



HEALING HEREAFTER



**Finding Rational and Refreshing Answers
for Why We're Here
and Where We're Headed**

Jason Dykstra, MD

Healing Hereafter

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*For everyone who wonders
what the hereafter has in store for us,
and especially for those who want to know why*

*With deep gratitude and love
to my Savior, spouse, and sons,
who all significantly gave of themselves
to make this possible*

Booklet 1

Where Am I Taking You?

Healing Hereafter *Introduction*

 **DIAGNOSTIC SOLUTIONS, INC.** 

Jason P. Dykstra, MD

Final Report (Signed off 3/14/13 at 0026)

Dykstra dictating for:

C. King-Moore

Patient ID:

Human being

Study:

The hereafter

Indication:

Ultimately, it's what everybody wants and needs to know about.

Findings:

Multiple views of God, humanity, hell, and heaven were obtained and compared to several prior studies as necessary. Surrounding a large mass of confusion within the brain, there are numerous clusters of opinions regarding the afterlife with varied appearances, many demonstrating indistinguishable margins. The mass becomes much more conspicuous upon the administration of contrast between learned truth, desired truth, and actual truth. The compression exerted by the mass on the adjacent neural cognitive centers may manifest clinically in frustration or in impairment of behavioral practices such as perseverance in seeking truth.

Impression:

Large mass of confusion, exacerbated by several surrounding poorly-defined opinions, explaining the patient's persistent headaches regarding the hereafter. Careful and complete excision is recommended, using the widely-accepted gold standard for the optimal surgical approach. Given adequate patient collaboration despite potential bouts of pain and intermittent discomfort, a significant improvement in vital signs and a perfect outcome are both expected upon completion of the procedure.

Dictation complete.

1

Just sit in a windowless room for nine hours and say something like the previous page into a microphone about 100 times—except with a lot more medical jargon—and you can pretty much do my job!¹ My name is Jason, and I am a diagnostic radiologist. I'm a doctor that interprets x-rays, CT scans, MRI exams, ultrasounds, and other imaging studies. Nice to meet you! Now it's not entirely true that I sit in the dark all day staring at what's going on inside my patients. I also get face time with some of them, the lucky individuals who get to drink rather large glasses of barium so I can look at their innards. I see less lucky folks too; we'll just say our time enjoying barium together leads to a different end! But whether I see patients on the outside or only on the inside, in every case my goal is to closely observe what is happening within them, find precisely what is not working, and use the words in my report to set them on the path to healing.

The goal of this book is the same. We'll intently examine the significant questions that make the Christian view of the afterlife seem confounding or unhealthy, discover biblical responses to them that actually make sense, and hopefully watch these answers transform this book into a comprehensive, consistent framework to bring healing to our hereafters. If we can find rational and refreshing explanations for why things are the way the Bible tells us they are, then perhaps we can somehow make hell understandable and heaven unmistakable. If we can remove the mass of confusion regarding the afterlife, we may very well experience the most perfect outcome anyone could ever hope for!

Although I've enjoyed researching a great many perspectives on the hereafter by pastors and professors, I've discovered that my position as a physician offers several of its own advantages in managing the mass we're trying to excise. First, not only are physicians continually exposed to individuals and families facing death, they also have the opportunity to walk (or sit) alongside them in their most

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physically and mentally vulnerable moments—even their final ones. This experience forces us to repeatedly wrestle with the questions associated with the afterlife ourselves, even as we attempt to provide both a receptive and rational presence during their struggle. One of the ways I uniquely and frequently experience this as a doctor is in talking through a newly-diagnosed breast cancer with a patient, usually a woman who has already had to wait in anticipation for days or weeks to get the final test results. Half of my job is to recognize, respect, and do everything I can to sympathize with the profound feelings and questions multiplying within her, while the other half is to present accurate facts and conclusions in a way that makes sense to her. Each of these women has enhanced my experience in negotiating this invaluable balance, and they have repeatedly emphasized how much it means to them that we're able to achieve it.

As in my profession, I will make a very intentional effort not to ignore or take advantage of anyone's feelings in this book. The hereafter generates a great diversity of highly-charged questions, and I would be wrong to *overlook* your emotional response to them. Even though a few concepts we'll explore are about as pleasant as confronting cancer, I am hoping my stories, attempts at appropriate humor, emotional checkpoints, and straight-up honesty about how tough these issues can be will help us negotiate a balanced discussion that means a lot to *you*. But I would be just as wrong to *manipulate* your emotional response to these questions. It's quite easy to offer words about the afterlife that people really, really want to hear—and many have done so. But if such teaching is inaccurate, the audience is often horribly misinformed, while the author benefits from the book sales or speaking circuit. In contrast, just as I have the responsibility to present accurate data and conclusions about a new cancer—a word no one wants to hear—in a way that makes sense to a person, I assume that same responsibility in this book regarding the afterlife. Don't worry, there's more to feel good about and a lot more sense regarding the biblical hereafter than you might think! But to prove that I don't wish to manipulate your feelings and to find what's most likely to be true, I'll take the less emotionally appealing side when the evidence demands it. After all, people

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are most convinced that something is true when they have come to believe it even though they didn't feel like it. In the end, I'm hoping for us to be convinced that we have found truth about hell and heaven, as well as a whole lot more!

The second benefit being a physician offers in exploring the hereafter is the persistent practice of diagnosis and management. Doctors are by nature people who never stop asking difficult questions and never stop answering them in the best way we can find, and it's hard to turn that quest for knowledge off when we leave the hospital. In addition to at least nine years of formal, on-call, post-college immersion in problem-solving, radiologists ask and answer difficult questions every time they look at a case. Having read up to over two hundred cases in a single day (the most paradoxical Labor Day of my life!), I get to practice wrestling with and identifying solutions to questions about a person's well-being at an intensity not experienced by most. Not all the answers I find are right, but after tens of thousands of opportunities, I have learned to hone both my inquiries and responses into an approach that makes the most sense and explains things better than anything else I've discovered. My desire in this book is to apply that sharpened skill to a person's *eternal* well-being. Because I want to help both you and me find the very best answers, I have never stopped asking and never stopped answering questions to heal our hereafters. This pursuit began long before I set foot into medical school and was accelerated by numerous years of training, so hopefully what we discover will make sense and explain things better for both of us.

The constant, everyday exposure of a physician to the secular world is the third advantage I have in exploring the hereafter that pastors and professors often don't. Outside Christian church walls and seminary halls, it becomes less likely that folks will approach life—or what comes after—in the same way I do. This leads them to ask different questions and challenge me in a far greater variety of ways than a homogenous group of people would who are just like me. Moreover, nine years of diversity in Ann Arbor, MI, five years of residency among the largest Arabic and Muslim population in the Western Hemisphere (Dearborn, MI), and the eclectic patient

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population arriving at the hospital each and every day have enabled me to approach the hereafter from numerous perspectives. Sometimes this gives me new options for answers, and sometimes it improves the ones I already have, but always it pushes me to ask more and better questions and find more and better answers. This constant external motivation is not present when you are immersed in an environment accustomed to the teachings of only one theologian or denomination or when you already agree with 95% of people's beliefs in your everyday world. The number of questions we'll respond to in this book is much greater than what I've found in comparable literature written from more homogenous Christian viewpoints. This is to address the greater diversity of questions asked by the people I've met in our heterogeneous secular world. People who wonder what sermons rarely address. People who resonate with making logical sense more than being theologically dense. People perhaps just like you.

These benefits give me and other laypeople some unique ways of finding responsible yet innovative explanations for the biblical hereafter. However, this absolutely does not mean that priests, ministers, or scholars don't have their own unique ways of doing the same. My intent is certainly not to minimize the importance of what they learn and objectively communicate to the rest of us. Rather, it is to demonstrate that the validity of a person's authority ultimately depends on the quality of his words, not on the list of degrees or titles behind his name. As many of you can verify, not all people with an MD behind their names are good doctors. Likewise, not all people with lengthy credentials or a following behind them to suggest that they are a reliable authority on the hereafter are either. Some of us are blessed with preachers and scholars who have responsibly and radically improved our understanding of the afterlife, and we should be thankful for them! But God himself encourages the "noble" pursuit of laypeople biblically validating their teachers, even one so great as Paul, and personal fluency with the Bible can offer insight and understanding greater than that of any human religious authority (Acts 17:11-12, Psalm 119:99-100). May all our words be judged by content rather than credentials, so that we can maximally benefit from anyone possessing a uniquely helpful approach to the hereafter,

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academic or adolescent, philosopher or fisherman, reverend or radiologist (Matthew 4:18-20, Acts 2:38-41).

And regardless of who's making the effort to describe the biblical hereafter as a sensible, viable option to others, their content can never be better than the Bible itself, what Christians consider to be God's words to humanity. Whether or not the Bible carries special significance for you, the specific concepts of hell and heaven, as they are most commonly described and understood, were first conceived and explained in detail in the Bible. It would follow then, whether for religious ends for the Christian or for educational ends for others, to use the Bible as the authoritative gold standard for our approach to discussing these topics. After all, ignoring its teaching on something it introduced us to in favor of our own isolated and relatively transient opinions is just as silly as insisting to JK Rowling that the four houses of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry are actually Blinky, Pinky, Inky, and Clyde (Clyde being my favorite Pac-Man ghost as he was the slowest and least likely to kill me)! And if you're willing to entertain the biblical concept of the afterlife, there's no reason not to entertain the possibilities of God, Satan, angels, demons, and biblical post-mortem destinations besides hell and heaven. The Bible initiates discussion on many of these topics, so we join with many others in discovering what it has to say. Only then we can accurately consider its comprehensive perspective as an option to decide what to do with.

Obviously, our exploration of the biblical hereafter will require open-mindedness, and this is something I humbly ask of you, realizing that you are already investing your time in reading this book. Simply because you've started it at all, it's clear that you have some unresolved issues regarding the afterlife—and who doesn't? God has "set eternity in the human heart" after all, so embrace this desire to find answers (Ecclesiastes 3:11)! It's also apparent that you are at least willing to be tolerant of someone else's take on the hereafter, enough to read it and understand it. I appreciate that and don't take it for granted. But to get the most out of this, to achieve the greatest yield from your investment, you'll have to take it one step further. To truly approach topics like hell and heaven with an open mind, you can't

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only spend time reading about them and understanding what you've read. You also need to be prepared to actually incorporate into your beliefs and life what you've discovered to be better explanations—and to remove from your beliefs and life what you've discovered to be worse explanations. Gaining new information without truly having the will to apply it is a waste of time, and neither of us wants to waste your time. The ways that many of the deepest questions of life are explained below may be better or worse than the explanations you already have, I don't know. My point is that you don't know either. I am not asking you to believe me; I am asking you to *truly consider believing and applying* whatever you learn—in this book or elsewhere—that offers more valid answers to these profound questions than the ones you currently have.

Some things that we discuss will excite you, while others might enrage you. Some things you will want to believe; others will make you very uncomfortable. Some things will sound very familiar, and others will seem totally new and foreign. These feelings are common whenever we encounter anything significant for the first time, whether it's a job, a sport, an art, or something as simple as riding a bike. When the training wheels first came off, I was excited until I fell again and again. Then I was just mad, angry at myself, at my dad for teaching me, and at the dumb bike for "making" me fall. I wanted to believe that I could succeed, but I was extremely uncomfortable trying to balance, pedal, look forward, and steer, all at the same time. I was familiar with riding a bike, but the concept of doing so on only two wheels was new, strange, and quite frankly ridiculous in my mind. Perhaps some things we'll cover will seem ridiculous to you as well, but maybe only because you have not yet learned how they fit into a comprehensive, logical, and practical picture of the hereafter. Being willing to apply the foreign concept of riding without training wheels when I was a child enabled it to be completely sensible and useful to me now. Likewise, being open-minded enough to consider applying the concepts below, ones you might initially balk at, can enable you to form a comprehensive and constructive picture of the hereafter—one that becomes as familiar and useful as riding a bike.

To make what follows the most worthwhile experience possible, all

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I ask is that you ask one simple question at the end of each chapter, and especially at the end of the book: Is this a better explanation than the one I currently have, and why or why not? If it's not and your "why not" is a good one, please teach us all your current explanation, because I genuinely would love to learn from you. Perhaps you have helpful truth to offer me. But if this explanation is better and your "why" is a good one (I'd hate for you to be lured into believing me based only on the charming charisma radiologists are so well-known for!), perhaps I have helpful truth to offer you. In encouraging you to keep an open mind, I want to reassure you that mine is open as well. I have learned a great deal while writing this book, and many large swaths of the text below describe information and beliefs that I did not have before I started. But I only know of one shot that I have to figure out what I need to know about hell and heaven, and to let that shot be blocked by ignorance, assumptions, or bias is unwise. I do not claim to know the truth, but I will do my very best to know what is most likely to be the truth and then believe and live according to that, even as I continue to learn to make my most likely still more likely. After all, there's no valid reason to continue believing or living according to something less likely to be true, right?

This applied open-mindedness will greatly benefit those of you who picked up this book with unfamiliarity or apprehension about biblical teaching on the afterlife, but it also has much to offer those for whom this teaching is old news. In fact, in some ways it's even more important to urge open-mindedness in those who are *too* familiar with the notions of hell and heaven that they've been taught. Why? Because some of that instruction may be incomplete or inaccurate, and some unlearning may be necessary before new learning can commence. Again, I am not *telling* you that more complete and accurate biblical teaching awaits you below; I am only asking you to *keep considering* that it might.

If you're a Christian, this is particularly important for the three following reasons. First, Christians typically believe that the Bible comprises God's only authoritative words to humans. Even though summaries of these words (such as creeds, confessions, catechisms,

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or denominational doctrine) or non-biblical words (such as those of clergy or inspiring Christian authors like radiologists) can all be helpful in understanding the Bible, its teaching is the gold standard by which their validity is judged. This authority also extends over descriptions of the afterlife following near-death experiences. Some may be completely accurate, but they may just as easily not be. As there are so few ways to objectively assess their accuracy, we won't be putting the focus on them in this book. Christianity, along with every other worldview, has to be defined by something more uniform and stable, or it becomes too amorphous to be identifiable or practical. That something is the Bible for Christianity, its sacred text, the Christian God's unchanging, identifiable, and practical communication of what he wanted us to know. It is the collective witness closest in time to the events it describes to offer a coherent explanation of God's work among humanity. But there's a problem. Many Christians who have no trouble believing this know a lot more about the summaries and non-biblical writings concerning the Bible than they do about the Bible itself. They devote themselves very passionately to a list of beliefs, a denomination, historical traditions, or a pastor's preaching, and because these entities are more concise and convenient than comprehensively studying Scripture, they *become* a bible to these folks. Such people can't know when these bibles disagree with *the* Bible because they don't have adequate knowledge of what the latter says. And often they won't change their beliefs even when they do find disagreement between their bible and the Bible, because they have become too attached to what the former says. If you are a Christian, never let this happen, not with my words or the words of others. If we don't try to fit the Bible into those bibles, we'll free ourselves to enjoy learning together how God's words end up incorporating portions of each bible into a unifying and satisfying whole.

Because we're only interested in if and how the Bible makes sense of the hereafter, we will intentionally refrain from a detailed discourse below on the church's historical understanding of hell and heaven, an exhaustive explanation of each denomination's take on these topics, or the opinions of every prominent theologian on the hereafter. Thank heaven, because that would be one hellishly long book! While these

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approaches might seem optimal, and while such knowledge can be very educational and useful, none of us will ever be able to know that we've explored and understood all the information out there. The one thing we might have missed could have been the one thing that explained the truth. But this is no cause for despair, because all the information out there has only one source to derive itself from and one authority to submit itself to anyway—the Bible. Since only two of its books were written to clergy (Paul's letters to Timothy), all the others were written to laypeople like you and me! Therefore, God doesn't expect us all to go to seminary, learn Hebrew and Greek fluently, become experts in ancient Middle-Eastern culture, and expose ourselves to all the words people have ever written about him before we can understand what he's up to in this world and beyond it. But he does expect that you know *his* words, because they are the source for *all* other commentary on the hell and heaven of Christianity, and the detailed discourse you *will* find below is saturated with Scripture. For those who don't consider the Bible to be God's words, I invite you to learn, perhaps for the first time, the whole story that it teaches about the hereafter, and how God makes so much sense through it. For those who do consider the Bible to be God's words, let the myriad biblical references in this book saturate your open mind and change whatever stands in opposition to them, however entrenched and endearing it might be.

The second example of how being open-minded can offer Christians a more complete and accurate understanding of God's words is the way they choose to approach a mystery in the Bible. Let's just admit it; there are things about a God who can create a whole lot of stuff out of nothing that his creation will never be able to understand, right? And there's a great deal about God that we don't need to understand, like what kind of BBQ sauce he prefers, how many toes he has on each foot, or if he likes country, pop, or rap the best (I say techno). These unknowables and unnecessaries are acceptable mysteries, things the Bible does not comment on and tensions, particularly for those who are very passionate about BBQ sauce, that we need to be comfortable leaving intact. But some tensions cannot be left intact, some questions about God cannot be unanswerable,

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and some explanations are absolutely necessary in order for humans to have any meaningful way to understand God and any reason to believe in him. We need valid reasons why God is trustworthy, or everything else he tells us about himself may be unreliable. We need to be able to convincingly demonstrate that God is good, or we have no reason to believe he isn't deceiving us. We need to be able to legitimately establish that God is consistent, or he may change his values or promises to us at any time. We need persistent evidence that God eventually makes sense, or we can never have assurance that he has everything figured out that we will never be able to. Therefore, any question in the Bible regarding God's trustworthiness, goodness, consistency, or logic needs an answer, and replying with "God is sovereign and he knows, so I don't have to" is never a helpful or responsible first attempt. If I hastily invoke such mystery as a solution to questions that challenge any of these aspects of God's character, then I—and anyone who comes to me for answers—no longer has any *objective* reason to believe anything God says. I am only left with the *subjective* experiences and chance upbringing my environment gave me, which have no more demonstrable validity than those claimed by anyone else believing in any other God. If I can demonstrate to others how my God makes sense from his words, an unchanging standard that is not dependent on my presumed personal encounters with God, then we'll all still have just as much reason to believe in that God when those subjective experiences are not so convincingly valid to me or them. If I merely believe in my God because I was raised in a Christian home or feel I have seen him work in my life, my God is no more legitimate than that of someone raised in a (whatever worldview) home who feels she's seen (whatever deity/authority) work in her life. That is why it's so crucial to discover how much sense the biblical God *does* make, and the appeal to mystery must *only* be made once we're sure we've objectively exhausted *all* the options his words give us for answers. In this book we will happily find such an appeal to be almost completely unnecessary.

Unfortunately, many Christians, some very influential, frequently use mystery as an "explanation" for almost every significant question about God's nature and the hereafter. This may be because their

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denomination or pastor teaches them to or because they are too unfamiliar with the Bible to offer a better answer. But often it's simply because they have been Christians within a Christian atmosphere for so long that their worldview does not seem significantly shaken by the incomplete answer of mystery. They will get over the slight discomfort it generates, and it's a simple answer, so they accept it and freely teach it to others. However, that discomfort never really goes away, does it? That is because the discomfort is legitimate, and these Christians are recurrently plagued by the gnawing, valid doubt that mystery does not adequately address. Many of you know exactly what I'm talking about.

But it is even more damaging when those who are not immersed in the Christian community are too quickly taught to accept mystery by Christians. They are seeking truth without the ingrained confidence in the Bible or Christianity that would tolerate mystery as a sufficient response. Because they have precious few other reasons to believe from their upbringing or experience, asking good and important questions is the primary way that they will learn whether or not Christianity is the best option. They can't afford an incomplete answer, and they don't have the Christian background to help them persevere through the resultant skepticism. Christians often forget this when they casually offer the answer of mystery. Multiple times confused individuals, both with and without extensive Christian backgrounds, have come to me to ask a difficult question about the hereafter because the last person they asked unnecessarily invoked mystery as the "answer." Obviously that answer wasn't deemed adequate, and it's not hard to see why. When we can't biblically establish why God isn't dishonest, evil, unreliable, or irrational, believing in his words is no better, and potentially a lot worse, than believing in anything else! In this predicament, we can invoke mystery and claim we don't need an answer because God is God, trustworthy, good, or wise, but only on the grounds that we've already subjectively chosen to believe that God is God, trustworthy, good, or wise enough for us to believe his words assuring us of these characteristics. We can't escape from this circular argument *that* God is all of these things in his words unless we can demonstrate *how* God is all

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of these things throughout his words.

In this book we will ask a great many of life's difficult questions regarding who God is, why we're here, why the world is the way it is, and especially what happens after we die. Unlike others, we will not be satisfied to simply answer with "because the Bible says so." While this answer may be perfectly adequate for Christians pondering questions that the Bible is universally clear about, it is not helpful when the Bible seems to say different things in different places. It's also fairly insensitive toward those for whom the Bible has yet to carry any special authority. Instead of merely claiming *that* the Bible says so, this book is all about *why* the Bible says so, *how* it makes sense, and why it's so important. Many inquiries about the afterlife are intimately intertwined with the characteristics of God listed above, and therefore, they need answers. I hope that you will be as excited as I was to discover that God gives us these answers in the Bible without surrendering one ounce of his honesty, goodness, consistency, or rationality! He is not always as mysterious as we might think or want him to be once we do the work to find the answers available in the Bible.

The third way being open-minded can offer Christians a more complete and accurate understanding of God's words is the willingness to identify and reconcile inconsistencies between the answers we have found, even if that means altering a firmly-held belief. Because questions about the hereafter are complex and often only tackled one at a time, an answer believed to work well for one is often only later discovered to be hopelessly inconsistent with an answer believed to work well for another. Let's use the rather significant question of why people might go to hell as our illustration. One very common answer to this question is that people go to hell to be punished for their sins. Although you're no doubt already thinking of follow-up questions to this answer, it works quite well for the singular question at hand. It's no mystery that people do some very horrible things, and most of us have a great enough appreciation for justice to acknowledge that those acts need to be punished. Since they often aren't punished in life, it follows that justice should be served in a post-mortem place of punishment like hell. Quite honestly, for millions

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of folks, responding to the question of why people go to hell with “to be punished for their sins” is perfectly satisfactory, and this is the answer they believe. But when we start asking other questions, this answer no longer works! If it’s nothing more than justice that requires a person to be punished in hell, then why is the punishment forever when the sins were only committed over 80-odd years or less? Justice also must require that the punishment fits the crime, right? Is there any earthly sin or number of sins that truly deserves eternal or even prolonged punishment in hell? And if God wants everyone to be saved, a desire he makes quite clear in the Bible, then why would he punish anyone in hell? Can’t he give them all a just punishment on earth, so that they also can go to heaven when everyone else does?

I could go on and on, and although the purpose of this illustration is certainly not to address these questions in detail, we will thoroughly examine all of them in this book. The point here is that even a widely-accepted, workable answer to one difficult question can easily collapse under the weight of other questions and the answers believed to solve them. But if all of these answers don’t concur, at least one of them must be invalid, no matter how well it answers the question directly associated with it. We need a framework that encompasses *all* the significant questions regarding the hereafter, posits biblical and rational answers to them, and assures that those answers remain valid when the framework is evaluated as a whole.

This framework is what I’m striving for in this book. First, we will open-mindedly approach the Bible’s teaching on the afterlife as a potential explanation of the truth, taking it at face value, just as we would the perspective of any other worldview. Second, we will thoroughly explore the entire Bible, including the oft-ignored parts, for information about the afterlife, giving us the most comprehensive and unbiased database to build from. Third, we will attempt to fit every piece in its place to discover a rational and refreshing way for it all to make sense. Given these goals, this book is not written for those who solely want proof of either what the Bible says, such as that God exists or that Jesus is God, or the historical and archeological validity of the Bible itself. Those folks would be better served by Timothy Keller’s informal *The Reason for God* or Josh McDowell’s

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more thorough *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Rather, this book is for all who open-mindedly acknowledge the Christian afterlife as a potential reality but are having trouble making sense of it. If that's you, join me in unveiling satisfying answers to many of your questions and doubts about the appeal, consistency, and necessity of the biblical hereafter. We will not be trying to explain something that will give you warm fuzzies, that will be comfortably familiar, that will allow you to remain confined to the bible of a denomination or person, that will encourage you to accept crucial questions as impossibly mysterious, or that only gives you incomplete answers that fail upon broader application. Rather, if you can offer me your open mind, I desire to offer you a framework for explaining the hereafter that is insistently biblical, persistently rational, and consistently applicable for every question it seeks to answer. Although no one can prove that any explanation of the afterlife is unequivocally true, I have certainly found the following framework the most likely to be true, and allowing God's words to heal my hereafter has been one of the most exciting and fulfilling joys of my life!

2

To optimize our journey, I need to share a few tidbits with you before we're off and running. This chapter clarifies precisely how the framework is set up, to make it as clear and helpful to you as possible. We'll also see how this book is different from others that seek to explore the afterlife, as my hope is to offer you something uniquely beneficial. I realize that such a framework is an ambitious goal and needs to be presented to you very openly and objectively.

In regards to being open with you, I have a few disclaimers. First, many assertions I make below I state absolutely, as if they were fact, even though I fully admit that they may not be. I do this only for the sake of simplicity and to not be annoying, as filling the text with thousands of "might be's," "maybes," "likely to be's," "probably's," "possibly's," "plausibly's," and "perhapses" gets on both of our

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nerves real quick, even in this sentence alone! If I definitively state something, I'm not saying that I know it's true, and please judge its validity on the evidence surrounding it. Second, unless otherwise noted, any italics used are mine and simply for *emphasis*. Third, I will often quote only parts of verses or sources, and occasionally I will use ellipses (...) to link two nearby phrases. I *only ever* do this to avoid quoting large sections of text that are irrelevant to the issue at hand, and I'll *never* do it to leave out portions of the text that do not seem to support what I'm saying, which I'll either deal with there or elsewhere. We will observe the disastrous effects of others partially quoting sources in order to omit the parts that don't agree with their opinion. Often we will suspiciously find that they neither reference these sources very well, nor do they encourage readers to double-check them. Double-check me. I stick with a single biblical translation, so you know I'm not constantly cherry-picking whatever one supports each of my conclusions the most. For this book, I'll be quoting from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, and it's easily accessible online here.²

Since this book is about the biblical hereafter, there is one additional housekeeping issue to take care of: what does the Bible mean by the terms used to describe the places we might go after here? The Bible actually lists several locations where people can exist after physical death. They are Sheol, Hades, Paradise, Tartarus, the Abyss, a mysterious unnamed place directly referred to by Peter, the current or old heaven, the new heaven and new earth, and Gehenna. These locales may sound strange and exotic, but they are all biblical, and they all need an explanation. Sheol and Hades are Hebrew and Greek versions of essentially the same locale, a realm of the dead mentioned throughout the entire Bible. They are translated synonymously, and we consider them synonymous for other reasons explained below as well. We'll discuss them in detail with the four places following them above, so you'll just have to wait in tantalized suspense until then. I know, so cruel! The current or old heaven is what people commonly think of as heaven, a rather ethereal realm where God, his angels, and at least one or two harps reside. This heaven will have "passed away" after judgment day to give rise to the

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“new heaven and new earth” which humans and others will inhabit forever (Revelation 21:1-4). To avoid confusion, henceforth, I’ll only refer to the old, temporary heaven as “the current heaven,” and I’ll call the ultimate destination of the saved either “Heaven” or the “New Earth.” Gehenna is the true hell, the lake of burning sulfur and fire that Jesus and others are constantly warning us about. Henceforth, I will only use “Hell” or “Gehenna” to describe this destination of the unsaved.

In regards to being objective with you, I intentionally reference and discuss in detail many perspectives on the biblical hereafter different than my own as we delve into each issue. I feel it is not responsible for me to artificially strengthen my position by hoping you don’t notice viewpoints I’ve left out. Within my profession I am authorized to wield the substantial power of radiation, and as anyone whose physical life has been significantly affected by radioactivity knows, with great power comes great responsibility. And not just in comic books! But the ability to wield words in ways that may affect a person’s eternal life is a far greater power than radiation, and with it comes far greater responsibility. With this in mind, as this framework is explained, I will frequently entertain and address numerous counterarguments, and I’ll try to anticipate and answer both the non-Christian’s and the Christian’s subsequent questions. Starting now. I’d like to make you aware of a resource that may provide somewhat of a backdrop for you, as it offers a relatively short summary of the various ways people view Hell and Heaven. It’s a bit academic and weighty, but it very objectively and thoroughly introduces many of the questions about the hereafter that we’ll encounter. Because it helpfully informs but does not ultimately unveil any one comprehensive framework, we’ll continue its discussion in the very hope of doing so by searching for a way to avoid the problems inherent to each perspective it shares. It was published in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and you can peruse it here.³ I have no problem informing you of your various options, even if I don’t agree with some of them. Of course, you don’t need to read it to understand anything that follows at all, but it might be an easy way to familiarize your mind with several different approaches to Hell and Heaven, providing context as we establish ours.

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Obviously there are many other summaries and frameworks in popular Christian literature seeking to describe aspects of the biblical hereafter as well. I have read and studied many of them, but I have found none that set out to accomplish what we are striving for here. If I had, I would be referring you to those books instead of laboriously writing my own! I do not reference these books here to condone or condemn them, merely to contrast their literary niche with that of *Healing Hereafter*. Some of them limit their scope to one postmortem locale only. These include anecdotal accounts of Hell or Heaven,⁴ along with biblical explorations of primarily Hell or Heaven.⁵ There are books that explore both Hell and Heaven or provide detailed descriptions of every biblical location in the afterlife but do not address many of the questions concerning why they are the way they are or why they contain the people they do.⁶ Others admittedly function more as discussion starters, offering several new or non-traditional ideas about the hereafter while intentionally leaving many related questions and proposed paradoxes unsolved.⁷ Reactionary books that join the discussion as a result are written as point-by-point responses, rather than comprehensive explanations of the afterlife.⁸ Similarly, others set out to find in-depth answers to only a short list of the most difficult questions, rather than putting answers to a more comprehensive list of questions into a complete framework.⁹ Finally, there are books that do describe Christianity comprehensively, but with a primary focus on everything leading up to the hereafter, instead of using that information to explain why that hereafter is the way it is.¹⁰ I have yet to discover a book that examines every locale in the biblical afterlife, asks a comprehensive list of questions relevant to why they are the way they are and why they contain the people they do, uses the whole of the Bible to construct biblical and logical answers to all of these questions, and steps back to make sure all of those answers remain consistent when taken together as a whole. Except for this book, which is why I am hopeful it will be valuable to you in ways that other summaries or frameworks might not be.

There are four other important differences between this book and many of its peers. The first is that anyone can easily read it and assess its validity. You need not have any prior understanding of Christian

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jargon, denominational perspectives, church history, or the views of various theologians, because this book does not derive its conclusions from them. For the reasons set forth in Chapter 1, you simply need a Bible and a brain, which are the only tools that many folks seeking to understand the biblical hereafter have anyway. All you have to do to validate my words is ask if the biblical evidence I offer agrees with them and if they make sense. Moreover, I have provided online references for non-biblical sources as often as possible, so that you can immediately double-check me to be sure I'm being truthful and complete.

Second, this book is also differentiated from others in its approach. It is not organized by topic, time period, person, or Christian subgroup. Instead, questions and answers are addressed in the order they would naturally occur to the inquiring mind. Our brains don't ask every question about only one topic before moving on to the next. Rather, we ask a question about one topic (e.g. free will), which prompts us to ponder about a different one (e.g. sin), which generates a query about a third (e.g. death), which leads us to wonder about yet another (e.g. Hell). Each booklet into which this book is divided represents a progressive series of related multi-topical questions, not a disconnected group of questions about a single topic (e.g. a chapter covering the gamut of random questions about Heaven). Our approach allows us to start at the beginning with a few initiating questions about God relevant to the hereafter, and as we answer those, we are free to answer resultant follow-up questions about any topic. Then we answer follow-up questions to those, and so on, until we finally exhaust a natural line of questioning regarding both Hell and then Heaven. Occasionally, we must hold a question for a later chapter or booklet when we will have obtained the knowledge necessary for answering it, but in general this approach keeps us from letting important questions go unasked or slip through the cracks. It also helps us to think through these issues as our mind normally would in any deep conversation with a friend or in bed as you lie awake pondering the profound things of life. Indeed, I wrote *Healing Hereafter* as questions naturally arose and were answered in my own mind, so I anticipate it will have a familiarly flowing feel to you also.

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And if you prefer pictures to text, no problem! A summary illustration appears at the beginning and end of each subsequent booklet, adding a synopsis of each image at the end as well. So try your hand at interpreting the illustrations as the text enlightens them, and then see how well our interpretations concur as you finish each booklet!

A third key distinction is that I am not content to simply describe *what* the Bible says about the afterlife; I am also interested in *why* the Bible says it. I suspect you are too, which is why I am writing this specifically for you. Many books do not ask why. They very diligently and often accurately describe what some biblical passages say about the hereafter, but they make little effort to explain why their whats seem to contradict each other at times. We choose not to settle for “because the Bible says so” as an adequate response; instead, we find more biblical information to help resolve the conundrums that the whats sometimes generate, which is seldom difficult to do if we look at the whole Bible and use our whole brain.

Lastly, perhaps the most significant difference between *Healing Hereafter* and the vast majority of other books is that it benefits people before it's even opened! All proceeds above publishing costs and taxes will be donated to aid orphans, at-risk mothers and their children, the enslaved and sexually exploited, and the hungry, via Compassion, Bethany Christian Services, International Justice Mission, and Bread for the World. Every penny that would have come to me is healing their hereafters instead. But our hereafters have yet to benefit, so let's finally get to the goods! It's time to begin building our framework.

Notes

1. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41Fwn_ku58s&feature=youtu.be
2. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/>
3. Kvanvig, J. (2009). "Heaven and Hell". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition)*. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/heaven-hell/>
4. For example, *23 Minutes in Hell* by Bill Wiese, *Heaven Is for Real* by Todd Burpo, *90 Minutes in Heaven* by Don Piper
5. For example, *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis, *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn, *Paradise Mislaid* by Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Heaven Revealed* by Paul Enns, *Made for Heaven* by C.S. Lewis, *Heaven* by Lisa Miller, *Heaven* by Peter Stanford, *Heaven Is a Place on Earth* by Michael Wittmer, *Surprised by Hope* by N.T. Wright
6. For example, *Life After Death* by Alan Segal, *Secrets from Beyond the Grave* by Perry Stone, *Following Jesus* by N.T. Wright
7. For example, *Love Wins* by Rob Bell, *The Love Wins Companion* by Rob Bell
8. For example, *God Wins* by Mark Galli, *Christ Alone* by Michael Wittmer
9. For example, *The Reason for God* by Timothy Keller, *The Problem of Pain* by C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel
10. For example, *The Mystery of Christ* by Robert Farrar Capon, *Doctrine* by Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

