

## Introduction

An acquaintance of mine (JR) who struggles with faith once asked if I believed Heaven was a real place. I told him I thought it was. He then told me that as a child and up into his teen years he had believed in Heaven but that he had since concluded it was a fable.

“What caused you to change your mind?” I asked.

“I just can’t wrap my head around the idea that a loving God would send a basically good person to Hell just because he doesn’t believe Jesus is his Savior.”

“Do you even believe in God?” I asked.

“Not really,” he replied. “Not any longer.”

I thought it best, on that occasion, to not pursue the issue. Suffice to say, the biggest reason for this individual’s non-belief is that God doesn’t make decisions he approves of. Like many non-believers (and contemporary liberal, progressive “Christians”), this fellow wants to create God in his own image. Rebellion often pretends to intellectualism.

Another friend told me he thinks a person gets to Heaven by “doing good things.” In all fairness, he regularly attends a church that encourages that very wrong and even destructive notion (among others).

“How many good things?” I asked.

“Huh?”

“How many good things does a person have to do in his lifetime?” I asked. “And what if someone’s life is fairly short? Does God determine who goes to Heaven on the basis of a certain average of good things per week, month, or year? And then there’s the question of the *kind* of good things a person should or has to do? Do you get more Heaven-credits for certain things and less for certain other things? How does that work, exactly?”

He gave me a befuddled look for a moment or two and then said, “Uh, I guess I’ve never thought about those things. So, I don’t know.”

“You want to get to Heaven, don’t you?” I asked.

“Of course!”

“Then you had better ask your priest if he can answer those questions.”

Yet another acquaintance of mine unabashedly ridicules the very idea of God. Nonetheless, he believes in heaven—a lower-case heaven, that is. His heaven is a reflection of his very postmodern, progressive worldview. He thinks there’s a place beyond this earthly life to which everyone goes when they die. It’s a multi-cultural socialist utopia where no one has to work, everything is hunky-dory, necessities are plentiful, every request is granted, and everyone gets a “fresh start.” Sort of a Country Club of the All-Is-One and Very Groovy Afterlife. Apparently even a Muslim terrorist who has beheaded a number of people who do not share his very sick, legalistic orthodoxy goes to this egalitarian paradise when he dies.

And then there's the atheist I know who thinks that when you die, you die, period. It doesn't matter what a person does or doesn't believe, what a person does or doesn't do during his or her lifetime, whether a person is "religious" or not, the cold blackness of death awaits one and all. Come to think of it, this fellow's afterlife is neither cold nor black. It's nothing. The lights go out and that's it. Quoting Tony Soprano of the eponymous hit HBO series, "Bada-bing, bada-*boom*."

Then there are the people I've known in my own past (pre-belief) life—I've stopped counting them—who believe in the "Ever-Turning Wheel of Reincarnation" on which we are all trapped, reincarnating again and again and again as bugs, birds, salamanders, porcupines, kangaroos, musk oxen and so on until we finally get it right and are able to get off this celestial merry-go-round and enter into a place called Nirvana where one floats around the universe like the cosmic fetus in the last scenes of the movie "2001: A Space Odyssey."

I can relate to all five of these notions concerning Heaven because at one time or another in my meandering journey to faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I believed in each of them.

It would appear that plenty of people, maybe most people, and including a fair number of Bible-believing Christians, are confused about Heaven. Some are confused about even whether there is such a place. Some are confused concerning the earthly price of admission. Others want Heaven (and God) to conform to secular notions of "fairness."

Based primarily on my own former muddle-headedness on the subject, I've come to the conclusion that some of the confusion concerning Heaven is due to ignorance. Included in this category are people who've never taken the time to read the Bible from cover to cover. A fair number of the confused have been misled by people they trust, including church leaders and other very prominent people in the Christian world. That would include my friend who believes that one gets to Heaven by doing good things but has never paused to ask or even think about how many or what sort. And then there are those people who are confused in the sense of being just plain wrong. That includes, but is not limited to, atheists. Mind you, there are a good number of very smart people who are atheists. Personal experience leads me to say with certainty that they're just too smart for their own good.

This book is written for confused people everywhere. My esteemed co-author and I are aiming at atheists, agnostics, and people who believe in God but can't wrap their heads around the idea that some 2000 years ago God took human form, voluntarily died an *excruciatingly* painful death while nailed to a wooden cross, and then rose from the dead, fully healed, to offer us salvation and eternity in Heaven with Him. We're aiming at Catholics, mainline Protestants, Mormons and anyone else who would say they are Christian, attends a church, and professes belief in God and perhaps even Jesus as Lord and Savior but is not, in our estimation, being given proper instruction concerning either the Bible or the very important issue of Heaven. We're aiming at evangelical Christians who may not be receiving adequate pastoral teaching concerning this vital (literally) issue and might believe, for example, that every once in a while God

randomly chooses someone—a preschool-age child even—to visit Heaven for a few hours and then come back and give the rest of us a full report. We are aiming at Jews, Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Scientologists, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, Shinto, Sikhs, Wiccans and other pagans, tree-huggers, tree-climbers, tree-choppers, Democrats, Republicans, libertarians, conservatives, socialists, communists, nihilists, anarchists, vegans, carnivores, omnivores, and even people who are gluten-free. In short, this book is intended for everyone; therefore, it is intended for YOU.

We believe it is an important book with multiple purposes. First, it is a ministry to non-believers. One of us was an outspoken non-believer for the first fifty or so years of his life and knows, first-hand, the need for non-believers to understand what they will be missing if they don’t change their erroneous and rebellious ways of thought and behavior. The other of us has been an equally outspoken believer for his whole life and pastors a large evangelical congregation. He knows, first-hand, the need for believers to have clarity on the issue of Heaven if for no purpose other than being better equipped to witness to others who for whatever reason do not possess that clarity.

After all, to possess clarity on the issue of Heaven is to possess clarity on Everything. Clarity on the issue of Heaven does not and cannot exist in a state of theological and intellectual isolation. It promotes and sits right alongside states of clarity concerning all of the following:

- the beginnings and nature of the Universe
- the one-of-a-kind significance of planet Earth

- the meaning of the human drama that ties all sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments together into one cohesive story
  - the nature of God
  - sin—its origins and consequences
  - The Bible as Divine Revelation
  - Jesus—Who He was and is and what that means to each and every one of us
  - salvation, repentance, renewal, and rebirth (but not in the sense of being reincarnated)

Like I said, Everything.

## CORRECT QUESTIONS

In my college days and for many years thereafter, I pondered the question: What is the *meaning* of life? That single question caused me to wander, lost, over life's philosophical landscape, time after time thinking I'd found the answer and then eventually realizing that whatever answer I thought I'd found was wrong or certainly inadequate and beginning to wander, lost, all over again. It wasn't until age fifty-three, when I came to my senses and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior, Guarantor of my life, eternal, that I realized I'd been pondering the wrong question all those years. The proper question is not: What is the *meaning* of life. The proper question is: What is the *purpose* of life?

Once I knew the proper question, I also knew the answer: *The purpose of life is to glorify God the Father, to have a personal, intimate relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ His Only Son as one's Lord and Savior and in so doing, enjoy eternity in Heaven.*

In other words, getting to Heaven is the ultimate purpose of life; thus, the title of this book.

Now, bear with us for a moment because we are going to assert the following bold claim: The authors are confident that we know how to get to Heaven, and we are going to share that knowledge with you, the reader.

How do we know? Because God has told us. The Bible, His Infallible and Inerrant Word, says there is a very real place called Heaven and clearly spells out how to get there.

Some pastors, churches, and denominations make this issue very mysterious—complicated, even. The truth of the matter is: God makes *nothing, absolutely nothing*, complicated. Things only *seem* complicated if one does not believe in God and have saving faith in Christ Jesus. The moment one claims that belief and faith everything begins to become clear, including the fact that getting to Heaven is a very simple and straightforward matter. Here's how simple it is: Upon claiming that belief and faith (the details of which will be spelled out in Chapters 1 through 5), one possesses an irrevocable ticket to Heaven. You're automatically and instantly on the Heaven Train! Getting to Heaven does not require the performance of "good works," rituals, readings

(one very old but timeless book is highly recommended, however), penances, mumblings, or the observance of numerous legalistic rules. Isn't that great!

Some of the people reading this book just need a little nudge to claim that belief and faith; some, however, will require a complete re-education program. They will need to wipe out the falsehoods currently stored in their heads and replace them with Truth. So even though getting to Heaven is a simple matter, for some people the steps they need to take to obtain that life insurance policy are not simple matters at all. They are not complicated, mind you. But for the people in question, those steps, spelled out in this book, are going to rock their worlds. Some of these currently lost folks<sup>†</sup> will even have to accept that their entire worldview—from the A to the Z of it—is in desperate need of replacement. We sincerely hope that a lot of the folks in question read this book and are moved to do exactly that.

As I discovered rather belatedly, to arrive at correct answers, one must ask correct questions. Where Heaven is concerned, the first such question is fairly obvious: "Does Heaven truly exist? Is it a real place?"

The answer is yes. How do we know? The Bible says so. I did not always believe that The Bible was an authoritative source for information or anything other than fantastic (as in, unbelievable) and somewhat entertaining (for children, maybe, but not for a smart guy like me) myths, but I have since come to the unshakeable conclusion that the Bible is the most authoritative source there is or ever will be. It is the inerrant,

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<sup>†</sup> [One can be completely lost and be thoroughly and blissfully convinced that one is not lost; such is the deceptive power Satan is able to exercise over our thinking.](#)



infallible Word of God Himself—His Revelation to us of Who He Is and what He wants us to know. It is The Truth. Not *a* truth as in one of many, but The One and Only Big and Final Overarching Truth About Everything Past, Present, and Future, Amen. Here, then, are some truths about Heaven according to the Bible:

- Heaven is not a charming myth. It is a real place.
- All roads do not lead to Rome and all religious beliefs or faiths do not lead to Heaven.
- Just because a person is “good” by some standard does not mean he is going to be admitted to Heaven.
- Some of the people you’re going to meet in Heaven (assuming you really want to do what it takes to get there) did some really bad things when they were occupying earthly bodies.
- Some people who never did anything approaching the bad stuff the aforementioned folks did are not going to be in Heaven. (That, by the way, is perhaps the most difficult of all paradoxes to wrap one’s head around, but we are going to make sure that happens).
- People who say they’ve been to Heaven and then returned to tell the tale are probably sincere (we happen to think, however, that some are not) but whatever they experienced, it was not Heaven. There is good possibility that Satan—who is also real and whose mission is to prevent Heaven from being populated—has misled them in order that they might mislead others. That would be consistent with one of his names: The Great Deceiver.

- Getting to Heaven is both very simple and very challenging.
- The idea that God loves all people but is not going to admit all people to Heaven is not a contradiction. God is not “fair” in the sense that many people expect Him to be. In The Bible, the word used to describe God is “just”, not “fair.” He will dispense perfect justice according to *His* criteria, not ours.
- When it comes to admission to Heaven, God is anything but arbitrary. It would be arbitrary for Him to admit people to Heaven based on good works they did while on earth. If that was the case, the questions “How many good works do I need to do?” and “What sort of good works do I need to do?” and “Do some good works earn me more Heaven points than others?” would be answered in Scripture. They are not. In Scripture, God is clear as to what it takes to get to Heaven. He says it takes ONE thing, and ONE thing only. That is hardly arbitrary.

The second question, following logically from the first, is: “What is Heaven like?”

The unsatisfying answer is that no one knows (not even folks who claim, sincerely or not, that they’ve been there). No one will know what Heaven is like until he or she gets there. One thing is certain: Heaven pre-existed the Universe. It is where God “lives.” It is, therefore, outside of the spatial and temporal boundaries of the Universe—His creation. It is impossible for the human brain to conceive of a “place” that exists outside of space and time, a place that is eternal, which is why a word like “place,” however inadequate, is nonetheless the best word at our disposal. We do know, because Jesus said so, that Heaven is a Paradise. The etymology of “paradise” equates

it with the Garden of Eden. We know, therefore, that Heaven is more clean, abundant in all manner of goodness, and blissful than one can imagine. It is supremely peaceful, free of want, free of desire other than consuming desire for relationship with the Lord God, and full of wonder. In a word, Heaven is *perfect*, which is another word that challenges the human imagination. Because of our limited understanding, we use that word in sloppy ways. Someone will say, for example, that a certain performance of Handel's *Messiah* was "perfect in every way." Well, in fact, human beings cannot do anything perfectly. Humans employ the word "perfect" in the relative sense only, usually to mean—again using the *Messiah* analogy—something along the lines of "far better than I've ever heard before." Heaven, on the other hand, is the *quintessence* of perfect. Its state of flawlessness is beyond our comprehension.

In the first chapter of the Bible's first book—the Book of Genesis—God creates the Universe and everything in it: light, then stars and other Heavenly bodies, planet Earth, the sun and moon, plants, animals, and lastly, the first two human beings. At the end of every creation day, God pronounces that what He has done is "good." In that context, good means perfect. God does nothing less than perfectly. God also created Heaven; therefore, Heaven is perfect.

## **THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION OF ALL**

When a person dies let's say he suddenly finds himself in a rather spartan room sitting at a bureaucratic-looking desk across from a bureaucratic-looking man who tells him to pay close attention to a movie screen hanging on one of the room's walls. The title

“Heaven” comes up on screen and is followed by a continuum of amazing, indescribable images that induce a great sense of peace and happiness, so much so that the person begins weeping with joy. After “Heaven” plays for maybe five minutes, a second title comes up on screen: “Not Heaven.” What follows are five minutes-worth of scenes so horrifying that words fail at describing them. These nightmarish images induce feelings of both immense loneliness and overwhelming terror, of unrelenting pain, as if one’s body is being stung by wasps, and being trapped inside one’s worst nightmare.

After the second video plays, the bureaucratic-looking man shuts off the projector, leans forward, folds his hands under his chin and asks, “Where would you like to go—Heaven or Not Heaven? Your choice, but remember, wherever you choose, you’re going to be there for all eternity.”

Would anyone in his right mind choose Not Heaven? No, and at least ninety-nine percent of people of unsound mind would choose Heaven as well.

The point is that the answer to the question “Do you want to go to Heaven?” is a no-brainer. That’s true of you, too, isn’t it?

Having established that you want to go to Heaven, we have also established that this book was written for you.

Enjoy your journey!