

# THE heavens

INTIMATE MOMENTS WITH  
YOUR MAJESTIC GOD

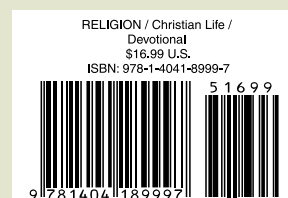
WHILE ALL CREATION DECLARES THE GLORY OF GOD,  
nowhere is His majesty more brilliantly proclaimed than in the  
heavens themselves. And the same God who created these vast  
expanses of space—who knows each and every star by name—  
also knows *your* name.

Join Kevin Hartnett, NASA's Deputy Science Operations Manager  
for the Hubble Space Telescope, as you gaze into the nighttime sky  
and see the mighty hand of God.

Kevin Hartnett and I share a lifelong love for astronomy. He is not only an  
accomplished amateur astronomer and astro-photographer, he is also an  
outstanding poet. Above all, he is a God-worshipper. Kevin has produced  
a beautiful and inspiring book filled with a sense of awe and wonder that  
deeply honors God. It leads the heart to praise and worship. I am happy to  
recommend *The Heavens Devotional*, which will be of great interest and  
spiritual encouragement to many.

**RANDY ALCORN**

Bestselling author of *Heaven*



THE  
heavens INTIMATE MOMENTS WITH YOUR MAJESTIC GOD



"...a beautiful and inspiring book filled with a  
sense of awe and wonder..."

RANDY ALCORN

# THE heavens

INTIMATE MOMENTS WITH  
YOUR MAJESTIC GOD

A DEVOTIONAL  
BY KEVIN HARTNETT



# THE heavens

INTIMATE MOMENTS WITH  
YOUR MAJESTIC GOD

*The Heavens: Intimate Moments with Your Majestic God*  
© 2011 by Kevin Hartnett

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson®, Thomas Nelson is a trademark of Thomas Nelson, Inc.  
The Author is represented by and this book is published in association with the literary agency of WordServe Literary Group, Ltd.,  
[www.wordserveliterary.com](http://www.wordserveliterary.com).

Cover and interior design by Koechel Peterson Design, Minneapolis, MN.

Managing Editor: Lisa Stilwell

Thomas Nelson, Inc., titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fund-raising, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail [SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com).

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION. © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked esv are from THE ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION. © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. rsv are from REVISED STANDARD VERSION of the Bible. © 1946, 1952, 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. used by permission. niv are from HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. nasb are from NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4041-8999-7

*Printed in China*

10 11 12 13 14 [RRD] 5 4 3 2 1

[www.thomasnelson.com](http://www.thomasnelson.com)

BY KEVIN HARTNETT

COUNTRYMAN

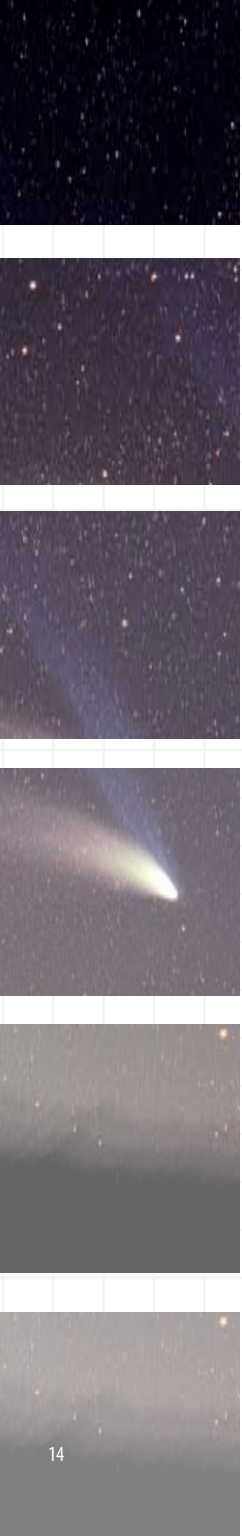


# TABLE OF CONTENTS

6	Wonder & Worship	60	Praying for Lost Loved Ones
8	Beauty	62	The Different One
10	Faith and Patience	64	So I Will Praise Him in the Night
12	Jesus, the Cupbearer	66	Wise and Bright
14	Sovereignty	68	Glimpsing God in the Andromeda Galaxy
16	God Everlasting	70	What Am I Doing in the Kingdom?
18	Honoring God & Giving Thanks	72	Our Special Earth
20	Needing Strength?	74	Transcendence
22	The Heavens Declare	76	The Fear of the Lord
24	Sovereign King and Caring Lord	78	Beware of Idols
26	Spot Removal	80	What Name Has He for Me?
28	Praise	82	Clear Thinking
30	Mercy & Faithfulness	84	Harbor of My Heart's Desire
32	Where Is Heaven?	86	Do Not Be a Wanderer
34	God Omniscient	88	Sensing the Truth
36	God's Protection	90	Praise Him Completely
38	No More Night	92	Pursue Four Things
40	Phosphors in the Cosmos	94	God's Holiness
42	Sovereignty and Conjunction	96	Astronomical Mercy
44	Hallowed Be Thy Name	98	God's Tadpoles
46	Solitude	100	This Is God
48	Christ, the Morning Star	102	Differing Like Stars
50	God Sees All Accurately	104	For I Believe the Gospel
52	The Lion of Judah	106	Higher than Your Thoughts
54	God Unchangeable	108	What Do You Study?
56	God in the Galaxy	110	Behold, the Son of Glory Comes
58	Predictability	112	Beauty at the Foot of the Cross

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

114	God's Omnipresence	170	The Twins
116	God's Surprises	172	God's Infinity
118	The Way to Suffer	174	The Jewel Box
120	The Last Day	176	Shine by His Glory
122	Where Beauty Gleams with Grace	178	Complex Lives
124	Alone but Fruitful	180	Wonder University
126	Thy Kingdom Come	182	How Awesome Is That Day to Me
128	Yearning for God in the Night	184	Holding It Together
130	Fighting with the Unseen	186	The Arm of the Lord
132	God Omnipotent	188	Two Revelations
134	Justice	190	Looking and Loving
136	Christ, Our Bridegroom	192	God Unsearchable
138	Anger	194	Variety Builds Piety
140	The Veil	196	Identity Change
142	He Who Places Faith in Jesus	198	Pride
144	Signs	200	Can It Be?
146	Faint, Clear, & Beautiful	202	Two Faces
148	God, Our Help	204	The Magnificent Cross
150	Lukewarm	206	Our Witness to the Generations
152	Love	208	Just in Time
154	Christ, the Center	210	Christ, the Substance
156	Physical and Spiritual Laws	212	The Trinity
158	No Hiding	214	Earthbound Eyes
160	Man's Miniscule Knowledge	216	Self-Sufficiency
162	Christ, the Strong	218	Fleeting Lives
164	Expressly Unique	220	Truth and Sacrifice
166	Discovery, Diligence, & Chance	222	He Is the Lord
168	Triune in Creation		



NAMED AFTER ITS CODISCOVERERS, ALAN HALE AND Thomas Bopp, the magnificent Comet Hale-Bopp was easy to see with the naked eye during the months of March and April in 1997. Comets are bodies of dirty ice and rock that travel around the Sun in long elliptically shaped orbits. Some, like Comet Halley, return with relative frequency. But most comets (like Hale-Bopp) take thousands of years to complete just one trip around the Sun. Based on its orbit, this celestial visitor was last seen around the era of the Old Testament Patriarchs (circa 2000 BC). Because of their unpredictable appearances and motions, comets have been viewed by many cultures throughout history as heralds of doom. The English word *disaster* literally means “bad star,” from the Greek *aster*.

Has a dirty ice ball of unpredicted and unwelcomed events careened into your life? Do circumstances seem completely haphazard or out of control? Are you fearful of what tomorrow might bring? If so, then be comforted by the knowledge that God is sovereign over all. Nothing is haphazard in His universe or beyond His control. Try to imagine the magnificent mind of God, working every circumstance—even the horrible death of His own Son on the cross—for the good of His sons and daughters. His timing may be beyond our comprehension, but trust that He has a grand design for your life.




*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

Romans 8:28

# Sovereignty

*Minister of mystery,  
The comet pierces history  
And lifts the head of mortal mind  
To contemplate the Grand Design.*





PERHAPS TODAY YOU FIND YOURSELF SO EXHAUSTED AND disillusioned that you doubt whether God even sees or hears you. If so, God has a word for you. He has graciously written it down so you won't lose it. It's in Isaiah 40—*wait*.

It doesn't explain why everything is happening the way it is in your life, though you probably couldn't grasp God's perspective on it all anyway. But it does give you the path to hope, strength, and renewal; it is worshipful waiting. God invites you to count the stars in this image if you can—one small part of one star cluster, like hundreds of others in our galaxy alone, multiplied hundreds of times over in literally billions of other galaxies in the universe. He knows them all; He's named them all; He keeps them all—and He's not tired.

Waiting and trusting greatly honors the Lord, and He requires it from all His saints. It makes plain who's really the everlasting God and who rightly deserves praise. Pick any godly figure in the Scriptures and see how his or her power was "made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). There's "a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Wait for His time, and until it comes, lift up your heart in worship and be renewed in Him.

*Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:26–31

# Needing Strength?

"How can it be," the Master said,  
"I call the stars, but know not thee?  
Think not, My way is hid from God,  
My strength is theirs who wait for Me."



# THE Heavens DECLARE

*Dazzling phosphor in the night,  
Silent orator, so bright,  
How I marvel at your story  
And the Hand behind your glory.*

THE EXQUISITE STAR SIRIUS IS THE PREMIER GEM OF OUR SPARKLING winter skies. Its name means “the Sparkling or Scorching One,” although it is also commonly called the Dog Star because of its location in the constellation of Canis Major, the Big Dog. Sirius is the brightest star visible from Earth (except, of course, for the Sun). This is due in part to its “nearby” location. Sirius is a mere 8.6 light-years distant from the solar system. That’s the distance a light beam would travel in 8.6 years at the speed of 186,282 miles per second—about 50 trillion miles! Through careful study, astronomers have concluded that Sirius is about twice as massive as the Sun but about twenty-five times more luminous. This makes it a whopping 660,000 times more massive than Earth! It has a tiny companion star, no larger than Earth, called the “Pup,” which is a white dwarf star. More than a hundred times smaller than the Sun, it has nearly the same mass, making it extraordinarily dense. A single teaspoon of its material would weigh more than fifteen hundred tons!

Psalms 19 tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. Take any spot in the sky, and see that this is so. Whether we gaze upon stars, planets, galaxies, or nebulae, day after day and night after night they speak in loud, eloquent tongues of His power, knowledge, beauty, and glory. The Psalm says: “There is no speech, nor are there words”—what words could ever adequately describe His glory? “Yet their voice goes out through all the earth”—and results in the echoes of praise from men and women, great and small, old and young, from every nation, on every continent, in every age. Indeed, the starry heavens are declaring at this very moment that our God is magnificent beyond comprehension. Listen to them! Hear how their endless hosts strive day after day and night after night to declare the least part, the smallest measure, of His great glory. It is never enough; it never will be; it never can be. He is infinite. Have you heard their voices? Have you joined their chorus?



*The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

Psalms 19:1–4 RSV

*But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know  
neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”*

Matthew 22:29 ESV

**SIT PERFECTLY STILL FOR A MOMENT. DO YOU FEEL DIZZY? DO YOU SENSE** the wind blowing through your hair? No, probably not, but maybe you should. Do you realize that at this very second you’re spinning four times faster than a tornado and moving across the galaxy at more than two hundred times the speed of an M16 bullet? Remarkably, it’s true. Despite our inability to sense it, the expanse of space is so large and the gravitational force of the Sun and galaxy’s center so strong that we move at these truly astronomical speeds to satisfy our “normal” orbital motions.

Here’s how the numbers work. Compared to other celestial bodies, Earth is tiny yet it is nearly 25,000 miles in circumference! It takes twenty-four hours to turn once on its axis—that means we’re moving at more than 1,000 miles per hour, much faster than the 250 mile-per-hour tornado. Likewise, Earth completes its colossal orbit around the Sun (584 million miles) in just 365 days, but it must move at a speed of around 67,000 miles per hour to do so. And even more astounding, our entire solar system is being flung around the center of our gigantic spiral galaxy at just under 500,000 miles per hour—much faster than the M16’s bullet.

There is a life-changing lesson to be learned here. If we cannot readily sense amazingly true physical realities, why do we doubt the equally true (and even more amazing) spiritual realities? We can’t *feel* God, but He exists. We can’t *sense* that He’s holding the universe together “by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3 ESV), but He is. We don’t see angels or demons, but Jesus spoke plainly of both. We can’t even tell our own spiritual state before God unless the Spirit opens the eyes of our understanding to see.

Today, let us humble ourselves before God and His truthful Word. It says He is faithful, loving, and wise, and He is—whether our feelings confirm it or not. It says He is our Help and our Shield, and we can surely trust that He will be today, tomorrow, and forever. It says He works all things together for the good of those who love Him—and we can trust Him to do just that.

*“If I have told you earthly things  
and you do not believe, how can you  
believe if I tell you heavenly things?”*

John 3:12 ESV



NASA, ESA, and The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA); Acknowledgment: P. Koczak (WYIN)

# Sensing the Truth



*If stars could speak and tell us of their view  
Of grand celestial movements, tracks and speeds,  
We’d be the better counseled to see through  
The fog that from our feelings e’er proceeds.  
Thus so, should angels tell us all they see  
Of God’s transcendent means for guiding men,  
Our hearts, so blind, would surely better be  
Informed with truth to trust His Word again.*



IN PSALM 48, WE'RE INVITED BY THE SONS OF KORAH TO CONSIDER THE greatness of God by touring, so to speak, the grand city of Jerusalem. Consider the power and faithfulness of God that enabled its construction there atop Mount Zion. Think of its beauty, its majesty, its remarkable size, its seemingly endless towers, bulwarks, and palaces. Think of the safety found there, the worship in the temple, the righteous judgments of the King. These things so remarkably spoke of the Lord and His presence that the psalmists could say metaphorically: "This is God" (v. 14).

A similar experience of wonder and awe in God fills us as we gaze into the heavens. In this image of what has been called the "Mystic Mountain" (a portion of the Carina Nebula), we marvel at pillars of gas and dust light-years tall that roil and churn under the influence of many embedded, gas-jetting stars. Even the radiation from these stars is so great that it pushes and sculpts the nebula around them. There is power here, majesty, beauty, mystery, and grandeur. Consider today the heavens, and worship the incomparably great God who made them. He is our King and Guide—both in this life and forever.

*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised  
In the city of our God,  
In His holy mountain.  
Beautiful in elevation,  
The joy of the whole earth,  
Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north,  
The city of the great King.  
God is in her palaces;  
He is known as her refuge. . . .  
Walk about Zion,  
And go all around her.  
Count her towers;  
Mark well her bulwarks;  
Consider her palaces;  
That you may tell it to the generation following.  
For this is God,  
Our God forever and ever;  
He will be our guide  
Even to death.*

Psalm 48:1–3, 12–14

# THIS IS God



*Spire after spire,  
In mystery and might;  
These declare God's glory  
Like cities in the night.  
O Lord, receive my worship;  
My joy is that You be,  
As Guardian of Your splendors,  
My Guide eternally.*



**REDEMPTION FROM SLAVERY, ADOPTION INTO A FAMILY, MARRIAGE—WHAT WONDER-**fully rich, yet gloriously true metaphors the Lord uses to describe His amazing love for us. Today—yes even today—amidst all your hurt, hardship, and fatigue, think on these truths. They will revive your soul to the point of overflowing praise.

Were we not all slaves—sold into the bondage of selfish living, not thinking about God or serving Him, but making a daily mess of our relationships, our bodies, and our futures? Yet the Lord Jesus intervened. He found us standing chained, ill-clothed, weak, and helpless upon the devil’s awful bidding block, and he bought us back. He rescued us from hell itself, purchasing us with the great price of His own blood—not because we were inherently worth the price, but because it was the only price that could free us.

And once bought, we’ve been brought into His home, treated like the returning Prodigal Son, made heirs of eternal life and every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. We can address God now as Abba, Father, ever-approachable, ever-loving, ever-knowing, ever-powerful.

And if this all were not enough, He now covenants with us as a Groom does with His beloved bride, to love her and cherish her as long as He lives. He plans a marriage feast. The angels are celebrating even now. There’s laughter coming, fulfillment, and tremendous eternal joy.

Now these things may all seem so amazing that they’re hard to believe. But why? Why shouldn’t God’s love be amazing beyond belief, just as He Himself is beyond measure and estimation in every way? His love is not like ours, just as we creatures—though made in His image—are really not much like the great Creator at all. Our love is fickle and laced with selfishness. His isn’t. He is incapable of sin or faithlessness. His love is all that love can ever be, for He is Love.

So it’s not surprising that He uses the height of the heavens to illustrate His love. Trillions upon trillions upon trillions of miles high—so great is His love toward those who fear Him. And as cosmic as it is in measure, it is even more so in scope. God Himself, bound within His own righteousness to uphold Justice by judging sin, found a way to free us from our rightful punishment. Love Himself became incarnate and hung in our place on the cross. God’s sacrificial provision of Christ satisfied His own demand to uphold righteousness. Mercy triumphed over judgment. Praise the Lord!

*For as high as the heavens  
are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love  
toward those who fear him.*

Psalms 103:11 ESV

*For God so loved the world that  
He gave His only begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in Him  
should not perish but have  
everlasting life.*

John 3:16

# Love

*Love, the soul’s true satisfaction,  
Love much higher than the skies;  
Love came at the call of Justice;  
Love was cruelly crucified.*



# CHRIST, the Center

*Do you know the order of the planets?  
Can you tell the clockwork in their circling?  
Neither has man fully seen creation  
Centered on the glory of the Son.*

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

Colossians 1:15–18



THIS AMAZING IMAGE OF JUPITER AND ITS MOON IO WAS TAKEN BY NASA's *Cassini* spacecraft as it passed by the giant planet in January 2001 on its way to Saturn. Io is one of the four large Galilean moons of Jupiter, so named because they were discovered by Galileo in the early seventeenth century using the newly invented technology of his day—the telescope! Galileo's discovery convincingly demonstrated that Earth was not the center of every astronomical body's sphere of motion. This was an important argument in persuading the scientific authorities of his day to accept that the Sun, not Earth, was the center of the solar system. While this seems elementary to us today, this was not man's understanding for most of recorded history. From their perspective, the planets seemed to zig-zag across the night sky from month to month. Astronomers now know that the Sun is indeed the center of the solar system and that all the planets, including Earth, move in great elliptically shaped orbits around it.

The Scriptures make it clear that all things in heaven and on Earth are to be summed up in God's glorious Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. History is moving unalterably toward this culmination. One day, we will see much more clearly how God's desire to glorify His Son drives all of created history. He will be exalted above every name that is named. He will banish Satan and his legions to the lake of fire, and He will take His church—purchased with His own blood—as His bride. Does this perspective guide your thinking and living? Is Christ the center of your life?





# Shine by His Glory

*Blackened, lifeless, cold, and grim—  
Such was my estate in sin.  
Then the mighty Son drew me;  
Hence I'll shine by His glory.*

---

*A* N ASTRONOMER ONCE COMMENTED THAT THE TAIL OF A COMET IS “as close to nothing as you can be and still be something”! Pushed into space by the action of the solar wind, the tail of a comet can stretch thinly for millions of miles behind its icy nucleus. Comet nuclei are generally small—tens of miles long—and are comprised of a mixture of ice and soot that’s no prettier than week-old snow on the side of a highway. Orbiting on highly elliptical paths, they spend most of their lives in the dark, bitter-cold of space—millions, if not billions, of miles from the Sun. It is only when they are drawn into the inner solar system by the Sun’s gravity that they warm and out-gas tails. Vaporized off the comet’s surface, a tail spreads its ugly “smoke” out so thinly that we would consider a sample of a comet’s tail to be a fine vacuum here on Earth. In this image of the comet Hale-Bopp, two tails can be seen: a blue ion tail of fluorescing carbon monoxide and a yellow-white dust tail. It is the brilliant illumination of our yellow Sun that allows this dust tail to be seen at all against the jet-blackness of outer space.

Spiritually speaking, our lives are like that of the comet. Hopelessly darkened, with hearts as hard as ice, we lived far away from God and His grace. But then He drew us to Himself and brought the light of the gospel to bear on our souls so that we were transformed. Though nothing in and of ourselves, we now shine beautifully with the righteousness and glory that come from Christ.

*Lord, how can we thank You enough for drawing us near and changing us forever by your grace? May our transformed lives daily reflect You—brilliantly and beautifully—for the whole universe to see. In Your holy name, amen.*

*Therefore remember that you . . . were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Ephesians 2:11–13



# GOD *Unsearchable*



*In nothing is the mind more fully satisfied,  
Nor does the eye or heart find rest,  
More than in contemplating Thee.  
And yet it is as if we skim the sheerest sprays  
That blow across the broad expanse  
Of some immense, uncharted sea.  
Oh, drop the weight to fathom yet again His love,  
And practice there with untold bliss  
The soundings of eternity.*

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! . . . For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

Romans 11:33, 36

THE GREAT CARINA NEBULA IS LOCATED WITHIN OUR OWN MILKY WAY Galaxy, about 7,500 light-years distant. It is found in the southern constellation of Carina, the Ship's Keel. Recent Hubble Space Telescope images of its center stagger the mind with its beauty and complexity. In every corner of this vast interstellar complex are objects and processes that are each sufficient for lifetimes of study. Young, hot, radiating stars; fluorescing gases; dark, gaseous, silhouetting pillars; rushing stellar outbursts; gravitationally collapsing clouds; and galactic tidal forces all intermix to form an endless scientific paradise. Not to mention the fascinating, singularly massive, and volatile star Eta Carina—likely two or more stars itself—embedded in the middle of the nebula and ready to explode at any moment in a colossal supernova.

Considering this vast, glorious complex—whose intricacies are repeated a billion times over in other galaxies—turns our thoughts to the unimaginable greatness of God who made them all. Thinking of God and His infinite, detailed knowledge, King David exclaimed in Psalm 139:6: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.” Psalm 145:3 says, “His greatness is unsearchable,” and Psalm 147:5 adds, “his understanding is beyond measure” (ESV). Indeed, through His own gracious revelation of Himself, we can understand God in part, but we can never fully comprehend Him, or even a single one of His qualities. There will always be more of His wisdom to understand, more of His power, more of His holiness, more of His love. We will never fathom Him, and we will never tire of Him. Through all eternity, we will look upon Him and marvel at the endlessly creative, wonderfully gracious, uniquely righteous, timelessly beautiful, unsearchably glorious, infinitely loving Maker and Ruler of all.

Credit for Hubble Image: NASA, ESA, W. Smith (University of California, Berkeley), and The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA). Credit for CTO Image: N. Smith (University of California, Berkeley), and NASA/AURA/CTO.



STRETCHING MAJESTICALLY ACROSS THE GLOWING BAND OF THE SUMMER Milky Way is the large, strikingly beautiful asterism known as the Northern Cross. It forms the central section of the constellation Cygnus the Swan. The body of the Cross is easily recognized, as it extends down the Milky Way from the bright star Deneb at its top. The arms of the cross reach out to either side, marked by stars slightly dimmer than Deneb. At the foot of the Cross is Alberio, a beautiful two-color, telescopic binary star. As the sky rotates from summer to winter, the angle of the Milky Way with the horizon gradually changes. Many have noted that at the latitude of Jerusalem (about thirty degrees north of the equator), the foot of the Northern Cross just skirts the horizon so that in late December—near Christmas—the Cross appears to stand nearly straight up from Jerusalem's northwest horizon in the early evening.

If there was ever an event worthy of remembering and honoring some way in the stars, it is the crucifixion of Christ. There the transaction eternally planned by God to lovingly save sinners from His own justified wrath, and secure the justice that His own holiness demanded, was fully accomplished. In the most unbelievable and unimaginable exchange, the perfectly righteous Son of God consented to His own bloody execution so that we might go free. Our sins were laid upon Him, and He was sacrificed—just as pictured in the Old Testament sin offering of a male lamb without blemish. Our penalty was paid, God's wrath against us satisfied, our relational enmity with God reconciled, and our spiritual bondage and blindness because of sin lifted.

Whatever the problems you face today, if you have sincerely placed your faith in the saving work of Christ, God has already solved your most pressing need. No amount of penance, charitable works, or good intentions can ever remove the stain of sin from a soul. Only the blood of Christ can. Jesus poured it out graciously and freely on the Cross for those would believe. This is the gospel, the good news that will forever be proclaimed.

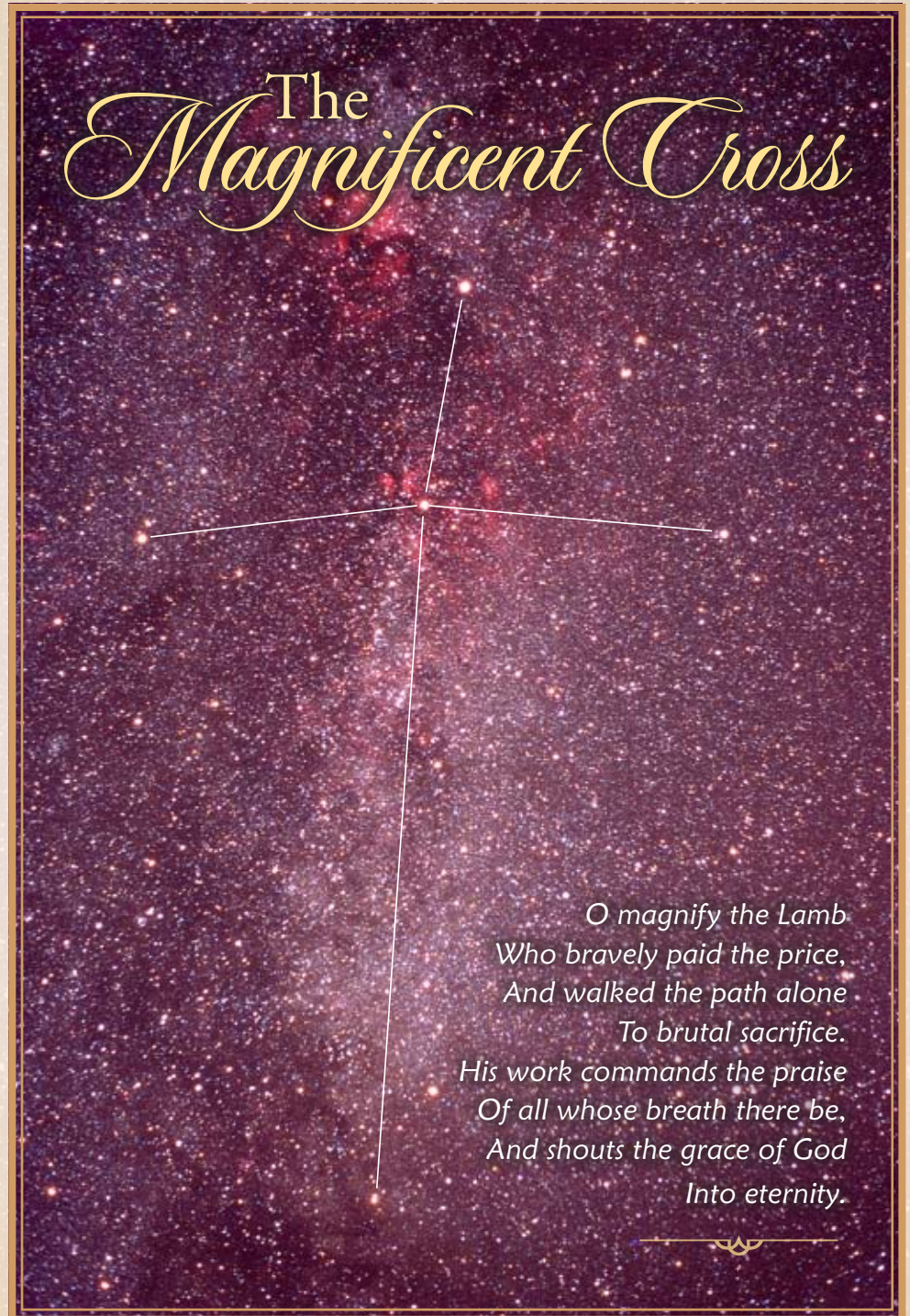


*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:*

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"*

Revelation 5:11–12

# The Magnificent Cross



*O magnify the Lamb  
Who bravely paid the price,  
And walked the path alone  
To brutal sacrifice.  
His work commands the praise  
Of all whose breath there be,  
And shouts the grace of God  
Into eternity.*

