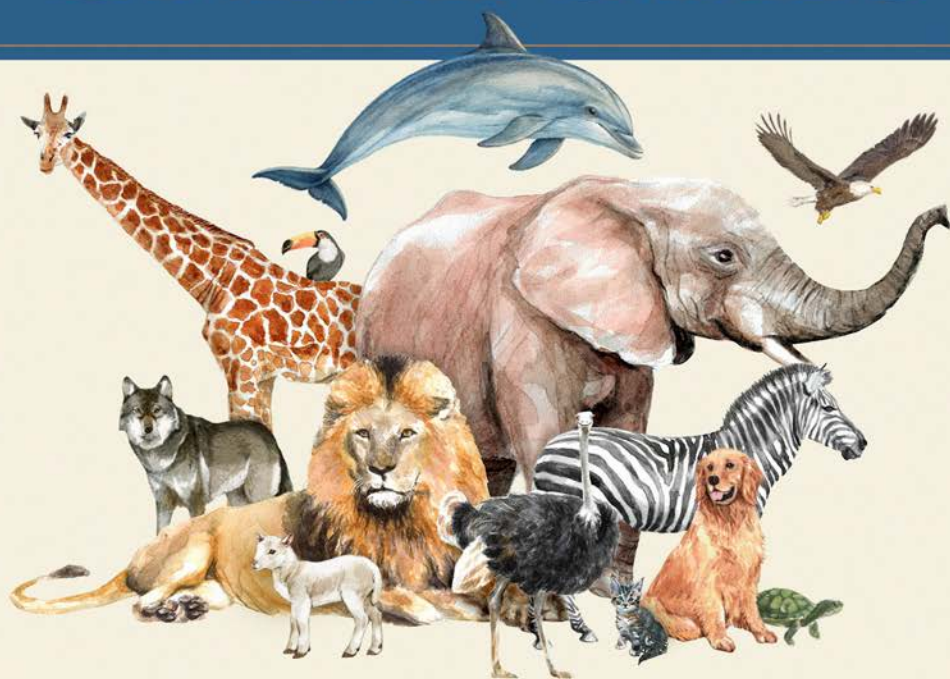


What the Bible Says About  
Animals, Heaven, and the New Earth

# ALL GOD'S CREATURES



RANDY  
ALCORN

Bestselling Author of *Heaven*

Randy Alcorn's books have blessed my life for decades. His volume *Heaven* guided me from a vague, ethereal perspective to an exciting view of the life to come. My copy is underlined, highlighted, and dog-eared! I have the same enthusiasm for *All God's Creatures*. It specifically addresses the question of animals on the New Earth by explaining the promise of Scripture regarding our eternal home. Prepare to be informed, inspired, and empowered. Thanks, Randy, for this brilliant work.

Max Lucado, pastor; author of *Tame Your Thoughts*

As a farmer's daughter and a farmer's wife, I have spent most of my life caring for animals. I thought I understood what God was doing with animals—and then I read this book. Randy Alcorn gave me eyes to see our own land and animals and flocks differently! With rigorous biblical scholarship and breathtaking scope, *All God's Creatures* is the book I did not know I was waiting for. It will change what you see when you look at the animals around you. More than that, it will change what you see when you look at their Creator! This is not a book of trite sentimentality. It is a book about the staggering generosity of a Creator who is larger and wilder and more delightfully attentive than we dare to believe! It completely undid me, the way the best theology does—by making the world larger and making God more extravagant, more attentive, and more delightful than my too-tidy categories had permitted. Read this book and let your vision of eternity grow into the glorious expansiveness of God.

Ann Voskamp, bestselling author of *One Thousand Gifts*

In this delightful and fascinating book, Randy Alcorn's thesis is that, in the age to come, God will remove the curse on the natural world—placed after the sin of Adam and Eve—so that animals will be “set free” from their current bondage (Romans 8:21, esv) and will regain the “very good” (Genesis 1:31) nature they had in Eden. Alcorn argues convincingly that many friendly animals will inhabit the New Earth. I hope he is correct in his expectation that God, in his goodness, may even bring back to life our favorite pets. I anticipate that everyone who reads this book will gain a deeper appreciation for the wonderful animal kingdom that God created for our companionship and joy.

Wayne Grudem, PhD, distinguished research professor emeritus of theology and biblical studies at Phoenix Seminary; author of *Systematic Theology* and *Bible Doctrine*

My friend Randy Alcorn has researched and written more about the topic of Heaven than almost anyone alive. Now, in *All God's Creatures*, he takes the questions people whisper after church and answers them out loud with the full weight of Scripture. Whether you've lost a beloved pet, are wrestling with why God allows animals to suffer, or just want a clearer vision of what eternity will actually look like, this book will point you to the Bible, and to the God who made and cares for every creature.

**Greg Laurie**, pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship; evangelist; host of *A New Beginning* radio program; author of *Jesus Revolution*

Do animals have souls? Will they be in Heaven? Why does God allow them to suffer? In *All God's Creatures*, Randy Alcorn's answers—based on Scripture texts—might surprise you. You may disagree with some of his conclusions, but you will undoubtedly enjoy his insights and be guided to wrestle biblically with these important questions. I love this book and believe you will too.

**Sean McDowell**, PhD, professor of apologetics at Talbot School of Theology; author; popular YouTuber

Given his previous work, we should expect Randy Alcorn to address every topic he writes on from a biblically grounded, theologically astute, pastorally sensitive, and well-documented perspective. This book is no exception. I have long leaned toward affirming that animals will be part of the new heavens and New Earth, but now I am sure of it. Despite how many Christians have ignored this topic, it is no small matter for Christian theology or apologetics. Randy has done us a wonderful service with this book.

**Douglas Groothuis**, PhD, research professor of apologetics and Christian worldview at Cornerstone University and Seminary; author of *Christian Apologetics*

Marvelous. Masterful. Meaningful. In *All God's Creatures*, Randy Alcorn sets his sights on a pivotal question: Will there be animals in Heaven or on the New Earth? Drawing on decades of thorough study and writing about Heaven, Randy brings a uniquely seasoned and trustworthy voice to this deeply personal topic through biblical wisdom, personal experience, and heartfelt animal stories. Randy invites us to believe Scripture and cling to the hope that God has a good plan for all his creatures.

**Louie Giglio**, pastor of Passion City Church; founder of Passion Conferences; author of *Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table*

As a financial planner, I've relied heavily on Randy's research and writings. His work consistently demonstrates a profound biblical foundation and a deep spiritual resonance. This book presents a compelling Bible-based argument that God loves his creation, including animals. While I've never doubted this, Randy presents the overwhelming evidence in a remarkably persuasive manner. Surprisingly, this book has reshaped my perception of God. I've come to see him as incredibly kind, loving, and compassionate—someone I will genuinely enjoy spending time with forever.

**Ron Blue**, author; founder of the Ron Blue Institute, Blue Trust, and Kingdom Advisors; cofounder of the National Christian Foundation

I teared up several times while reading *All God's Creatures*. Randy's words not only reinforced what I've felt for years, but also what I *know* from reading the Scriptures and studying God's amazing creation.

**Angela Hunt**, ThD, author of *Unspoken*

I don't love dogs, especially indoors. Maybe that's because of sin and the Curse. But I do love this remarkable book. Studied, balanced, and compelling, it helps us love animals even more—and through them, their amazing Designer and Keeper. I have long enjoyed and marveled at God through wildlife. I've dreamed of a book like this one, that some great lover of God and skilled student of his Word would write to serve Christians and pastors everywhere. Under God, Randy Alcorn was the man for the job. I'm thankful for his God-honoring labor on this tremendous project.

**David Mathis**, senior teacher and executive editor of *Desiring God*; pastor; author of *Habits of Grace*

I got up early every morning to carve out time to read a few chapters of this book. I read the last ten in a single day. I just did not want to put it down. It is a much-needed book, and so well done. *All God's Creatures* is a book I will treasure and re-read in the years ahead. It is a Scripture-saturated, "legal brief" presentation, beautifully paced with real-life animal stories. I have always believed that animals are in Heaven, but this book equips me with Scripture and logic to back it up. It makes me look forward to Heaven even more.

**Francine Rivers**, author of *Redeeming Love* and *Earth Psalms*

How is it that we think the New Earth, where we will spend eternity, will be devoid of the comfort and joys of those very animals that have taught us and so enriched our lives? Well, no more of that! As you'll discover from Scripture, God's creatures will not only be there in eternity, but will also join us in joyful worship of the one who cares even about sparrows.

**Elyse Fitzpatrick**, author of *Home: How Heaven and the New Earth Satisfy Our Deepest Longings*

What the Bible Says About  
Animals, Heaven, and the New Earth

# ALL GOD'S CREATURES



RANDY  
ALCORN



*A Tyndale nonfiction imprint*

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INTRODUCTION

# WHY A BOOK ABOUT ANIMALS ON THE NEW EARTH?

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I believe in my heart that faith in Jesus Christ can and will lead us beyond an exclusive concern for the well-being of other human beings to a broader concern for the well-being of the birds in our backyards, the fish in our rivers, and every living creature on the face of the earth.

John Wesley

Love all God's creation. . . . Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and joy untroubled. Do not trouble it, don't harass them, don't deprive them of their happiness, don't work against God's intent. Man, do not pride yourself on superiority to the animals; they are without sin, and you, with your greatness, defile the earth.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Since the 2004 publication of my book titled *Heaven*, I've heard easily a thousand questions about Heaven and the New Earth. The questions I hear most often are these: *Will there be animals in Heaven?* and, more specifically, *Will our pets be there?*

One person wrote, "We are mourning the loss of our cat. He was hit by a car and died in my arms. Can you give us encouragement as to whether we might be reunited someday?"

Another asked, "Our beloved dog died. Should I correct my kids when they say they can't wait to play with him again in Heaven?"

Why do we wonder about a future for our pets in the far better world God promises? Well, given their importance in our lives, why *wouldn't* we?

Yes, God will make the New Earth primarily for humans. Nothing will diminish that. But people aren't the only beings God loves, nor the only ones he made to live on the earth.

Many people, both children and adults, count their pets among their closest friends. Though their lives are shorter, pets are by our side more often than most people. These relationships involve loyalty, affection, comfort, and closeness without judgment. Pets are with us when no one else is. Sometimes they rescue us from the pit of loneliness. Who empowers them to do that for us? It's not the devil; it's *God* who created them to be our companions and bring us happiness! If they do that now in a world with suffering and death, why not in the redeemed world where there will be no more suffering and death?

Taking care of another living being gives people structure and purpose, which can be especially important during hard times. Since my wife Nanci went to be with Jesus, my dog Gracie has played a profound part in my ongoing healing.

I had three dogs growing up, and Nanci and I both had cats and parakeets in our childhoods. We had four dogs and two cats during our

forty-seven-year marriage. Those pets were an important part of our lives and our children's lives. God brought great joy, laughter, love, and companionship into our home and taught our family much through those beloved creatures.

As Nanci and I have, many people sense a spiritual dimension in their bond with animals—involving an ongoing, two-way flow of happiness and friendship. So naturally we ask: *Will our relationships with animals end permanently, or might they resume in God's new creation and go on forever?*

It seemed like the right time to devote several years of research and an entire book to answering this question. I believe the far-reaching significance of the answer is far greater—and more God-exalting—than most Christians have imagined.

### **A young girl voiced what countless people wonder.**

At an evening church service Q&A, a young girl stepped to the microphone with a smile on her face and addressed her Bible-teaching pastor—a man I highly respect.

“In Revelation 19, it talks about how Jesus comes from Heaven riding a white horse,” she began. “My question is, *are there animals in Heaven?*”

The pastor responded, “What a *good* question—and I know you're hoping there are!”

He chuckled, and then grimaced, before giving his definitive answer: “*No.*”

The church audience erupted in laughter. The pastor smiled and waited for the laughter to die down before adding, “Which, as somebody said, means there's also no shovels in Heaven.”

He then expanded on his answer:

We don't have any indication that any being is eternal except human beings. But that [image of Jesus on a white horse] is a way to illustrate or demonstrate that the Lord is coming back as a conquering hero. He's riding on a horse, he has a crown on his head, he has a sword, and with that sword he brings judgment.

Now that's not an actual sword. . . . Those are images, and the great image of a conquering general in the ancient world was riding on a great white horse in triumph. So that's a picture of the triumph of Christ.

But Heaven is for holy angels and for redeemed people.

Now, animals are a common grace; we all enjoy animals. Some of you are so attached to your animals, the thought that they're not going to be in Heaven is disturbing to you; but they are creatures for earthly comfort that will play no role in the perfect comfort of Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

No one could accuse this pastor of uncertainty. He didn't preface his remarks with "I think . . .," or "Possibly . . .," or "In my opinion . . .," or "Other Bible teachers and commentators disagree with me, but . . ."

He simply said, "No."

Many sincere believers are equally certain that animals won't exist in God's eternal Kingdom. But I find that belief strange, given Scripture's significant revelation of truth to the contrary—truth I invite you to explore with me in the chapters ahead.

I agree the girl asked a good question. But I don't believe the pastor, though well-meaning, gave her a good answer. Given the format of the evening, his reply had to be condensed. But it could have been far more biblically grounded. Whether his explanation took one, three, or five minutes, he could have shared a great deal of biblical truth, thereby instructing his audience and encouraging the questioner. If anyone deserved a few extra minutes, it was that young girl, who earnestly wanted a good, biblically substantiated answer to a question close to her heart.

To say that animals are "creatures for earthly comfort" with no place in Heaven implies there will be no room for earthly comfort "in the perfect comfort of Heaven." But if animals of earthly comfort thrived in Eden, why wouldn't they bring earthly comfort on the New Earth as well? The pastor seemed to think of Earth and Heaven as exclusive or even opposite realms, when to God they are complementary domains that will eternally join as one.

This is what God planned for the climax of all times: to bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth.

EPHESIANS 1:10, CEB

In a subsequent Q&A session, this same pastor elaborated on his views about Heaven in response to a nearly identical question about animals, this time posed by a man. Once again, without citing a single verse of Scripture in support of his view, the pastor emphatically stated,

There is *nothing* in the Bible that indicates there are animals in Heaven. . . . Animals are part of the passing world. You could ask the same question: Will there be *flowers* in Heaven? Will there be *grass* in Heaven?

We do know that Heaven is another *dimension*, a completely distinct dimension from anything we know today. The one thing that we do see in Heaven is a river of life. I don't exactly know what that means, but I know it won't be the same kind of H<sub>2</sub>O that we have here.

Heaven is occupied by eternal souls: the eternal God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the eternal holy angels, who live and worship him and do his bidding forever; and the eternal souls of believers who are gathered into Heaven. There is *no* indication *anywhere* in Scripture that there are *animals* in Heaven. They are part of this world, and . . . they basically were designed for the *food chain* here. That is, they were designed to be consumed, to one degree or another. Or to serve man in some capacity, as domestic animals, to help him living out his life, generating food, taking care of the things that he needed, helping with transportation, all of that.

So, they belong to this world. . . . They're a part of the creation that *passes away*, and there's no enduring place in Heaven for them.<sup>2</sup>

I chose these examples not to single out or discredit this pastor. He faithfully preached God's Word during his long pulpit ministry, and I along with countless others benefited greatly from his teaching. But *on this particular topic*, his answers reflect the widespread misunderstandings many evangelical Christians have about the ultimate and eternal Heaven—which, according to the Bible, will be relocated to the New Earth. Consequently, I believe he missed some great opportunities in these Q&A sessions to affirm the Bible's clear teaching about the final resurrection, which doesn't just involve human souls, but also *human bodies*. (And a physical planet so earthlike that it's called the New Earth, on which his embodied people will live forever.)

Scripture promises that, after the final judgment, God will come down to dwell with his people on the New Earth, making it the center of his eternal Heaven (Revelation 20:11–21:4). He will permanently remove the Curse (Revelation 22:1-5); and from that redeemed Earth, he will govern a sinless and wondrous universe. The new heavens and New Earth will be the eternal Heaven where God will dwell with his people. And the Creator explicitly promises that animals will live on the New Earth—literally Heaven on Earth!—forever at peace with each other and with God's people (Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:25).

The Isaiah passages stand in stark contrast to the pastor's claim, "There is *no* indication *anywhere* in Scripture that there are *animals* in Heaven."

The preacher's responses serve as a preview to the rest of the book, where I will explore in greater detail what the Bible says about animals in Heaven—and yes, the possibility of pets in Heaven—as well as misunderstandings people commonly have about the afterlife.

### **Many believers hold vague and erroneous views of Heaven.**

It's not surprising that people frequently lack a robust biblical view of Heaven, given how many pastors—whose job it is to teach the *whole* counsel of God—are themselves essentially untaught concerning the vital doctrine of the New Earth. Though I'm grateful to hear from recent graduates that some seminaries have begun to change, countless seminarians

(myself included) were taught, or at least came away believing, that after the current age ends, God's people will be taken up to live forever in an angelic heaven, either in a disembodied state or with resurrected bodies, but not on a physical New Earth. However, these views of the eternal Heaven are not biblical.

The more I researched the doctrine of the final resurrection and the New Earth, the more I realized that, like most evangelical Christians, I had a highly deficient view of God's far-reaching eternal plan for his people and his creation.

In my book *Heaven*, I coined a term—*Christoplatonism*—to describe the viewpoint of some early church fathers who merged Christian theology with Plato's dualistic philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Plato believed material things (including our bodies) were evil, while immaterial things (including our souls) were good. Influenced by this flawed worldview, many believers see physical pleasures and cultural realities—including work, art, sports, drama, literature, and even animals—as temporary and unimportant at best, and sinful at worst.

From a Christoplatonic perspective, earthly things are inherently bad or inferior, distracting us from God and Heaven. Therefore, because animals are physical and not created in God's image (which is true) and don't have souls (which we'll examine closely in chapter 6), they're seen as unworthy of living in God's presence with his redeemed people.

In *The Essence of Christianity*, German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach observes: "Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself, and the salvation of his soul."<sup>4</sup> In many cases, that piercing critique was on target when Feuerbach wrote in the mid-nineteenth century. Sadly, it still rings true in many Christian churches today.

When I've written and spoken about the wonders that await us on the New Earth, some people have responded negatively, saying,

"We should not distract ourselves with thoughts of earthly things."

"We should only care about being with Jesus."

"What is physical is unimportant; what is spiritual is all that matters."

“All we will do in Heaven is worship; to think about anything else, including animals and other things we love on Earth, would be unspiritual.”

Through my research and many conversations, I've found that arguments against the presence of animals on the New Earth boil down to the idea that animals are earthly, smelly, sometimes dangerous, and therefore unspiritual.

But many Christians forget that *Eden* and the *New Earth* should inform our view of animals—not the present world, which is subject to suffering and death, not only for them, but also for us. For example, the pastor stated that animals were “designed for the *food chain* here. That is, they were designed to be consumed.” But that's imposing the Fall and the Curse onto God's original design. Animals in the pre-Fall Eden were *not* designed to be consumed, any more than humans were designed to suffer and die. One day, God will reverse the Curse, and neither people nor animals will ever suffer or die again (Isaiah 11:6-9; 25:8).

Deceived by Christoplatonism, we fail to grasp that God created and loves animals and all those non-sinful “other things we love on Earth,” and he has a purpose and a place for animals that doesn't end with this present world. What he will give us for our delight in the renewed creation will never distract us from him but will only *attract* us to him! Animals—and so many other wonderful things awaiting us on a restored and sinless Earth—will unceasingly move our hearts to praise and worship God.

### **The biblical doctrine of continuity between this life and the afterlife is critical to understanding God's eternal plan.**

When the Bible talks about the New Earth, some act as if it's not going to be a *real* Earth like this present one. The pastor I quoted seemed to take this view—questioning whether there will be flowers and grass, or whether the water in the river of life will even be real water: “I know it won't be the same kind of H<sub>2</sub>O that we have here.” But why wouldn't it be? Since the Garden of Eden had flowers, grass, and real water—and God pronounced it

all “very good” (Genesis 1:31)—why is it so hard to believe the New Earth, a global Edenic paradise, will also have them?

We’re told we will have real bodies and still eat and drink. Why would there not be real water, flowers, grass, and animals? In what sense would the New Earth be a *real* Earth without them?

If I said to you, “I’m going to give you a new car,” would you think, *Well, if it’s new, it probably won’t have a motor, tires, headlights, a steering wheel, seats, or brakes?* No! If it didn’t have those things, it wouldn’t be a car. A new car is still a car. Our new bodies will still be bodies. And the New Earth will *still be Earth*, only far better than the fallen version, forever free of anything bad, “where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13, NIV).

Jesus’ resurrection is the prototype for God’s people and for Earth itself. The tomb was empty because Christ’s resurrection body was the same body that died. God allowed his scars to remain as a proof of continuity. His resurrected body was physical, tangible, and touchable, with a head and torso, arms and legs, hands and feet. Jesus ate and drank after his resurrection. The disciples recognized him. But he was also glorified in that body. There was a one-to-one correlation between Jesus’ first body and his resurrection body. The same will no doubt be true of ours.

A new body is first and foremost a *body*; a new Earth will be an Earth, not a non-Earth. God wouldn’t call it New Earth if it wasn’t a *real* Earth, with the features we are familiar with from living our entire lives on the present Earth.

We should understand that the word *new* refers to a restored and perfected version of our familiar bodies and our familiar planet. Second Peter 3 tells us that God will destroy the cursed Earth we’re on right now. But Peter immediately adds that we’re looking forward to a *new* Earth, raised from the old, just as our old bodies, destroyed at death, will be raised as new.

At the heart of its newness, the New Earth will be “filled with God’s righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13); that is, it will be without sin or Curse or death. It will be Earth as God meant it to be, with rivers, mountains, cities, plants, and a renewed animal kingdom. Simply put, God’s redemptive

plan involves the restoration of his very good original creation, not the erasure of it.

God promises us a *new* Earth, not a *non*-Earth. Adjectives *modify* nouns, they don't negate them.

### **Denying that animals will be in Heaven trivializes their significance in God's plan.**

Many of the books I've read about whether animals will live in Heaven were self-published. They weren't written by Bible scholars, but by laypeople who love animals. And with surprising consistency, the authors tell stories about pastors and other Christian leaders who told them it was sentimental nonsense to think we might one day be reunited with our pets.

I served as a pastor for fourteen years, and I know and deeply respect countless pastors. But when it comes to the topic of animals in Heaven, some pastors are remarkably dismissive. They simply repeat what they heard in church or seminary, where conventional thinking often dominates. Some pastors seem to take strange delight in bursting the balloon of hope, held by supposedly naive people, about animals existing in the afterlife.

I'm all in favor of bursting balloons whenever the Bible contradicts what we believe. But instead of presuming a contradiction, we should first examine our beliefs against the biblical texts. When we are forced to make our case from Scripture, sometimes we realize that what we've believed all along is simply not biblical. In this case, the falsehood stems from an ethereal view of a disembodied Heaven, which ignores the Bible's promises of a physical resurrection and a redeemed creation.

### **Why assume that references to animals in Heaven are only metaphorical?**

The pastor said only humans are eternal. Of course, as he well knew, so is God, so are the angels, and presumably so are the four living creatures mentioned in Revelation 4:6-11 and Ezekiel 1 and 10, who also live in Heaven (see chapter 9). But he ruled out other animals, including the

white horse ridden by the conquering Jesus in Revelation 19—which he viewed as purely symbolic. But why couldn't the horse in Revelation 19 be an actual horse?<sup>5</sup>

When I taught biblical interpretation at a Bible college, we often said, “If the literal sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.” Still, symbolism and literal meaning can coexist. My wedding ring, for instance, symbolizes commitment—but it's still a real ring. Similarly, Heaven is described with thrones, crowns, palm trees, and the tree of life that was in Eden. Why not horses too?

In 2 Kings 6:17, when God opens the eyes of Elisha's servant, the young man sees literal horses and chariots of fire, which appear to have come from Heaven. This isn't Elisha's only experience with heavenly horses and chariots of fire. Years before, while he and Elijah were walking together, “suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire . . . and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11).

It appears Elijah was taken into Heaven without dying, as was Enoch, the father of Methuselah (Genesis 5:21-24). If Enoch and Elijah might still possess their physical bodies in Heaven, and since Jesus certainly does (Acts 1:11), isn't it possible for physical horses to inhabit Heaven? If those depicted as riding horses out of Heaven are real humans, why couldn't the horses be real as well?

### **Many biblical passages answer the young girl's question.**

The pastor could have briefly addressed the important difference between the *present* Heaven and the *eternal* Heaven, which Revelation 21 tells us God will one day bring down to the New Earth.

Peter called this “the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:21). This distinguishes between the present Heaven and the future Heaven, which is the New Earth, where the Bible clearly indicates there will be animals.

Had the pastor highlighted this distinction, even if he held to his view about figurative horses, his answer to the girl's question could have been equally quick and definitive: “Though the horses in the present Heaven

may be figurative, God has promised there will be animals on the New Earth, which is what the Bible calls the eternal Heaven where we will live forever. So, the answer is *yes*, there *will* be animals in Heaven!”

The pastor’s joke about no shovels in Heaven also doesn’t fit, because the New Earth will have grass, flowers, dirt, trees, human bodies, animals, and therefore, in all likelihood, *shovels*. (Why *wouldn’t* it?)

Didn’t God create human and animal digestive systems on that first perfect Earth? In keeping with its name, the New Earth will be earthy as well—what else would it be? Since we are told we will have real bodies, we will serve God, and the lion will eat straw like an ox, why would we imagine the New Earth with no shovels?

I also found it curious when the pastor said, “There is *nothing* in the Bible that indicates there are animals in Heaven.” We’ll get into this topic more in later chapters, but just for starters, Isaiah 11 specifically mentions wolves, lambs, lions, bears, and more, all living in peace with humans on the New Earth, where “they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9, ESV).

Isaiah 60:6 speaks of a “multitude of camels” (KJV). And because Isaiah 60 is cited twice in Revelation 22, we can be confident it is a text about the New Earth. (We could also turn to Isaiah 65:17, where God explicitly says, “Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth,” his everlasting Kingdom.) And in verse 25, he mentions a wolf and a lamb, a lion and a cow, and snakes. A quick listing of all the animals in Isaiah 11, 60, and 65 would have given the young girl a joyful and *true* biblical answer.

The account of God’s dramatic preservation of every kind of animal on the ark, along with eight humans, is also worth mentioning. And after the account of the Flood, the Bible tells of the “eternal covenant” God makes with humanity *and* animals (Genesis 9:16).

The pastor might also have quoted what the apostle John experienced in his vision of Heaven:

I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
belong to the one sitting on the throne  
and to the Lamb forever and ever.”

REVELATION 5:13

Not only are there creatures in Heaven, but they also sing praises to God! Further, the pastor could have mentioned the large number of respected Bible scholars, commentators, Greek experts, and pastors—including John Calvin and John Wesley—who have understood Romans 8:18-23 to teach that the New Earth will be inhabited by some or many of the same animals who once groaned and suffered under the Curse alongside us (see chapters 13–16).

The girl’s question was a golden opportunity to teach about God’s plan to restore and renew the world, including the animal kingdom. Though the pastor obviously couldn’t have said everything I’ve said here in the time he had available, it’s remarkable that he said *none* of it.

I much prefer this answer from theologian N. T. Wright (though he, too, doesn’t cite any of the biblical texts we will look at in this book):

We also look forward to a future resurrection in the ultimate new creation, which is a heaven-and-earth combination, a total transformation of everything. . . .

So will we see animals and pets in that new creation? . . . I think we can carefully respond: “Yes.” When a human being loves and cares for an animal, and when that animal responds to that love and care, there is a bond between them, which is part of who that human being is. Just as when somebody loves God, there is a bond between them and God, . . . and the Holy Spirit looks after that person until the resurrection. I don’t see any reason at all why looking after that person shouldn’t include, by a kind of overflow of grace, looking after all of the animals, birds and whatever that person has loved and brought joy to in this life.

You could start the question from the other end and say: “If God the creator made a world that included giraffes and

whales and grasshoppers, and all the other weird and wonderful creatures, is it likely that the new creation would be boring and flat and wouldn't have any creatures like that in it?" It seems to be far more likely that there will be an abundance of all sorts of creatures being gloriously themselves and sharing in all kinds of relationships with God's human creatures.

And in the middle of that, perhaps there will be an older woman who will recognize among the plethora of delighted creatures a dog to whom, as a little girl, she once gave love and companionship and who returned that favor. I don't see why that shouldn't be so.<sup>6</sup>

Neither do I. But wishing and hoping doesn't make it so. We need biblical evidence. And that's why I've written this book.

### **I hope to enhance and expand our view of animals, allowing God's Word to correct false assumptions.**

I, too, once believed what I'd been taught in church, Bible college, and seminary: that there would be no animals in the afterlife. Twenty-five years ago, during four years of research on the biblical doctrine of Heaven and the New Earth, I changed my mind. I came to believe that the "no room for animals in God's eternal Kingdom" arguments are utterly unsupported by Scripture. I can tell you from countless interactions that they often consist of dogmatic, unfounded, or misapplied statements such as these:

"Animals don't have souls or spirits."

"People have an afterlife; animals don't."

"Jesus didn't die for animals."

"If we say animals could be in God's eternal Kingdom, it makes them equal to people."

"The notion of ever seeing your pet again is just sentimentality."

"Let's not sound like animal-worshiping environmentalists."

"Only converted sinners can go to Heaven, and animals aren't

sinners.” (This last one seems to make the odd argument that animals would be able to enjoy eternal happiness only if they, like us, had sinned!)

Anyone who thinks we are wrong to love and take delight in animals needs to remember what Scripture says, which we will see as this book unfolds:

God made animals because they please him.  
God has a purpose for every animal he has made.  
God loved animals from eternity past when they existed only in his mind.  
God loved animals before the first humans did.  
God’s care for animals is not contingent on humanity.  
God says nothing to suggest his design and plan and love for animals is temporary.

Just as God loves people more than we do, he loves animals more than we do . . . and more than we ever will.

**We will answer these questions, and others,  
in light of what the Bible tells us:**

1. Do animals exist in the present, pre-resurrection Heaven?
2. Will animals live on the New Earth—the post-resurrection Heaven?
3. Will some, most, or all animals on the New Earth be newly created—that is, having never before existed?
4. Will some, most, or all of the animals on the New Earth be ones who already lived, suffered, and died on the fallen Earth? That is, will animals be restored on the coattails of human resurrection?
5. Will some of the animals on the New Earth be the pets God entrusted to our care on the present Earth?

Every serious Bible student should understand from Scripture that humanity's original, God-given dominion involved governing animals (Genesis 1:26-28). And our destiny is that God will come down to live with his people on the New Earth, where we will rule the world under him. So why wouldn't the New Earth involve governing the animal kingdom again, only this time doing it right, without sin, suffering, and Curse?

**Try to set aside preconceived ideas and ask God to help you understand what the Bible actually says about animals.**

I encourage you to come to the topic with an open mind. If the evidence is weak, by all means reject it. But even if it contradicts what you've always heard and maybe even what you've taught others, if the evidence is strong—which I believe it is—be willing to reconsider.

You may not agree with every one of my conclusions, but I believe you'll agree with more than you might expect. If you're a church leader, these insights can help you shepherd those in your care who love animals, who have been touched by God through them, and who grieve when animals suffer and die. And they will help you answer questions about whether God has a place for animals in his new creation.

Scripture tells us “we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). *To look forward to anything, we must be able to imagine it.* We can't long for what we can't envision. The challenge is to base our imagination on biblical truth.

Don't be afraid to imagine God's eternal Kingdom, but ground your vision in Scripture—not in tradition, prejudice, or groupthink. Whether you envision eternity with or without animals, both are imaginative acts. The question is, which vision best aligns with God's Word?

Just because something seems new doesn't make it wrong. Sometimes what's wrong is what we've always been told. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised—and refreshed in your faith—by how much the Bible says about animals.

If you're not a Christian but picked up this book because you love

animals, I pray you'll be moved by the fact that there's a God who is the Creator and original Lover of animals. I hope you'll be excited and inspired by God's plan—for both people and animals—in his restored creation. If you've never said yes to Christ's invitation to embrace his promises and warnings, I pray you'll believe him, receive his gift of eternal life, and join him in the wonderful world to come. I invite you to explore that life-changing good news, which has delightful implications for animals, but is first and foremost for the people God created in his image.<sup>7</sup>

I've written this book largely for Christians who've never heard that God's eternal plan includes not only people but the goodness of his whole creation, including animals. They've missed or never fully grasped the biblical truth that eternity will be on a resurrected Earth, inhabited by resurrected people, along with animals, in continuity with God's original creation.

Because their view of Heaven is vague and ethereal, they naturally can't envision animals there. Yet in God's wise plan, animals will play an equally important role in his restored creation as they did in his original. Those creatures he first created for his glory will continue to bring him glory forever.



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# WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ANIMALS

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Americans love their pets and are very hungry for a religious framework for thinking about animals, but Christian theologians have been slow to respond to this need. . . . To say that God's love extends beyond human beings is not to diminish God's love for us, nor to deny the special moral role we play in the world. But to say that God loves *only* us is surely to betray our limited imaginations.

Stephen Webb, *Good Eating*

He prayeth well, who loveth well  
Both man and bird and beast.  
He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge,  
"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

**O**n a flight out of my hometown of Portland, Oregon, I struck up a conversation with the passenger seated beside me. I asked her about her work, and she in turn asked about mine. When I said, “I’m a writer,” she wanted to know about my books, so I told her about a few novels and mentioned I had also written nonfiction. But when I said I’d written books about Heaven, her body language changed, and she appeared very uncomfortable. My “religious” reference shut down the conversation. I wasn’t entirely surprised, because Portland has the highest percentage of people in the US without any religious affiliation—9 percent higher than San Francisco and Seattle, the nearest runners-up.<sup>8</sup>

In an effort to revive the conversation, I asked, “Do you have any pets?”

Suddenly, her face brightened. “Yes, I have a dog!”

She showed me a photo, happily telling me all about him. I showed her a picture of my dog and shared how much my wife and I loved animals. I mentioned that two chapters in my big book about Heaven address whether animals, including our pets, might have an afterlife.

She looked at me wide-eyed. “Are you saying you believe there will be animals in Heaven?” I briefly explained the Bible’s teaching about the new creation and God bringing Heaven down to the New Earth, where many different animal species will live together peacefully with people. Just minutes earlier, she had disengaged at the very mention of Heaven. But now we were talking not just about animals, but about Jesus—the central figure of Heaven and the only way to get there.

Like many people I’ve met over the years, Christian and non-Christian alike, this woman had never heard of the biblical doctrine of the New Earth—a beautiful, restored planet with all its current wonders and much, much more, yet without evil or suffering. The prospect of such a place, a true Earth that included animals, moved her from disinterest in the afterlife to genuine curiosity.

Many people distrust organized religion but love animals and the

natural world. They don't know God, yet they cherish what he created. They catch glimpses of him in nature (Romans 1:19-21). Their love for animals flows from being God's image-bearers and can be a bridge to the gospel. Why? Because the God who created them made the animals they adore. Scripture tells us Jesus went to the cross primarily for humans, but also for the good of his entire creation: "Through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross" (Colossians 1:20).

God's love for animals and his plan to restore all creation is a major biblical theme, though many believers haven't yet grasped it—or have never heard it. For me, embracing this truth brings paradigm-shifting joy. That explains why the devil has worked so hard to hide what the Bible says about Heaven, even from those who regularly attend church.

### **Animals are mentioned frequently in Scripture and are also used as imagery and illustrations.**

Some might think the Bible doesn't say much about animals, but that's not true. One biblical scholar, Clinton Archer, found 3,805 references to animals in God's Word.<sup>9</sup> He noted 495 references to animals in the New Testament alone, including 113 in the Gospels.<sup>10</sup> As we'll see, animals appear throughout Jesus' life and teachings.

The Bible mentions apes, badgers, bees, camels, cattle, chameleons, crickets, dogs, donkeys, doves, fish, foxes, frogs, goats, hens, jackals, leopards, moths, ostriches, oxen, pigs, ravens, scorpions, sheep, snakes, sparrows, vipers, vultures, weasels, and wolves. That's thirty kinds, and we can find at least seventy more, totaling more than one hundred and perhaps as many as 130. (The uncertainty arises from scholarly debates about the meaning of various Hebrew words, some of which may be different names for the same species.)

In the Bible, God uses animals to preserve human life. He sent ravens to feed Elijah (1 Kings 17), a fish to save Jonah (Jonah 1:17), and quail to feed millions of Israelites (Numbers 11:32). Nature—both animate and inanimate—consistently fulfills God's purposes.

God also uses animals to execute judgment, including the poisonous serpents in the wilderness (Numbers 21:6), the bears that mauled several dozen hecklers who were mocking the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:23-24), and the worms that struck down King Herod (Acts 12:23).

Moreover, 573 verses use animals as imagery in the biblical text.<sup>11</sup> Jesus is called both “the Lamb of God” and “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (John 1:29; Revelation 5:5). He compares himself to a mother hen: “O Jerusalem . . . ! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me” (Luke 13:34).

In comparing God to a bird sheltering its young, Jesus echoed Old Testament passages:

Hide me in the shadow of your wings.

PSALM 17:8

All humanity finds shelter

in the shadow of your wings.

PSALM 36:7

Let me live forever in your sanctuary,

safe beneath the shelter of your wings!

PSALM 61:4

Proverbs uses animals to teach wisdom:

It is safer to meet a bear robbed of her cubs

than to confront a fool.

PROVERBS 17:12

Take a lesson from the ants. . . .

Learn from their ways and become wise! . . .

They labor hard all summer,

gathering food for the winter.

But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep?

When will you wake up?

PROVERBS 6:6, 8-9

Animals frequently appear in biblical illustrations:

Ants—they aren't strong,

but they store up food all summer.

Hyraxes [rock badgers]—they aren't powerful,

but they make their homes among the rocks.

Locusts—they have no king,

but they march in formation.

Lizards—they are easy to catch,

but they are found even in kings' palaces.

PROVERBS 30:25-28

Jesus told his disciples, "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

## Does God really care about animals?

Scripture answers decisively: "All the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird on the mountains, and all the animals of the field are mine" (Psalm 50:10-11).

God claims *every* creature as his own. He takes personal interest in them, on their own merits, not simply in conjunction with humans. He delights in them and tells his people to look after them: "The godly care for their animals, but the wicked are always cruel" (Proverbs 12:10).

That doesn't mean we can't swat a fly or step on a cockroach, but we *are* told never to be cruel, which would mean never pulling the wings off a fly or the legs off a cockroach or leaving an animal squirming in pain. God is never indifferent to brutality. Cruelty is wicked in his sight and will come under his judgment.

God commanded that animals be permitted to rest on the Sabbath, just like people (Exodus 20:10). He also insisted that oxen not be muzzled but allowed to eat what they choose while they work (Deuteronomy 25:4). Oxen are large animals; they can weigh 800 pounds and have large appetites. An Israelite family might have been tempted to muzzle their ox to save more grain for human consumption, but God's law forbade it, demonstrating his compassion for animals and calling on his people to exercise that same compassion.

God also gave specific commands to care for lost or struggling animals:

If you see your neighbor's ox or sheep or goat wandering away, don't ignore your responsibility. Take it back to its owner. If its owner does not live nearby or you don't know who the owner is, take it to your place and keep it until the owner comes looking for it. Then you must return it. . . .

If you see that your neighbor's donkey or ox has collapsed on the road, do not look the other way. Go and help your neighbor get it back on its feet!

DEUTERONOMY 22:1-2, 4

Jesus reflected his love for animals when he asked, "Don't you untie your ox or your donkey from its stall on the Sabbath and lead it out for water?" (Luke 13:15). And, "If your son or your cow falls into a pit, don't you rush to get him out?" (Luke 14:5). Both are urgent priorities—your child first, of course, but your animal's welfare very much matters too.

God's law even directed care for wild animals: "Let the land be renewed and lie uncultivated during the seventh year. Then let the poor among you harvest whatever grows on its own. Leave the rest for wild animals to eat. The same applies to your vineyards and olive groves" (Exodus 23:11).

In Job, the longest divine monologue in Scripture spans nearly four chapters where God speaks about animals, revealing his love for and delight in them (Job 38–41). We'll explore those passages in chapter 12.

Despite these passages and many more, how many sermons have you ever heard about what God thinks of animals? Or how they reveal his character and how that should inspire our trust in him in difficult times? If your church or Christian college or seminary offers elective classes in theology, have you ever seen a course called A Theology of Animals? I haven't.

How often do pastors teach about how animals reflect God's attributes? In my own fifty-some years of experience as a church attender, Bible college and seminary student, pastor, and graduate-level teacher, I've never heard a single sermon on the subject. Animals are mentioned in passing in messages about Creation or the Flood, or in messages about Jonah or about Balaam's donkey, but they're usually bypassed quickly and are rarely treated as serious subjects worthy of reflection.

Our theology of animals is weak because our theology of creation, and of God's robust and sweeping plan to redeem his fallen creation, is weak.

As Clinton Archer writes in his doctoral dissertation on animals in the Bible, "Animals truly are ubiquitous in creation and in Scripture. They are at home in every nook and cranny of our world and are found in nearly every book of the Bible."<sup>12</sup>

In Genesis, God gave humans the responsibility to rule over animals—not to abuse or exploit them, but to care for them (Genesis 1:26-28; Proverbs 12:10). God not only created animals in general, but also our pets in particular.

Whenever I spot a wild animal—a squirrel, a rabbit, a raccoon, or even a single coyote (a pack is a different story)—I see it as a divine appointment. I stand still, soaking in its wonder as God's handiwork. I think, *God sent that animal to me with a purpose in mind*. Often, I think, it is simply to encourage me to marvel at his creation.

With my pets, I feel a deeper calling: God entrusted them to me for a reason. I share meaningful and ongoing relationships with them. From childhood, they have been significant in my life. They were God's gifts to me before I ever knew him, and they played a real part in moving my heart toward him. And they still do, both in daily life and in my memories.

## Does the Bible refer to pets?

I've heard multiple people claim, "There are no pets in the Bible." But that's simply not true. In Job, the oldest book of the Bible—probably written in the days of Abraham—God asks, "Can you make a pet of Leviathan as you would a bird or put it on a leash for your girls?" (Job 41:5, NCV). This shows that birds—and no doubt other animals—were beloved pets that parents gave to their children.

In Mark 7:28, the Canaanite woman speaks to Jesus about dogs under the table eating scraps that fall from the children's plates. The Greek word here is not *kyōn*, the common word used for wild dogs, who were scavengers. Rather, it is *kynaria*, a diminutive form of *kyōn* that literally means "little dogs" or puppies, suggestive of an affectionate term for domesticated dogs—that is, pets. Wild dogs posed a threat to people, so they were *never* allowed inside homes. And certainly not at a dinner table around children! Any dog eating scraps was a beloved pet, who likely also provided protection for a family.

When Paul writes, "Beware of the dogs" (Philippians 3:2, NASB), he is not referring to literal animals. In the ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman world, wild dogs ran in the streets, carried diseases, and terrorized people. Hence "dogs" became a figure of speech for dangerous or impure people. Paul uses it for false teachers. The warning concerns spiritual deception and has no connection whatsoever to tame animals, including household pets. (Likewise, when Jesus says "outside are the dogs" [Revelation 22:15, NIV], he is talking about evil-doing people, not to actual canines.)

A third biblical example of pets is in the story God gave the prophet Nathan to tell King David:

There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. *He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it*

*in his arms like a baby daughter.* One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest.

2 SAMUEL 12:1-4

Nothing in this story suggests the man's affection for his lamb was abnormal or weird. This bond between human and animal was relatable—especially to David, a former shepherd. The treasured lamb wasn't just livestock; it was family. And it was certainly a pet.

There's no indication that the man should be seen as wrong to cuddle his pet lamb or grieve its loss. On the contrary, his devotion was honored. The story resonated with David, and later with readers of 2 Samuel, presumably because such relationships were common and natural in Hebrew culture, just as they are in ours today.

Sure, people are more central and valuable, but animals rank far above everything else in creation. (The silver medal isn't bad!)

### **In Scripture, human destiny is intertwined with that of animals.**

People and animals were together in the Creation, together under the Curse, together on the ark, together in the new world after the Flood, together in the blessings and judgments in the age of the prophets, together in the time of Jesus and the apostles, and together in all God's kindnesses and all God's disciplines throughout Scripture. (And as we'll see, people and animals will be together again on the New Earth.)

Though I've read countless books, commentaries, and systematic theologies in my research, I looked mostly in vain to find a substantial theology of animals, other than the usual emphasis that they are not created in God's image. (As if that means they have no eternal worth. Tell that to the angels, who are also not created in God's image!)

Scripture routinely links the fate of people with that of animals. Consider these statements from the prophets:

There is no faithfulness, no kindness,  
no knowledge of God in your land.  
You make vows and break them;  
you kill and steal and commit adultery.  
There is violence everywhere—  
one murder after another.  
That is why your land is in mourning,  
and everyone is wasting away.  
Even the wild animals, the birds of the sky,  
and the fish of the sea are disappearing.

HOSEA 4:1-3

How the animals moan with hunger!  
The herds of cattle wander about confused,  
because they have no pasture.  
The flocks of sheep and goats bleat in misery.  
LORD, help us! . . .  
Flames have burned up all the trees.  
Even the wild animals cry out to you  
because the streams have dried up,  
and fire has consumed the wilderness pastures.

JOEL 1:18-20

“I will sweep away people and animals alike.  
I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish in the sea.  
I will reduce the wicked to heaps of rubble,  
and I will wipe humanity from the face of the earth,” says  
the LORD.

ZEPHANIAH 1:3

Through the prophet Joel, God spoke direct promises to animals:

Don't be afraid, you animals of the field,  
for the wilderness pastures will soon be green.  
The trees will again be filled with fruit;  
fig trees and grapevines will be loaded down once more.

JOEL 2:22

If you're an animal lover, I encourage you to dig into the Bible verses I share throughout the book. Deep down, you may hope animals will live forever on God's New Earth and that your pets will be there with you. Yet you've never thought there might be a solid theological basis for that hope. But we don't have to lean on wishful thinking; we can build a case on what God actually says.

I believe our deepest desires are not at odds with God's plans for our eternal joy. I think you'll be amazed by how much light the Bible sheds on the subject of animals in Heaven—as long as we remember that a *physical* New Earth will be the center of the eternal Heaven!