

TH 599 THEOLOGY OF HEAVEN
Corban University School of Ministry
Course Syllabus • May 8-10, 2012

Randy Alcorn, Instructor

DESCRIPTION

This course is a biblical, theological, and practical exploration of the theology of Heaven. The instructor will strive to bring eternity to light in a way that will surprise students, spark their imagination, and change how they live.

RATIONALE

The subject of Heaven is one of the least accurately discussed subjects in the whole of Christendom. Even pastors often fail to give appropriate time and attention to Heaven as described throughout the Bible. The majority of Christians who do think about Heaven often have faulty, non-biblical assumptions inherited more from Saturday morning cartoons than the pages of Scripture. This course explores in detail what God's Word says about Heaven past, present, and future (including the new city of God and the New Earth).

PREREQUISITES

There are no specific prerequisites for this course, but there are several pre-course assignments (see pages 4-5).

TEXTBOOKS

Required:

- Alcorn, Randy. *Heaven*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004.
- Alcorn, Randy. *Safely Home*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011.

Recommended:

- Milne, Bruce. *The Message of Heaven and Hell*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2002.
- Helm, Paul. *The Last Things*. Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989.
- McGrath, Alister. *A Brief History of Heaven*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishers, 2003.

Recommended also:

- Alcorn, Randy. *We Shall See God*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale Publishers, 2011.
- Additional books written by the instructor regarding Heaven and eternity.

SYNOPSIS

This course will explore biblical indications of what happens at death; the intermediate state (present pre-resurrection Heaven), as distinguished from the final state (future post-resurrection Heaven); the resurrection and final judgment; the nature of God's kingdom plan from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22; the culmination of God's Kingdom on the New Earth, a Heaven centered on Earth (Rev. 21:3); and reigning with Christ, a central aspect of the doctrine of eternal rewards.

We will address the myths and misconceptions about Heaven, and the problem of Christoplatonism and how it has derailed our understanding of the resurrection. We will also talk about some of the most frequent questions about Heaven, including these:

Is the intermediate state a dwelling place of disembodied spirits, or is there a transitional form between death and the resurrection? Is it a physical place or is it entirely immaterial? Will the New Earth be like Eden? Will there be animals? Will we learn and grow in our understanding? Will space and time still exist? What will our relationship with Christ be like? What will it mean to see God? What will it be like to worship Him? Will worshipping him mean we will not pursue other activities? How will we relate to each other? Do those now in Heaven see what's happening on earth? Do they remember their lives here? Will we recognize each other? Will we still be ourselves, or will we be completely different? Will we eat and drink? What is meant by "resting" and "serving" in Heaven? Will there be national or ethnic identities and carry-overs of culture from the present earth? Will there be libraries, travel, recreation, sports or technology?

Central questions will include 1) Is there a basic continuity or discontinuity between our present life on earth and our future life in Heaven? 2) Will Heaven ultimately be the dwelling place of God and angels, which men must take on as an incorporeal nature to inhabit, or the dwelling place of men to which God chooses to accommodate through an eternal incarnation? 3) What are some of the central areas in which Satan seeks to deceive us about Heaven? 4) What difference does it make whether we set our minds on Heaven in general, and the New Earth in particular, while we still live on earth?

Special emphasis will be given to the New Jerusalem as capital city of the New Earth, and the New Earth as capital planet of the new universe, and the far-reaching redemptive implications of Christ's work culminating in a resurrected universe delivered from the curse.

We will also deal briefly with hell, annihilationism and universalism, as well as purgatory, soul sleep, near death experiences, and the nature and significance of the millennium as it relates to the doctrine of Heaven.

The central focus of the class will be the Scriptures dealing with Heaven, particularly those chosen by the instructor in the pre-assigned "Inductive Biblical Overview of Heaven." Special attention will be given to the book of Revelation's depictions of both the present Heaven and the New Earth, as well as the interpretive tensions in dealing with apocalyptic and metaphorical language about Heaven. (What should we interpret literally, and what figuratively, and how can we determine this?)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After successfully completing this course, you will:

BE:

1. More confident in your ability to identify and deal with biblical texts on Heaven.
2. More mature in your walk with God, as you cultivate your thoughts and anticipate Heaven.
3. Better prepared to face trials, grasping the reality that has always brought hope, sanity and joy to God's people in adversity—that soon we will be where all tears are wiped away, all hurts are healed, all justice is done, and we are at last free from sin, temptation, death and suffering.

KNOW:

1. The central biblical texts on Heaven.
2. The distinctions between the past, present and future Heavens.
3. How the truths about Heaven should radically affect our deepest longings and daily decisions.
4. The various misconceptions within our culture, and within the Church at large, about Heaven.

BE ABLE TO:

1. Summarize what Scripture says about Heaven.
2. Answer dozens of specific questions that people frequently ask about Heaven.
3. Convey to others—in your family, small group, class or congregation—a revolutionary understanding of Heaven, one that is true to Scripture, Christ-centered, and motivating to the life of joyful obedience.
4. Cultivate and nurture an eternal perspective in this life.
5. Anticipate our future destiny more accurately and passionately.

FORMAT

A large portion of the class will involve a direct study and discussion of numerous biblical texts, to get an accurate sampling and larger perspective on what Scripture says about this crucial but neglected subject. This will produce more of a biblical than a systematic theology of Heaven, but as we piece together these passages it should produce some overall systematic perspectives.

The instructor will present central ideas and supplementary insights. He will call on students to draw their own conclusions, with his guidance and input from other students. Class discussions, coming out of thoughtful biblical study and contemplation of the assigned reading, will play an important role.

SCHEDULE

All six sessions of this course will be held in Corban University's Psalm Performing Arts Center.

- Session 1, Tuesday, May 08, 2012 9:00 am -11:30 am
- Session 2, Tuesday, May 08, 2012 1:30 pm - 4:00 pm
- Session 3, Wednesday, May 09, 2012 9:00 am - 11:30 am
- Session 4, Wednesday, May 09, 2012 1:30 pm - 4:00 pm
- Session 5, Thursday, May 10, 2012 9:00 am - 11:30 am
- Session 6, Thursday, May 10, 2012 1:30 pm - 4:00 pm

We will have short breaks in the middle of each section, and a longer lunch break. Please clear your schedule so you can attend all sessions, and arrange your commute to be on time. Those who step out and miss sections may find themselves confused since the class builds logically and progressively. It wouldn't be fair to other class members to go back to answer questions about items someone may have missed.

The class will be conducted in lecture/discussion style, lectures being interactive, two-way, with questions and answers. The goal of the discussions will be to cultivate your own biblically sound theology of Heaven. We will examine Scripture and generally follow the subject areas dealt with in the instructor's book *Heaven*.

REQUIREMENTS

Reading:

- Both required textbooks should be read before the start of the course on May 8, 2012. Students will be asked to verify how much of each book they have read (see page 6).
- The instructor's book, *Heaven*, should be read at the Mastery level (averaging about 30 pages per hour). This assumes careful interaction with the ideas, note-taking in book margins and/or in a notebook, and accountability for grasping material in preparation for class discussions. Budget 15 hours for this particular reading assignment.

Attendance:

- Attendance at all six teaching sessions May 8-10, 2012, is required.
- Each unexcused absence shall lower the student's grade by 60 points, and each excused absence by 30.

Written Assignments:

- Inductive biblical overview of Heaven. A comprehensive list of Scriptures will be sent to each student and in many ways is the backbone of the course. Write brief observations or questions concerning each passage. Credit students should turn in their notes on the first day of class. They will be handed back at the beginning of the second day. You should always have them with you in class. They will be graded on the basis of completion and indications from your written or typed notes that each Scripture passage has been read, and some have been given more thought.

Budget 10 hours for this particular assignment. Spend 5 minutes average per the 100 asterisked passages. The 75 other passages are for your supplemental or future study. Some of them will be referred to in class. This is intended as an overview, *not* as an in-depth study. Part of the purpose is to experience the breadth of biblical teaching on a subject many believe Scripture doesn't say much about.

Credit students should keep track of your hours. If you go through the asterisked passages in less than 10 hours start going through the others until you have given 10 hours of time. Those auditing will profit from as much time in Scripture as possible, of course, but you will still benefit from the class if you have not done preparatory work.

If credit students can't complete this prior to the first class, talk to the instructor to make special arrangements. However, you will benefit greatly if you've at least read the biblical texts in advance. Due May 8, 2012.

- Doctrinal statement about Heaven (2 pages). Use complete sentences. Add a heading above each section. Cite Scripture references that support each point. Budget 10 hours. Due June 9, 2012.
- Research paper on an important theological issue related to Heaven (5 to 7 pages). Write in essay form. Add a heading above each section. State the question, present possible answers and argue for what you see as the best answer. Cite Scripture references and other sources using endnotes. Budget 15 hours. Due July 10, 2012.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

Plagiarism is not tolerated at Corban University School of Ministry in any form. A student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to failure in the assignment and failure in the course.

GRADING

Course grading will be based on the following:

Reading of <i>Heaven</i>	120 points possible
Reading of <i>Safely Home</i>	40 points possible
Attendance at May 8-10 lectures	180 points possible
Writing of biblical overview	60 points possible
Writing of doctrinal statement	40 points possible
Writing of research paper	60 points possible

This point scale is a reference so you can monitor your progress:

500-480 A	459-440 B+	399-380 C+	339-320 D+
479-460 A-	439-420 B	379-360 C	319-300 D
	419-400 B-	359-340 C-	299-280 D-

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Reading Report (for Students Earning 2 Graduate Credits)

Randy Alcorn, Instructor

_____ I completed reading Randy Alcorn's book *Heaven*, at the Mastery level, before the class sessions began Tuesday, March 8.

_____ I completed reading Randy Alcorn's book, *Safely Home*, before the class sessions began Tuesday, March 8.

_____ I didn't read *Heaven* before May 8-10, but I completed it at the Mastery level by July 10.

_____ I didn't read *Safely Home* before May 8-10, but I completed it by July 10.

_____ I didn't read either book.

Name

Date