

## Heaven | Randy Alcorn

Reviewed by Max Frazier in the May 2005 Philogian

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... (Revelation 21:1). It is the interpretation of this verse that guides the reader through the latest volume by Randy Alcorn titled, *Heaven* (published in 2004 by Tyndale House Publishers in Wheaton, Illinois). It has been many years since a book describing heaven has been published and one wonders why the Christian world has been so reticent to write on that place to which we will spend all of eternity. So, Mr. Alcorn has done us a service in writing on this subject. The book is the product of his twenty-five years of research on the subject of heaven. Within the book he draws the reader deeper into the biblical passages describing the new heavens and new earth, as well as into many of the writings that have come from the pens of influential leaders in the history of the Church.

I was eager to read this book and my excitement was not diminished as I read. Yet this book was not just an affirmation of all that I had come to believe about my eternal home – called heaven. In fact, my conception of heaven was greatly changed as I read. At first I wanted to cast the author's descriptions aside as being the product of a rich imagination and much speculation. Yet he kept drawing me back into the Scriptures themselves. Many of those Scriptures I had previously interpreted as applying to that age we know as the Millennium. I had never considered that these passages might have a dual fulfillment – once in the Millennium and again as describing the state of the new earth. But the more I pondered those texts, the more I began to see the validity of Mr. Alcorn's conclusions.

The premise upon which the author builds his case for the new heavens and new earth is to draw heavily upon what we now conceive when we hear the words "heaven" and "earth." You picture a world that contains trees and flowers, birds and animals, mountains and prairies, lakes and rivers. You picture rain and snow and sunshine. Delicious foods grace the tables around which sit friends both new and old. It is a world that contains people who speak different languages and have different cultures. It is a world of travel and leisure, yet also one of meaningful work.

Now, take that picture and remove the curse that came upon the world when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, and you have a picture of the new heaven and new earth. The author invites us to consider foods more delicious than we have ever eaten; trees and flowers more beautiful than we have ever seen; and mountains with more grandeur than we have ever beheld. The author also invites us to consider the possibilities of traveling to the vast regions of space – perhaps of even living in such distant places as Mars or Mercury or Venus. He claims that when the curse is removed, such places might become inhabitable.

The author greatly refutes the stereotypical picture we have of heaven – of sitting on clouds, playing harps, and singing all day. He states that picture is not even a biblical one for the Bible describes heaven as a place of service, meaning that some type of work will be given to us. Yet all work will be done for the Lord, whether it is as a gardener or farmer or teacher. Yes, the author states that he believes great learning will take place on the new earth. He strongly denies that we will have all the answers when we get to heaven, for to have all the answers would mean that we would be as God, which we know is not biblically correct. He invites us to ponder sitting under the teaching of a Jonathan Edwards or a Martin Luther or an Apostle Paul. He also invites us to consider the possibilities of there being a great library in heaven housing many of the great books of history written to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, volumes such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *The City of God*. Perhaps we will all have more time to get caught up on our reading in heaven.

One area that Mr. Alcorn admits is more speculative is the concept of the appearance of different cultures. He asks the question about the presence of people from cultures which have long since passed from view. Would there be an ancient Roman culture, or an ancient Israelite culture? How about a world during the time of the Reformation? The concept is certainly something interesting to think about.

One cannot read this book without giving some serious thoughts to the concept of heaven. We know that the Bible makes it clear that No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him (I Corinthians 2:9). And Randy Alcorn has done an excellent job of helping us to ponder just what heaven might be like. You may not agree with all of his conclusions, but he will at least cause you to dig more deeply into the Scriptures that he uses. And in that way we all are benefited.

Let me close with a quote from the author himself. Life on Earth matters not because it's the only life we have, but precisely because it isn't – it's the beginning of a life that will continue without end. It's the precursor of life on the New Earth. ... We need to stop acting as if Heaven were a myth, an impossible dream, a relentlessly dull meeting, or an unimportant distraction from real life. We need to see Heaven for what it is: the realm we're made for. If we do, we'll embrace it with contagious joy, excitement, and anticipation (page 443). All I can say to that is a loud "Amen!"