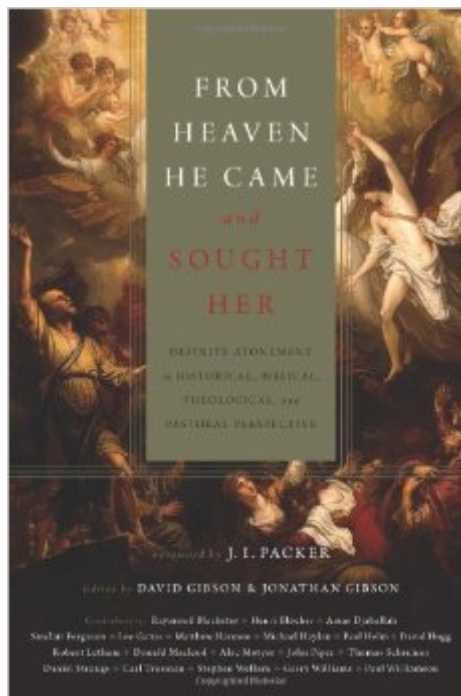


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# From Heaven He Came And Sought Her: Definite Atonement In Historical, Biblical, Theological, And Pastoral Perspective



## Synopsis

There is a palpable sense of confusionâ and sometimes even embarrassmentâ with regard to so-called limited atonement today, pointing to the need for thoughtful engagement with this controversial doctrine.Â Incorporating contributions from a host of respected theologians,Â From Heaven He Came and Sought HerÂ stands as the first comprehensive resource on definite atonement as it examines the issue from historical, biblical, theological, and pastoral perspectives. Offering scholarly insights for those seeking a thorough and well-researched discussion, this book will encourage charitable conversations as it winsomely defends this foundational tenet of Reformed theology.

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## Customer Reviews

When I was a student in Bible college and in seminary there were many students who called themselves "4-Point Calvinists." The doctrine they were repulsed by was the "L" in the acronym TULIP standing for "Limited atonement." As I talked with my comrades in ministry they had a genuine love for the lost and couldn't reconcile God's love for the "world" and how Christ's death on the cross could in any way be "limited" only to the elect. "Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect" was the mantra of many of the "five-pointers." In discussions with those who hold to unlimited atonement over the years I have found much of the disagreements not so much over doctrine, but over semantics. The reality is very few students of the Scriptures have taken the time to study (outside of John 3:16) what the Bible has to say about the specific intent of Christ's death on the cross from

Genesis to Revelation. Seldom have I ever read such a balanced treatment on a subject by multiple authors - 23 of them! I learned something new in each chapter, gleaned wise insights, and appreciated the reverence for Christ and the irenic spirit maintained throughout this book. Clear, comprehensive, pastoral, convincing, thought-provoking, and adoration are the words that came to mind frequently in my reading. Whether you have wrestled with the atonement (limited vs. unlimited) for years, have landed on a position, or are undecided - this book is definitely worth wrestling with - primarily because its teaching is so biblically saturated and cogently argued. All of the author's have done their homework - their pens ooze theology and adoration. This is the new go-to work covering all the various aspects of the atonement - historical, exegetical, theological, pastoral, and evangelistic. This massive work by some of Christianity's finest historians, biblical scholars, theologians, and pastors is a veritable feast for the mind and heart. Those who take the time to read carefully and prayerfully through this meticulous work will (no matter whether you agree or disagree with the argumentation) be drawn to adoringly reflect on Jesus for what he achieved in his atoning death. I can't recommend it highly enough. It's sumptuous theological food for the soul of those who glory in the Person and work of our Lord and Savior who sought and bought us with his precious blood.

Definite atonement is one of the hardest doctrines for people to accept, Christian or non, Reformed/Calvinistic or not. There is something about this doctrine that offends many who reject it and embarrasses many who hold to it. Others would argue that the doctrine of definite atonement is not a central doctrine and it cannot be proven from Scripture so we shouldn't even fool with it. People from all walks of theological life have been trying to prune the L out of the Reformed TULIP bed for centuries, claiming that it is a doctrine that assaults the very character of God by limiting His love. So, a fair question to ask might be, "Why even hold to a doctrine that is, apparently, so awful and not even that important to begin with." From Heaven He Came and Sought Her not only sets out to show that this doctrine is not "awful" or peripheral, but that it is actually beautiful and central, one that is "at the heart of the meaning of the cross." For this reason, along with the list of notable scholars quite apt to explain and defend thoroughly this position, this is a book that I, and many, have looked forward to with great anticipation. There is much to be praised about this massive volume and relatively little that would leave the reader frustrated or shorted in any way. This text is thorough! Regardless of whether you think the conclusions drawn are sound or every aspect of thought is covered fairly, you have to acknowledge that just about everything you could want covered is covered. The major

players and major events get many pages and all of the Scriptures you would want to see addressed seem to be. This is a 700 page beast of a book and it will take some time to get through, but due to the quality of scholarship and writing, it will be time well invested and an enjoyable experience to boot. It is important to remember that this is a collection of essays. While the essays build on each other in parts, they can be read individually. This leads to a bit of overlap and some repetitiveness at times. For example, many of the authors, for good reason, were determined to point out what a poor label "limited atonement" is and I agree. But it got to a point where I was a bit battle-worn at how many shots needed to be fired at this acronymical enemy. Add to that the fact that no one addressed how silly TUDIP would sound and I felt time would have been better spent not kicking this dead flower. However, and this is key, I am convinced that some of this weariness is in large part due to my reading strategy. I really wanted to finish the book and I read, for the most part, in order and one immediately after another. I think it would be wiser, for numerous reasons, to spread out the reading of these essays and spend more time on each individual one. That would have made the repetition not a negative at all, but quite beneficial. That also would make it much easier to digest the contents of this behemoth. Don't get me wrong, this book is quite readable. The authors are quite capable writers and the text is very readable, but it is VERY meaty. There is not much soup and salad on this buffet, it is pretty much steak from beginning to end. For me, the historical essays were especially readable and the OT theology essays, especially over Isaiah, were especially tough, along with the whole of section IV. I have a feeling that this has to do with my interests and what I am familiar with. Certain things stood out to me as I was reading: The introductory essay by Gibson and Gibson was quite good and set a high standard for the remainder of the book. Thankfully, the essays that followed consistently lived up to this standard. There was a good historical essay on the age-old (see "tired") argument of "Calvin wasn't even a Calvinist" thus you cannot have an L in your TULIP! Paul Helm gives a good defense of why his theology and Calvin himself would probably hold to definite atonement. It is definitely more thorough and probably quite a bit more convincing reply to this argument than my standard response of "So?!?" The essay on Moyse Amraut is excellent. Simply superb. Djaballah gives a good, interesting biography of the man and then provides the reader with comprehensive coverage of his "Brief Traite", a chapter by chapter summary and exposition of this influential work. Carl Trueman commenting on Baxter vs Owen was quite interesting and going in, due to the author and the subject, I figured this would steal the show for me. Trueman the historian is not quite as sarcastic and cutting as Trueman the blogger or current events/political thoughts author. While it is probably more appropriate how he

engaged the subject here, I certainly missed some of his biting British humor. That being said, Trueman's essay was excellent. Moyter's essay on Isaiah left me in the dust. It looked really good and I tried my best to work through it, but I think I will have to return to it after a bit of study. This should be more of a critique of my OT prophetic writings knowledge than a testimony of any deficiency in the essay. I have a feeling, though, that many readers will be in the deep end of the pool with this one. Both of Gibson's essays on the Pauline literature were great. I enjoyed his discussion of Col 1:20 and the parallel reading of 1Tim 2:4/4:10 and especially enjoyed his essay on Definite Atonement in Paul's soteriological paradigm, about how Definite Atonement is a biblico-systematic doctrine. I was less than impressed with much of Schreiner's arguments in the chapter on "problem texts". I agreed with his conclusions, but did not think he gave a good account of how he arrived at his destination. Too often he simply contradicted the opposing view he had just presented without much explanation of how he reached his position. He even brings up one opposing view, says it would take too long to explain but "suffice it to say" the opposing position "is unpersuasive and lacks exegetical and theological support from the remainder of the NT." I disagree that this, in any way, "suffices". In a book of 700 pages, it would have been ok to devote a couple more to fleshing this out a bit more, or not bringing it up at all. (At the very least maybe this could have been relegated exclusively to a footnote and an encouragement for any who were willing to chase down this rabbit, but to include it in the body of the text in this manner just did not sit right with me.)

Section 3, Definite Atonement in Theological Perspective, was a tough section for me to read. The content was deep and rich, but at times hard to get through. This is, for the most part, an academic-level book so it is not a bad thing at all to find parts that the reader will need to spend time with and work through. Wellum's essay was particularly enjoyable for me, partly due to content, the necessity of definite atonement in regards to the priestly office of Christ and His intercession for believers, and partly due to the format, a series of very clearly outlined lists in response to lists in response to lists—it was incredibly comforting for a person who processes things the way I do to have such deep and complex thoughts presented in such an organized and simple way. The book ends on an upswing with Sinclair Ferguson and John Piper presenting passionate and pastoral essays on McLeod Campbell's assault on penal substitutionary/definite atonement and how the doctrine of definite atonement particularly glorifies God. From Heaven He Came and Sought Her is a hard read and deserves to be soaked in and enjoyed, not rushed through. This will be the definitive text on definitive atonement, at least at a popular-to-academic level, for some time to come. It warrants a spot on every pastor and thinking

Christian's shelf, regardless of one's position, in order to better understand and articulate this important doctrine. I received a copy of this book from the publisher to read and review.

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