

HEAVEN

S T U D Y G U I D E

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ALCORN



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

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Heaven Study Guide

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ISBN-13: 978-1-4143-0977-4

ISBN-10: 1-4143-0977-5

Printed in the United States of America

12 11 10 09 08 07 06
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>How to Get the Most from Your Study of Heaven</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface and Introduction: The Subject of Heaven</i>	<i>xii</i>

PART I A THEOLOGY OF HEAVEN

SECTION ONE

REALIZING OUR DESTINY

1 Are You Looking Forward to Heaven?.....	1
2 Is Heaven Beyond Our Imagination?.....	3
3 Is Heaven Our Default Destination . . . or Is Hell?.....	5
4 Can You Know You're Going to Heaven?.....	7

SECTION TWO

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERMEDIATE HEAVEN

5 What Is the Nature of the Intermediate Heaven?.....	9
6 Is the Intermediate Heaven a Physical Place?.....	11
7 What Is Life Like in the Intermediate Heaven?.....	13

SECTION THREE

GRASPING REDEMPTION'S FAR REACH

8 This World Is Not Our Home . . . or Is It?.....	15
9 Why Is Earth's Redemption Essential to God's Plan?.....	17
10 What Will It Mean for the Curse to Be Lifted?.....	19

SECTION FOUR

ANTICIPATING RESURRECTION

11 Why Is Resurrection So Important?.....	20
-------------------------------------------	----

12	Why Does All Creation Await Our Resurrection?	22
13	How Far-Reaching Is the Resurrection?	23

SECTION FIVE

SEEING THE EARTH RESTORED

14	Where and When Will Our Deliverance Come?	25
15	Will the Old Earth Be Destroyed . . . or Renewed?	26
16	Will the New Earth Be Familiar . . . like Home?	28

SECTION SIX

CELEBRATING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

17	What Will It Mean to See God?	30
18	What Will It Mean for God to Dwell Among Us?	31
19	How Will We Worship God?	33

SECTION SEVEN

RULING ON THE NEW EARTH

20	What Does God’s Eternal Kingdom Involve?	35
21	Will We Actually Rule with Christ?	37
22	How Will We Rule God’s Kingdom?	38

PART II
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HEAVEN

SECTION EIGHT

WHAT WILL THE RESURRECTED EARTH BE LIKE?

23	Will the New Earth Be an Edenic Paradise?	41
24	What Is the New Jerusalem?	42
25	What Will the Great City Be Like?	44
26	Will There Be Space and Time?	45
27	Will the New Earth Have Sun, Moon, Oceans, and Weather?	47

SECTION NINE

WHAT WILL OUR LIVES BE LIKE?

28	Will We Be Ourselves?	48
29	What Will Our Bodies Be Like?	50
30	Will We Eat and Drink on the New Earth?	51
31	Will We Be Capable of Sinning?	53

32	What Will We Know and Learn?.....	55
33	What Will Our Daily Lives Be Like?	56

SECTION TEN

WHAT WILL OUR RELATIONSHIPS BE LIKE?

34	Will We Desire Relationships with Anyone Except God?.....	58
35	Will There Be Marriage, Families, and Friendships?	60
36	Whom Will We Meet, and What Will We Experience Together?	62
37	How Will We Relate to Each Other?.....	63
38	What Will New Earth Society Be Like?.....	65

SECTION ELEVEN

WHAT ABOUT ANIMALS?

39	Will Animals Inhabit the New Earth?.....	67
40	Will Animals, Including Our Pets, Live Again?.....	69

SECTION TWELVE

WHAT WILL WE DO IN HEAVEN?

41	Will Heaven Ever Be Boring?.....	71
42	Will There Be Arts, Entertainment, and Sports?	73
43	Will Our Dreams Be Fulfilled and Missed Opportunities Regained?.....	74
44	Will We Design Crafts, Technology, and New Modes of Travel?.....	76

PART III
LIVING IN LIGHT OF HEAVEN

45	Reorienting Ourselves to Heaven as Our Home.....	79
46	Anticipating the Great Adventure	81
Appendix A Christoplatonism’s False Assumptions.....		83
Appendix B Literal and Figurative Interpretation		85
<i>About the Author</i>		95

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM YOUR STUDY OF *HEAVEN*

The questions in this study guide are intended to facilitate group discussion and your personal study. When other significant issues and statements in each chapter also catch your eye, jot down a Scripture passage, quotation, or page number from the book related to something that you've underlined or wish to discuss. Use Scripture as often as possible, including passages you think of and those cited in *Heaven*. This will help to center your study on God's Word.

In preparation for your study of *Heaven*, read through Revelation 21–22 at least three times, using a couple of different Bible translations, if possible. (You might want to write down some observations and questions as you go.) This will whet your appetite for Heaven, and especially for the New Earth! When you're done reading the book, you'll have a much deeper understanding and appreciation of this and other passages.

Preface and Introduction: The Subject of Heaven

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. HEAVEN, xvii

1. What are you looking forward to in your study of Heaven?

2. Read Acts 17:11. What does this passage say, and how does it relate to how we should view claims about the afterlife based on near-death experiences and personal speculation?

3. Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:21: “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” How should this principle be applied to reading any book other than the Bible, including *Heaven*?

4. “The sense that we will live forever *somewhere* has shaped every civilization in human history. . . . Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is” (*Heaven, xix*). Do you think this statement is significant or revealing? In what way?

5. Read Psalm 39:4-5. How are these verses important as we consider the subject of Heaven?

6. Ancient merchants often wrote the words *memento mori*—“think of death”—in large letters on the first page of their accounting books. What perspective did this bring to their daily lives? Is anticipating death unhealthy, or can it be healthy?

7. What did you learn from the story of Florence Chadwick, the swimmer? How does this story relate to the subject of Heaven?

PART I A THEOLOGY OF HEAVEN

SECTION ONE: REALIZING OUR DESTINY

CHAPTER 1

Are You Looking Forward to Heaven?

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, . . . 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.”

HEAVEN, 7

1. As you begin reading the book, what do you already believe about Heaven?

2. What do you remember learning about Heaven as you were growing up? Who or what were your sources of information?

3. “What God made us to desire . . . 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” (*Heaven*, 7). How does this concept of Heaven compare with yours?

4. Discuss how Heaven has “fallen off our radar screens” as a culture. Why don’t we think more about it?

5. Read John 8:44 and Revelation 13:6 in the NIV. What role does Satan play in keeping us from anticipating Heaven?

6. Review “Resisting Naturalism’s Spell” at the end of chapter 1 (see *Heaven*, pages 12–13). What is naturalism, and why should we resist it? *How* can we resist it?

CHAPTER 2

Is Heaven Beyond Our Imagination?

The writers of Scripture present Heaven in many ways, including as a garden, a city, and a kingdom. Because gardens, cities, and kingdoms are familiar to us, they afford us a bridge to understanding Heaven. However, many people make the mistake of assuming that these are *merely* analogies with no actual correspondence to the reality of Heaven. . . . Too often we’ve been taught that Heaven is a non-physical realm, which cannot have real gardens, cities, kingdoms, buildings, banquets, or bodies. So we fail to take seriously what Scripture tells us about Heaven as a familiar, physical, tangible *place*. HEAVEN, 15

1. God has given each of us an imagination and expects us to use it. Why do you think that many Christians shy away from studying Scripture and letting it guide their imagination to visualize what Heaven will be like?

2. Describe a place you've visited or an experience you've had that helps you envision what some aspect of Heaven will be like.

3. What does 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 tell us? This passage isn't about Heaven in any direct sense. But even if it can be applied to Heaven, how does its real meaning differ from the way it is typically understood?

4. In Colossians 3:1-2, what are we commanded to do? How can we do this in our daily lives?

5. Why is it appropriate—and biblical—to involve all our physical senses when imagining Heaven?
