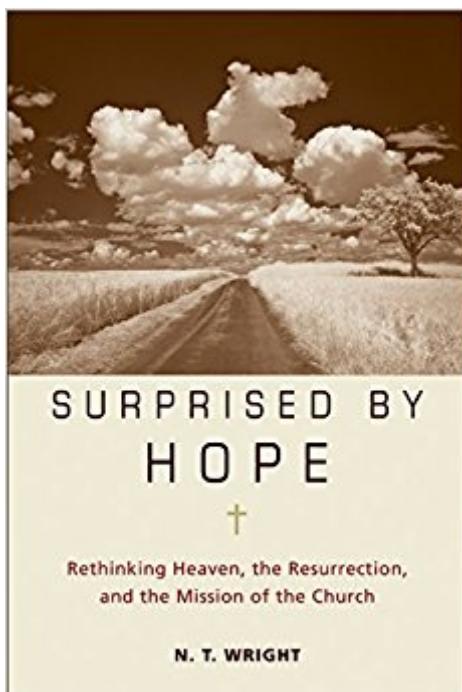


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Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, The Resurrection, And The Mission Of The Church



Synopsis

In *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, top-selling author and Anglican bishop, N.T. Wright tackles the biblical question of what happens after we die and shows how most Christians get it wrong. We do not “go to” heaven; we are resurrected and heaven comes down to earth--a difference that makes all of the difference to how we live on earth. Following N.T. Wright’s resonant exploration of a life of faith in *Simply Christian*, the award-winning author whom *Newsweek* calls “the world’s leading New Testament scholar” takes on one of life’s most controversial topics, a matter of life, death, spirituality, and survival for everyone living in the world today.

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Customer Reviews

Wright, one of the greatest, and certainly most prolific, Bible scholars in the world, will touch a nerve with this book. What happens when we die? How should we think about heaven, hell, purgatory and eternal life? Wright critiques the views of heaven that have become regnant in Western culture, especially the assumption of the continuance of the soul after death in a sort of blissful non-bodily existence. This is simply not Christian teaching, Wright insists. The New Testament’s clear witness is to the resurrection of the body, not the migration of the soul. And not right away, but only when Jesus returns in judgment and glory. The “paradise,” the experience of being “with Christ” spoken of occasionally in the scriptures, is a period of waiting for this return. But Christian teaching of life after death should really be an emphasis on “life after life after death”-the resurrection of the body, which

is also the ground for all faithful political action, as the last part of this book argues. Wright's prose is as accessible as it is learned-an increasingly rare combination. No one can doubt his erudition or the greatness of the churchmanship of the Anglican Bishop of Durham. One wonders, however, at the regular citation of his own previous work. And no other scholar can get away so cleanly with continuing to propagate the "hellenization thesis," by which the early church is eventually polluted by contaminating Greek philosophical influence. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review Wright, the Anglican bishop of Durham, shares the strong current interest in Christian beginnings evidenced by the historical Jesus quest but points to faith, more than practice, more than dogma, as what most differentiates early from later Christians. Early Christians had faith in the Resurrection, that is, not only that Jesus rose from the dead in a new body but that they (indeed, everyone) would also rise from death in new bodies and into a new creation, not different but fulfilled, in which all would live fully and never die. That is what Christian hope consists in, and not in an afterlife in a distant heaven or hell, both of which domains are largely medieval fabrications popularized by a Florentine satirist, Dante. After explaining why we ought to believe objectively in Jesus' literal resurrection, Wright argues that in his ministry resurrection is called the first fruits of the new creation because it demonstrated that the conditions of the new creation could be realized, however imperfectly, in the old, and by human agency. In the long run, Christian hope empowers and enjoins Christians to heal humanity and nature now, not to participate in general degradation through war, greed, and pollution. --Ray Olson

I don't read an awful lot of Christian books. Most of the popular ones seem to be focused on either apologetics or how one is to live properly within the Christian camp. This book by Church of England Bishop N.T. Wright is much different from the norm of what most readers are familiar. For starters, this guy is deep. This guy is well educated. This guy reminds you of one of those stuffy Oxford-like professors that's very high in the knowledge department, but doesn't always speak simplistically enough for the layman. This is not a book that one can read over a weekend. Such characteristics can be seen as a drawback, but in most cases, I found his prose to be a welcome change of pace. If you're a fan of someone such as C.S. Lewis, I would imagine you would be able to enjoy this author's writing style as well. The subject of this book focuses on the misunderstanding that centers around many western churches when

discussing the eternal destination of the Christian. According to Wright, the common misconception is that we will dwell in heaven forever. Instead, Wright argues, Heaven is only a temporary resting spot, and one day in the future, all Christians past and present will again live on the earth under Jesus' reign. The main drawback for this book is that Wright seems to want to overly convince his readers of this fact. He states scripture after scripture, hymn after hymn, story after story, to prove his point. It's a bit much. I think the reason that such confusion exists is because, for most people, the debate of "where" we will be is not that significant. Instead, most people when discussing eschatology are more concerned with "how" we will be. As long as we are in a place like heaven, we don't seem to mind exactly where we will be. As Wright makes his arguments, he seems more driven towards left-brain thinking than right-brained thinking. He doesn't spend too much time talking about what this new world will be like and what everyone will experience. He assures us that even though we will all be working and have some sort of job in God's kingdom, all souls will, in fact, relish the experience. When it comes to such matters that are somewhat mysterious, the author doesn't claim to offer heavy handed explanations based on what he might feel. If he doesn't know, he doesn't know, and has no trouble at all stating this in the book. The big challenge that he gives Christians is that if we are to one day live in this world with Jesus as our king, we must take care of the world as it is now. We must "get it ready" for the glory of God. I think this is where his real struggle is with a lot of Western thinking. Too often, many Christians today have "End Times" syndrome. They are so convinced that Jesus will rapture the saints at any moment, that they don't seem to care about things such as acid rain or global warming. After all, this is only our temporary home, right? This is what the author is trying so hard to dispel. Being a Christian, he says, involves a lot of "doing" in addition to "witnessing". It's quite interesting (although many would find it insulting) when the author finds faults in many practices that Western (particularly U.S.) churches engage in every Sunday. He is not a fan of "check off the box" salvation, and he clearly doesn't believe in such widely held beliefs as the rapture of the church. I am not one with a degree in theology, so I can't challenge him on such sentiments, but he seems to think that as a body,

Christians definitely need to be doing more both within their church and community, and within the world itself. He doesn't spend very much time talking about "who gets to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven" (that he states that he is clearly not a Universalist (although he confesses that such a concept might not be completely foreign to God), and the main reason behind this thinking is the wickedness that some people possess. I confess I would have liked to have him expound on this a bit more. He makes references to such obvious atrocities such as Nazism and sexual slavery, but where exactly does he draw the line? Aren't all evil without the blood of Jesus? Then, some of his "evils" that he describes didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. He quickly mentions "Hiroshima" for example. Hiroshima? What exactly is "evil" about this? I'm assuming he is referring to the atom bomb, and yes, this was truly a very evil event, but who was ultimately responsible? Some would argue Harry Truman, but others would say it was the mayhems of Japan and their treatment of American POWs that actually caused the unfortunate event. So his failure to go into more depth left me a bit disappointed. I still felt this was an excellent book. If anything, it causes one to rethink and reevaluate such predispositions that many Christians have had, say, forever. Such debate is healthy, I believe. Although he doesn't argue that one must "work" towards salvation (at least that wasn't the impression that I got), he does plainly say that once one is saved, the converted heart should want to work for God's glory both in this life and the next.

Yep---the Kingdom is here. Just re-read Matthew (The Message translation) and put a "K" by verses that say so. You may be surprised. Thank you N.T. Just one small issue---authors that say "I'll talk more about this (whatever topic it is) later in the book" get me somewhat confused. Just say it NOW in this place in the book and my thoughts don't get interrupted. However, I am old and may be confused anyway. Thanks again for the book.

NT Wright challenged my thinking. This was a tough read, but worth it. I assumed much of my thinking about the resurrection and our hope in Christ for eternity to be sufficient, but Wright gave me a complete paradigm shift. Much of this shift centered around this idea: the kingdom of God is not something which will come after we die when the earth burns up and God creates a new one. The kingdom can be heard on earth as we participate with God in renewing creation. This idea gives

basis to correct thinking about all sorts of kingdom renewing projects in the world, based in the resurrection (without the resurrection no project social or otherwise will restore this world) but with the resurrection we can really partner with God and bring pieces of eternal life as it were, to earth. I am excited to live this out in my day to day walk with God, and people!

This book is a well-reasoned, fresh approach to understanding the impact of the resurrection of Christ on our collaborative work to serve our world in our callings at work, home and community service. The book addresses the vital message of the gospel that brings spiritual and social transformation. N.T. Wright's depth of historical research in understanding the Jewish, Greek, and Roman first century cultures brings fresh insights that peal away the layers of cultural overlays that have colored our interpretations and hindered the effective work of Christians to believe the message and apply it in our own day to as we faithfully deal critical social issues. At the core of the book is a renewed emphasis on understanding the uniqueness of Christ's resurrection at the first fruits of what will one day happen at the second great resurrection. His insights include a renewed emphasis on a Christian view of ecology, a strong point of view regarding what happens at death, a reaffirmation of a bodily resurrection, the assertion of a unified body and soul, and a new understanding of the relation of heaven and earth. This is one of my favorite books that I have read in the past 5 years.

If you are serious about your faith, in my opinion, there is no one on the planet who is a better resource to provide you solid interpretations of the Bible and biblical history. I am on my 4th NT Wright book now and they are incredible. Let me add, be careful what you choose to bite into first. This book is very reasonable and with an average background in this area, you will leave with information I have found no where else. The explanations are at a level that I understand and it leaves me looking for my Bible to read and finally understand, to a greater degree. But, there are volumes of Wright's work available which will leave your head spinning for hours. He holds nothing back, if you want to learn, learn from NT Wright. I cannot say enough about him, absolutely an incredible resource. This book will clear up what the Resurrection of Jesus is and what it means to us. Also look for his youtube videos, amazing!

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