

THE NON-PROPHET'S GUIDE™ TO HEAVEN

Written & Illustrated by
TODD HAMPSON



HARVEST PROPHECY
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Dedicated to our daughter Natalie—“God’s Girl.”

His sovereign touch has been on your life since long before that wonderful Christmas morning when you were born. Your mom and I are so proud of the woman you have become. As you pursue your calling and the adventures the Lord has in store, never forget that you will always be our “Baby Girl.”

Psalm 139:13-18



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INTRODUCTION

Heavenly Minded and Earthly Good

*Set your minds on the things that are above,
not on the things that are on earth.*

COLOSSIANS 3:2 NASB

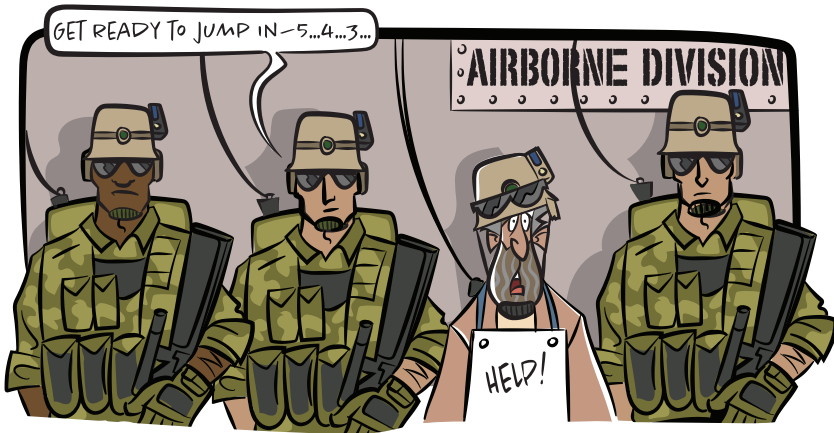
We sat on the edge of a rocky creek, our clothes still wet from flipping over rocks searching for crayfish and “accidentally” falling completely into the cool mountain stream. The summer sun warmed our backs as the soothing sounds of the winding water became the soundtrack for the story we were about to hear. The rugged log that served as our pew became saturated as our clothes dripped while we awaited our camp counselor’s Bible devotion to begin.

I—along with eight or nine others in our group—wanted to keep playing in the creek. But it was time for another “boring” Bible lesson, or so I thought. Our cabin leader, Doug, a dad in his early forties, sacrificed a few weeks each summer to brave the noble and dangerous calling of leading groups of the unruly organisms, known as middle-school boys, outside in the beauty of God’s creation.



After some introductory remarks and camp instructions—including many reminders to quiet down and listen—Doug began to describe the experience of jumping out of an airplane and landing safely on the ground via the

use of a parachute. For around ten minutes, he methodically described the tedious preparation of all the details that had to take place in order to jump from a moving plane in the sky. A full-body jumpsuit had to be meticulously donned. Boots had to be laced up and tied correctly. The parachute had to be precisely folded and packed. The plane had to be fueled up, and go through a rigorous and time-consuming safety check. Each jumper had to have their harnesses checked and double-checked. Also, the weather had to cooperate before they could receive the green light to fly.



By the time Doug finished explaining all the preparatory details, we felt somewhat exhausted just listening. All of that, just to jump out of a plane with a parachute? It sounded like a lot of work to simply abandon a perfectly good aircraft. But then he unpacked details of the jump itself. He described the nervous anticipation he felt as the plane took off. He talked about how, when the correct altitude was reached, the jump door was opened and the reality of what was about to take place set in. Things got very real, very quickly. His knees knocked. His stomach churned. His adrenaline surged and his pupils dilated. Our gifted storyteller described the moment when he crossed the threshold and jumped out into thin air—placing his trust and his life into a piece of cloth and a harness.

With great detail and passion, Doug described what he saw from such a high altitude as he flew through the air. He explained the exhilarating feeling of

adventure he felt as he hurtled toward the earth. He told us about the moment the chute opened and he was suddenly yanked to a slower speed. Doug shared how he could feel his heart pounding in his chest with excitement as that occurred and how he paused to look around—supposed to be able to see for a hundred miles in each direction. He shared that as soon as he landed, he couldn't wait to go up again, and how experiences like this defy description.

We were riveted by his story as our imaginations placed us in his boots. We saw ourselves jumping out of that plane. We could almost feel the wind hitting our faces and sense the yank on our bodies the moment the parachute opened. Our earlier chatter had become silence. Our camp counselor had us right where he wanted us, filled with rapt attention and ready to hear how this story connected with the Bible.

Our leader pivoted, and he shared a few verses about heaven and how different our bodies will be when we are there. He described how we could skip the tedious task of putting on the jump suit, lacing up the boots, packing a parachute, wearing the uncomfortable harness, or needing a safety check. In fact, we wouldn't even need a plane! Our riveting storyteller effectively shifted our mind's eye from earthly things to the reality of heaven—as much as the minds of unchurched, pre-Christian, middle-school-aged boys could.

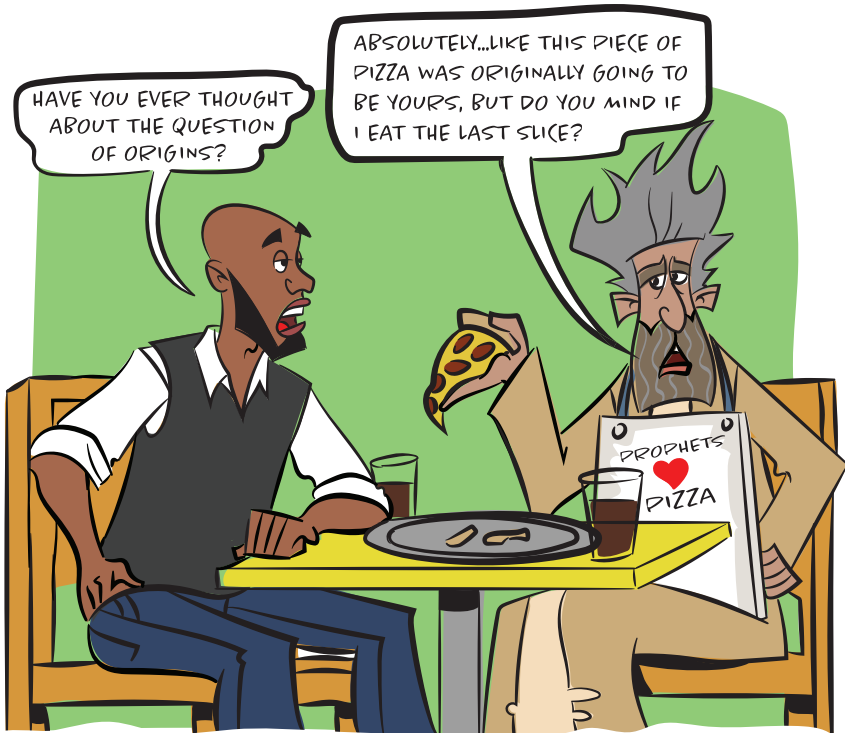
Though I was not yet a believer in Christ, heaven drew me. At the core of my being, I knew there was more to life than what we see. Eternity is in the heart of man (Ecclesiastes 3:11)—and middle-school boys. Everyone—from the firm agnostic, to the devout believer, to the pantheistic unreached tribal group member—has some concept of eternity.

Even staunch naturalists—when pushed—have to admit that something is eternal. If there was ever a time when nothing existed, nothing could exist



now because something can't come from nothing. Therefore, the naturalist posits that the universe itself is eternal—cycling through an endless rubber band of explosion, expansion, energy loss, and contraction. Rinse and repeat ad nauseam. They propose that a singularity (all matter condensed to a tiny speck) explodes, expands, and contracts over and over again.

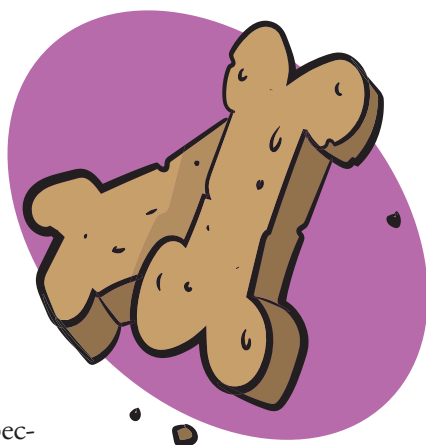
But even within the naturalist's explanation of the universe, there are major foundational problems with their thesis. Where did the matter originally come from? What caused the first explosion? What guides the forces that affect matter, space, and time? What controls heat, gravity, energy, and inertia? The pure naturalist has no valid or reasonable explanation. Even for the staunch naturalist, logic dictates a supernatural and eternal conclusion to the question of origins. I'm not even talking about biological origins. I mean the origins of anything and everything that exists. No matter how you slice it, logic and fact demand some kind of supernatural beginning to the space-time continuum.



As human beings, we know this intuitively. That's why remote tribes offer sacrifices to appease their "gods." That is why atheists rail so hard against those of us who believe in God and the supernatural. They reject the notion of God and are angry with him simultaneously. King Solomon states it simply in Ecclesiastes 3:11. To paraphrase, God has placed eternity in the heart of humankind. It is imprinted. It is part of us. It is an essential piece of what it means to be human—created in the image of God.

Think about it for a moment. Animals don't think about eternity past or eternity future. My family has two dogs, and I did an experiment. I asked the dogs if they wanted 100 pounds of doggie treats tomorrow or a single doggie treat today. I explained it very carefully. Then I set the single treats before them and gave them the opportunity to make their choice, one treat now or 100 pounds of treats the next day.

They instantly chose now. Obviously I'm joking here, but you get the picture. Animals are a different type of being. They may have a personality, talents, instincts, and emotions, but I guarantee they never contemplate the things that humans do as God's image-bearers.

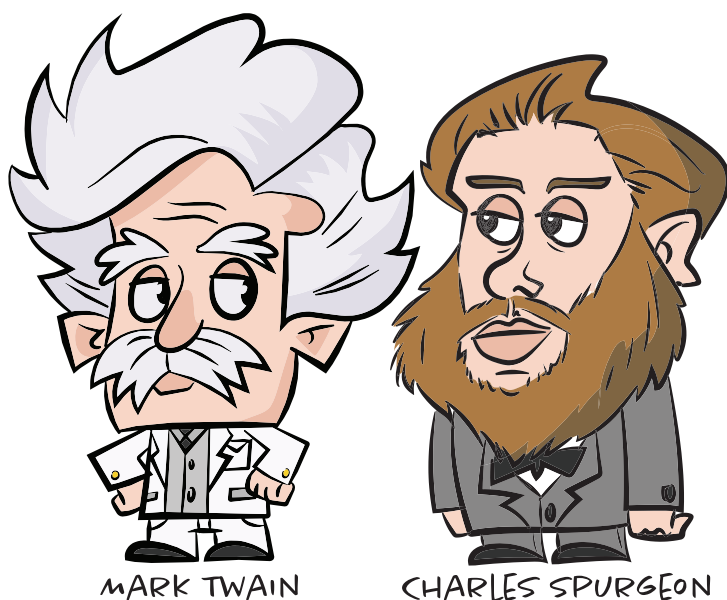


When it comes to eternity, it is all about perspective. If we accept what God reveals to us about eternity and receive Christ's redemptive substitution, we will view eternity one way. If we reject the biblical truths about eternity and how to be justified before a holy God, we will view eternity another way. In his book *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn aptly draws attention to the contrast between these two points of view by citing the end-of-life perspectives of two notable personalities from the nineteenth century:

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.”

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.”¹



What About Near-Death Experiences?

There has been a plethora of books, TV shows, and movies about near-death experiences, trips to heaven, trips to hell, and everything in between. Many of these stories tug at the heart strings and seem like they could be credible accounts made by honest people. Yet, they often contain conflicting information between retellings. Worse yet, the details that are given are often at odds with clear information given to us in God’s Word—the Bible.

So, how do we reason through these stories, conflicting accounts, and widely varying details about the afterlife? Simple. We turn to *the* source of Truth. The Bible is our plumb line. Using modern-day construction terms, it is our level. It is the single standard by which we evaluate all accounts.



I'll say it plainly (and I'll make my case throughout this book): If anything you hear does not square with the clear truth of Scripture, throw it out. Time and eternity will prove it false. We may not know everything about heaven, but the Bible does provide us with what we need to know about it. When it comes to wild speculation, we need to remember the principle given in Deuteronomy 29:29, which reads, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things *revealed* belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." We can bank on what God *has* revealed, and we can confidently reject anything that contradicts his Word.

That being said, I have personally known believers who were present at the time of a loved one's passing. And in many cases, as their loved one neared death, they gave witness to seeing a glimpse of heaven or even the Savior. Or, after days of unconsciousness, they opened their eyes wide and began to talk about seeing Jesus and loved ones who had gone before. I won't share the names or personal stories of others without permission, but these are level-headed, nonsensational people of integrity. Best of all, their accounts ring true, align with Scripture, and provide great comfort and hope.

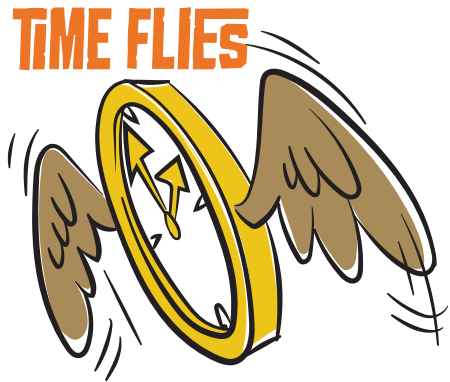
Practically There

The title of this opening chapter reminds us that if we are truly heavenly minded, we will be earthly good. Without a doubt, there are believers who know their Bible well but don't live out their Bible well. They *learn* theology but they don't *do* theology. They fill their head with Bible knowledge

but fail to activate it. Because of this tendency in some modern church circles, I've heard it stated that people can be "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good."

One of my goals with this book is to flip that script. To help readers develop a mindset about heaven that is so compelling that it will lead readers into action and place people on a collision course with their next assignment from the Lord. I believe if we catch a glimpse of what heaven (and the beautiful build-up to heaven) looks like, it will cause us to put feet to our theology like never before. When we realize how beautiful, fulfilling, and eternal heaven is, we will be compelled to do our very best when on mission to see as many other people there with us as possible.

Depending on your age, you may have already experienced the realization that time is fleeting. When we are children or teenagers, old age and death seem as if they are an eternity away. However, the older we get, the more we realize that time is passing quickly, we have only one opportunity to live for the Lord in our fallen world, and before we know it, we will be standing before our Creator.



A systematic study of heaven will help us put all those things into perspective as we use Scripture and our God-given imaginations to view an accurate glimpse of heaven. To be reminded that the most important things are eternal things. Only what is done for Christ will last. And when we endeavor to understand our beautiful future in heaven, it reminds us of how close we are to our future and it should cause us to put that knowledge and understanding to practical use.

We're not there yet, but we're practically there, and I state that intending a twofold meaning. We're nearly there in the sense that through the lens of

Scripture, we can taste heaven with our imaginations. In another sense, the more we set our minds on things above (as this chapter's opening verse reminds us), the more we will realize that: spending our lives in pursuit of God's best is what matters most, earthly temptations are a destructive waste of time, unsaved people around us need to know Christ so they can join us in heaven, and the actions we take now in our temporal time will truly echo in eternity.

One who is truly heavenly minded will, in fact, be of tremendous earthly good!

Anything but Boring

I've noticed that many people envision heaven as a place where we'll peacefully sit around on clouds, playing harps for eternity. Honestly, that sounds more like hell to me. Humans long for adventure and exploration, for living out a story, for connecting with God and others on an ever-deepening level, and for enjoying true rest after a life well spent.

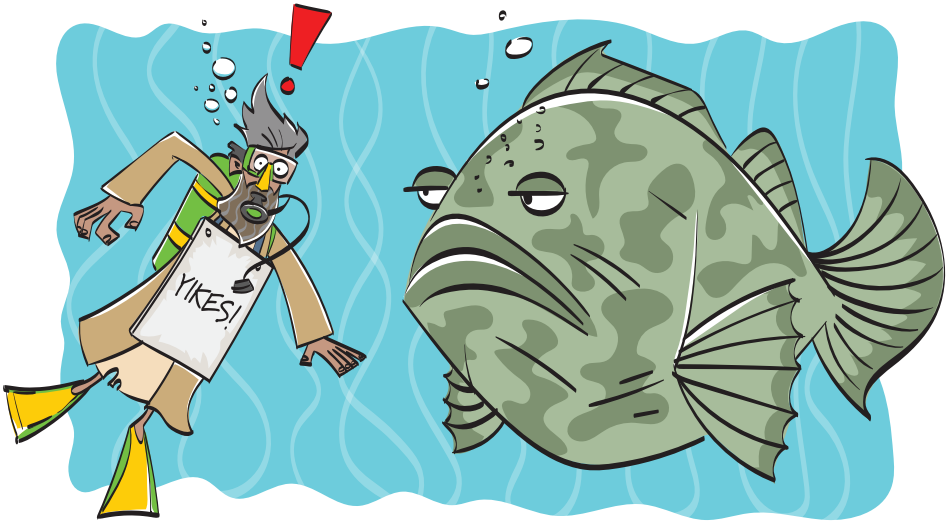


Now more than ever, Christians need a renewed biblical understanding of our amazing future. A proper understanding of where we will spend eternity and the remarkable events that will unfold leading up to it will help believers live with increased joy and anticipation as they serve God's purposes in this generation. It will also light a fire within believers, emboldening them to invite

their friends and family members along with them to experience the mind-blowing future God has in store for those he calls his own.

If you think heaven might be boring, read the following verse slowly, carefully, and repeatedly. Let the truth of God’s Word set in. In 1 Corinthians 2:9, we read, “‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’—the things God has prepared for those who love him.”

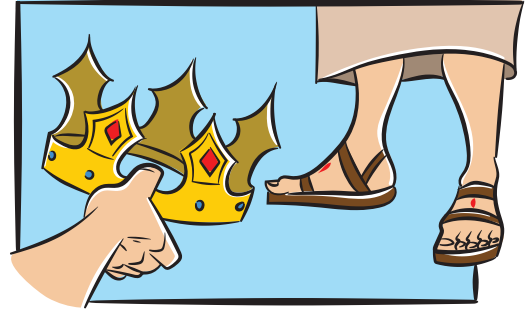
Ponder that verse for a moment. What is the most beautiful scene you have ever beheld? A 360-degree vista from the top of a mountain range? A sunset over the Grand Canyon? An underwater tropical reef teeming with life and vibrant with color?



What is the most beautiful sound you have ever heard? An orchestra playing a complex symphony? Birds chirping on a spring morning? An epic electric-guitar riff that stirs your soul and makes you feel alive? A newborn baby cooing contently? A houseful of children giggling and having fun?

Let’s take it up a notch. What is the most beautiful thing you have ever imagined? Being able to fly without needing an airplane or parachute? Traveling to distant galaxies at the speed of thought? Reuniting with loved ones who have

died and seeing them in their glorified eternal bodies? Being in the throne room of God, surrounded by billions of saved people and angelic beings singing praises to Almighty God? Hugging Jesus and beholding his nail-scarred hands with your very own eyes?



Nothing you or I have ever seen, heard, or imagined even comes close to how great heaven is going to be! May that heavenly mindedness cause each of us to truly live out our theology as we resist temptation, persevere when suffering, love the unlovable, and reach as many people as we can with the life (and eternity)-changing message that Jesus Christ died for them and secured a direct path for them to heaven!

The Theology of Heaven

As we embark on an in-depth, systematic, and practical study of heaven, it is important that we first reach bedrock. There are wildly conflicting views about heaven that are held to by various world religions, cults, and secular culture. We need a rock-solid baseline by which to compare all else. We need a standard. That standard is the Bible.

Important to any theological endeavor is an understanding of the foundational doctrine of bibliology—the doctrine of Scripture and revelation—or simply put, the doctrine of the Bible itself. In the study of bibliology, we learn that God reveals himself and his ways to his image bearers.

This leads to the five related doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, and canonicity. In short, this means that God has revealed truth to us through the inspired (literally “God-breathed”) Word of God; it is without error, authoritative in its instruction, sufficient (providing everything we need to understand about God and our relationship to him), and complete (meaning the 66 books of the Bible contain God’s full revelation).

BIBLIOLOGY

THE DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE

INSPIRATION:

Deuteronomy 18:18-19; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13;
2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 2:21; 3:1-2

INERRANCY:

Psalm 119:142, 151, 160; John 17:17;
2 Peter 1:16, 19-21

AUTHORITY:

Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35;
2 Timothy 3:16-17

SUFFICIENCY:

Psalms 19:7-14; 119:105; Colossians 2:6-8;
Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:3; Jude 3

CANONICITY:

Ephesians 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:13;
2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; 3:15-16;
Jude 3; Revelation 22:18-19

All of that to say, our understanding and study of heaven must square with God's revealed truth as it is found in the pages of Scripture. Only what is revealed in the 66 books of the Bible should be used to form our theology,

and all else must be measured against the standard the Bible sets forth. That is what I have attempted to do for you in this book.

I have one final thought before we dive into our study. Perhaps you are reading this book during a dry season of life, or at a time of great loss, pain, or disappointment. Or perhaps the slow and steady grind of life in a fallen world has you discouraged, as you look around and see what is taking place in our generation.

These are yet additional reasons to learn more about our true home as believers. Studying the topic of heaven steels our nerves, recalibrates our mindset, encourages our spirit, and reminds us

of why we are here. Our goal is to finish our race strong, and take as many people as possible with us to heaven!



The Non-Prophet

He's a Renaissance man. The ultimate throwback. The Non-Prophet is a 501(c)(3) that seems to have been born in 501 BC. He prefers the clothing, speech, food, grooming (or lack thereof), and customs of an archetypical Old Testament prophet living in twenty-first-century America. He misunderstands Bible prophecy and gives well-meaning but poor advice. The Non-Prophet is also not very wise with money, so he's a Non-Prophet on two levels. He's the epitome of the idiom "a day late and a dollar short."

