giant cat. They begin to waver.

The queen, who hates Aslan and wishes to conquer Narnia, tries to deceive them into thinking that whatever they cannot perceive with their senses must be imaginary—which is the essence of naturalism. The longer they are unable to see the world they remember, the more they lose sight of it.

She says to them, hypnotically, "There never was any world but mine," and they repeat after her, abandoning reason, parroting her deceptions. Then she coos softly, "There is no Narnia, no Overworld, no sky, no sun, no Aslan." This illustrates Satan's power to mold our weak minds as we are trapped in a dark, fallen world. We're prone to deny the great realities of God and Heaven, which we can no longer see because of the Curse.

Finally, when it appears they've succumbed to the queen's lies, Puddleglum breaks the spell and says to the enraged queen, "Suppose we *have* only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that . . . the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours *is* the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow."<sup>28</sup>

The truth is exactly the opposite of naturalism's premise—in fact, the dark world's lamps are copies of the sun, and its cats are copies of Aslan. Heaven isn't an extrapolation of earthly thinking; Earth is an extension of Heaven, made by the Creator King. The realm Puddleglum and the children believe in, Narnia and its sun and its universe, is real, and the witch's world—which she tempts them to believe is the only real world—is in fact a lesser realm, corrupted and in bondage.

When the queen's lies are exposed, she metamorphoses into the serpent she really is, whereupon Rilian, the human king and Aslan's appointed ruler of Narnia, slays her. The despondent slaves who'd lived in darkness are delivered. Light floods in, and their home below becomes a joyous place again because they realize there is indeed a bright world above and Aslan truly rules the universe. They laugh and celebrate, turning cartwheels and popping firecrackers.

Sometimes we're like Lewis's characters. We succumb to naturalistic assumptions that what we see is real and what we don't see isn't. God can't be real, we conclude, because we can't see him. And Heaven can't be real because we can't see it. But we must recognize our blindness. The blind must take by faith that there are stars in the sky. If they depend on their ability to see, they will conclude there are no stars.

We must work to resist the bewitching spell of naturalism. Sitting here in a dark world, we must remind ourselves what Scripture tells us about Heaven. We will one day be delivered from the blindness that separates us from the real world. We'll realize then the stupefying bewitchment we've lived under. By God's grace, may we stomp out the bewitching fires of naturalism so that we may clearly see the liberating truth about Christ the King and Heaven, his Kingdom.



eternal perspective ministries  
with author Randy Alcorn

## Learn more about *Heaven*

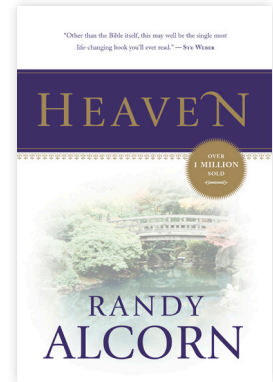
In the most comprehensive and definitive book on Heaven to date, Randy invites you to picture Heaven the way Scripture describes it—a bright, vibrant, and physical New Earth, free from sin, suffering, and death, and brimming with Christ’s presence, wondrous natural beauty, and the richness of human culture as God intended it.

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And the next time you hear someone say, “We can’t begin to imagine what Heaven will be like,” you will be able to tell them, “I can.”

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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.



## About Eternal Perspective Ministries

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.

You can order all of Randy’s books and products through EPM’s online store at [www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org).