

Everything you always
wanted to know about

HEAVEN

Randy Alcorn

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wanted to know about Heaven*

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Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Heaven

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Author's Note

THE MATERIAL IN this little book is just a slice of all you can discover from Scripture about what Heaven is like and what it will be like for God's people some day. With help from my editors, Jason and Ron Beers, what you see here is taken from my larger, more comprehensive book entitled *Heaven*. I hope that after you read *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Heaven*, you'll be enriched and will be motivated to learn more and more about the amazing place our God of wonders is preparing for his children.

Introduction

IN THIS BOOK, we'll see from Scripture an exciting yet strangely neglected truth: 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.

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 that 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.

Jesus said of the devil, "When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Some of Satan's favorite lies are about Heaven. Satan need not convince us that Heaven doesn't exist. He need convince us only 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 even we're not looking forward to?

Fortunately, Jesus has come 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 devil's lies—we will never be the same. Nor will we ever want to be. Satan 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 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.

By the time you finish reading this book, you will have a biblical basis for envisioning the eternal Heaven. You will understand that in order to get a picture of Heaven—which will one day be centered on the New Earth—you don't need to look up at the clouds; you simply need to look around you and imagine what all this would be like without sin and death and suffering and corruption.

So look out a window. Take a walk. Use your God-given skills to paint or draw or build a shed or write a book. But imagine our world—all of it—in its original condition: The happy dog with the wagging tail, not the snarling beast, beaten and starved.


The flowers not wilted, the grass not dying, the blue sky without pollution. People smiling and joyful, not angry, depressed, and empty. If you're not in a particularly beautiful place, close your eyes and envision the most beautiful place you've ever been—complete with palm trees, raging rivers, jagged mountains, waterfalls, or snowdrifts.

Think of friends or family members who loved Jesus and are with him now. Picture them with you, walking together in this place. All of you have powerful bodies, stronger than those of Olympic decathletes. You are laughing, playing, talking, and reminiscing. You reach up to a tree to pick an apple or orange. You take a bite. It's so sweet that it's startling. You've never tasted anything so good. Now you see someone coming toward you. It's Jesus, with a big smile on his face. You fall to your knees in worship. He pulls you up and embraces you.

At last, you're with the person you were made for, in the place you were made to be. Everywhere you go, there will be new people and places to enjoy, new things to discover. What's that you smell? A feast. A party's

ahead, and you're invited. There's exploration and work to be done—you can't wait to get started.


I have a biblical basis for all these statements, and for many more. After you examine what Scripture says, I hope that the next time you hear people say, "We can't begin to imagine what Heaven will be like," you'll be able to tell them, "I can."



PART I

The Present Heaven

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT WHERE
WE GO FIRST WHEN WE DIE



What is the “present Heaven”?

1 Thessalonians 4:13 . . . Dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope.

Philippians 1:23 . . . I’m torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.

The apostle Paul considered it vital for us to know what happens when we die: “Dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died.”

Most of this book will be centered on the eternal Heaven—the place where we will live forever after the final Resurrection. But because we’ve all had loved ones die, and we ourselves will die unless Christ returns first, we should consider what Scripture teaches about the present Heaven—the place Christians go when they die—and where they will live until the return of Christ and the final Resurrection.

When Christians die, they enter into what is often called the “intermediate state,” a transitional period between their past lives on Earth and their future resurrection to life on the New Earth. By definition, an intermediate state or location is temporary. “Intermediate” does not mean a halfway place that’s only sort of Heaven, but the place where we will live between our lives here and the “final” Heaven that will be centered on the New Earth.

Life in the Heaven we go to when we die is “far better” than living here on Earth under the Curse, away from the direct presence of God. Though it will be a wonderful place, the present Heaven is not the place we are made for, the place God promises to refashion for us to live in forever. God’s children are destined for life as resurrected beings on a resurrected Earth.

Are there actually two distinct Heavens?

Revelation 21:1 . . . I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.

Books on Heaven often fail to distinguish between the intermediate and the eternal states, using the one word—Heaven—as all-inclusive. But this keeps us from understanding important biblical distinctions.

In this book, when referring to the place believers go after death, I will sometimes use the theological phrase “intermediate Heaven,” but more often I will say the “present Heaven.” This is because the latter term seems less confusing to most people. However, both terms refer to exactly the same place.

The present Heaven is a temporary residence where departed saints live until the return of Christ and our bodily resurrection. The eternal Heaven, the New Earth, is our true home, the place where we will live forever with our Lord and one another. The great redemptive promises of God will find their

ultimate fulfillment on the New Earth, not in the present Heaven.

Once we abandon our assumption that Heaven cannot change, it all makes sense. God does not change; he's immutable. But God clearly says that Heaven will change. It will eventually be relocated to the New Earth. Similarly, what we now refer to as Hell will also be relocated. After the Great White Throne Judgment, Hell will be cast into the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15).



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with author Randy Alcorn

More about *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Heaven*

This beautiful little book provides solid, biblically based answers to more than 100 questions about God, Heaven, angels, and eternity.

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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*.



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, and unsupported people around the world. You can order all of Randy's books and products through EPM's online store at **www.epm.org**.