

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
ONE

THE GOAL OF CREATION



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Lesson One

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly every follower of Christ is familiar with the Lord's Prayer and how it teaches us to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." But as familiar as these words are, their significance often escapes us. In these petitions, Jesus summarized God's goal for history and creation. He explained why we live on this planet, and why he came as our Redeemer. And the reason is simple: God is turning the entire earth into an extension of his heavenly kingdom. When he's finished, his will *will* be done on earth just as fully as it's already being done in heaven. But in the meantime, it's our job to pray for and to work toward the consummation of the kingdom of God.

This is the first lesson in our series *Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology*. In this series, we'll explore several aspects of God's earthly kingdom in Christ, with a particular emphasis on its final or completed state. We've entitled this lesson "The Goal of Creation" because we'll be looking at how God's plan for history leads to the ultimate goal of completing his kingdom.

Before we begin, we should call attention to the technical term that describes this area of study, namely, "eschatology." The word eschatology comes from two Greek words: *eschatos* (ἔσχατος), meaning "last" or "final"; and *logos* (λόγος), in this case meaning "study." So, "eschatology" is "the study of last things" or "the doctrine of last things." Broadly understood, eschatology covers the entire period of the last days that began with Jesus' life and ministry, and that will be completed when he returns.

Our lesson on "The Goal of Creation" will focus on two historical periods. First, we'll consider the Old Testament expectations for the end times. And second, we'll contrast those with their New Testament realizations. Let's begin with the Old Testament expectations for the end of history.

OLD TESTAMENT EXPECTATIONS

In the Old Testament, God's kingdom was expected to unfold in three phases: the initial creation of the universe and its creatures; a long period of redemption necessitated by humanity's fall into sin; and finally, the everlasting eschaton — the ultimate state of the universe, after redemption is complete, when God's heavenly kingdom fills the earth. Just like the term "eschatology," the theological term "eschaton" comes from the Greek word *eschatos* (ἔσχατος). So, naturally, the events we study in eschatology are the ones that take place during the eschaton.

In line with this Old Testament understanding of history, we'll explore the Old Testament expectations for the culmination of God's kingdom in three parts. First, we'll mention the plans God revealed at creation. Second, we'll talk about the hopes he revealed throughout the history of redemption. And third, we'll consider some prophetic pictures of the eschaton. Let's look first at the plans God revealed at creation.

CREATION

Most Christians are familiar with God's work of creation detailed in Genesis 1, 2. Genesis 1 teaches that God created and ordered the heavens and the earth. He created all the realms within the universe, such as the waters, the dry land, and the heavens. And he created all the creatures that inhabit these realms, such as fish, land animals, and birds. And of course, he created human beings to rule over and administer the entire creation, including both the earth itself and all its creatures. Listen to what Moses wrote in Genesis 1:27-28:

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:27-28).

In the vocabulary of the ancient Near East, God intended humanity to be his "vassals" or servant kings. Our job was to rule over creation on behalf of God, the great "suzerain" or emperor. This idea is strengthened by the fact that human beings were created "in the image of God." In the ancient world, kings often set up statues and other images of themselves throughout their kingdoms. It was a way of indicating *their* authority and rule over the land and its people, and a way of bringing themselves honor and glory. So, when God created human beings in his image, he indicated that his plan was to create an earthly kingdom. We know that God was pleased with this initial arrangement of the world, and with the role he'd given to humanity, because in Genesis 1:31, he said that everything he'd created was "very good." But, he had plans to make it even better. Look at Genesis 1:27-28:

God created man in his own image ... and said to them ... "[F]ill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:27-28).

God didn't want just one couple that would merely manage the things he'd created. Rather, he wanted them to populate the world and to turn it into his earthly kingdom.

Theologians generally refer to these verses as the "cultural mandate," because they require humanity to build culture throughout the whole world. That means not only reproducing to create enough people to fill the world, but also creating human culture

throughout the world — things like families and governments, farming and animal husbandry, and even arts and sciences.

The implications of the cultural mandate become clearer in Genesis 2, where God planted a garden in the land of Eden. In particular, the garden exemplified the perfection God wanted the world to reach under humanity's leadership. As we read in Genesis 2:15:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15).

Humanity's job was to cultivate the garden. But the word pair Moses used here — “work” and “take care” — was technical language. Moses used the same word pair in Numbers 3:8 to describe the priests' work in the tabernacle.

So, the combined picture of humanity's role as servant kings in Genesis 1, and as priestly workers in chapter 2, tells us that human beings are God's royal and priestly images. Our job is to extend his rule until it fills the world, and to cultivate the whole earth until everything resembles the Garden of Eden. And this role for humanity provides the Bible's first glimpse of eschatology. It indicates that God plans to fill the earth with images that serve and honor him by ruling over creation on his behalf.

Having considered some of the Old Testament expectations for God's kingdom that were established at creation, let's turn to expectations associated with the history of redemption.

REDEMPTION

All Christians should know the story of humanity's fall into sin recorded in Genesis 3. God put Adam and Eve in the garden to work it and to take care of it. But Satan spoke through the serpent in the garden. He tricked Eve into eating the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God had forbidden. Then Eve gave the fruit to Adam and he ate it, too. Because of this sin, God cursed all humanity, and the great hope of his eschatological kingdom appeared to be lost. But God mercifully introduced a plan of redemption that would rescue individuals through personal salvation, and would restore the hope of his great messianic kingdom on earth.

This plan of redemption was first introduced in Genesis 3:15 when God said this to the serpent:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15).

Theologians call this offer of redemption the *proto-euangelion* or “first gospel,” because it's the first offer of salvation after humanity's fall into sin.

You know, some Bible teachers believe that Genesis 3:15 may be the most important verse in the Bible because there we receive a promise

immediately after the Fall that God is going to send a deliverer to deal with our sin problem. He tells the serpent and the woman that there will be hostility between their two seeds. The serpent will bruise the seed of the woman's child, but that child is going to crush the head of that serpent. And basically, the rest of the Bible unfolds the grand redemptive story of that head-crushing that ultimately took place on the cross at Calvary, a head-crushing we share in based upon Romans 16:20.

— Dr. Danny Akin

When God promised that the seed of the woman would defeat the seed of the serpent, he indicated that humanity would be redeemed from the curse of sin. And throughout the long period of redemption, God continued to affirm this expectation through his redemptive acts — especially those acts associated with his covenants.

In the Old Testament, God made five major redemptive covenants, beginning with his covenant with Adam.

Adam

After Adam had sinned against God in the Garden of Eden, God offered him salvation through the *proto-euangelion*, or “first gospel.” This created the expectation that God’s plan for his worldwide kingdom would eventually come to pass. But its growth would be characterized by strife between the children of the serpent and the children of Eve. In fact, Genesis 4, 5 indicate that the descendants of Adam and Eve’s faithful son Seth were in constant tension with the descendants of their murderous son Cain. From the very beginning, the entire human race has been divided between those who serve God’s purposes and those who rebel against God.

Many generations after Adam, God made his second major redemptive covenant with Noah.

Noah

Genesis 6–9 records the flood that destroyed the world in Noah’s day. Within this account, Genesis 8:21–9:17 explains the covenant God made through Noah. In the context of promising not to flood the earth again, God also established the broader stability of nature. He did this to enable humanity to serve his purposes of filling the world with images of God and ruling over creation. And this created the expectation that humanity’s growth, and therefore the growth of God’s kingdom, would proceed without further global catastrophes. But listen to Genesis 8:22, where God added this qualification:

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease (Genesis 8:22).

The stability of nature was guaranteed only “as long as the earth endures.” That is to say, only until the end of the present order of creation. This established the expectation that the present natural order will be replaced when humanity completes its task of building God’s kingdom on earth.

Long after Noah, God made his third major redemptive covenant with Abraham.

Abraham

According to passages like Genesis 15, 17 and 22, God called Abraham and his descendants to serve him in a special way. It remained all humanity’s task to fill and subdue the earth. But from this point forward, Abraham and his descendants played a central role in bringing God’s eschatological kingdom to earth. In particular, they were chosen as the special nation through whom God would extend redemption to the rest of humanity. This began as God established his kingdom presence in the Promised Land. And it continued as Abraham, and later the nation of Israel, stretched the borders of the Promised Land toward the ends of the earth. As God told Abraham in Genesis 22:18:

Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed (Genesis 22:18).

God’s covenant with Abraham created the expectation that God’s earthly kingdom would not consist of a single nation or people. Instead, it would eventually include members from “all nations on earth.”

Many centuries after Abraham, God made his fourth major redemptive covenant with Moses.

Moses

Moses wrote about God’s covenant with him in many places. Several times, he confirmed that the Mosaic covenant incorporated and continued the early covenants with Adam, Noah and Abraham. But he also revealed a new dynamic that created additional expectations for God’s earthly kingdom. In passages like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 30, God revealed that his special covenant people wouldn’t always be faithful to him. As with prior covenant administrations, the Mosaic covenant mentioned God’s commitment to bringing the covenant blessings to pass. But if his people disobeyed him, he would punish them. Listen to what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 4:27-31:

The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive ... But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your

soul... [T]hen in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers (Deuteronomy 4:27-31).

The worst covenant curse would be exile from the Promised Land, with God's people being scattered among the peoples or nations. But God's mercy wouldn't allow him to abandon his people forever. When they repented of their sin, and sought him with all their heart and soul, he would restore them to his favor. Moreover, Moses wrote that God's mercy would accomplish this "in later days."

The Hebrew expression Moses used for "later days" was *bayahariyt hayyamim*. This expression frequently was a simple reference to the future. But in Deuteronomy 4, Moses created an expectation of a future age when God would fulfill all of his covenant promises of blessings for his people and judgment against his enemies.

The Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek in the work we call the Septuagint. The translators understood Moses' words *bayahariyt hayyamim* as a reference to the future eschaton. So, they rendered the Greek translation as *ep eschatō tōn hēmerōn* (ἐπ' ἐσχάτῳ τῶν ἡμερῶν), meaning literally "at end of days." You'll recognize in this phrase the word *eschatō* (ἐσχάτῳ). This is a form of the word *eschatos*, from which we get the terms "eschaton" and "eschatology." The later biblical authors also understood Moses' words in this same way. And they continued to think of the "later days" as the future and final age of blessing after Israel's return from exile.

There are times where you see the phrase "latter days" used, say, in the Pentateuch. One example is at the end of Deuteronomy 4. Now, we need to be careful when we see the term "latter days" that we don't automatically jump ahead to the final, ultimate end of things, such as the eschaton. But in that context, what Moses is warning Israel about, as they're about to enter the Promised Land, that when they get into the Promised Land, he says that if they disobey God and don't follow what's expected in the Sinai covenant that ultimately they could get kicked out of the Promised Land and sent into exile. So, what Moses is warning or speaking about is once they've been kicked out of the land, are in exile due to disobedience, what he says though, is there's still hope for those people who have been kicked out of the land, that in the "latter days" they can turn to God and call upon him and bring them back. And of course this is a wonderful glimpse of our God who is willing to not give up on his people, but bring them back and restore them, which lays a great theological basis for who God is, a God who restores, a God who redeems even after sin. That provides a basis for understanding God's later acts in the person of Jesus Christ and what he will do in the end ultimately.

— Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

Near the beginning of the tenth century B.C., God made the fifth and final major redemptive covenant of the Old Testament with David.

David

The historical record of God's covenant with David is mentioned in 2 Samuel 7. And many more of its details are recorded in Psalms 89, 132. From the perspective of eschatological expectations, the most important detail of this covenant was that God would establish the house of David as the permanent dynasty ruling over God's earthly kingdom. Listen to God's words in Psalm 89:34-37:

**I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered...
[David's] line will continue forever and his throne endure before me
like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful
witness in the sky (Psalm 89:34-37).**

Some theologians have said that when the Old Testament refers to God's rule as king, its primary focus is on his active, abstract reign. It's not an *actual* kingdom with territory and citizens. Now, it's certainly true that God's kingdom includes his reign. But it's not just an abstraction. Adam was to fill and subdue the earth. Noah was promised stability in creation. Abraham was chosen as the father of the nation that would save all nations. Moses focused on the Promised Land. And David was assured that his dynasty would rule over God's earthly kingdom forever. God's kingdom is a real place, populated by real people. And the great expectation of the Old Testament covenants is that *that* place and *those* people will live in perfect harmony with God forever.

So far, we've considered Old Testament expectations stemming from creation and the history of redemption. So, now we're ready to turn to prophetic descriptions of the eschaton.

ESCHATON

During David's kingship, the nation of Israel was well established in the Promised Land. And during the reign of his son Solomon, the boundaries of the kingdom reached even further. Sadly, in the generations that followed, God's people rebelled against God, and fell into rampant idolatry and sin.

During the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam, in 930 B.C., the nation was divided in two. The northern kingdom retained the name "Israel," and the southern kingdom took the name "Judah." Neither kingdom was terribly faithful to God, but Israel was markedly worse. By 722 B.C., Israel had rejected prophetic warnings to repent for around two hundred years. So, God sent the Assyrians to defeat Israel and carry many of its people into exile. The prophets then exhorted Judah to repent in order to avoid Israel's fate. But ultimately, Judah continued in sin. So, in 586 B.C. God sent the Babylonians to destroy Judah's capital city, Jerusalem, and to take many Judahites into exile, too.

The prophets explained that these horrific events were God's covenant curses, resulting from Israel and Judah's persistent and flagrant rebellion. The people had broken God's covenants, and they received the great covenant curse of exile — just as Moses had threatened. But the prophets also remembered Moses' promise of restoration after exile. So, they continued to reassure God's people that in the last days, or eschaton, God would grant them repentance. He would forgive them, return them to the Promised Land, and culminate history in his perfect worldwide kingdom. Listen to Isaiah's words in Isaiah 2:2-4:

In the last days ... Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Notice that this picture of God's completed earthly kingdom was to be realized "in the last days," after Israel's return from exile. The same use of this phrase appears in places like Micah 4:1 and Hosea 3:5.

In Hebrew, Isaiah's phrase "in the last days" is *bayahariyt hayyamim* — the same words that Moses used in Deuteronomy 4:30. And it refers to the same eschatological kingdom that Moses had in mind. But what kinds of hopes did this prophecy create?

One hope Isaiah mentioned was that after Israel's exile had ended, God would rule over the whole earth from his throne in his temple in Jerusalem. Another was that every nation on earth would eagerly serve as part of that kingdom. The people would want to learn God's law so that they could obey him rightly. Another hope was that God's rule would include his righteous judgments. Another was that every nation would live in such unshakeable peace that they would actually get rid of their weapons. And one of the greatest expectations for God's eschatological kingdom is hinted at in Isaiah's final words. Listen again to what he wrote in Isaiah 2:4:

Nation will not ... train for war anymore (Isaiah 2:4).

Here, Isaiah implied a *permanent* end to war. In other words, God's kingdom would establish peace *forever*. Or as Daniel 2:44 tells us:

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will ... endure forever (Daniel 2:44).

But perhaps the greatest prophetic expectation for God's eschatological kingdom is that a particular descendant of David would be its king. You'll recall that in the Davidic covenant, God promised that David's house would rule over his earthly kingdom permanently. Well, one way the prophets built on this expectation was by emphasizing

that *one* descendant of David would reign forever. There wouldn't be a perpetual line of kings; there would be one king that ruled forever. As Isaiah 9:7 teaches:

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever (Isaiah 9:7).

The prophetic vision of God's eschatological kingdom was so wonderful that in places like Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, the expected kingdom was called a "new heavens and new earth."

The Old Testament prophets conceived of God's end time kingdom, his eschatological kingdom, in several ways: One ... the kingdom is going to arrive all at once. It's not going to be staggered. Secondly, it's going to be very physical, very political; it's religion and politics in one. Thirdly, it's going to happen through the Messiah... So the Messiah's going to usher it in, he's going to lead the revolt. Lastly, there's going to be a considerable amount of bloodshed, because Israel is going to have to completely dominate the surrounding neighbors and bring everybody into subjugation around them... But what's also attached to this... I mean, this is part of God's larger program. It's not just the kingdom that is coming in, it's God's Spirit is coming down, there's forgiveness of sin, there's resurrection, there's the new heavens and new earth. It's part of a larger program... It's kingdom and everything is working together, which is part of God's larger program, which will obviously climax in the new heavens and new earth.

— Dr. Benjamin Gladd

Ultimately, the prophets expected God to fulfill the plans he had laid at the beginning of creation, and had elaborated throughout the history of redemption. Creation would become a perfect extension of God's heavenly kingdom, ruled and cared for by perfected, redeemed human beings. It would fulfill every promise made in every redemptive covenant, including the utter defeat of God's enemies and the immeasurable blessing of his people. And the great Son of David, who came to be known as the Messiah or Christ, would rule forever from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem.

So far in our lesson on "The Goal of Creation" we've looked at the Old Testament expectations for the end times. Now, we're ready to turn to our second major topic: the New Testament realizations of those expectations.

NEW TESTAMENT REALIZATIONS

Understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ is foundational to understanding the New Testament. And this is particularly true when it comes to God's earthly kingdom. The New Testament *insists* that Jesus brought the kingdom of God to earth, and that he rules over it as its king. At the same time, the New Testament is very aware that we don't currently experience all the kingdom blessings described in the Old Testament. So, how do we deal with that tension? Well, one way is to learn more about what Jesus really came to do, and what he continues to do, and what he plans to do in the future.

We'll consider the New Testament realizations of Old Testament expectations in three steps. First, we'll summarize some theological developments that flowed from Old Testament expectations. Second, we'll look at some historical complications faced by the New Testament church. And third, we'll explain their adjusted expectations in light of those complications. Let's begin with some theological developments that took place between the Old and New Testaments.

THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the centuries between the close of the Old Testament and the coming of Christ, rabbis and other Jewish theologians developed a view of eschatology that gained wide acceptance. In its simplest form, Jewish eschatology held that world history could be divided into two great ages. They called the first age "this age" — or *olam hazeh* in Hebrew. It was characterized by sin, exile, suffering, and death. "This age" started when Adam and Eve fell into sin, and it corresponds to the age of redemption we identified earlier.

Jewish theologians called the second age "the age to come" — or *olam haba'* in Hebrew. This was the future eschaton, when God's kingdom would fill the earth. It would be characterized by forgiveness, righteousness, peace and eternal life.

In the first century, Jewish sects had varying ideas about the transition between the ages. But most agreed there would be a catastrophic war, leading to an abrupt transition. They believed the Messiah or Christ would lead an army of angels and faithful men to victory over Israel's enemies. After that, as heir to David's throne, the Messiah would restore the kingdom to Israel. From then on, all the Old Testament expectations for God's kingdom would be fulfilled, and God's people would live in peace forever.

The connection between the Messiah and the kingdom of God for the Jews of Jesus' day was largely political. This is because through the Old Testament the Messiah, or the anointed king, led a nation that was a political entity in space and time — the nation of Israel — and Israel did battle with her enemies, neighboring nations and people groups and so on and so forth. So, after the fall of Israel and after Israel has gone into exile and then comes back, but under Roman occupation and Roman rule, the hope for Israel is that another

political Messiah or king will lead Israel out of bondage, out of slavery and back into her former glory or even greater glory. So, it's perfectly understandable, therefore, that when Jesus comes on the scene and people begin to wonder whether he is the Messiah, they have certain political expectations about what he will accomplish, but we find out from him that his kingdom is not of this earth.

— Dr. Constantine Campbell

You'll recall that in 722 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel went into exile in Assyria, and that in 586 B.C. the southern kingdom of Judah was exiled to Babylon. So, by the time of Jesus' ministry in the first century A.D., they had been living in exile under foreign domination for many centuries. They had been ruled by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. Nevertheless, many of God's people were also hopeful. They believed his promises about the last days. Many even thought that prophecies like the statue in Daniel 2, and the beasts in Daniel 7, referred to the kingdoms that had dominated them, and indicated that their oppression was about to end.

Not surprisingly, Jesus and the writers of the New Testament also spoke of "this age" and "the age to come" as the two major eras of history. And they largely agreed on the way other Jewish theologians characterized these ages. They taught that the Messiah would end this age of sin and death and usher in the age to come with all its blessings. Listen to what Jesus said in Mark 10:29-30:

I tell you the truth... no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age ... and in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Jesus distinguished "this age" from "the age to come," just like his contemporaries did. And he made it clear that blessings would come to those that followed him. In Mark 10:29, Jesus indicated that he was the Messiah that was expected to bring the transition from this age to the age to come. He did something similar in Matthew 12:32, where he used the term "Son of Man" to refer to himself as the Messiah. And listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 1:20-21:

[God] seated [Christ] at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come (Ephesians 1:20-21).

Like Jesus, Paul distinguished between this present age of evil and the blessed age to come, and he associated the triumph of the age to come with Christ, that is, with the Messiah. Paul used similar language in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8; 2 Corinthians 4:4; and 1 Timothy 6:17-19. These and many other passages show that Jesus and his apostles and

prophets agreed with most other Jews in their day about the basic structure of the eschaton.

Having considered New Testament realizations in terms of theological developments, let's address some of the historical complications faced by the New Testament church.

HISTORICAL COMPLICATIONS

It was clear to everyone in the New Testament era that Jesus didn't meet all the expectations of Jewish theologians. He didn't lead God's armies to victory over their enemies. He didn't restore David's throne in Jerusalem. And his faithful people were still struggling with sin, pain, sickness and death. In short, he didn't *end* this age, and he didn't appear to bring many of the glories of the age to come. For this reason, the majority of Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah. So, why did the church accept him? Given these historical complications, why did the church continue to believe that Jesus was the Christ?

Our discussion of the historical complications faced by the New Testament church will divide into four parts. First, we'll look at the unmet expectations related to the coming of God's kingdom. Second, we'll explore prophetic mystery as an explanation of these unforeseen circumstances. Third, we'll consider covenantal conditionality as a component of the explanation. And fourth, we'll mention divine freedom as another aspect of our explanation. Let's begin with the early church's unmet expectations.

Unmet Expectations

During his life and ministry, Jesus didn't fulfill *all* of the contemporary expectations for the last days. And this sometimes created tension and confusion in his earliest followers. They had to wrestle with three truths that were hard to reconcile. First, they believed the Old Testament teaching that the Messiah would end this age and usher in the age to come. Second, they were committed to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. But third, they recognized that Jesus hadn't done what they expected. He hadn't ended this age or completely ushered in the age to come.

It shouldn't be hard to understand why the early believers might have struggled with these facts. Without a doubt, Jesus affirmed the Old Testament teaching that the Messiah would bring the earthly kingdom of God. He taught this before his crucifixion, and the apostles continued to teach this after his ascension. And he and his apostles also maintained that Jesus really was the Messiah or Christ. But since these truths were unquestionable, why hadn't Jesus, the Messiah, fulfilled their expectations of the age to come?

It's very likely that, following his resurrection, Jesus spent time explaining why he hadn't done everything his followers expected. Luke wrote that after Jesus rose from the dead, he spent forty days teaching the apostles about the kingdom of God. This would seem to imply that Jesus put a lot of effort into reconciling these truths. But even at the

end of the forty days of training, the apostles still didn't understand everything clearly. Listen to Luke's account in Acts 1:4-6:

On one occasion ... [Jesus] gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised ... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:4-6).

This question made sense to the apostles because the Old Testament says that in the last days God will pour out his Spirit on all his people. In Ezekiel 39:27-29, and in Joel 2:28-3:2, God explicitly associated the pouring out of his Spirit with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. So, it was natural for the apostles to wonder about this connection. But the Old Testament never said these two events had to be simultaneous. As Jesus told the apostles in Acts 1:7-8:

It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (Acts 1:7-8).

Jesus insisted that the timing of the kingdom hadn't been revealed to anyone. In fact, in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, he even said that it hadn't been revealed to him! — from the perspective of his humanity. Now, that's not to say that the Old Testament didn't talk about the timing of the events of the last days. But the Old Testament never guaranteed that these events would occur in precisely the way the early church expected them to happen.

So far in our discussion of historical complications, we've introduced the early church's unmet expectations. Now, let's consider prophetic mystery as part of the explanation of these unforeseen events.

Prophetic Mystery

Biblical prophets rarely explained the fulfillments of their prophecies in detail. And they always left at least some gaps in the information they provided. As a result, there was always a range of ways their prophecies could be interpreted.

Some of the prophecies that we read in the Old Testament Scriptures are very specific, so we learn, for example, that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem — that's really specific, a particular town — but most prophecies in the Old Testament are not like that. They are prophecies of coming judgment or of future blessing, and they're fairly nonspecific. Some people might even think they're vague. They're certainly very general prophecies. And I think there's a lot of wisdom in that in the purpose of God and in the mind of the Holy

Spirit in how these prophecies were given... There's something about the open-endedness of biblical prophecy that makes it relevant and applicable to the people of God in any place at any time.

— Dr. Philip Ryken

Paul talked about intentionally vague prophecies in Romans 16:25-26, where he mentioned,

the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God (Romans 16:25-26)

The mystery Paul mentioned here was related to the large-scale extension of salvation to the Gentiles, which he had previously explained in Romans 11. This mystery had originally been hidden in the Old Testament prophetic writings. But Jesus taught the apostles to understand these prophecies in ways that revealed the mystery.

As we pointed out earlier, despite the messianic expectations of the early church, Old Testament prophecies don't say that God's eschatological kingdom has to come all at once. In fact, one of the main goals of the New Testament seems to be to help readers understand those aspects of God's kingdom that were mysterious to earlier audiences.

We can think about God's mysterious timing by comparing Old Testament eschatological prophecies to a view of two mountains in the distance. From the perspective of the first-century audience, the "mountains" appeared to be close together. So, they expected the events of the last days to happen around the same time. But as history progressed and the mountains come into closer view, it became apparent that they were actually very far apart. So, later audiences were able to understand the previously hidden mystery, specifically, that the events introducing the eschaton would take a long time to unfold.

Now that we've looked at historical complications in terms of unmet expectations and prophetic mystery, let's turn to covenantal conditionality.

Covenantal Conditionality

As we saw earlier, God's covenants with his people had conditions. If his people obeyed the conditions, they'd be blessed. But if they disobeyed, they'd be cursed. For example, their disobedience had gotten them exiled from the Promised Land. And because prophecy was fundamentally a tool God used to motivate his people to obey his covenant, it was also fundamentally conditional. In other words, the prophecies about Israel's restoration were conditioned upon Israel's repentance and renewed covenant obedience.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah explained this fundamental conditionality in Jeremiah 18. In that chapter, he described his visit to the potter's house, where he saw the potter shaping clay. When the vessel didn't turn out the way the potter wanted, he

reshaped the clay, according to his own preference and discretion. Listen to what God said about the potter's work in Jeremiah 18:6-10:

O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does? ... If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it (Jeremiah 18:6-10).

Here, Jeremiah indicated that prophecies are fundamentally conditional, just like the covenants they represent. This is true even when the prophecies concern the nation of Israel, and even when the kingdom they refer to is God's kingdom.

Of course, when we talk about God altering prophetic fulfillments, we have to be careful. When God swears, or takes an oath, or makes a covenant, those promises are *absolutely* sure. But not everything God says is a promise. And when prophecies don't include promises, their fulfillment isn't guaranteed.

The patriarch Abraham clearly understood this. In Genesis 15:7, 8, God said that Abraham would possess the Promised Land. But that wasn't enough to convince Abraham that it would necessarily happen. So, Abraham asked God to turn his prophecy into a covenant promise.

The prophet Daniel also understood this principle. Around a generation after Jeremiah's ministry, Daniel ministered to God's people that were living in exile in Babylon. They'd been exiled, of course, because they'd ignored Jeremiah's warnings and refused to repent. Daniel observed that their exile *might* be coming to an end. According to Jeremiah 25:11, 12, the exile was supposed to last 70 years. So, when those 70 years had passed, Daniel prayed for God to restore their kingdom. But, as we read in Daniel 9, the people were still breaking God's covenant law. Daniel knew that God might have mercy on them despite their sin. But he also feared that God might choose to *extend* their covenant punishment. Sadly, his fears were well founded. Rather than ending the exile, God multiplied it *seven times* — extending it another 490 years!

This extended exile was nearing completion in the days of Jesus. God sent his own Son as the messianic king and tasked him with preaching repentance so that the kingdom would be restored. Mark 1:15 summarizes Jesus' preaching this way:

“The time has come,” [Jesus] said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15).

Having considered the historical complications surrounding unmet expectations, prophetic mystery, and covenantal conditionality, we're ready to look at God's divine freedom.

Divine Freedom

God's freedom is emphasized throughout Scripture. And it's particularly evident when people question the fulfillment of relatively straightforward prophecies. For instance, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and Bathsheba became pregnant, the prophet Nathan prophesied that her son would die. But David didn't believe this was a *necessary* outcome. He knew that God was free to withdraw the threat to the child's life. So, David repented and humbled himself. After his son died, David had this to say in 2 Samuel 12:22:

While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, “Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live” (2 Samuel 12:22).

David asked, “Who knows?” because he knew that God was completely free to save the boy or let him die.

The English words “Who knows?” translate the Hebrew phrase *mi yodea*. This same phrase appears in Joel 2:14, where Joel encouraged repentance as a way to avoid a prophesied judgment. In Joel's case, we don't know how God responded. But the prophet's understanding of his own prophecy is clear: God had prophesied judgment against his people. But he was still free to withhold that judgment, and even to bless the people instead.

We also see the phrase *mi yodea* in Jonah 3:9. In this case, Jonah proclaimed that Nineveh would be destroyed. So, the king of Nineveh ordered his entire city to repent of its sins, hoping that God would spare them. Here, *mi yodea* expressed the king's hope that God would show mercy to Nineveh. And in this case God did; he relented of the judgment Jonah had prophesied.

God isn't bound to act according to our expectations, even when we do our best to base those expectations on his Word. In the absence of a promise, God is free to fulfill prophecy in whatever way seems best to him. So, when first-century Jewish theologians were asked when and how the Messiah was going to restore the kingdom to Israel, they probably should have said, “Who knows?”

Whether we conceive of Old Testament prophetic expectations in terms of mountains in the distance, clay in a potter's hands, or divine freedom, one thing is clear: God didn't complete his eschatological kingdom during the first century. For hundreds of years, God's people had expected that when the Messiah came, all would be right with the world. But instead, the Messiah was crucified, and his people suffered persecution. Thankfully, as we've seen, the Bible provides many ways to reconcile these realities.

Now that we've looked at the New Testament realizations related to theological developments and historical complications, let's explore the early church's adjusted expectations.

ADJUSTED EXPECTATIONS

Jesus and his apostles disagreed with Jewish theologians about the transition between this age and the age to come. As we've seen, Jewish theologians expected a sudden, violent transition that rapidly ended this age and brought the kingdom of the age to come, or eschaton, all at once. But this expectation wasn't based on covenant or prophetic promises. And as things turned out, it was wrong.

In contrast to Jewish expectations, Jesus and his apostles taught that the transition between the ages would *not* happen quickly. The age to come began with Jesus' life and earthly ministry, but this age hadn't ended yet. In other words, Jesus instituted a period in which the ages *overlap*, prolonging the full realization of the eschaton. As a result, we suffer the hardships of this age at the same time that we enjoy the initial blessings of the age to come. This is the view that the church adopted. It's often called "inaugurated eschatology" because it acknowledges that God's eschatological kingdom has begun, or has been *inaugurated* in Christ. But it hasn't yet come in all its fullness.

One of the most important frameworks in understanding the Bible is what we sometimes call technically, "inaugurated eschatology." When we hear the word "eschatology" we sometimes think, oh, we're talking about the very last days, the end of history. And that's true, but according to the N.T.^{*}, when Jesus first came to earth, he inaugurated the last days. The prophecies in the O.T.[†] about what God would do when he would ultimately save his people, those have begun when Jesus came to earth, so we now live as Christians in a time when already many of God's promises have been fulfilled, but we are still waiting for other promises to be fulfilled in the future. So that's this kind of fundamental inaugurated eschatological structure that's fundamental to understanding a lot of the N.T. and our own Christian lives as well.

— Dr. Douglas Moo

Jesus told many parables showing that the kingdom of God grows over a long period of time. For example, in Matthew 13, he compared the kingdom to a field growing toward harvest, a mustard tree that grows from a seed, and yeast spreading through a batch of dough. In verses 39, 40 and 49, he taught that the kingdom would continue to grow until "the end of the age." Only then would "this age" finally be over and "the age to come" be present in all its fullness. This is why the New Testament speaks of the kingdom of God as happening in three stages. It has already arrived, it is currently in the process of arriving, and it will arrive in the future. The fact is all three are true. According to the inaugurated eschatology that Jesus taught, the kingdom *has* come, *is* coming and *will* come.

* New Testament

† Old Testament

We can divide the timeline of the last days into three main parts. The last days began with the inauguration. This is when the ages began to overlap during Jesus' life and earthly ministry, including the foundational work done by the apostles. The continuation follows the inauguration. During this time the church builds God's kingdom to prepare for Christ's return. Finally, the consummation brings the full blessings the Old Testament expected for the eschaton. It ends *this age* and permanently replaces it with *the age to come*.

Let's look more closely at the timeline of the last days, beginning with the inauguration. Through explicit teaching and parables, Jesus taught that he had already inaugurated God's earthly kingdom.

Inauguration

For instance, in Luke 16:16, Jesus said:

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it (Luke 16:16).

Similarly, in Matthew 11:12, Jesus told his audience:

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing (Matthew 11:12).

The kingdom has been advancing, or growing in the world at least since the time of John the Baptist. And, as the Bible teaches, John's work prepared the way for Jesus' public ministry. But Jesus didn't just teach and tell parables about the inauguration of the kingdom. He also argued that his miracles proved the presence of God's kingdom. As he said in Luke 11:20:

If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Luke 11:20).

He asserted the same thing in Matthew 12:28.

Jesus' taught that in order for demons to be cast out, they first had to be defeated. And the only way that could happen was if a more powerful force conquered them. Since the demons were obviously beaten, it meant that God had advanced his armies, conquered his enemies, and built his kingdom.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church was another indication that the last days had begun. Acts 2:1-11 tells us that, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. This outpouring enabled them to speak in other languages, and visibly marked them with tongues of fire. Listen to Peter's explanation of this event in Acts 2:16-17:

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (Acts 2:16-17).

Here, Peter saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as proof that the last days had begun.

Probably the most frequent way the New Testament refers to the inauguration of the kingdom, though, is through the term “gospel.” In the ancient world, “gospel” or “good news” typically referred to a king that had conquered new territory. In order to announce the new government to the people, the king would have messengers proclaim the “good news” that he was their new king. Similarly, the Old Testament used the term to refer to Israel’s restored kingdom after their exile. Listen to what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7).

Isaiah is speaking especially to those who are anticipating going into exile, or maybe those who have already been into exile are hearing what Isaiah wrote, or reading what he wrote, and they are heartened because “good news” in his context means that our king has won the victory, that his armies have been successful in battle, and he’s delivering us from our captivity. He’s going to bring us back home to our land. And we see that Isaiah picks up on how God has done that in the past. In verse 4, he talks about how God did that in Egypt and delivered them from Egypt. And also in verse 4 he says, in Assyria, the Assyrians came, but I’m going to deliver you. And so, with the Babylonian exile, there’s this anticipation that God will once again be victorious... So Jesus, when he picks up this concept of “good news” from Isaiah, is talking about real deliverance in the lives of people, where the gospel liberates people, the gospel changes things on the ground, and our God is victorious.

— Dr. Greg Perry

Isaiah had in mind messengers that were proclaiming God’s victory over his enemies. And that meant that God was reigning — his kingdom had been established. This is why Jesus and his apostles borrowed the term “gospel” from Isaiah. They wanted people to understand that God had defeated his enemies and had begun to reign on earth. Or to put it in the terms we’ve been using, God had *inaugurated* his earthly kingdom.

The second stage of the last days is the continuation of the kingdom.

Continuation

The continuation of God's kingdom stretches from Christ's first coming to his return. During this time, we enjoy many blessings of the age to come, like the Holy Spirit's gifts and victory over our spiritual enemies. But we also suffer the hardships of this age, like sin, disease and death. Even so, we have great reasons to persevere through this tension, knowing that our work is expanding the kingdom of God, and that he will reward our faithfulness.

Earlier in this lesson, we pointed to Jesus' parables as evidence that the kingdom of God grows on earth over a prolonged period of time. We mentioned that in Matthew 13 Jesus compared the kingdom to a field growing toward harvest, a mustard tree that grows from a seed, and yeast expanding a lump of dough. These parables described how God's kingdom spreads and grows throughout the world, primarily through the work of the church. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus gave the church the following instructions:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

In this passage, commonly called the Great Commission, Jesus indicated that he had received authority as king, that the church would spread his kingdom to all nations, and that this work would continue until the very end of the age.

The Great Commission calls us to expand the borders of Christ's kingdom to all nations, and to continue this work until the end of this age. Moreover, as we make disciples, they join us as citizens in God's messianic eschatological kingdom. As Paul told his readers in Colossians 1:13:

[God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Colossians 1:13).

And as John proclaimed in Revelation 1:5-6:

[Jesus] has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Revelation 1:5-6).

Also during this time of continuation, Jesus is advancing his kingdom in ways that are less visible than the expansion of the church. For example, he governs his earthly kingdom and battles his enemies from his throne in heaven. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:25:

[Jesus] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25).

Jesus is already reigning over his kingdom, and will continue to push his kingdom forward until all of his enemies are defeated.

The third and final period of the last days is the consummation of the kingdom, when this age is completely replaced by the age to come.

Consummation

As we saw at the beginning of this lesson, the Old Testament outlines the history of God's kingdom in three phases: the initial creation of the universe and its creatures; a long period of redemption necessitated by humanity's fall into sin; and the eschaton, when God's kingdom completely fills the earth.

The Old Testament portrays the eschaton as a time when the Messiah will end this age of sin and death and rule forever from David's throne in Jerusalem. His reign will renew creation, secure peace throughout the whole world, ensure perfect justice and righteousness, and last forever. And the New Testament agrees with the Old Testament regarding the final state of creation and the kingdom of God. But the New Testament gives us more details, such as identifying Jesus as the Messiah. In Luke 1:32-33, the angel announced Jesus' birth with these words:

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end (Luke 1:32-33).

But according to the New Testament, the greatest eschatological blessings foreseen by the Old Testament won't be fulfilled until the consummation of God's kingdom. These include the return of Jesus, the general resurrection of the dead and the last judgment, the destruction of the current creation, and the creation of new heavens and a new earth. In addition, in places like 1 Corinthians 15:52-54, the New Testament assures us that in the new creation, we'll live forever in glorified bodies. Death will be completely destroyed, and we'll never suffer again. And in 2 Peter 3:10, 13, the apostle Peter added the detail that the present creation will be destroyed by fire. This will purge creation of sin's corruption, and prepare the way for the new heaven and new earth.

The largest volume of new details comes from the apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation. Near the end of that book, John described the new heaven and new earth of God's eschatological kingdom, including the New Jerusalem, its capital city. Listen to John's description in Revelation 21:1-4:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every

tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).

We’ll explore these events in detail later in this series. So for now, we simply want to say that the New Testament realizations never disagree with the Old Testament. Instead, they help us make sense of the Old Testament in light of the historical complications related to Jesus’ work as the Messiah. And they offer even greater hope and assurance of blessing to those of us that follow him faithfully.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on “The Goal of Creation,” we began by looking at history from the perspective of Old Testament expectations related to creation, redemption and the eschaton. Next, we considered some New Testament realizations related to those expectations by focusing on theological developments, historical complications, and adjusted expectations.

We live in an amazing time. For thousands of years, the Old Testament looked forward to the last days as that time when God would bring his kingdom to earth. That was the great hope of the Old Testament saints. And we have the privilege of living in that kingdom. True, it isn’t perfect yet; the consummation is still in our future. But even so, we already enjoy many kingdom blessings. We have the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Christ is reigning from heaven and defeating our spiritual enemies. And God is clearly expanding his reign throughout the world. So, even though we continue to struggle with sin and its consequences, we can have confidence that the consummation will come, and that we will live with God in the new heavens and the new earth forever.

Dr. Matt Friedeman (Host) is Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship at Wesley Biblical Seminary and founding pastor of DaySpring Community Church in Clinton, Mississippi. Dr. Friedeman earned his M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. He is a contributing columnist for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, a political analyst for WAPT-TV, chaplain for the Hinds County Penal Farm, and is very active in prison and pro-life ministries. He is also the author of several books including, *The Master Plan of Teaching*, *LifeChanging Bible Study*, and *Discipleship In The Home*.

Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College & Graduate School.

Dr. Danny Akin is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Constantine Campbell is Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Dr. Douglas Moo is the Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College & Graduate School.

Dr. Greg Perry is Vice President for Strategic Projects at Third Millennium Ministries (formerly Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of City Ministry Initiative at Covenant Theological Seminary).

Dr. Philip Ryken is President of Wheaton College.

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
ONE

The Goal of Creation Faculty Forum



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson One: The Goal of Creation

Faculty Forum

With

Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.
Dr. Danny Akin
Dr. Randy Alcorn
Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.
Dr. Bruce Baugus
Dr. Rick Boyd
Dr. Gary M. Burge
Dr. Constantine Campbell
Rev. William W. Carr, Jr.
Dr. D.A. Carson
Dr. Lynn Cohick
Dr. Brian Fikkert

Dr. Paul Gardner
Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs
Dr. Mark Gignilliat
Dr. Benjamin Gladd
Dr. Dana M. Harris
Rev. Thaddeus J. James, Jr.
Dr. Scott Manor
Dr. Keith Mathison
Dr. Douglas Moo
Dr. Josh Moody
Dr. Craig Ott
Dr. Amy L. Peeler

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.
Dr. Greg Perry
Dr. Vern S. Poythress
Dr. Timothy E. Saleska
Rev. Rico Tice
Dr. Daniel Treier
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Guy Waters
Dr. Stephen E. Witmer
Rev. Dr. John W. Yates

Question 1:

What is eschatology?

Dr. Constantine Campbell

Eschatology is a fancy theological term that comes from two Greek words: *eschatos*, meaning “last,” and *logos*, meaning, “word,” So, it’s the study of the last things. And there’s a strict way of speaking about it and then a broad way of speaking about it. The strict way is simply to talk about what will happen at the end of time when Jesus returns, what will that look like, and so on and so forth. But the broader way to think about it is, what actually does the New Testament in particular and the Bible as a whole say about how the end affects life now? So, for example, the fact that we are living in an inaugurated eschatology — an overlap of the old and the new — means that, actually, we can talk about eschatology and how it affects our life *now*. It’s not simply things off in the distant future that will happen one day, but actually something that has broken into our current life and experience now.

Rev. Dr. John W. Yates

Eschatology is the doctrine of the last things or the end times. And when we talk about eschatology, we’re really talking about the end of time as we know it and have experienced it; the end of history as it has poured out over the millennia. Eschatology is also, though, the doctrine of the purpose of things, or the direction in which things are headed. So, when we talk about the end, we’re not just talking about the period at the end of the sentence. We’re talking about the purpose to which we are headed as people created in God’s image. So eschatology is not just the end. It’s also the beginning of new and eternal and risen life in the new heavens and the new earth.

Scripture tells us a bit about what the new heavens and the new earth will look like and what our resurrected bodies will be like, but we're only really given a glimpse. So, I think of eschatology as not just the doctrine of the end times or the last things, but the time at which we transition into creation as it was meant to be and into life in all its fullness.

Rev. William W. Carr, Jr.

Eschatology is the study of the end times. For the Christian, that entails an assortment of things, all of which center on the expected and promised return of Jesus Christ to gather his faithful people to be with him forever... I think that there has been a tendency to study eschatology as if we are looking *at* a timeline, and we wind up thinking in terms of, one part of the timeline is prior history, one place on that timeline is our present, and somewhere out in the distant future is the end, the eschaton. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, and I think the Old Testament prophets, don't look, don't view eschatology that way. They are not looking at a timeline, but they are looking along time... They reckon that the condition of the people to whom they're preaching is such that it warrants God's fairly soon intervention. At the same time, they also understand that that judgment is not God's last word, and so they see God's activity for salvation of his people as a piece with his judgment activity... I think that we always, if we ... look as the prophets do, that we'll actually see eschatology as more imminent and the closing lines of the Revelation become that much more clear when the apostle says, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, come soon."

Question 2:

How did the Fall affect the created world?

Dr. Scott Manor

The Fall affected everything, including the created world. In Genesis 3, when we read about the Fall, we learn about what happens as a result of that. And so, God is communicating with Adam and Eve and saying, "You have sinned and, therefore, a lot of things are going to change." And the main thing is really the relationships. It's the relationship between God and man, between man and his wife — Adam and Eve. But here we're talking about the relationship between man and creation, and so he talks about how the relationship between Adam and the earth is going to be significantly different. Adam's toil will be much more difficult as he cultivates the ground; as he tries to develop the earth, there will be thorns, there will be thistles, there will be things which negatively influence his relationship with the earth as a result of sin. And so, fortunately, that's not the end of the story. We hear in Romans 8, actually, where Paul talks about the groaning of the earth in the same way that we groan towards that future hope that we have in Christ, where those things will no longer be true, where that relationship between the earth and Adam will be restored, where the things that are broken within the earth itself as a result of sin will be made right as well. And so, on the one hand, we read in Genesis 3 that there's a brokenness,

and yet we also read later on that that is what exists now but will not exist for all time because Christ is going to make that right.

Rev. Thaddeus J. James, Jr.

When we look at the Fall, when we look at the created world, we look at the creation again, that everything that God created was perfect, everything that God created was good. And then we go back again into Genesis 1:31, and after he created man he said that is was “very good.” Now, we enter into Genesis 3 and we have the Fall. So, now we see that everything that God created has now dramatically changed because of sin... We see that now in the Garden, work will now become toil. It’s going to be sweat. It’s going to be struggle. It’s going to be hard. What was originally beautiful in the woman in childbirth is now equally going to be pain. It’s going to be troublesome. It’s not going to be an easy task... But now, equally, what has happened to the relationship of man to God, which now is Adam now walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, because now that separation has existed between man and God. So, that innocence, that purity, that sinlessness is lost. So, we see that not only in the devastation between man and woman, between woman and God, but also now on the earth, because death has entered into the world. And so now, where there was peace among animals, now animals are fighting and destroying and killing and eating each other. Now we have weeds that are growing up in this beautiful land that God created, and we have droughts and all those things that now have come because of the devastation of sin upon this world.

Dr. Brian Fikkert

What we see happening in Genesis 3 is that when Adam and Eve fall into sin, God curses the creation, and so every square inch of the entire universe has been affected by that curse. That means that the natural world has been affected by the curse. That means we have things like poverty and we have famines and we have floods. It also means that human beings have been dramatically affected in all of our relationships. So, for example, Adam is told that as he tries to work, thorns will infest the ground making his work hard and difficult. Eve is told that there will be pains with childbearing. All of human life is affected, and that means that the systems that human beings create, the cultures that we create are distorted as well. So, things like our economic systems are broken; there’s poverty. Things like our social systems are broken; we have ethnic strife and tribalism. Our political systems are broken; we have injustices. The natural world is broken, our cultures are broken, and we ourselves are broken. The Fall has affected everything.

Question 3:

What was the initial state of creation like?

Dr. Paul Gardner

I’ve always wanted to know what it would be like to have been there when God had just created the world — to be Adam. It must have been amazing because the Bible tells us God looked, and it was good. Everything was good. When he created the sun

and the moon, the stars, when he created the animals, he looked and it was good. When he created Adam, and then Eve to be with Adam, it was good. And I can imagine a little of what that must have been like, because the Bible talks of Adam and Eve being able to walk and talk in the Garden with the Lord God. We can imagine a little bit of that, but we really can't get our heads around the beauty of all of that. To imagine a creation where everything is good, where when I sow something in the ground it actually grows, and it has the right amount of sunshine and the right amount of water, rather than getting washed out in a flood or getting dried up in a desert or whatever, I can only dream of what that must be like. It is a place, though, that sets a picture for what is to come in the new earth. In many ways, actually, the description of the new earth is of something better even than Eden because now Jesus will be there, now we will know grace, we will know God's infinite mercy and his love, and we will know what he saved us from. But it will still be this restored, beautiful place where I think, from the biblical evidence we have, which is limited, everything will just work perfectly, where we will, above all, be able to bring glory to God as we were created to do.

Dr. Brian Fikkert

In the creation what we see is God making all things good. At the end of the creation process, God announces, "It is good." That means that all of creation was able to be what God had created it to be: Giraffes could be what he created them to be, turtles could be what he created them to be, and human beings could also be what God created them to be... What the Bible teaches is that in the creation God gave each human being four key relationships. Our primary relationship is with God himself. It's a relationship in which we're to bring honor and glory to God with all that we do — it's all about him. But it's also a relationship that is to be characterized by intimacy. Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden. Our relationship with ourselves: Adam and Eve were made in the image of God. They had inherent dignity and worth, and they knew that. Relationship with others: We're to love others as much as we love ourselves. Adam and Eve had perfect community. And finally, a relationship with the rest of creation: Adam and Eve were called to be stewards over creation. That meant to both preserve and protect it, but also to create bounty. Four key relationships: God, self, others, and the rest of creation. And Adam and Eve experienced these relationships in exactly the way that God intended, because he made those relationships in a certain way, and they were good.

Question 4:

Why did God give humanity the cultural mandate?

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

God gave humans the cultural mandate, which we see in Genesis, really 1:26 as well as 1:28. In 1:26 when God says, "I'm going to create humans and they're going to rule," then 1:28, after he creates them, he gives them this command to rule over creation, to have dominion over creation. I call the cultural mandate, actually, the *first*

great commission, because it's really a great task. So, with this first great commission, the cultural mandate, God gives it to humans because, as part of being his image bearers, because humans are the only ones that bear the image, though the rest of creation may reflect the fact that God has made it, only humans are the ones that God says are actually in his image itself. So, as part of being in the image, as part of being human, God gives them the great responsibility, the great *commission*, of caring for his world, being the ones who have the great opportunity, I like to say, to steward the world so that it goes to its fruition, so that its potential can be developed. One way to think about that further is in Genesis 2 we kind of see it action because God comes to Adam and says, "You name the animals." God doesn't say, "Here's the names of the animals." So, you see God ... bringing the animals, so to speak, to Adam, but Adam is the one who has the responsibility of taking care of this. So, the cultural mandate is the responsibility that all of us have as humans for taking care of God's world.

Dr. Josh Moody

So, in the beginning of Genesis there's this passage, Genesis 1:26, 27, where God gives the cultural mandate. In other words, he gives us the world to take care of and to rule in his place. What Genesis is teaching there is that humans have an extraordinary responsibility in their created nature intended by God to fulfill. They are, as it were, God's vice-regents. And so, we humans, in our identity, are to think of ourselves as kings under his kingdom with a high responsibility and a great dignity to rule according to his rule. Now, humans — Genesis 3 — have grabbed not just their rule, but his rule, and taken God off the throne of his kingdom and inserted themselves there. This is original sin teaching and the great rebellion against God's rule. But though that truth is taught in Genesis 3, we should not forget the intended nature of the relationship between God and humanity, that we are made to be vice regents under his rule, little kings under his kingdom, with an enormous responsibility, and that is part of our intended dignity that is redeemed in Christ and in his kingdom as we exercise our role of blessing, good authority under his authority.

Dr. Bruce Baugus

I think to understand why God gave man the cultural mandate, it's important to remember that man was uniquely created in his own image. So, there's a structural component to the divine image — we just *are* in God's image. But then there's also the functional component, that we show and display the glory of God in the particular way that's just right for us being human by the way that we carry out and reflect his glory through the work that we do. And so, when we think about the cultural mandate, we have sort of a work to fill the earth and to subdue it, to make the world like Eden, like the Garden, and so on, but also to fill it, to populate it. And so, the idea is that we are to carry out the cultural mandate to spread the glory of God displayed uniquely in his divine image in human form to the ends of the earth for his own glory.

Question 5:

What does the cultural mandate require of humanity?

Dr. Rick Boyd

When God created humanity — we go back to Genesis 1 — and God created us in his image, male and female in his image, and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” And it’s not just before sin enters in; that happened before sin entered in, in chapter 3 of Genesis but even after he destroys the earth with the flood and Noah and his wife and the sons and their wives, they all get out of the ark, and he, once again, says, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” God’s given us this earth for our good and for his glory.

Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

When we look at Genesis 1 and we ask, “Why was humanity created?” what we see is that they were created for a very specific function. As God’s image bearers, they were given the task of ruling over and subduing creation and within that, multiplying and filling the earth to carry out that role for caring for God’s world, if you will. So, when you think of, “Why were humans created?” we need to remember that we were created to care for and, if you will, even develop from what God has initially placed upon this earth... One thing that I see students come up with a lot, and even during my church ministry, is they struggle with, “What does it look like to serve God? Should I leave my job doing computer science, or should I stop being a businessman because maybe I should go into fulltime ministry where I can preach God’s Word?” Now, there’s a value to ordained teaching ministry, but Genesis 1 reminds us that there is something extremely important, that God cares deeply about when his people are engaged with all of God’s creation and are serving as his image bearers, they’re representing him, reflecting him and allowing creation to flourish, and within that, man to flourish, humankind to flourish, as well as they carry out this call to care for God’s world.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

If there’s a phrase that twentieth century Reformed-type people know and like to bandy about maybe more than — I shouldn’t say any other phrase, but they toss it around a lot — is a quote from Abraham Kuyper where he said, “Jesus Christ does not look at one square inch of this world and not claim, ‘This part is mine.’” The cultural mandate is a claim on Christians that this world, that all of this world, is God’s world, and because we’re made in the image of God, we go out into the world to bear witness to God in all spheres of life. This is one of the great contributions of Reformed thought, as the line between clergy and laity — though still a line that’s demarcated — does become fuzzier because every Christian is called to some vocation, whether it’s clergy or lay, and in the vocation that you’re called to, you’re called to be God’s witness, God’s emissary as he claims this whole world for himself. Whether it’s art or law or medicine or the trades, whatever it is, that is not without the purview of God’s ownership and lordship over all of creation.

Question 6:

What is the significance of what theologians call the *proto-euangelion* in Genesis 3:15?

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

The *proto-euangelion* in Genesis 3:15 is the gospel in seed form. The gospel in seed form. And what is particularly detailed in Genesis 3:15 is the overthrow of the serpent, that is, the serpent's dominion. Remarkably, the Old Testament picks up on Genesis 3:15 and alludes to it throughout. I mean, there are several texts that mention — Psalms 91 comes to mind; there are some other places even in the Pentateuch. And then the New Testament then picks up on Genesis 3:15 and continues to allude to it throughout even the Gospels, a couple places maybe in Paul and in Revelation, so that it really points to Christ's utter and full and consummate defeat of evil, of Satan... And that is hugely important when it comes to eschatology, because eschatology, much of it, has to do with how the kingdom is installed in the absolute annihilation of wickedness to completely remove the threat of evil. This was a big deal in the Garden. There in Genesis 3, Adam did not do a good job of removing the threat. He did not protect the Garden very well; the serpent just came on in. What we're going to see in the new heavens and the new earth is there is no threat to the temple, garden/new heavens and new earth. The threat of evil has been put down and now there's full righteousness with God, there's nothing incomplete.

Dr. Dana M. Harris

In Genesis 3:15 we find a remarkable promise that God gives to Eve. This is in the context of Adam and Eve having rebelled against God... It's important to understand that neither Adam nor Eve are cursed; the ground is cursed and Satan is cursed. But also in this context, Eve is given a remarkable promise: she is told that her offspring will eventually bring about the downfall of the serpent. Now, this promise actually continues through the rest of Scripture in some remarkable ways... So, we began to see this, for example with Noah, where God rescues one, and of course his family, as the means by which God will then bless the rest of creation. Let's fast forward to Abraham. With Abraham once again we see this pattern where God singles out the *one* through whom he will bless all the families on earth. This is also the logic between the choice of the nation of Israel, the *one* nation that will display the glory of God to other nations. Now, in the promises that are given to Abraham we see a promise, of course, of many things, but one of which is descendants... So, we look through the rest of the biblical record, we see that the promise of descendants begins with a concentration or focus on Isaac. But then it expands rather quickly. By the time we get to the beginning of Exodus, there are *many* descendants. Then we began to see something very interesting that happens. Once we move to the time of Samuel and then David, we began to see that this promise of descendants crystallizes in one, the promised Son. We see this very clearly in Psalm 2, where God's response to human rebellion is to say that he has installed his Son on Zion. This sets up for an understanding for how the Son will eventually point to David's greater son, Jesus

Christ. So, we put all of this together, we can see in the most remarkable way that what God promised to Eve eventually culminates in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Craig Ott

You know, the story of creation and fall is not only just foundational to our whole understanding of creation, humanity, the nature of the source of evil and so on and so forth, but it's also absolutely foundational the way we observe that God engages humanity even after the Fall. We see Adam and Eve trying to hide from God as one of their first responses, and yet our God is a God who goes seeking them. This is a theme we find throughout Scripture, of God pursuing men and women who would hide from him. Jesus said, "I came to seek and to save that which was lost." And yet, God does not only seek them out, he provides a way for them to be reconciled with himself. Now, immediately in the Garden there is the killing of an animal to provide clothing for them, and so there's shedding of blood, there's a redemptive element in there — clothing yourself with leaves would not be adequate. But more than that, God gives a promise which is somewhat veiled. We don't know the whole story yet, but he tips his hand, and he says the woman is one day going to bear a child, the seed, and that child will be wounded, but this child will one day conquer Satan who has brought the source of evil into the Garden and has led to this catastrophe. And so, God not only goes seeking after Adam and Eve to restore a relationship, but he provides that. Now, we know, of course, the rest of that very long story how that plays out and the promise to Abraham and that blessing to all nations would one day come, and God's vision to call out Israel as a people who'd be bearers of that seed, and yet, for the purpose of blessing the nations, and then ultimately with Jesus coming to fulfill that work of redemption, conquering Satan through his work on the cross, and then ultimately, through Pentecost, of bringing that message then to all nations so that all who would exercise faith might become children of Abraham and be included in this people of God.

Question 7:

How did the Old Testament prophets characterize God's eschatological kingdom?

Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

So, the idea of the kingdom of God is more of a concept that biblical theologians will use to talk about what the prophets were looking forward to. Now, each prophet has their own different flavor and way that they're articulating things and expressing things. But when you think about a kingdom, any kingdom needs a king, any kingdom has a people, and any kingdom is in a particular place. So, one way of looking at what are the prophets looking towards, you ask, well, what are they looking for in terms of a king? Now, we might immediately think of a Davidic king, but the prophets are often looking ahead to God being the king. As you see in Isaiah 40, there's this vision of God coming which develops in Isaiah 52 with the

proclamation that God has come as King. And so you see then that the prophets are looking for God who's going to come as a king. So, you must ask, what does this king care about? What does he want to bring about? Well, one of the elements that we see that God as King wants to bring about, according to the prophets, is he wants to establish justice and righteousness in this world. In a world of injustice he wants to make things right. Now, one of the means that kings in the ancient world used to bring that about is to have kind of key leaders who would bring about those realities. Well, in the biblical vision, God the King is going to be using a Davidic king, an agent who's going to be establishing justice and righteousness in the world. So, you see in Isaiah 9 this vision of this son has been given, this child has been born. And what will that child accomplish? He will rule with justice and righteousness. In Isaiah 11, the Spirit is going to come out of a little shoot that's going to come from the stump of Jesse. And what will that Spirit enable him to do? He'll be wise but he'll also bring about justice and righteousness in this world. So, we see then that God the king will have an agent such as a Davidic king who's going to bring justice and righteousness. But we also see that God as king knows that reconciliation needs to happen between he and his sinful people, so that's where he sends, in Isaiah's vision, the suffering servant who will serve the role of dying as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of people who couldn't be right with God, for those who were sheep who've gone astray. So, we see, then, God using some key agents to bring about a reality where there can be justice and righteousness in the world and where there can be forgiveness of sins made possible for the people. Now, when we look at who the people are in God's kingdom, we're seeing these are people who are not just Israel, they're coming from all nations, streaming to God. And they will be like God in terms of carrying out what he cares about: justice and righteousness in this world. We'll see peace flooding the earth where lions and lambs will lie next to each other, which, really, I think is symbolic of nations who are hostile with one another having peace. So, we see then a grand vision in the prophets of a king establishing his kingdom in this world, where he's creating a people, a community. But we need to ask, what about "place"? And this is where Isaiah 65 beautifully portrays this hope of a new heavens and a new earth where all the realities, where there's hunger and thirst will be reversed, there'll be great food, there'll be flowing water; it'll be like a return to Eden where the curses that were affecting creation before have been eradicated. So, this is the hope of the prophets, their hope in the kingdom of God himself reigning as king with the people who live in line with him in a place that's like paradise.

Dr. Simon Vibert

The Old Testament prophets speak about God's eschatological kingdom in passage like Isaiah 61 that looks forward in hope to the year of the Lord's favor, the day when God's message, God's *euangelion*, will be preached to the whole of creation in anticipation of the world realizing that Christ is King.

Question 8:

How does the concept of the kingdom of God appear in the Old Testament?

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

The idea of the kingdom of God is something that already appears in the Old Testament. And actually, it appears in two different ways. There's one sense in which God is always ruling from creation onwards. Psalm 103:19 says:

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19, ESV).

That's providence. It's comprehensive rule. But there's also a sense in which God's *saving* reign — he's always reigning, but his salvation is something that the Old Testament prophets and others looked forward to as something future. So, for instance, in Daniel 2 there's a picture of the great stone, which represents the coming kingdom of God that's going to fill the earth. And in Isaiah 52 it talks about the message of salvation, "Your God reigns," which is really saying he's coming to bring his salvific power to bear and to rescue his people.

Dr. Greg Perry

The phrase the "kingdom of God," doesn't really appear in the Old Testament, but the *concept* of God's reign is everywhere in the Old Testament. That phrase, "the Lord reigns," of course, is repeated throughout the Psalms. But this concept really starts in the very beginning of the Bible where God creates Adam and Eve as his image bearers, and this notion of bearing the image of the king is a concept that's very important in the ancient Near East as kings would want to let people know who was in charge by reproducing their image and putting their statues all around their territory, their kingdom. And so, right from the beginning of the Bible we see this concept of the reign of God through image bearing. And then it continues in covenant making. The way kings did business in the ancient Near East was to make treaties with one another, to make these covenants, and so with Abraham we see God as the great King granting land to Abraham by using these same treaty forms that the kings would use in the ancient Near East. But of course, the kingdom of God really comes to its fullest expression in the Old Testament in this covenant with David's house, and we see that the kind of king that reflects the character of God is this "man after God's own heart." And so, Psalm 72 gives us a really great example of what should the kingdom of God look like. And so, when dignitaries come to visit Jerusalem, to visit Solomon, they see that the poor are defended, that there's righteousness, there's justice, that there's mercy, that there's economic flourishing, that the way a king is to do business in terms of reflecting God's character is the way it's conducted under David's household.

Dr. Timothy E. Saleska

I think the concept of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament is one of the unifying themes of the entire Bible. The idea that Yahweh is the Creator, the one who created all things, ruled, still rules and will always rule all things, is a concept that you see over and over at many different levels in the Old Testament. You see it especially in the creation Psalms, for example. You see it in the kingdom of God Psalms where the voices in the Psalms proclaim that it is Yahweh who reigns. What is interesting about the concept again, though, is how complex it becomes, because in the theme “the kingdom of God,” we see the idea that this Yahweh who created everything, who rules all things, chose a people for himself to be his own — Israel. And even when Israel wanted their own king, their own earthly king, it was understood by them, and especially by the king, that Yahweh was the ultimate ruler and that this king ruled by virtue of the rule of Yahweh, so that ancient Israel saw Yahweh and its king functioning as a unit together. Another thing that’s interesting about the kingdom of God in the Old Testament is that sometimes you see it visibly manifest. It’s very much on the surface. So, for example, to the extent that Solomon, for example, was faithful; he brought the characteristics of God’s kingdom very much to the surface in the peace and justice that he was able to bring to the people, to the prosperity of the country, to the peace that he had with his enemies round about. The kingdom of God seemed very much there. To the extent that the kings were disobedient and strayed from God and worshiped false gods, the kingdom of God seemed very much below the surface, so that Israel even was given into the hand of their enemies. Well, where is the kingdom of God, where is God’s reign, where is the promises to his people, you see? But always there was that underlying hope and promise that Yahweh had not forsaken and would not forsake his people, that his rule was there. You see it, for example, in something like Psalm 2 in which you have the nations raging against Yahweh and his anointed one, and on the surface it looks like they are in control, but notice in the middle of that psalm we read these words from the psalmist:

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion” (Psalm 2:4-6, NKJV).

So, there we see the psalmist who assumes that beyond what see visibly on the surface there’s another realm of reality in which Yahweh rules all things.

Question 9:

For the Jews in Jesus' day, what was the connection between the Messiah and the kingdom of God?

Dr. D.A. Carson

“Messiah” is a word that is bound up with “Anointed One,” and in the Old Testament the king was anointed, and the priests were anointed as they were appointed to their

particular roles, and on one or two occasions a prophet was anointed, like Elisha. And so, it came to be associated with expectation of One who was to come, but most commonly with kingdom, and namely with the Davidic kingdom. But you have to recognize that Jews were divided on such matters. In Qumran, for example, in the area near the Dead Sea south of Jerusalem, it's pretty clear that they expected two Messiahs: a priestly Messiah and a kingly Messiah. And what Christ does when he comes along, turns out to be king and priest. In one sense they were right, but they wanted two figures, and we have one figure being both priest and king, and prophet too, for that matter, as well. So, there was rising expectation of One who was to come, and as far as I can see, when Messiah is connected with a Coming One, most likely it's the Davidic figure who is in view, that is, the promised king in the Davidic line with prophecies going back, finally, to the seedbed of 2 Samuel 7 and reinforced by a typological reading of Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 and so forth. So, when we come to the word "Christ," which is simply the Greek equivalent of "Messiah" — when it has titular force, and I think it never loses all of its titular force in the New Testament — it's regularly a way of saying that Jesus is the Davidic king, though in the right context it might have other overtones of priesthood and authority beyond that.

Dr. Gary M. Burge

In Jesus' day when Jewish thinkers began to imagine the Messiah, they imagined some things that were very different than what Christians might say today. Jews in Jesus' day thought of the Messiah as a composite figure of the great heroic figures of the Jewish story, and in those figures, probably Moses was the most important one. Moses was a strong political leader, he was also a great spiritual man who led Israel out of Egypt, defeating Pharaoh, and establishing Israel's national identity, you might say, at Mount Sinai. So, therefore, when they thought about the Messiah, they understood that there would be a *human* character who would come into Israel's history, and this very human character would inaugurate Israel's national life. Now, you can see this in Acts 1:6 where the disciples talk to the resurrected Jesus and they say, "Lord, now in your resurrected glory, now that you have your messianic power, will you restore to Israel again the kingdom?" That's the political question. In the Judaism of Jesus' day, the Messiah would be a catalyst for the restoration of Israel's political life, its kingdom life, perhaps the restoration of the world of King David, something like that. When Jesus steps onto the stage of first century Judaism, he does not pick up those political motifs that you have in his day. He announces that he is establishing a kingdom, but this kingdom is not of this world. This is going to be a kingdom that promotes different values. This is not going to be a kingdom defined by any political body. So, on the one hand, he is using a lot the vocabulary of first century Judaism to talk about his identity as Messiah and his role in establishing the kingdom. And I imagine he frustrated a lot of people in his audience when he denied those political dimensions. When Jesus announces a kingdom which is going to be a different sort of kingdom, a kingdom whose Messiah even dies to establish itself, the frustration and discouragement among many Jewish followers probably was acute. Jesus indeed is the Messiah. Jesus is indeed establishing a kingdom. Those two ideas come together in first century Judaism, but Jesus is reframing the entire idea.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.

First of all, if you're going to have a kingdom, you need a king. The Jews believed that a king-like figure, a Davidic-like figure would come and reverse the fortunes of Israel, someone who would come in, get rid of the Gentiles, establish righteousness, and reassert Yahweh's throne in Jerusalem. Now, the core of this promise goes back to 2 Samuel 7 in what we call "the Davidic covenant," where David approaches God and says, "God, I'd love to build a house for you." And God says, "Well, I've got some other plans," and so he instructs Nathan the prophet to go to David and say, "Well, you think you're going to build a house for me, I'm going to build a house for you." And so, from the time of David down through the centuries up until the first century, we have this longstanding promise that, "Your seed, O David, will sit on the throne and will rule." Now, along the way, the Jews developed certain notions as to what this Messiah would be. He would be a powerful figure, he would be a wise figure, and most Jews believed that through a political or military-type coup that the Messiah would finally, again, get rid of the Gentiles, those nasty Gentiles, and bring in the righteous rule of God. Now, Jesus reinvents that whole concept fundamentally and dramatically through his own ministry. But the concept of the messianic king he retains.

Dr. Lynn Cohick

The kingdom of God and Messiah are two huge topics in Jesus' day, and they're each, in themselves, very complicated and then together even more complicated. But let's take Messiah first. There was no consensus about what the Messiah would do specifically, but there were general expectations. The Messiah would purify the temple. The Messiah would, by extension, then purify the land, and that would mean Solomon's kingdom space, right, so Judea, probably Samaria and Galilee. And then finally, the Messiah would establish righteous rule, and that carries us, then, to "kingdom of God." "Kingdom of God" is about God's rule or reign. So, the Messiah was seen as someone who would bring in the reign of God. Now, in Jesus' day, you had aspects of Messiah that would be priestly, that would be royal, kingly, and Jesus would fit those for sure. He is from the Davidic line, the line of the kings. But Jesus also spoke about the temple and, in fact, went into the temple as one of his last deeds we find in the Synoptic Gospels, where he cleansed the temple. And people in that day would have seen that action as messianic, as someone who was ready to make the land holy and righteous before God.

Question 10:

How did Jesus' contemporaries distinguish between "this age" and the "age to come"?

Dr. Gary M. Burge

When Jesus' contemporaries thought about "this age" that they were living in and "the age to come," they really thought about these two ages as separate and distinct entities, and they saw these two ages as having a boundary between them. So,

therefore, we live in this present age in which we struggle with evil, we struggle with the incompleteness and brokenness of this world, and we hope to live lives of holiness and goodness pleasing to God. But then what they understood was a terminus was on the horizon, and at that terminus God would intervene in the world. This would be a messianic era, the Messiah would arrive, and Israel would be restored again to its national glory, and in this period, God's reign would be supreme. So, Jesus' contemporaries understood that these two eras stood side by side with a very sharp terminus in between. The remarkable thing is this, is that when Jesus announces his ministry, he says the kingdom of God is not simply *coming* — that would be Jewish — but the kingdom of God has *arrived*. That's the remarkable thing in Jesus' ministry. So, therefore, is you think of these two spheres as standing side by side with a terminus in between, what Jesus has done is he has shifted Jewish eschatology; he has moved these two spheres so now they overlap. So, Jesus is not just announcing the good news of salvation, he's announcing the arrival of Jewish expectation.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

You know, one of the common ways that Jesus' contemporaries had of talking about the history and the world and what their God was doing was to talk about "this present age," "this age," sometimes "this present evil age," and "the coming age." They tended to talk about it as if the coming age had not yet started. It's understandable as they could see how broken the world was. The Holy Land itself had been conquered by one idolatrous empire after another — now the Romans are in power. So, as they looked at the world, it was pretty clear to them that, although the promises that had been given, especially through the prophets, were *certain* promises, that they simply hadn't begun yet to be fulfilled. So, it's as if the two ages are lined up against one another, or next to one another, but there's no overlap. And, of course, the marvelous and shocking thing about first, John the Baptist's and then Christ's ministry himself, is the claim, the paradox that, even as the power of the evil age, Satan, and sin, Satan's allies, continues, God has begun to do something new in Jesus. So, when John says the reign of God has come nearer, they're actually claiming that the new thing that God had promised to do, he has actually begun to do in Jesus.

Dr. Stephen E. Witmer

Jesus' contemporaries understood the whole of history to be divided into two ages: "this age," and "the age to come." "This age" is the age of suffering, death, persecution sometimes for God's people; God's people struggle, even the righteous don't prosper... "The age to come" is understood as the time where God finally vindicates his suffering people, where righteousness is established, where God judges his enemies in the end. And so, there's a huge disjunct between this age and the age to come. Jesus himself thought in these terms, so he talks about those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, there's not forgiveness for them in this age or the age to come. The apostle Paul in Galatians 1 says that Jesus gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age. So, the New Testament authors themselves are thinking in these terms. And it really is, I think, both a realistic and a hopeful view of

history. So, it's realistic because Jesus and his fellow New Testament authors recognize that we're not in the age to come yet. God's people are not vindicated; God's people often suffer. And yet, at the same time, it's hopeful because the age to come is coming. It's going to come. God's people will be saved.

Question 11:

Why does God sometimes put conditions on his prophecies?

Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

It's common in the prophecies in the Old Testament for God to attach conditions to them, such as, "If you don't repent you are going to experience judgment." A wonderful kind of glimpse at this way that God works with his prophecies is in Jeremiah 18 where you have this symbolic experience where Jeremiah has been told to go down to the potter's house and he's observing a potter forming clay, and then all of a sudden the clay becomes warped and the potter starts over again. And God draws upon that to give a teaching lesson for a prophecy that Jeremiah is supposed to give, which is that Israel is told that if they don't repent that they're going to experience judgment. God could change that, because if they do repent, God will change his plan for judgment, if you will, of destroying the pot and remake it now, Israel, into a restored community. But on the flipside, God says, "If I've promised to bring good to you but you instead start doing evil," he could change his mind too, and he could bring judgment. So, this is a typical way that prophecy works, where God is framing his call for repentance in light of prospective judgment, but also warning those who think they're destined for a good life that judgment could meet them too if they are not righteous.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

God puts conditions on his prophecies and the prophets in some sense to remind us that God's interaction with his people is a lived and dynamic interaction; it's a relationship, it's a covenant, it's a covenant that he's determined to enter into with people. And so, when God makes a prophecy or gives a prophetic announcement against his people, he will put conditions into that at times to provide, again, that dynamic relationship that gives room for real response in time and space. And those responses matter. And sometimes these qualifications that are made are qualifications that are reminders — "I've claimed you, you're mine; come back to me." You see this throughout Jeremiah's prophecies from beginning to end. "Why is this bad thing happening to us?" they ask in Jeremiah, in his book, and the answer is, "Because God has claimed you and you've turned away from him." So, these conditions are given to the people to remind them of their covenantal relationship with God and their commitment to that. And sometimes these qualifications are stated in very clear ways, and sometimes they're unstated qualifications. I think the most famous one is in Jonah. Jonah gives us the smallest sermon in history: Forty days and Nineveh is destroyed. But then ... the Ninevites actually, the pagans, turn and God relents from his judgment. I think what you see there is a prophetic statement that has an unstated

qualification. And when you get into Jonah 4, you can see that Jonah's not real happy about the fact that God pulled back, he relented from his destruction toward the Ninevites. And the reason why Jonah was angry — and I think this gets at the heart of these prophetic qualifications — the reason why Jonah was so angry was because he knew the character of God: God's gracious, "you're compassionate; I knew that you are quick to forgive, and you're doing it with the wrong people" — in the book of Jonah. So, these qualifications that come into the prophetic announcements are rooted in a covenantal relationship with God and his people.

Question 12:

What is inaugurated eschatology?

Dr. Danny Akin

I'm an advocate of what is called "inaugurated eschatology." It's kind of a *via media*, or if you like, "a middle way" between what is called "realized eschatology" — the kingdom is already here in its fullness — and "futuristic eschatology," which says none of the kingdom is here and we're still looking for all of it to come in the future. Inaugurated eschatology, I think, is true to the New Testament because it teaches that with the coming of the King, the kingdom *has begun*, the kingdom *has inaugurated*. That small mustard seed has been planted. But, we still await the full fruition of the kingdom where the glory of King Jesus is seen cosmically and universally. So, is the kingdom here? Yes. Is it here in all of its fullness? No. It has been inaugurated. It has begun, but its full flowering will only come to realization when Jesus comes again.

Dr. Daniel Treier

Inaugurated eschatology is the belief that God's kingdom has been inaugurated in the first coming of Jesus Christ, but has not yet been fully consummated or realized, and won't be until his second coming to bring in the eternal state. We look at biblical texts like Luke 17:20-21 to get at the already side of this inauguration. Jesus says that he has brought the kingdom of God into our midst, or he has brought it near. So, it's already here. In his person and ministry and speech, the kingdom of God has come, and this explains certain realities in the New Testament such as its appeal to Old Testament types and promises already being fulfilled in some sense, the New Testament frequently speaking of us being "in the last days," and so forth. These realities suggest that the kingdom of God is already inaugurated. But there's another set of texts that suggest that it's not yet fully consummated. Jesus tells us in the Lord's Prayer to pray, "Thy kingdom come" and gives us a sense of what it would mean for that kingdom to come when he has us pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." That's something we pray for because it's not yet here. Hebrews, quoting a Psalm, acknowledges we do not yet see all things subjected under his feet. That's something we still wait for when Jesus will deliver the kingdom over to God the Father and God will be all in all... In the meantime, the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us as a guarantee of our future hope being fully

realized and as an enablement for us to live between the times in the here and now, between Christ's first and second comings.

Dr. Keith Mathison

Inaugurated eschatology is a view that sees the last days foretold by the Old Testament as having already begun with the first advent of Christ as opposed to a completely futurist eschatology, which sees eschatological events as still being in our future, or a completely realized eschatology which sees all the events as already fulfilled, commonly associated with Oscar Cullmann who used D-Day, V-Day analogy to illustrate this, where the first coming of Christ is associated with D-Day. It's the decisive battle that wins the war, present age is the time between D-Day and V-Day in which the armies are progressing forward towards Berlin, and then V-Day would be analogous to the second coming of Christ when the consummation occurs, the final judgment, second coming and all of those final events.

Question 13:

What kinds of tensions do Christians feel during the overlap of “this age” and the “age to come”?

Dr. Guy Waters

Christians do live in the overlap of this age and the age to come. Paul tells the Galatians that Christ has rescued us from this present evil age. Paul tells Titus that we continue to live in this present evil age. And so, we feel that tension. Part of that means that we continue to sin; we don't delight in that, we don't rejoice in it, but that sin is a sad but constant factor of our existence. We're not under its lordship, but like Paul in Romans 7, we grieve under its presence. We continue to experience death. Unless Jesus returns before then, we should prepare to die, and that's part of living in a world that lies under the curse, that groans, as Paul says in Romans 8. But even as we feel these things, and we should feel these things as Christians, we have gospel hope that sin and death and curse are not the last word, that Christ has won the victory, and part of our eagerness for him to return is that when he comes, then all things truly will be made new.

Dr. Dana M. Harris

When Jesus came, he ushered in the kingdom of God. For us right now this is a spiritual reality in the present time on earth, but one day it will be a physical reality when Jesus returns. So, as believers, we're caught in a tension, which is sometimes described as “the already-not yet.” Part of the already is the fact that we have the Holy Spirit as a down payment. This is what Paul talks about in Ephesians 1:14. This down payment is an assurance that we will one day have our eternal inheritance. We also experience this in the reality of spiritual gifts and the spiritual bond that we feel between believers around the world. But we also know that we live in a world that is wracked by evil and is still under the effects of a world in condemnation. So, we look

forward to that day when we will see Jesus face to face and when he will return and bring about the complete and total eradication of evil.

Rev. Rico Tice

In terms of the tensions that Christians feel in the overlap between this age and the age to come, I think what best sums up those tensions and how we deal with them, or how we sort of in our mind handle that tension is understanding the three tenses of salvation. Past tense: I have been saved from the penalty of sin — that's justification. Present tense: I am being saved from the power of sin — that's sanctification. Future: I shall be saved from the presence of sin. And it's seeing those three things; so, I have been saved by the penalty. Thank you, Lord, Christ died for me, I have his righteousness. I am being saved from the power. Every day I'm trying to put to death my sinful nature, but it's an ongoing battle. But one day, wonderfully I shall be saved from the presence of sin. And as I hold those three — past, present and future — as I hold them together and as I see what they mean, I think it enables me to live wisely. I'm so looking forward to being free of sin. I'm so grateful my sin has been paid for and the penalty has been dealt with. Now, Lord, help me in the present to battle sin. I'm not going to always be victorious. It's ongoing repentance, but at the same time, hopefully there will be change, I'll be growing more like Christ and looking forward to the future.

Question 14:

What did Isaiah mean by the term “good news”?

Dr. Paul Gardner

The term “good news,” which we use often in Christian-speak because it is the translation of the word “gospel” in the New Testament, the term actually starts way back in the Old Testament with the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 40:9 we read this:

You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9).

And then Isaiah picks up this idea later on in chapter 61 as well as he speaks of the proclamation that God has given him, that God will save the people. How it is going to happen is not made clear by Isaiah. His prophetic word is that one day God will come and God will judge those who have taken his people away into captivity, those who have actually been used to bring God's judgment on his people for their rebellion. God will come and will vindicate his people and will vindicate his name. And that's the good news. Now, those tidings, he tells us in chapter 61, are to be preached to all the nations, not just to his people. But the picture is of God's people hearing at last that they are going to be restored to being a people in a relationship

with him, and that gives rise then to Jesus being able to come along and quote Isaiah and identify as the one who is the substance of the good news.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Passages like Isaiah 61 speak about the “good news” as prophesied in the Old Testament. For example:

The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (Isaiah 61:1).

Isaiah then goes on to speak about binding up the brokenhearted and good news for the poor. And the promise that Isaiah makes here is that there will be a day in which all wrongs are righted with the coming of the Messiah. But at this point, we recognize that the good news isn’t being preached to the nations, but we yet wait for the full fulfillment of the coming of justice on earth.

Question 15:

How will the creation experience God’s redemption?

Dr. Amy L. Peeler

When the Fall happened, we know that it affected humanity; humans sinned and they reaped the repercussions of their sin. But Scripture also talks about how that sin has infiltrated all of God’s creation. In Romans 8, Paul says that creation too is groaning, anticipating the day that God’s redemption will come. And so, I think we get a picture of what that redemption will look like... I think preeminently of Revelation 21, 22 ... that talk about a new heaven and a new earth. God will not eliminate the world; he will renew it. Now, that may come through the purging of fire and difficult trials, but all creation, the New Testament seems to indicate, will be renewed. And so, that means for us right now we need to be good stewards of what God has given us, because it won’t be destroyed and eliminated, it will be renewed. And that is the hope, not just of humanity but of all of God’s creation.

Dr. Douglas Moo

I think Christians all around the world are wrestling with the impact of the environmental movement and environmental concerns. A lot of Christians are very uncertain about how to respond and what their role should be. As I understand the Bible, it teaches ultimately that the creation itself will be affected by God’s promises, that it’s not just humans whom God is concerned about; it’s his entire creation. So, as I read the Scripture at least, God has plans for this actual world we live on. He created it; he’s concerned about it; he has a future for it. Exactly what that future will look like is hard to say. The Bible talks about a new heaven and a new earth, which I think is in some continuity with this present world but also is a transformed world, a redeemed world, a place where believers will live forever, enjoying the presence of God and Christ. I do think, therefore, that the future of what God is doing in the

created world carries some implications for how we treat God's world now, that it is his creation, and we should work as his people at being very good stewards of the creation he has made and plans to redeem.

Dr. Randy Alcorn

How will creation experience God's redemption? Romans 8 talks about how the whole creation is under bondage, that it's groaning, or under the curse, and it talks about not only we groan as people, but the creation itself groans... The whole creation is groaning. And sometimes we narrow Christ's redemptive work as if all he does is snatch souls out of this world to go to heaven forever. And he's concerned about the redemption of our bodies, and the creation that fell under us, that fell on our coattails, so to speak, will rise on our coattails, looks forward to our redemption, the redemption of our bodies, the resurrection. And this is the great promise of God, that even as we led creation into destruction we will lead it out, or Christ through our resurrection, will lead it out of destruction so that there will be a new heavens and a new earth, a new redeemed universe.

Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Danny Akin is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Randy Alcorn is Director of Eternal Perspective Ministries.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College.

Dr. Bruce Baugus is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Dr. Rick Boyd is Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Wesley Biblical Seminary.

Dr. Gary M. Burge is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Constantine R. Campbell is Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Rev. William W. Carr, Jr. is Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary.

Dr. D. A. Carson is Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Co-founder of The Gospel Coalition.

Dr. Lynn Cohick is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Brian Fikkert is Professor of Economics and Community Development at Covenant College and Founder and President of the Chalmers Center for Economic Development.

Dr. Paul Gardner is Senior Pastor of ChristChurch Presbyterian in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs is Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat is Associate Professor of Divinity in Old Testament at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Dr. Dana M. Harris is Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Rev. Thaddeus J. James, Jr. is Vice President of Academic Affairs at Birmingham Theological Seminary in Alabama.

Dr. Scott Manor is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Dean of Faculty at Knox Theological Seminary.

Dr. Keith Mathison is Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College.

Dr. Douglas Moo is the Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Josh Moody is Senior Pastor at College Church in Wheaton, IL.

Dr. Craig Ott is Director of the PhD (Intercultural Studies) and Professor of Mission and Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Dr. Amy L. Peeler is Associate Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D. is the Franklin S. Dyrness Professor of Biblical Studies and Dean of the Graduate School at Wheaton College.

Dr. Greg Perry is Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of City Ministry Initiative at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

Dr. Vern Poythress is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary and Editor of the Westminster Theological Journal.

Dr. Timothy E. Saleska is Dean of Ministerial Formation and Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

Rev. Rico Tice is Associate Minister of All Soul's Langham Place in London and Founder of Christianity Explored Ministries.

Dr. Daniel Treier is the Blanchard Professor of Theology at Wheaton College.

Dr. Simon Vibert is the former Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Wimbledon Park, UK, and is presently the Vice Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Director of the School of Preaching.

Dr. Guy Waters is Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

Dr. Stephen E. Witmer is Adjunct Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Rev. Dr. John W. Yates is Rector of Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
Two

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Two

The Living and the Dead

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest times of recorded history, human beings have wondered about life after death. Will our souls live forever? Will we have bodies of some sort? Will we retain our individual minds? The only reliable answers to these questions come from God's revelation in Scripture. Of course, the Bible doesn't tell us everything we might want to know. And sometimes Christians interpret its words very differently. But we all agree that Scripture gives us great hope for a glorious future in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the second lesson in our series *Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology*, and we've entitled it "The Living and the Dead." In this lesson, we'll consider what theologians commonly call "individual eschatology."

In a prior lesson, we defined eschatology as "the study of last things" or "the doctrine of last things." We also said that eschatology covers the entire period of the last days, which began with Jesus' life and ministry and will be completed when he returns. In this lesson, we'll focus on a subcategory of eschatology called individual eschatology. Individual eschatology is:

the study of how individual human beings experience the events of the last days

— especially with regard to life, death, the intermediate state, and the final state of our bodies and souls.

Our lesson on "The Living and the Dead" will divide into three parts. First, we'll see what the Bible says about the present state of human life. Second, we'll look at the intermediate state that begins when we die. And third, we'll consider our final state at the consummation of the eschaton. Let's turn first to our present state.

PRESENT STATE

As we saw in our prior lesson, humanity currently lives during the last days, also known as "the eschaton." As a result, we all suffer the hardships of this age, like sin and death. But these problems are partially alleviated by the blessings of the age to come, like forgiveness and salvation. In humanity's present state, believers, or "the regenerate," experience the effects of both ages simultaneously, while unbelievers or "the unregenerate" overwhelmingly experience the hardships of this age.

In theology, the term “regenerate” means “recreated” or “reborn.” So, we could refer to those who are regenerate as the spiritually “living.” It follows then, that the theological term “unregenerate” means “not recreated” or “not reborn.” In other words, the unregenerate are spiritually “dead.”

In light of this distinction, we’ll address humanity’s present state in two parts. First, we’ll consider those who are unregenerate. And second we’ll turn to those who are regenerate. Let’s begin with the present state of the unregenerate.

UNREGENERATE

Scripture tells us that fallen human beings are born spiritually dead. The unregenerate remain in this state of spiritual death because they haven’t been renewed or “regenerated” by the Holy Spirit.

We’ll focus on three characteristics of the unregenerate: first, their spiritual death; second, their moral inability; and third, their enmity with God. We can start by exploring their spiritual death in more detail.

Spiritual Death

It’s tempting to think of spiritual death in ways that parallel physical death. But this can be a little misleading. When we die physically, our souls are separated from our bodies. Our bodies are incapable of independent action, and eventually decay to the point that they return to dust. But when we’re dead spiritually, our souls are still active in our bodies. The unregenerate continue to think, feel, dream, make choices, and engage with the world in almost every way the regenerate do. They aren’t robots, nor are they mindless bodies. So, what exactly *is* spiritual death?

When we think about spiritual death, I’m reminded back in the Garden. It’s really interesting when we look at the Old Testament, especially in Genesis, where God had told Adam, he says, “Of any tree of the garden you may eat.” Some translations in English and other languages will say, “You may *freely* eat”... Clearly God was saying, “You can eat until your heart’s desire. You eat all you want. But there’s this one tree, and if you eat from that tree ...” — as I say — “You will be as dead as a doornail.” So clearly, God said that as soon as Adam ate of that fruit that he would die, not only physically, but spiritually as well. All throughout the Old Testament we see the horrible wages of sin. Even in the New Testament, Paul is going to talk about that spiritual death. We’re going to see verses such as “The wages of sin is death”... Another verse I love is “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” ... It’s so important to understand that sin has separated from me from God, that sin has caused all sorts of trouble. When I first understand that I have sinned, and I’ve fallen

short, then I think, “What can I do? Where can I turn?” That’s when the gospel comes in.

— Rev. George Shamblin

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve with spiritual life. So where did spiritual death come from? The short answer is: God. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, God cursed humanity with spiritual death. In Genesis 2:17, God said to Adam:

You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:17).

But as we learn in Genesis 3, Satan spoke through the serpent and tricked Eve into eating the fruit. And after Adam saw that Eve had eaten it and lived, he ate some too. Then, according to the terms of the covenant God had made with Adam, God cursed them. They didn’t die that day, at least not physically, but they became spiritually corrupt. And this spiritual corruption is the essence of spiritual death. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul referred to this as our “sinful nature.” He described it by saying that sin lives inside our very bodies and even takes control of our minds.

Worse, spiritual death affects all the naturally conceived descendants of Adam and Eve. Passages like John 3:5-7, Romans 8:10, and Colossians 2:13 indicate that every human being, except for Jesus, comes into this world spiritually dead. As Paul indicated in Romans 5:12-19, Adam was our representative and, therefore, we all share in his punishment.

One of the most difficult doctrines, people often say that the Bible teaches is how, as in Adam, all sinned — as Paul talks about it Romans 5 — and therefore, sin leads to punishment and death, and we’re in Adam. Is this Adam’s sin, and why am I being blamed for this? How do we answer that question about the fairness of God in relation to our culpability in Adam’s culpability? ... People often say that they object to that, but what they usually don’t object to is the other side of Paul’s argument, which is, as in Adam all sinned, so in Christ shall all be made alive. And if we object to the one, why wouldn’t we object to the other? What God is saying is that he treats humanity in two categories and two categories only. This is extraordinarily helpful for all kinds of racial conflict or class conflict. From God’s point of view there are only two categories: we’re either in Adam or in Christ... This is one we should accept because it’s taught in the Word, and for the practical reason that if we are to accept that we can be in Christ and made alive, we need to accept the other side of the coin that Paul teaches.

— Dr. Josh Moody

Having seen that in the present state the unregenerate are characterized by spiritual death, we're ready to consider their moral inability.

Moral Inability

The term “moral inability” refers to the fact that unregenerate human beings have:

no capacity to please God or merit his blessings.

Most significantly, they can't appeal to him for forgiveness, or work their way to salvation.

Augustine, the bishop of Hippo who lived from A.D. 354 to 430, famously taught that before humanity's first sin, Adam and Eve lived in the state of *posse non peccare*. This Latin phrase can be translated literally as, “to be able not to sin.” In its theological use, however, the phrase is more commonly translated as “the ability not to sin.” According to Augustine, Adam and Eve were empowered to avoid sin completely. But they also had the ability to sin. And when they sinned, they moved from the state of *posse non peccare* to the state of *non posse non peccare* — the *inability* not to sin. They and all their naturally generated descendants lost the moral ability to avoid sin.

In places like John 8:31-44, and Romans 6:6-20, both Jesus and Paul compared moral inability to being slaves to sin. And Paul taught in Ephesians 2:1-5 that the unregenerate live under the control of sin, following the sinful ways of the world and its demonic leadership. And they remain in that state of spiritual death, incapable of rescuing themselves until God mercifully saves them. Yes, unregenerate people still do things that are *outwardly* good. They love and provide for their children. They promote justice. They even lay down their lives for others. But unfortunately, all of these acts are tainted because the unregenerate aren't motivated by love for God. Jesus addressed this issue in Luke 6:43-45. He compared the works of the unregenerate to bad fruit produced by bad trees. His point was that human beings act according to their hearts. Therefore, those with evil hearts — namely, the unregenerate — are morally incapable of doing works that God considers to be good. Paul described this problem in Romans 8:6-8 when he said:

The mind of sinful man is death ... the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).

Are the unregenerate morally able to please God? The short answer is “no,” because the concept of pleasing God has to be framed in terms of relationship... So, works that are pleasing to God are necessarily the product of a relationship between man and God. In order to please God in how we live, we must first believe that he exists and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him — that's the language of Hebrews. So, this is why the Anglican Articles of Religion say that the

works of the unregenerate necessarily have the nature of sin, because they are works, they are things done by people outside the context of relationship with God, and since humanity is made for relationship with God, that is the necessary context for which any action that pleases him must happen.

— Dr. Carey Vinzant

So far, we've discussed the unregenerate in terms of spiritual death and moral inability. And that brings us to their third characteristic: enmity with God.

Enmity with God

One of the most harmful aspects of spiritual death is that the unregenerate are God's enemies. Scripture teaches that Satan and his followers are constantly at war with God and his faithful angels. And the unregenerate are on the side of Satan. They love their sin and hate God. Listen to what Paul said of the unregenerate in Ephesians 2:1-3:

[They are] dead in [their] transgressions and sins ... follow[ing] the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient... gratifying the cravings of [their] sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts... [They are] by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).

It's hard to imagine a stronger statement of the enmity that exists between God and the unregenerate. The unregenerate aren't simply bystanders or innocent civilians in the spiritual conflict. Instead, as we read in places like Romans 5:10, and Colossians 1:21, the unregenerate are themselves God's enemies. And because of this, they stand condemned, doomed to suffer God's everlasting wrath. As Jesus told the unbelieving Jews in John 8:42-44:

If God were your Father, you would love me ... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire (John 8:42-44).

And in James 4:4, James wrote:

Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).

None of this is to say that the unregenerate knowingly and purposefully oppose God, although some clearly do. Most of the unregenerate, however, are simply deceived. After all, false religions, and even atheism, claim to promote true worldviews. But even

when the unregenerate lack a direct and explicit animosity toward the God of the Bible, they're still his enemies. They're still part of the kingdom of this world, following the ways of Satan. They still reject God's goodness and oppose his authority. And God still condemns them.

Now that we've considered humanity's present state from the perspective of the unregenerate, let's turn our attention to the regenerate.

REGENERATE

You'll recall that the technical term "regenerate" means recreated or reborn. In other words, the regenerate are those who have been born again through the work of the Holy Spirit. When that happens, our spirits are regenerated or given new life.

We'll explore the characteristics of the regenerate in three ways that correspond to our discussion of the unregenerate. First, we'll see that they have spiritual life. Second, we'll explain their moral ability. And third, we'll focus on their reconciliation to God. Let's look first at their spiritual life.

Spiritual Life

The Bible teaches that all human beings are born into a state of spiritual death. So, in order for us to be regenerate — to have spiritual life — our souls have to pass from death into life. We might think of this as a kind of spiritual resurrection. This principle is clearly taught in places like John 5:24, Ephesians 2:4, 5 and Colossians 2:13.

Scripture also describes this process in terms of rebirth. Human beings are first born when they receive physical life. But in order for us to receive God's blessings, like salvation, we have to undergo a second birth — a spiritual one.

The idea that we need spiritual life in order to inherit God's blessings isn't complicated. But even Nicodemus, a Pharisee and teacher of Israel, struggled to understand it. So, in John 3:3-6, Jesus explained it this way to Nicodemus:

No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... [N]o one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (John 3:3-6).

Here, Jesus taught that we can only have spiritual life if the Holy Spirit gives birth to our spirits. And Paul said something similar in Titus 3:5 when he wrote:

[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

In some translations, the word "rebirth" here is actually rendered "regeneration."

Another important point to make about our spiritual life is that it's everlasting, or, as some translations put it, "eternal." When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, our souls pass from death to life. And that life never ends. Even when our earthly bodies die, our souls will live forever.

Eternal life is one of those wonderful, wonderful concepts that every Christian hears about, knows about, and should believe in. When it begins is always an interesting question, because I think a lot of people think of eternal life as that which happens to us after we've died, that goes on and on forever. And, of course, it is that, but the Scriptures say that we *have* eternal life when we come to faith in Christ, that it begins at that point when we are born again, when God regenerates us. And from that point onwards, we belong to God, we live for God, we glorify God, and he is our protector and our keeper. From that point onwards, no one will ever snatch us out of the Father's hand. So, eternal life ends up being not just about how long does it go on and not just about perfection, but it is about the quality of life, life under the Lord, life lived for the Lord and with the Lord, both now and eventually in the new heavens and the new earth.

— Dr. Paul Gardner

We often think of eternal life as something we gain after we die. And there's an important sense in which our everlasting life won't begin in all its fullness until our bodies are resurrected. But the Scriptures still speak of eternal life as a blessing that the regenerate already enjoy in our present state. John 10:28, 1 Timothy 6:12, and 1 John 5:11-13 all teach that the regenerate already possess everlasting spiritual life.

With the spiritual life of the regenerate in mind, let's consider their restored moral ability.

Moral Ability

Not surprisingly, the term "moral ability" refers to:

the capacity to please God and merit his blessings.

We'll say more about this in a moment, particularly with regard to merit. At this point, we'll just say that our moral ability does not enable us to *earn* our salvation — things like forgiveness, righteousness and eternal life are free gifts from God, based only on Christ's merit. But our restored moral ability does empower us to obey God's will and to pursue the blessings of his kingdom.

You'll remember that, according to Augustine, when humanity fell into sin, we moved from the state of *posse non peccare*, or the ability not to sin, into the state of *non posse non peccare*, or the inability not to sin. But Augustine also taught that when the

Holy Spirit regenerates our souls, giving us spiritual life, he revitalizes our moral ability. He moves us back into a state of *posse non peccare*. In other words, the regenerate regain the ability to avoid sin and to please God. Listen to what Paul said in Ephesians 2:4-5:

God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5).

And then in verse 10 he stated:

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

The fact that God prepares good works for the regenerate proves that we've regained our moral ability. Even so, regeneration and salvation are the result of grace. Our good works don't save us.

Now, when the Holy Spirit regenerates us, we need to understand that he doesn't completely remove sin's corruption and influence from our lives. As Paul explained in Romans 7:14-25, the sin that lives in us still battles with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Scripture describes this struggle in terms of war in places like Romans 7:23, Galatians 5:17, and 1 Peter 2:11. But the good news is, the Spirit dwells in us and works in us. So, even though we continue to stumble because of sin's influence, we also do good works because of the Spirit's influence. As Paul put it in Philippians 2:13:

It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

So, if God takes the credit for the good works we do, where does merit come into the picture? Theologians have different views of this matter. On the one hand, all evangelical theologians agree that God can claim credit for the good works we do. This much is obvious from the passages we've read.

But on the other hand, some evangelical theologians say that those who are regenerate can claim a measure of merit, too. They point to the fact that God rewards our good works with heavenly treasures and crowns. As just a few examples, in Matthew 5:12, Jesus said that those who endure persecution will be rewarded. In Matthew 16:27, he said that in the last judgment each person will be rewarded "according to what he has done." And in 1 Corinthians 3:8, Paul said that eternal rewards will be distributed "according to [our] own labor."

There are some voices today that argue that there's a kind of pair of justifications. We're justified now as sinners because of what Christ has done on our behalf, bearing our guilt in his own body on the tree, but then at the end when God asks, as it were, "Why should I let you in here?" then you are justified at that stage partly on the basis of Christ's work and partly on the basis of how you have lived... But that's hugely troubling, because that means that the justification

received in the first instance is not safe, it's not certain... So, that's troubling. On the other hand, you have to do something with this notion of reward because reward language is used quite a lot in the Bible. I think that there are several things that help clear the air just a wee bit. If we do good things that are consummated at the end in glory and reward, the question becomes, are those things the basis of our acceptance or not? ... So, it seems to me that Christian rewards in the new heaven and the new earth are bound up with this consummation of the relationship that is already itself the fruit of grace, which is why Romans can speak of rewards being reckoned according to grace and so that our works don't become the basis, as if they have some independent contribution to make, but there is some connection between what we do and reward there out of the fullness of the grace of God in our lives that enables us to do certain things. But the ground of our acceptance before God is Christ's righteousness imputed to us and our sin imputed to him, and he's borne the whole and given the whole, and that is the *ground* of our acceptance before the living God on the last day.

— Dr. D.A. Carson

Regardless of how we answer the question about merit and rewards, all evangelicals agree that God has restored our moral ability, and he holds us accountable for doing good works. He calls us to imitate him, to love him, to love each other, and to keep his law. And he promises to reward us greatly when we do.

So far, we've examined the regenerate with regard to their spiritual life and moral ability. Now let's turn to their reconciliation to God.

Reconciliation to God

When God regenerates us, he also *adopts* us into his family. We were once enemies fighting against God on the side of Satan. But now God has made peace with us through Jesus. Through Christ's death our sins have been forgiven, and we've been brought into his household as heirs of his covenant promises.

As Paul wrote in Romans 5:10:

When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son (Romans 5:10).

And he said essentially the same thing in Colossians 1:21, 22.

In fact, we're not just children and heirs in God's household. Because we're united to his Son Jesus, we actually share Jesus' status as God's favored Son. In several places, Paul taught that, through saving faith, symbolized in baptism, we're united to Christ. So, when God looks at us, he sees us in Christ's shadow, and he credits Christ's

perfections and righteousness to our account. In other words, he treats us as if we were Jesus himself: heir to Abraham and David, and perfectly keeping God's covenant. And because we're also united to Christ's death, God counts us as having already died for our sins, so that no punishment remains for us — only blessings. We see this in places like Romans 6:3, 4 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. And listen to Paul's words in Galatians 3:26-27:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

Beyond this, Paul actually taught that union with Christ — and the reconciliation it brings — is a fulfillment of God's eschatological promises. As such, it's proof that the new creation of the last days has begun. On this basis, we might even say that reconciliation to God is a foretaste of the eternal rewards we'll receive when the new heavens and new earth come in all their fullness. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul wrote:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17, NRSV).

Some translations replace the phrase "there is a new creation" with "*he* is a new creation" or "*he* is a new creature." But the Greek *kainē ktisis* is more naturally rendered "*there* is a new creation." This reading also makes better sense of the renewal Paul described. So, our union with Christ proves that the age to come has arrived. Listen to how Paul continued in verses 19-21:

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them ... [W]e entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:19-21, NRSV).

Christ took our place on the cross, and was counted sinful in order to save us. And because he did that, his righteousness is now credited to us. This is what accomplishes our reconciliation. God sees us not only as innocent because we're forgiven in Christ, but also as perfectly obedient — as obedient as Christ himself.

So far in our lesson on "The Living and the Dead", we've seen what the Bible says about the present state of human life. Now let's address our second major topic: the intermediate state.

INTERMEDIATE STATE

The “intermediate state” is a term used by theologians to describe the time between people’s deaths and the resurrection. So, there is an intermediate state both for believers and unbelievers, and heaven in its present state, hell in its present state — what’s sometimes called the “present heaven” and the “present hell” — the eternal, eventual hell will be the lake of fire, the eternal, eventual heaven will be on the new earth. So, intermediate state is not like halfway between heaven and hell; it’s heaven or hell as they are now prior to the resurrection. So, everybody goes to the intermediate state when they die. The intermediate state ends for everyone at the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust.

— Dr. Randy Alcorn

The intermediate state begins when we die and ends when Christ returns. It’s called “intermediate” because it lies *between* our present state of bodily life on the current earth, and our future state of bodily life in the new heavens and new earth. It’s a somewhat unusual state because, unlike in the other states, in the intermediate state our souls are separated from our bodies.

Our discussion of the intermediate state will divide into three parts. First, we’ll address physical death. Second, we’ll consider the fate of unregenerate souls. And third, we’ll examine the destiny of regenerate souls. Let’s begin with the matter of physical death.

PHYSICAL DEATH

Physical death is a universal human experience, but it’s also horribly unnatural. Why? Because our bodies weren’t created to die; they were designed to last forever. That’s one of the reasons death is so tragic and so traumatic. It shatters our existence. It rips us out of the earthly creation we were designed to inhabit. It ruptures our relationships, separating us from our families and loved ones. And for those that are left behind, it hurts — badly. It’s no wonder that Scripture calls physical death our “enemy.”

Many scientists teach that physical death is the cessation of cellular activity. When the cells in our body stop working, we are dead. And this view is true, as far as it goes. But the theological aspects of physical death are far more significant. Like spiritual death, physical death is part of the curse God laid on humanity because of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. You’ll recall that in Genesis 2:17, God told Adam:

You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:17).

When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he fell under God's curse. God graciously delayed Adam's physical death, so that Adam didn't die immediately. But he didn't lift the curse entirely, and Adam's body eventually died. And just as Adam's sin spread *spiritual* death to the entire human race, it also spread *physical* death to us. Paul talked extensively about this problem in Romans 5. Listen to these examples from Romans 5:12-17:

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men ... [T]he many died by the trespass of the one man ... [B]y the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man (Romans 5:12-17).

When we die, our souls are separated from our bodies, and our bodies are left to decay and return to dust. As we learn in Genesis 2:7, God created Adam from the dust of the ground. And when God cursed Adam in Genesis 3:19, he explicitly said that Adam had been created from the ground and would, therefore, return to the ground. He had been made from dust and would become dust again.

Now, Christians are sometimes tempted to think that because our bodies don't go with us to heaven when we die, they really aren't that important. But Scripture demonstrates that our bodies are still part of us, even after we die. The most obvious examples of this are resurrections. Consider the widow's son that Elijah raised from the dead in 1 Kings 17:20-22, or Jesus' friend Lazarus whom the Lord raised from the dead in John 11:43, 44. Before they were raised, their bodies were still referred to and treated as the people they were in life. There's no suggestion that their bodies were merely shells shed by their spirits. And everyone viewed their resurrections as blessings, because significant parts of these people — their bodies — had been returned to life.

So, what happens when we die, right? If you believe there's an intermediate state that we are present with God outside of our bodies when we die, it might be easy to think that our bodies are no longer a part of us, because aren't *we* somewhere with God and then our body, which is no longer part of us, that's in the grave? But the reason that we would be mistaken to think about that is, one, God created us as whole persons. So, this separation is actually a tragic result that happens with the Fall, as John Cooper puts it. And the fact is, though, is that that separation that happens... While the good thing is apart from, after death, people are still experiencing God's presence, but, you know, we're made to be embodied, and because we're made to be embodied, and because Christ is raised in a body, then what that says to us is, well, even though there is this tragic separation, that's still *our* body in the grave, that's still part of us, and in the last day, I mean, *that body* is going to be raised.

— Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

When our bodies die, we aren't whole anymore. For those who are saved, that means we can't do the things God created us to do, like filling and subduing the earth. Yes, heaven will be wonderful for our souls. But physical death is still a tremendous loss that should push us to hope for restoration in the future. And for the unsaved, it's an unmitigated catastrophe. It takes them from bad to worse, and gives them a foretaste of even greater suffering in the future.

Now that we've described physical death as the start of the intermediate state, we're ready to consider the experiences of unregenerate souls.

UNREGENERATE SOULS

As we saw in our discussion of spiritual death, when our souls die they don't cease to exist. They don't even cease to be conscious. And the same thing is true when our souls are separated from our bodies by physical death. Our souls continue to exist, think, and feel even after our bodies die.

We read in Ecclesiastes 12:7:

The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

For the unregenerate, the fact that their souls continue to exist should cause great fear, because when their spirit returns to God who gave it, it's not to enjoy his blessings. It's to begin suffering their just punishment in hell. As Jesus taught in Luke 12:4-5:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more... Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell (Luke 12:4-5).

I believe that people should believe in hell for two reasons. The first reason is that Jesus Christ spoke many times about hell. For example ... [he said] that people should not fear the one who can kill the body and nothing else. But we should fear the one who can kill the body and also throw the soul into hell. In addition, the church needs to believe, trust in this, and preach about hell — speaking firmly, but in love — so that men can understand their condition before God so they won't be eternally condemned.

— Rev. José Aristides, translation

Scripture uses many different words that theologians and translators include in the generic term "hell." For example, the Hebrew word *Sheol*, or "SHEE-ohl" in English, is used in a variety of ways throughout the Old Testament, including, in Psalm 9:17, as a reference to the home of unregenerate souls. The Old Testament also uses *Abaddon*, or

“uh-BAD-n” in English, which means “destruction,” in places like Job 26:6 and Proverbs 15:11. And *bowr*, or “pit” in English, refers to a place of punishment in Isaiah 14:15-19.

The New Testament also has a variety of terms for the place souls are held during the intermediate state. For instance, the Greek word *Hades*, or “Hey-deez” in English, is used in several ways, including as a place of punishment in Luke 10:15. *Abussos* or abyss, generally refers to a prison for demons, as in Luke 8:31 and Revelation 9:1-11. But in Romans 10:7, Paul also used it to refer to a place for human souls, including Jesus’ righteous soul.

The word “*geenna*” or Gehenna, however, universally identifies a place of fiery punishment, torment and destruction. It’s mentioned in many passages, including Matthew 5:22, and Mark 9:43. Gehenna is often described as bodily suffering, which associates it with the final state, rather than with the intermediate state. But James 3:6 indicates that Gehenna is already in use, suggesting that it’s where unregenerate souls go during the intermediate state.

The clearest picture we get of how unregenerate souls experience the intermediate state comes from Luke 16:19-31. In this passage, Jesus described a rich man who died and was immediately tormented in Hades. Listen to Luke 16:23-25 and this description of Hades:

In hell, where [the rich man] was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.” But Abraham replied, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony” (Luke 16:23-25).

The Bible doesn’t make it clear whether Jesus’ account of Hades is an historical account or a parable. But the distinction isn’t terribly relevant to our investigation of the intermediate state. After all, the warning this account offers would be meaningless if the torments it describes weren’t real.

People ask the question, what happens to people who do not believe in Christ when they die? And the answer is given in several places in the New Testament, but one of the most detailed is in Luke 16, where Jesus gives a parable, but it’s a parable that realistically depicts what the afterlife is like for both believers and unbelievers. The unbeliever, who’s the rich man, he goes and is in torment. That’s right after he’s died. He’s already being punished because he has rebelled against God and his — of course, apart from Christ — his sins are unpaid for. And so, he is depicted as being in suffering, but that is ... a state that’s prior to the final judgment when Christ returns.

— Dr. Vern S. Poythress

Having explored the intermediate state with regard to physical death and unregenerate souls, let's turn our attention to regenerate souls.

REGENERATE SOULS

Obviously, regenerate souls continue to exist just like unregenerate souls do. But their experience is far different. Whereas unregenerate souls suffer a foretaste of their final punishment, regenerate souls enjoy a foretaste of their final blessings.

We'll mention just three experiences regenerate souls have during the intermediate state, beginning with the fact that they're in the Lord's presence in heaven.

Lord's presence

In several places, biblical writers and characters expressed their belief that when the regenerate die, their souls are immediately taken into God's presence in heaven. For example, in Luke 23:43, Jesus told the penitent thief on the cross that *that very day* they would be together in paradise. Revelation 6:9 speaks of the souls of the martyrs being close to the altar in God's heavenly tabernacle. And Paul looked forward to physical death as the time that his soul would depart to be with Jesus. Listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:8:

We ... would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

And in Philippians 1:23, he said:

I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far (Philippians 1:23).

What happens to believers at death? Well, here is Jesus the night before he dies... He's surrounded by this little group of disciples; they're mourning. These are some of his last words, and he tells them about the future. The first thing he says is this ... So, "I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come back and take you to be with me, to where I am going." So as the believer dies, Jesus says, "I'll come to that believer and say, 'Come on, let's go. It's time to go.' And I will escort you to the Father's house"... It's an amazing thing. He's the escort. But he's not just the escort. He's the destination. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place, I'll come back and take you to be with me that you may come to where I am." So he doesn't just escort me to be there. He's the destination. "But how do we know the way?" says

Thomas. He says, “I am the way. I am the truth. I am the light.” So he’s the escort; he’s the destination; he’s the way. So what happens to us after we die? Focus entirely on Jesus. He’ll escort you there. He’ll be the way there. He’ll be the destination. And he prepares a place, of course, by dying for us. He’s the one who enables us to get there by dying on the cross so that, actually, our sin is dealt with, and we can find our way to heaven through the cross.

— Rev. Rico Tice

When the regenerate die, their bodies rest in the grave, but their souls are immediately taken into the Lord’s presence in heaven, where they remain until the last resurrection. We need to be clear here that the standard expression “in the grave” includes all who have died, regardless of whether or not their bodies were laid in physical graves.

Also, we should pause to mention that some Christians throughout history have taught a view called “soul sleep.” This is the idea that God does *not* take our souls to heaven immediately when we die. Instead, our souls remain with our bodies, unconscious until Jesus returns. Supporters of this view appeal to passages like Daniel 12:2, and 1 Corinthians 15:51, which refer to the dead as if they’re sleeping.

But this view is inconsistent with Scripture. As we’ve seen, Jesus, Paul and others believed they would enjoy each other’s presence in heaven immediately upon their deaths. And the Bible teaches that the martyrs are already there and fully conscious. Simply put, when the Bible speaks of the dead “sleeping,” this is best understood as a euphemism — a gentle, metaphorical way of talking about death. Jesus himself spoke this way regarding Lazarus’ death in John 11:11-14, when he said that Lazarus had “fallen asleep.” Modern Christians use similar euphemisms when we say that the dead have “passed on,” “departed,” or “gone to be with the Lord.”

A second experience regenerate souls have during the intermediate state is fellowship with other regenerate souls in heaven.

Fellowship

Revelation 6:9, 10 indicates that the martyrs in heaven know and fellowship with each other. And they speak together with one voice as they appeal to God to hasten the final judgment.

And in the Gospels, when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, he appeared with Moses and Elijah, who spoke with him and with each other. We read about this in Matthew 17:3, Mark 9:4, and especially Luke 9:30, 31.

In Jesus’ account of Abraham and the rich man, the soul of a poor man named Lazarus is being comforted by Abraham. Moreover, in Luke 16:26, Abraham says that there is a great chasm that separates the regenerate souls from the unregenerate souls. This suggests that Abraham and Lazarus aren’t alone on their side of the chasm, but are in the fellowship of all the other regenerate souls.

And Hebrews 12:22, 23 speaks of a heavenly assembly of “the spirits of righteous men made perfect.” In the context of Hebrews 11:40, this assembly includes every regenerate person that has experienced physical death.

The third experience of regenerate souls during the intermediate state we’ll mention is that they reach perfect holiness.

Perfect holiness

When we speak of human holiness in this context, we have in mind both moral purity; and acceptability in God’s presence. When our souls are separated from our bodies by physical death, sin loses its hold on us, and we eagerly avoid all sin from that point on.

You’ll recall Augustine’s teaching that when humanity fell into sin, we moved from the state of *posse non peccare*, or the ability not to sin, into the state of *non posse non peccare*, or the inability not to sin. You’ll also remember that, according to Augustine, when the Holy Spirit regenerates our souls, he moves us back into a state of *posse non peccare*, restoring our moral ability. Augustine also taught that in the final state, we’ll reach the condition of *non posse peccare*, which is Latin for the inability to sin. But what about the intermediate state? When do we lose the ability to sin? Scripture suggests that we actually lose the ability to sin when we enter the intermediate state. This is what Hebrews 12:23 has in mind when it refers to:

the spirits of righteous men made perfect (Hebrews 12:23).

Regenerate souls become perfect in the intermediate state because they’re no longer corrupted by sin, and they’re received into God’s immediate presence. As the answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism’s question 37 puts it:

The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory.

To support this idea, the catechism points to 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6 and 8; Philippians 1:23; and Luke 23:43. Each of these passages indicates that as soon as the regenerate die, they are immediately taken to heaven.

But why is physical death the event that frees us from sin’s corruption and influence? The English theologian John Owen, who lived from 1616 to 1683, offered insight into this question. He argued that while sin indwells our hearts, it uses our bodies to fight against our souls. As Owen wrote in chapter 6 of *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin in Believers*:

Peter shows what [sinful desires] oppose and fight against, — namely, the “soul” and the law of grace therein; James what they fight with or by, — namely, the “members,” or the corruption that is in our mortal bodies.

Here, Owen referred to 1 Peter 2:11 and James 4:1, and concluded that our physical bodies are the weapons sin uses to push us toward sin.

The apostle Paul argued similarly in Romans 6:12, where he wrote:

Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires (Romans 6:12).

And in Romans 7:22-23 he added:

In my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members (Romans 7:22-23).

When the regenerate die, indwelling sin can no longer use our bodies to push us toward sin. As Owen wrote in *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, chapter 2:

Indwelling sin always abides whilst we are in this world ... We have a "body of death" ... from whence we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies.

God created us to live forever on earth. And that means that death is only a temporary setback for those who trust in Christ. Yes, it's traumatic, and it causes us tremendous grief. But we don't grieve as those who have no hope. In the short term, our hope is that the intermediate state will free us from suffering and sin, and allow us to live with Christ in heaven until the resurrection. So, we can face death without fear, trusting that God will end our suffering and shower us with indescribable blessings in heaven.

Our lesson on "The Living and the Dead" has so far addressed the present state of human life, and the intermediate state that begins when we die. So, now we're ready to turn to our third major topic: the final state of humanity when the eschaton is consummated.

FINAL STATE

In a prior lesson, we divided the eschaton, or last days, into three stages: The inauguration spanned Jesus' life and earthly ministry, including the foundational work done by the first century apostles and prophets. During the inauguration, the age to come, characterized by God's blessings for his faithful people, began to overlap with this age, characterized by sin, suffering and death.

The second stage is the continuation, which began immediately after the inauguration. This is the period we live in now, so it's also the period covered by the

present state and intermediate state of individual eschatology. During this stage, we feel the tension of coexisting in this age and the age to come.

And the third stage is the consummation, which will completely end this age, and permanently replace it with the age to come. With regard to individual eschatology, the consummation is the stage when all human beings simultaneously reach their final state.

We'll divide our discussion of the final state into three parts. First, we'll address the physical resurrection of the dead. Second, we'll describe the fate of the unregenerate. And third, we'll explore the fate of the regenerate. Let's look first at the physical resurrection of the dead.

PHYSICAL RESURRECTION

When God created humanity, he gave us bodies and souls. During the intermediate state, our bodies are temporarily separated from our souls. But when the final state begins, the bodies of everyone that has ever died will be resurrected, so that we can all face God's final judgment as whole persons. This event is often called the "general resurrection" because it includes everyone that has ever died, whether regenerate or unregenerate.

The general resurrection is taught clearly in both the Old and New Testaments. And Hebrews 6:1, 2 asserts that it's one of the most basic doctrines that every Christian should affirm.

The general resurrection of the dead is important because, as Paul says in Acts 17, God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world, and he's given us evidence of this by raising Christ from the dead. That judgment is of whole people, and the general resurrection is about affirming the fact that we are whole people, that we will stand before God as whole people. And what this does is not only affirm the fact that we are going to be judged in the bodies in which we lived, sinned, believed, but also that we are going to spend eternity as whole people. This is important not only from the standpoint of the way we view eschatology, but it's also important from the standpoint of the way we view one another and the inherent dignity and value of every human being, because we're made in the image of God.

— Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.

In the Old Testament, the prophets taught that the physical bodies that had once died and returned to dust would rise again from the dust. And they would rise in order to face divine judgment. Daniel 12:2 says:

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

And Isaiah 26:19-21 prophesies:

Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy... [T]he earth will give birth to her dead... See, the Lord is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins (Isaiah 26:19-21).

Other Old Testament passages like Psalm 49:7-15, Psalm 73:24-28, and Job 19:25-27 also indicate a resurrection unto judgment.

In the New Testament, Jesus confirmed the general resurrection multiple times. For example, in Matthew 22:31, 32 and Luke 20:35-38, he called God, “the God of Abraham ... Isaac and ... Jacob,” saying that God was “not the God of the dead but of the living.” And listen to what Jesus said in John 5:28-29:

A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of Man’s] voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).

Like the Old Testament, Jesus said that all the dead will rise at the general resurrection in order to face God’s judgment. And other reliable New Testament characters believed the same thing, including Martha in John 11:24, and the apostles in Acts 4:2. The apostle Paul also argued for the general resurrection in Acts 17:32, 23:6, and 24:21, as well as in his own writings in 1 Corinthians 15:12-42.

The New Testament teaches that the general resurrection will take place at the judgment throne of God, or at least that’s where all humanity will be brought after having been raised. Listen to the apostle John’s vision in Revelation 20:11-13:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it... The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done (Revelation 20:11-13).

The last detail of the general resurrection we should mention is what happens to those that are still alive when judgment day arrives. Like those that have been resurrected, those that are still alive will also be judged. First Corinthians 15:51, 52 mentions this fact with specific reference to the regenerate. But it applies equally to all people everywhere. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10:

We make it our goal to please [the Lord], whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

At the consummation, the dead will rise, and join those who remain alive, before the judgment throne of God. And he will judge all of us according to our works. Those who have been unfaithful to him will be condemned for their sins and receive eternal punishment. But those who have been faithful — those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and justified in Christ — will receive an everlasting reward.

Now that we've seen that the final state begins with the physical resurrection of the dead, let's address the fate of the unregenerate.

UNREGENERATE

As we've seen, all fallen human beings deserve punishment because of Adam's sin. But beyond this, we're guilty of our own sins as well. As a result, God would be justified in condemning all of us. But because of his great mercy, he saves some. Sadly, but justly, those that aren't saved suffer the appropriate punishment for their sins. As Jesus himself said in Matthew 16:27:

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27, ESV).

The word translated “repay” here comes from the Greek word, “*apodidómi*” (ἀποδίδωμι). Some translations render this word “reward.” But Jesus was clear that the “reward” here refers to both punishments and blessings “according to what [each person] has done.” This same idea is clear throughout Scripture, including in Mark 9:43-47, John 5:29, 2 Corinthians 5:10, and 2 Peter 2:4-9.

Earlier, we mentioned several different terms that Scripture uses for hell. The New Testament descriptions of hell typically fall into one of two categories, referring to hell as a place of darkness, or as a place of fire.

With regard to its darkness, Scripture calls hell “*to skotos to exōteron*” meaning “the outer darkness” or simply “the darkness.” We see this in places like Matthew 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30. It's also referred to as “*ho zophos tou skotous*,” meaning “blackest darkness” in Jude 13.

This darkness is significant because it implies that God doesn't manifest his glorious, gracious presence in hell. Revelation 21:23, 24 teaches that in the New Jerusalem, the light of God's glory will fill the entire city. But the wicked in hell will be shut out from this light. They will be eternally separated from the glories of God's kindness, favor, and mercy. As Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:9:

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

That's not to say that God isn't present in hell. After all, he's omnipresent, meaning he is present everywhere all the time. But in hell, he's present as the jailor and punisher, not as a gracious, glorious Savior.

You hear a lot of people say that God is not present in hell because the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1 describes how it is being away from the presence of the Lord. And yet, of course God is present in hell because God is present in all places. He's present there in his wrath. People have this idea if they go to hell, oh, what a good time they're going to have, and it will just be like at the neighborhood bar, and they'll be doing what they want. In fact, it will be the active wrath of God. He will be absent in his grace, in his favor. You think of the great Aaronic blessing: "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you." There will be none of that in hell. It will be the turned-away face of God; they will be conscious of the curse of God, the alienation that they have from God, the wrath of God. Think of our Lord Jesus on the cross. There's a good place for us to go to look at this. "Why have you forsaken me?" God was upon his Son in his wrath on the cross. And so, when people say that God is not present in hell, some of those connotations are necessary. God's favor, God's goodness, God's love, all of these things are completely absent. That's what Paul's talking about... But the wrath of God, the terror of God the awareness of the beauty and the holiness of the God they have spurned, but to which they have no access eternally, these things will be very present in hell. It will be the curse and the wrath of God forever and ever.

— Dr. Richard Phillips

In addition to describing hell as a place of darkness, Scripture says that hell is a place of fire. It's called: "eternal fire" in Jude 7; the "lake of fire" in Revelation 20:14, 15; and a "fiery furnace" in Matthew 13:50. And as we saw earlier, it's also referred to as *geenna* or Gehenna — a place of fiery punishment, torment and destruction. The name Gehenna identifies the Valley of Hinnom, where apostate Israelites burned their children in sacrifice to false gods. Second Chronicles 28:3 tells us that King Ahaz sacrificed his children there. And 2 Chronicles 33:6 reports that King Manasseh did, too. Clearly this earthly valley is just a metaphor for the real hell. Even so, it points to the kind of torment the wicked suffer there.

But perhaps the most frightening thing we can say about hell is that it will never end. As Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, the wicked "will be punished with everlasting destruction." Jesus made the same point in Matthew 25:41, where he referred to hell as "eternal fire," and in Matthew 25:46, where he talked about "eternal punishment." In the same way, Hebrews 6:2 calls hell "eternal judgment."

The idea of eternal torment in a lake of fire should terrify anyone. It should motivate us to run to God begging for mercy in Christ. And when we think of our unsaved family and friends spending eternity in such torment, it can cause us to wonder

how a loving God could inflict such severe punishment on people he created. Do their sins really warrant such a terrible fate?

One of the most difficult questions that we'll ever have to answer as a pastor is, how could a loving God send anyone, even his enemies, to eternal damnation or to hell? And I think the answer lies within an understanding of God's holiness. I don't think that most people understand just how holy God is, and in turn just how sinful we are. We have a very limited view of God's holiness, and so we don't understand that when we've offended or sinned against an infinitely holy God, then we deserve an infinite punishment. When you really play that out it actually makes a lot of sense, but I think the fact that God is so incredibly holy and that in turn, we're so incredibly sinful that his wrath justifiably could be poured out on mankind because of that holiness... If the gap between his holiness and our sinfulness were not that great, if the chasm were not that wide, then God could have just said, "Hey, I forgive you of your sins. Go on about your business," and nobody would go to hell. But, there's the cross of Jesus. He poured out his wrath on Jesus at the cross. That seems pretty severe if there's no hell and if there's no gap between God's holiness and our unrighteousness. And so, the good news is, though, that anyone can avoid the wrath of God because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. And so, I think the question is not, why would a loving God send people to hell, but how in the world could a loving God allow any of us to go to heaven? And he did it through Jesus. And the only way we'll ever get to the bottom of that is when we understand just how holy he is and just how sinful we are.

— Dr. Matt Carter

As harsh as it may sound, the wicked deserve their punishment in hell. And although we may weep for their suffering because we love them, we can never count it to be unjust or undeserved.

Having looked at the final state with regard to physical resurrection and the punishment of the unregenerate, let's focus on the final blessings the regenerate receive.

REGENERATE

For the regenerate, the final state will be wonderful. Death will *not* be able to hold us. After our bodies have been raised from the dead, the Lord will render his final judgments. And for us, those judgments will bring only blessings. In Christ, we are perfect. And God's judgments will reflect that. We don't know *exactly* what it will be like. But the details Scripture gives us are more than sufficient to convince us that our final state will surpass our greatest dreams.

We'll consider three aspects of the final state the regenerate will enjoy, beginning with the fact that we'll have perfect bodies.

Perfect bodies

We've already seen that our bodies will be resurrected for the final judgment. But it's encouraging to understand what our bodies will be like then. In the intermediate state, our regenerate souls are perfected in holiness, but our bodies decay in the grave. So, in this sense, our salvation isn't complete during the intermediate state. But it is complete in the final state because, as Paul said in Romans 8:23, that's when our bodies are redeemed. Our souls are regenerated in the present state, and will be free from corruption in the intermediate state. But our bodies have to wait for the final state for their renewal and perfection. Theologians often refer to this as our "glorification," because we'll finally be able to reflect God's glory in the way he intended from the beginning.

But what exactly will our glorified bodies be like? In 1 Corinthians 15:52-54, Paul described them as "imperishable" and "immortal," meaning we'll no longer get sick, or be infirm, or die. And listen to what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:21:

[Jesus Christ] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21).

As incredible as it may seem, the New Testament reports that Jesus' resurrected body was physical and substantive. For example, he was able to eat in Luke 24:30-43. And Thomas was able to touch Jesus' side where it had been pierced, as we see in John 20:27.

But Jesus' resurrected body was also different from his body that died. He was able to appear suddenly to his apostles in Luke 24:36, and to vanish suddenly from their presence in Luke 24:31. Similarly, he appeared in rooms without having to enter in John 20:19, 26. Paul addressed these differences in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, where he wrote this description:

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Paul compared the bodies we bury to seeds that grow into plants. And his point was, there is continuity between our natural body and our spiritual body — one turns into the other. But the spiritual body has lost the corruption of the natural body, and gained glorious new attributes for eternal life.

I would like to clear up a very important misunderstanding about the nature of our resurrected and glorified bodies. It's based on a confused interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15. I have encountered many

believers who read Paul's phrase "spiritual body" and assume from that that the resurrection body will be immaterial, that it will be nonphysical. And that's not actually what Paul is teaching. There are two different terms for "spiritual" in New Testament Greek: one that means "made of" or "composed of" spirit, and the other that means "adapted" to the spirit. And it's this latter term that Paul uses here. He's not saying that our resurrection, glorified bodies will be *made of* spirit, but that they will be perfectly adapted to the spirit. What does he mean by that? Well, right now our physical bodies suffer the consequences and corruption of the Fall, and although we have been spiritually renewed, this body still has sinful longings. It wants to pursue pleasures that are forbidden, and so forth. And as long as we are in this body, we suffer that battle between flesh and spirit that Paul so frequently describes... But in the resurrection and glorification, the bodies that we receive will be perfectly adapted to the Spirit's control. All traces of our corruption will be removed from the physical body so that this battle that we're constantly engaged in now will at last be over. I long for that day.

— Dr. Charles L. Quarles

The second aspect of the final state of the regenerate that we'll mention is we'll live in the new heavens and new earth.

New heavens and new earth

Many of us are content to learn that our souls will go to heaven when we die. But as we've seen, this is only our *intermediate* state. We only receive partial blessings in heaven, since our bodies remain in the grave. We'll receive our full and complete blessings when we live *bodily* in the new heavens and new earth. This has always been the hope of God's people, ever since Adam and Eve corrupted the present creation.

In Genesis 3:17-19, God cursed the earth because of Adam's sin. But in verse 15 of that same chapter, God indicated that when the Redeemer came, he would reverse the effects of the curse. The prophet Isaiah made this hope explicit in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, when he referred to the consummation of God's earthly kingdom as "new heavens and a new earth." The apostle Peter confirmed this hope in 2 Peter 3:13. And the apostle John foresaw it's coming in his apocalyptic vision recorded in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 21:1, John reported:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (Revelation 21:1).

John's description of a new heaven and new earth continues through 22:5.

In the new heavens and new earth, God's curse on the earth will be completely removed. The ground will no longer cause us trouble, and we'll enjoy and tend God's

perfected kingdom with ease. And more importantly, God will be present with us in a visible way. Revelation 21:22, 23 teach that his glory will light the New Jerusalem. And Revelation 21:3–22:4 ensures us that God himself will reign from his throne in that holy city.

The third detail we'll mention about our regenerate lives in the final state is that we'll receive everlasting rewards.

Rewards

The regenerate will be rewarded for what Christ has done on their behalf, for their faithfulness, and for the good they have done in obedience to God. For instance, in 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul mentioned a “crown of righteousness.” And in 1 Peter 5:4, Peter spoke of a “crown of glory.” In 2 Timothy 2:12, Paul also said that we would reign with Christ. Hebrews 4:1–11 says that we'll enter God's final “Sabbath rest.” And in several places, Jesus spoke of storing up our treasure in heaven, including Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21, and Luke 12:33.

We honestly don't know what these rewards and treasures will be. But we know the gracious character of our loving God, and we can trust that whatever he has planned for us will lead to our great enjoyment of him forever.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we've explored the various states of “The Living and the Dead” in individual eschatology. We've considered the present state of the unregenerate and the regenerate. We've described the intermediate state in terms of the universality of physical death, and the subsequent experiences of the unregenerate and the regenerate. And we've looked at the final state of humanity beginning with physical resurrection, and continuing with the ultimate destinies of the unregenerate and the regenerate.

Studying individual eschatology is important because it reminds us that our lives in this fallen world have everlasting consequences. For those of us that receive salvation, we're guaranteed to be blessed beyond measure in the intermediate state, and even beyond that in the final state. But those that reject Christ have no hope in the next world. Far from causing us to gloat over our good fortune, those facts should inspire us to preach the gospel, so that as many as possible might share our everlasting joy and fellowship in the new heavens and the new earth.

Dr. Matt Friedeman (Host) is Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship at Wesley Biblical Seminary and founding pastor of DaySpring Community Church in Clinton, Mississippi. Dr. Friedeman earned his M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. He is a contributing columnist for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, a political analyst for WAPT-TV, chaplain for the Hinds County Penal Farm, and is very active in prison and pro-life ministries. He is also the author of several books including, *The Master Plan of Teaching*, *LifeChanging Bible Study*, and *Discipleship In The Home*.

Dr. Randy Alcorn is Founder and Director of Eternal Perspective Ministries.

Rev. José Aristides is Dean of Miami International Seminary (MINTS) in Brazil.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College & Graduate School.

Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr. is Dean of Seminary at Africa Christian University in Zambia.

Dr. D.A. Carson is Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Co-founder of The Gospel Coalition.

Dr. Matt Carter is the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, TX.

Dr. Paul Gardner is Senior Pastor of ChristChurch Presbyterian in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Josh Moody is Senior Pastor at College Church in Wheaton, IL.

Dr. Richard Phillips is Senior Minister of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, S.C. and Chairman of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary and Editor of the Westminster Theological Journal.

Dr. Charles L. Quarles is Director of Ph.D. Studies and Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Rev. George Shamblin serves at Birmingham Theological Seminary and The Center for Executive Leadership.

Rev. Rico Tice is Associate Minister of All Soul's Langham Place in London and Founder of Christianity Explored Ministries.

Dr. Carey Vinzant is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary.

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
TWO

The Living and the Dead Faculty Forum



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Two: The Living and the Dead

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Jimmy Agan
Dr. Danny Akin
Dr. Randy Alcorn
Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.
Dr. Matt Carter
Dr. Gareth Cockerill
Dr. Lynn Cohick
Dr. Saul Cruz
Dr. Paul Gardner

Dr. Mark Gignilliat
Dr. Benjamin Gladd
Rev. Dan Hendley
Rev. Clete Hux
Dr. Samuel Lamerson
Dr. Jeff Lowman
Dr. Douglas Moo
Dr. Amy L. Peeler
Dr. Greg Perry

Dr. Robert A. Peterson
Dr. Richard Phillips
Dr. Vern S. Poythress
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
Dr. Stephen C. Roy
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Peter Walker
Dr. Guy Waters

Question 1:

Is it fair for God to punish all human beings for Adam's initial sin?

Dr. Douglas Moo

As I read Romans 5, for instance, Paul is teaching there that somehow all human beings are caught up in the initial sinful act of Adam, that his sin and death becomes the sin and death of all human beings, who are, of course, traced back to him. This is compensated for, of course, by the fact that on the other side Christ represents all who belong to him and that we have the benefit as we belong to him of life and the good things that come to us because we belong to Christ as well. The idea of what we sometimes call "original sin" has been called an "offense to reason." In his day, Pascal, the great French philosopher/theologian dealt with this, and he said, in a sense, yes, it is. It is hard for all of us to understand how it can be fair for all human beings to be judged by something Adam did so many millennia ago. Yet that's what Scripture seems pretty clearly to teach. I don't think we can ultimately remove that offense, but there are a couple of things we can say. First of all, there is the fact that according to Romans 5, we all really were with Adam when he sinned, so it's not just kind of an arbitrary fact in which God says, "Well, because Adam sinned I'm going to consider you sinned also." No, there was a sense when we really were with him when he sinned so that his sin is our sin. Second, we have to remember as well, that at least for humans who are reaching an age where they can commit sin on their own, all humans do in fact sin on their own. So, whether we attribute our sin and death ultimately to Adam or just realistically recognize that, yeah, I am a human being, have sinned and deserve death, we come out to the same place in some ways in the end. And the third point, and this is a point that Pascal made himself, is original sin can be a sort offense to reason, but he went on to say, how do we explain the world

without it? I think that if any of us are realistic about the world we live in, we're going to see that in fact the tendency of humans is to be self-centered, to be concerned about themselves, to treat others badly, to exalt ourselves at the expense of others in all kinds of ways. I'm always amused when people say, "Oh, there is a genocide that took place in country 'X'; what a terrible thing, what an unusual thing." And in fact if you look at human history, genocide has been the *typical* thing that has happened again and again and again and again. And Pascal's point was to say, how do we explain the actual human condition we see around us unless something like an original sin in Adam took ... place, so that we can understand how universally it is the case that humans everywhere all across the globe are caught up in this nexus of evil and sinfulness, and ultimately death.

Dr. Stephen C. Roy

In the third and fourth centuries in the debates between Augustine and Pelagius over sin and grace, Augustine's position was that God did hold all humanity accountable for the sin of Adam, that original sin. He affirmed that all humanity, all subsequent humanity, inherited from Adam both legal guilt and moral corruption. And this position of Augustine, over and against that of Pelagius, was affirmed by the church in the Council of Ephesus in the year 431. And that has been the dominant position in the church ever since. But the question then is "why?" Why would God hold you, and me, and all subsequent humanity both legally guilty and morally corrupt as the result of this original sin of Adam? Augustinians have affirmed in general that that is because of a unique and special closeness that exists between Adam and all humanity. Now, among Augustinians, there are two primary ways of explaining this closeness. There is a position that's been called "realism," which was the position of Augustine himself and many others that accounts for this closeness because of Adam being the first human and the biological head of the human race, and in a very real sense all humans are *in* Adam, even as an example would be how the author of Hebrews argued that Levi, the founder of the Levitical priests, was in the loins of Abraham when Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, who was the forerunner of the priesthood that Christ himself would one day have. So, realists would say that this connection is natural. The other view among Augustinians has been called "federal headship," which says that the closeness between Adam and all subsequent humanity is *covenantal*. They would argue that Adam is the covenant head of a covenant of creation that God had with all humanity. And so, as covenant head, Adam represents us all, and so his actions — in this case, his sin — is rightly held... we are held accountable for that. In an analogous way, Paul will argue in Romans 5 that Christ is also the covenant head of his people of the covenant of redemption. And so, even as Adam's sin was transmitted to the people of his covenant, so Christ's righteousness is as well... My own position is that of federal headship. I think this best fits the covenantal structure of Scripture as a whole. It accounts for the comparisons that Paul makes in Romans 5 and also in 1 Corinthians 15 of Christ as the second Adam whose righteousness, obedience and righteousness, also impacts his people. I think this best accounts for the reason why God holds all humanity accountable for that original sin of Adam.

Question 2:

Are the unregenerate morally able to please God?

Dr. Jeff Lowman

Before the Fall, everything that Adam did — this is interesting to think about — everything that Adam did was pleasing to God, except eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But once that sin was committed and once our lives were affected in our heart, mind, soul, entire being, everything that we do now is sinful. And so, not even the righteous actions that we take — or what we would call righteous actions — are free of sin. And so, in our hearts we're not only totally depraved, we're also totally unable to do anything that would truly bring glory to God. And so, the Fall is complete. And without the gracious work of Christ, there is nothing that we can do ultimately that will please and honor our God.

Rev. Dan Hendley

Unregenerate people are not morally capable of pleasing God. Here's precisely why: the Scriptures say that without faith it is impossible to please God, and obviously people that are not born again haven't put their faith in God, so everything they're doing comes from a fountain and heart of unbelief and, therefore, could only be grievous to God. In addition, what does Jesus say is the chief and foremost command? To "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." Those who don't believe in God, those who have not entered into a personal relationship with God, certainly can't even begin to keep that commandment to love their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

Question 3:

What is eternal life?

Dr. Gareth Cockerill

Life and eternal life are an important theme in Scripture... And the eternal life that God gives us, then, is his very own life. It is not something I ever owned myself or have in my possession. Now, of course, as far as existence goes, the Bible teaches that we will exist forever, be it in fellowship with God in heaven and then in the new heaven and the new earth, or for those who have rejected God, in hell, separated from God. But when we talk about eternal life, it is a quality of life that is God's own life that he gives to the people who live and trust in obedient fellowship with him. And John's gospel makes it so clear. He calls it — receiving this life — being "born again." And that life then — the imagery is so strong there — that life is preserved by Jesus, who is the Bread of Life, and Jesus, who gives the water of life, the Holy Spirit. And we're shown how that we have it only in union with him. For instance, in John 15, the parable of the vine and the branches, where we are branches, he is the vine; we receive our life only from him. So, this eternal life, this life that God gives, his own life to his people who put their trust in Christ and live in obedient fellowship

is eternal life. So, in one sense, I mean, it's always there with God... This is the amazing thing that God promises us, to put his own life within us so that we become, in a way that is beyond our explanation, the children of God, and live in fellowship with him. This is the joy — it's from this eternal life and the fellowship with God that the joy and gladness of the Christian life comes.

Dr. Simon Vibert

The phrase “eternal life” could be understood in two ways. So, there is the idea of life eternal. Jesus said, “I’ve come that you might have life and life in all its fullness,” and believers recognize that by being brought into a living relationship with the living God, we enjoy a fullness of life now. But ultimately, eternal life refers to the fact that we will live forever with resurrected and new bodies, and that will result in God bringing about the new heaven and the new earth, and therefore, we will experience eternal life in that respect.

Dr. Greg Perry

In the Synoptic Gospels, in Matthew, Mark and Luke, we see that Jesus is declaring the kingdom of God, but he gets these questions from the lawyer talking about, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus begins to answer that in terms of who will experience the resurrection unto life. There’s a sense in which eternal life is what will happen at the final resurrection, at the final judgment — who will experience the salvation and deliverance of God in the final day? We see that also in Luke 18 where Peter is saying, “We’ve left our families and our homes to follow you,” and Jesus says that, “Anyone who has left family or father or mother to follow me for the sake of the kingdom will inherit much more in the new world” — inherit eternal life. Again, there he seems to be talking about this final judgment, this final salvation, the experience of the new heavens and the new earth. But interestingly, in John’s gospel this concept of eternal life has much more prominence. We see less reference to the kingdom of God, and Jesus talks more about eternal life, not just in terms of the final salvation, of the resurrected life in the new heavens and the new earth — he does refer to that — but he says in John 5 and in John 6 that whoever believes in the Son, whoever believes my word, whoever abides with me *right now* experiences eternal life. And so, in John’s gospel we get the sense of, already beginning to participate in this kingdom of God, in this new life, where it’s a little bit different in the Synoptics.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

What is eternal life? That’s a question which many people ask, and the most common answer might be, well, it’s life that just goes on forever. And that is one sense of the term, but in the Bible, frequently the focus is on the way God *designed* us to live life forever enjoying his presence, enjoying life with him; the true living is living the way God designed you to live. So, typically when Jesus, for instance, speaks of eternal life and, “he who believes in me has eternal life,” when he says that kind of thing, he’s not just saying you’re going to live forever, because that’s not the heart of it. The heart of it is you’re going to live in fellowship with the God who made you and who destined you to enjoy his presence forever, and that presence is mediated through

Christ himself, who is our Savior. So, it's a tremendously rich promise to be promised eternal life just because you trust in Christ who has life in himself.

Question 4: **When does eternal life begin?**

Dr. Lynn Cohick

Eternal life begins the moment that Jesus enters into our lives, the moment when we receive the call, we hear the call, and accept the gift of salvation. And with that acceptance of the gift, we suddenly find ourselves in new territory, because we will have one foot in the eternal kingdom, sealed with the Spirit, ready to live our lives in our resurrected bodies with God, but we also have one foot in what Paul calls "this present evil age." And it's an age that tempts our flesh — the siren sounds of pleasures and desires — and so it is a time of conflict, if you will. But we have the promise that Paul tells us in Romans 8, that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son, and so we know where we're going. We are on a journey to look more and more like our brother, if you will, co-heirs with Christ. We are being shaped to look like Jesus. Thus, when we begin this journey of faith, until we are called to the Lord and then we establish our life in heaven, in the new heavens and new earth, this life that we live now, we can think of it as a journey, and Paul encourages us to run through the tape. So, our eternal life begins now, but it is a life, a life that we walk each and every day having put on Christ, walking with the Spirit, trusting God, knowing that the end is secure, but that we show that confidence each and every day in the wise choices that we make.

Dr. Jimmy Agan

John 3:16, as is so well known, promises us that anybody who puts their faith in Jesus will receive eternal life. And what a precious promise if you know what eternal life is. And so, if you think eternal life is simply this life continuing on forever and ever, that might not be such a good promise, because this life is filled with a lot of sorrows, a lot of frustrations. So, how wonderful that when Scripture promises us eternal life, it has in mind not just a quantity, a duration of life forever and ever, but a quality of life. Simply put, eternal life is the kind of life that can't be diminished in any way. It's a life that comes from the Holy Spirit; life that can't be damaged by death, by sickness, by disease; life that can't be frustrated by sorrow; life that can't be undone by sin and its curse; life that is the power of the Holy Spirit extending into every aspect of who we are; life that means we are in perfect fellowship with God our Father; life that means we're perfectly united to Christ our Savior and our head and so life that we wouldn't want to end and life that will never end. It's a quality of life that is perfect and a quantity of life that endures forever. When will that life begin? It begins at the transition from this present age, which is dominated by sin and death, into the age to come, which is dominated by the power of the Holy Spirit and life that he gives. That age will never end, and so eternal life will go on as long as the age to

come, and that's forever and ever. So, eternal life is the kind of life that God wants us to have, being enjoyed for as long as God loves us, which will be forever.

Dr. Amy L. Peeler

Eternal life is an important concept in the New Testament. Especially, I think of the writings of John. Whereas the Synoptics talk a lot about God's kingdom, John has this vision of life that will be eternal, coming from death, as does Paul and Hebrews and others, but he gives particular emphasis to it. When does this eternal life begin? I know that I grew up in a context in which salvation was emphasized on the moment; you have a moment of conversion. And I'm very grateful for that background, but once I started studying the New Testament in a more focused way in my academic work, I realized that its picture of salvation is quite broad. It's not just the moment that you convert that you are justified before God, but it's also that process of becoming more like Christ, typically talked about as "sanctification," *and* that hope that we have of dwelling with God forever eternally. So, I believe that moment of eternal life actually begins when you come to know Christ, when God in his grace calls you, and you're allowed to respond to him. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell you. The Scripture says that he is our guarantee, and that's when we start to get a taste of the life that we'll experience forever. It doesn't mean that life on earth becomes perfect, but you get a sense of God's presence through his Spirit and the *kind* of life that you will share with him forever.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

Paul makes a profound statement in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says that we're in the resurrection, the age of the resurrection right now. I tell my students here where I teach, if the apostle Paul were to walk into the room, which would be a pretty big moment, actually, but if he were to walk into the room and we were to ask him, "Paul, when does the resurrection begin? When is the age of the resurrection? When is eternal life?" His answer would be, "We're in that now because Christ is raised, and he's the firstfruits, the guarantee of the future resurrection." And then in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17:3, Jesus says that eternal life is to know God the Father and the Son that he sent to us. So there's an organic connection between eternal life and the life lived now, there's a continuity between the two. So, the very simple answer to the question, "When does eternal life begin?" the answer for the Christian is eternal life begins now.

Question 5:

Are our eternal rewards in heaven based solely on Christ's merit, or do our works count as well?

Dr. Douglas Moo

When the New Testament talks about the time of judgment, it makes clear that somehow Christians are going to be involved in that judgment as well. Now, we have to make sure that we always move into that issue with the fact that we as Christians,

by virtue of being in Christ and justified in Christ, have already been declared innocent before God in the judgment. So, we don't have to fear the day of judgment. We have what the New Testament calls "assurance" for that day, the certainty that the verdict is going to go our way. Nevertheless, we have to stand at the judgment, and most Christians think that involved will be some degree of reward that Christians will be given at that time. Now, on the one hand it's clear that any reward that we get, any benefit or blessing that is ours at that time comes because of Christ's work on our behalf and because of the Spirit's work in our lives as well. We cannot take credit for those things. But I think there's a sense also, however, in which the N.T.* talks about the importance of Christians living lives that do honor God, responding well to God's grace and the promptings of the Spirit, so that the reward that we receive ultimately at the time of the judgment, while always based on and given to us in and through Christ and his Spirit, will nevertheless also have to do with what we have actually done. This theme of God's work in us and our responsibility to take God's work and use it, is a kind of fine balance you see throughout Scripture, and it affects also this idea then of the rewards, the blessings, as it were, that we receive at the time of the judgment.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

The question is what role do our works play in the final judgment? A very difficult question. Evangelicals, Protestants, Catholics, we all... a lot of people disagree over this. It's both, *a bit*. What we bring to the table at the final judgment is our works. God will say, "Show me these works, that you are joined to Christ," and our works demonstrate our position in him. They demonstrate that we are "already in." So, we use the word "evidence," or "proof." But nevertheless, there are works through God's Spirit, through God's grace, it's fully God, it's fully monergistic, but there are works that we show to God, and God says, "Yes, you demonstrated that you are indeed a follower of the Lamb." They're attesting works; they're works that are a result of our position... This is the perseverance of the saints... In other words, if you're in Christ, you've got to act like Christ and everybody who acts like Christ will be with Christ in the new heavens and new earth.

Dr. Danny Akin

You know, the Bible teaches that revelation brings responsibility; the more you know, the greater is your accountability. So, I think the Scriptures teach clearly that there are degrees of punishment for those who die apart from Christ, but there are also degrees of reward for those who are in Christ. Certainly, we stand before God because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Nevertheless, the Bible speaks of the judgment seat of Christ where we are also judged on the basis, not of our salvation, but of the things we've done in Christ. And so, I expect there'll be degrees of reward in heaven based upon our faithfulness both in terms of actions, but also in terms of the intention of the heart.

* New Testament

Dr. Randy Alcorn

Are eternal rewards based only on the merit of Christ, or does our own merit count? Well, in the interesting question, the merit of Christ is exclusively what *saves* us, so there's no question of that. We contribute nothing to our own salvation. We receive a gift. We believe in the work of Christ on our behalf... However, we as people also have a responsibility to do things, and God kindly gives us rewards for doing so, promises us those rewards. For instance, in Philippians 2, you see a picture of God working and us working when we're told to, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in you" to do his good pleasure, and to will — to work and to will. And so, God works in us, God wills in us, yet we are working out our salvation, and we are making choices that are important, and they're so important that God promises us rewards, crowns. He says, I won't overlook so much as a cup of cold water given to one of these little ones in my name. So, we have a choice of whether to give the cup of cold water or not. So, does our merit result in reward? I hesitate to use the word "merit" because it's so easily and quickly confused with our salvation, which is not what this is about. But yes, our faithful work done for him is something he chooses to reward us for. That's all by his grace, but yes, our works and what we choose to do really does matter and will matter for eternity.

Question 6:

What happens to believers at death?

Dr. Stephen C. Roy

The evidence of the New Testament points clearly to the direction that believers at the point of their physical death are ushered directly and immediately into the presence of God, a state that Paul will say is "better by far." This conclusion is pointed to by several texts in the New Testament. Paul says in Philippians 1:23 that he desired to depart from this life and be with Christ, which, again, he says is better by far than anything this life has to offer. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. The reality of this, of believers being in the presence of God after their death is pointed to in Luke 16 in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, where Lazarus, this poor man throughout his life, is now, after death, in the presence of God in the company of Abraham, the father of the people of God, and enjoying blessedness in the presence of God. Perhaps the most definitive statement comes in Luke 23 with the words that Jesus spoke to the repentant thief on the cross... He said in Luke 23:43 to this repentant thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise." So, that very day when that thief died, when Jesus died, they would be together in paradise in the presence of God himself. So, the testimony of the New Testament seems clear: believers at the point of physical death are ushered into the presence of God and into the blessedness that comes from that.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

Many people want to know what happens to Christian believers at death. And the Bible is clear that we go to be with Christ. Paul talks about that himself in Philippians 1, and there's pictures of it in several places in the New Testament... That picture is a picture of consciously enjoying the presence of Christ; it's better than this life, but it's before the final resurrection of the body. That's what we are promised if we believe in Christ; we go to be with him and we're blessed immediately with the blessings of salvation, but we still anticipate a final resurrection of the body.

Rev. Dan Hendley

Believers, when they die, the Scriptures tell us, go to be with Christ. The Bible doesn't tell us a great deal about what happens at that point, but Paul says, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," so we know that whatever happens, it's going to be good... In 2 Corinthians the apostle Paul talks about us being absent from the body but present with the Lord, which suggests to us that there's a period after death when believers, their spirit or soul is separated from their body — and will be until the time of the resurrection — but during that time, again, we're not told a lot about what that experience is like, but we're told that we're with the Lord. You think of the thief on the cross and Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." That's not the ultimate state where we have redeemed bodies in the new heaven and the new earth, but it's still very good because Jesus is there and we will be with him.

Question 7:

When we die, do our bodies stop being part of us?

Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.

It is very important for us to understand the connection between our whole selves and the fact that when we die our bodies don't stop being a part of us. This is the central idea behind the doctrine of the resurrection. Christ has been raised, but he is the firstfruits of the resurrection. There is another resurrection to come. Our bodies will be raised. They will be raised imperishable. This is why Christians respect the body. This is why Christians bury their dead. This is why we treat the dead with honor and respect. This is why Christian churches have often had graveyards, because it is a central aspect of who we are as Christians that we have hope in the resurrection. We don't believe, like the pagans do, that somehow the goal is to be released from this body and, therefore, we can mistreat the body, or asceticism becomes our goal. It is not our understanding that the body is somehow sinful. We don't have that sort of platonic dualism. Our understanding is that we are whole people, and we were always meant to be whole people. And in eternity we will be whole people. So, we will be made new, but it's *our* bodies that will be made new.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

When a person dies, right now, that is, we are in within the — we call this the overlap of the ages — right now, when a person dies, their soul goes to be with God in

heaven. Think of it like that. For example, the most explicit text in this regard is Revelation 6 where it talks about how the souls of the martyred saints are under the altar, if you'll remember, but they're crying out because they realize that something is amiss, that they don't have their bodies and they're not in the new creation. In fact, they say, "How long, O Lord?" because their fellow servant, their fellow brothers and sisters are still being persecuted. So, they realize that there's still a problem on earth, and there's a problem with them; that is, they don't have their bodies yet, and they're wondering when will wickedness be put down, *and* when will we receive our bodies? And the answer is, the answer is, "a little longer, just wait a little bit more." But yet, what does God do? God gives them a white robe, and so he clothes them. But this is all sort of a temporary fix for what will happen in the new heavens and new earth. *Then*, then, souls — those who die now — will receive their bodies. That's the way it's supposed to be. To be dislodged, for the soul to be dislodged from the body is a very bizarre thing; it's something that is incomplete. It's in God's plan, but it's incomplete, and it's not the way it's supposed to be. The Old Testament looks at a person and sees wholeness. It doesn't like to see this tri-part division of mind, soul and body. In fact, it sees the entire being, the entire person. That's all platonic thought that's related to ripping a person into pieces. The biblical understanding of a person is that they are *whole*, and so when you're resurrected you're resurrected both spiritually *and* physically.

Question 8: **What is the intermediate state?**

Dr. Stephen C. Roy

When theologians speak of the "intermediate state," they refer to a period of time between the death of a believer and final resurrection. During that time, according to the New Testament, a person's soul, or spirit, is with God in a state, as Paul says in Philippians 1:23, is "better by far." Their body is in a grave, and so they, believers in this intermediate state, are experiencing a disembodied state, different than the unified state of their ... life on earth or what will be true in the new heavens and new earth. This intermediate state, this intervening time of whatever duration between their death and final resurrection is a state of great blessedness in the presence of God. It's a state where the transformation of their souls is completed. John says in 1 John 3:2 that we know that we shall be like Jesus, for we will see him as he is — that transformation. But as wonderful as that is, is not all that God has in store for his people. That awaits a final resurrection when glorified, perfected bodies are reunited with transformed spirits, and as whole people, body and soul in the new heavens and earth we will see God, we will live with God, we will love God, we will serve God, we will worship God for all eternity. That's the ultimate hope. Before that time, an intermediate state — great blessedness, yet not all that awaits the people of God.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

The term “intermediate state” is a term that theologians have developed that describes something that’s actually mentioned and taught about in the Bible. It’s the time between when a person dies and the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns. So, anybody who dies before Christ returns, where do they go? They don’t go into nonexistence. The Bible is clear that they continue to exist, and we who are believers are taken immediately into the presence of Christ, where we enjoy fellowship with him even more intensely than what we have in this life. Paul says in ... Philippians 1 that to go and be with Christ is better by far. The intermediate state is that time, but it’s called “intermediate” because it’s short of the time when our bodies are raised from the dead and we enter into the consummate state of the new heaven and the new earth.

Dr. Richard Phillips

One thing you learn as a pastor is how really surprisingly unaware most Christians are about what the Bible teaches about life after death, and so if you were to ask believers, “What is the intermediate state?” probably most would not know. That’s a theological term — it’s not in the Bible, but it’s a category we should know about. Christians believe that when they die they go to heaven. What they need to realize is that going to heaven is not the end of our history. The reason we speak of the intermediate state is because there’s something after it; there is life after life after death... The intermediate state tells us that when we die and go to heaven, there is something yet to happen after that ... That’s an intermediate life after death situation, but it’s not the final state that we have. Now, the intermediate state is, when we die, our souls are separated from their bodies, and our non-bodily selves, our conscious selves, will be in heaven. As soon as you die — here’s wonderful news for a Christian — the instant you die... Death is not a process in that sense... Death is an instantaneous departure of the soul from the body into the presence of the Glory. But you’re separated from your body. Your body goes into the grave. It’s interesting when John’s gospel says they laid Jesus’ body into the grave, the next verse says they laid Jesus into the grave. The body is the self, but that’s separated from the conscious self, which is the soul. Now, presently all believers who have died and are in heaven are in the intermediate state. Their souls are in the presence of the glory of the Lord, seeing him in light and glory; what a glorious state is that of those in the intermediate state. But the good news is there’s more, and that’s why Revelation 6:10 has the saints in heaven crying out, “How long, O Lord!” Well, what are they crying out for? The return of the Lord Jesus, when there will be the resurrection of the body and our souls will be rejoined to our bodies, our bodies will be resurrected, will be renewed like the body of Jesus after he rose from the grave and then, together with our Lord and all the glorified resurrected states ... then we enter into the eternal glory, when the cosmos will have been renewed, and we will live in a bodily form in eternal glory. Well, the intermediate state is that time after death and before the bodily resurrection.

Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.

The intermediate state is that state between our death and our resurrection. It’s interesting the Bible doesn’t give us a lot of very clear information about this state

other than to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So, we don't teach as some do that there is a "soul sleep," that your soul ceases to be, or that there ceases to be any activity. We are present with the Lord when we die... However, in the coming age there is this resurrection of our bodies, and there is this reuniting of the whole, so that the fact that the intermediate state doesn't include our bodies doesn't mean that our bodies aren't important. It's a very difficult doctrine to grasp; however, we need to be very clear that those who have died are still in existence, and they're either in existence in the presence of God in glory, or they're in existence in torment.

Question 9:

Why should Christians today continue to believe in hell?

Dr. Guy Waters

Well, as Christians we're people of the Book. That means we're committed to believing and embracing what Christ has given us in the Scripture. And when we come to something as unpopular as the doctrine of hell, the most important question we have to ask as Christians is, is this something that the Bible teaches? And it is. Whether we look at the teaching of Jesus, say in Matthew 25, or we look at the teaching of the apostles, be it in 2 Thessalonians 1 or in the Revelation, hell is something that is taught in the Bible, and so for that reason, we believe it, though it's unpopular.

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

Should Christians jettison the doctrine of hell? Should they believe in it? And if so, why? Well, the answer to that's really, on the one hand, is relatively simple. On the other hand, it's pretty profound. The simple answer is, is the Bible teaches it, and God's Word is infallible and inerrant, and, therefore, we must hold to all that God's Word reveals, because it's true. And that's our responsibility, is to be good stewards of the truth. Paul says that he is innocent of the blood of all men because he has declared the whole counsel of God. So, while we fully recognize that some doctrines are more important than others, there is no such thing as a superfluous doctrine in the Bible. And the doctrine of hell, by no means, would fall into a secondary or tertiary element of doctrine. So, why is it so important? Well, number one is you can't preach the gospel without preaching the doctrine of hell. The gospel is that God has delivered us from sin, death, hell and the grave. So, if you don't articulate those issues, it's not good news if you don't know what the bad news is and the bad news is that we are under the judgment of sin; we are under the power of sin, and therefore the wages of sin is death, and death is an eternal death of everlasting condemnation in a place called hell, and we go there by way of death, and therefore the grave seemingly has the victory, unless you've heard the good news that Jesus Christ has overcome death and the grave because he overcame our sin, and he did that by paying our penalty. So, on the cross he endured our hell — all the judgment of God for all the sins of all of his people for all of eternity. So, to preach the gospel you have to

preach the doctrine of hell as well as sin and death and that Jesus delivers us from all of our enemies. But the second reason is, is that we can't be more spiritual than Jesus, and the number one teacher of the doctrine of hell is Jesus, in the Bible. At least two-thirds, perhaps more than two-thirds of the material we have in the Bible comes directly from the lips of Jesus himself. And then thirdly and finally is just an argument from church history. You can't have a Great Awakening without the gospel, and you can't preach the gospel without dealing with the issue of sin and hell. All great gospel awakenings have had a clear, robust preaching of the doctrine of hell.

Dr. Randy Alcorn

Why should Christians today continue to believe in hell? ... If you look at Jesus in the Gospels and the things that he says about hell — Matthew 8, Matthew 10, Matthew 13, each of the other Gospels ... he talks about hell in ways that portray it as a horrifying place. He talks about the worm that does not die, the fire that burns. You've got darkness, which seems like a contrary metaphor because you've got the great heat and fire, and then you've also got darkness. But I think the aloneness, the utter desolation of this place, and he speaks of it as a place that's eternal. The righteous ... go to eternal life and the wicked to eternal punishment, everlasting punishment... Though he's a God of love, he talks very directly about hell. And I shouldn't say *though* he's a God of love — *because* he's a God of love, he talks about hell. Hell is a reality. If we love people we will tell them the truth about hell... We're doing nobody a favor by denying the reality of hell. If we love people, we'll tell them the truth. Just as if we saw somebody on a canoe and he's going down the river and we know that river is going off into a waterfall, and they don't see it coming, and we're on the shore, we need to yell at them to get their attention, if that's what it takes. And it might seem rude to be doing that, but if you love people, you warn them... If you love people, you'll warn them about a disaster that's imminent. And that's why Jesus loved people enough to warn them about hell.

Dr. Matt Carter

Hell for many can seem like an antiquated subject, but the question is, why should Christians today still believe in it? And I think the answer is twofold. One, we believe in it because Christ believed in it, he talked about it, he taught on it, he spoke about it as a very real place. That's one. So, there's a theological foundation for why we should believe in hell. But number two, it ought to drive our mission. If hell's a real place, if there is a real place where people who are separated from the Lord who do not know Christ are going to spend eternity in suffering, then that ought to drive what we do every day of our lives. We have been given the gift of salvation through Jesus; we're not going to hell, we're going to heaven but our calling and our goal is to be motivated to see others who do not know Christ, to know him. And if hell is a real place, then we've got to get off our backsides and go to the nations like Jesus called us to. It ought to impact the way you work. It ought to impact the way you raise your family... It ought to impact the way that you spend your money. The doctrine of hell and eternal suffering for those that are separated from Christ, if it's true — and I believe that it is because Scripture says that it is — ought to impact every aspect of our life and motivate the way that we spend every day.

Question 10:

How should believers respond to the doctrine of annihilationism — the belief that, at some point after death, unregenerate souls will cease to exist?

Dr. Robert A. Peterson

Annihilationism is the view that the wicked in hell, after paying the punishment, the penalty for their sins will be annihilated or destroyed so that they no longer exist... Jesus, in Matthew 25 says that the lost, the unsaved, the wicked, will be thrown into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. And John, in Revelation 20:10 says that involves being tormented forever and ever. So, plainly, hell is everlasting punishment... In Revelation 14, the fire imagery doesn't mean *consumption* so the wicked are made extinct and exist no more. Rather, it speaks of pain. He'll be tormented with fire and sulfur... And concerning the length of the punishment in hell, the duration: "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever." Annihilationists claim, oh, this is symbolic of the extinction of the wicked; they're gone and the smoke continues to go up forever. No, it isn't symbolic of the extinction of the wicked. Far from it. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night. The ongoing smoke testifies to their ongoing suffering of terrible punishment in hell.

Rev. Clete Hux

Christians ought to respond to the doctrine of annihilationism by seeing that Scripture really doesn't teach the extinction of the soul. When God created man in his image, he created him with a soul that will last forever. It is eternal. The Scriptures talk about this: "It's appointed unto man once to die, after this comes the judgment." Some people might point to the situation with Lazarus and the rich man... He named a certain man Lazarus and he named the rich man, so he's talking about everlasting, not extinction of the soul.

Dr. Jeff Lowman

When we think about annihilationism, we have to realize that that type of thinking is never even approached in Scripture... You really don't even see the basis for thinking that we simply cease to exist if we are damned, so to speak, if we have not received salvation through Christ, because the same adjectives are used consistently in the New Testament that salvation lasts forever and that we go to eternal torment forever.

Question 11:

How can a loving God send anyone, even his enemies, into eternal condemnation?

Dr. Paul Gardner

Perhaps one of the most frequently asked questions of me, especially when we're introducing those who don't know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Christian

faith is, how can a loving God ever judge anybody? How can a loving God think of sending anybody to hell? It's not an easy question. And we need to be very careful, those of us who are Christians, *very careful* not to give rather pious, easy answers to a dreadful question at some levels, because it is a *fearful* thing to contemplate being judged by Almighty God, to being placed in hell, being placed away from the presence of God forever. This is fearful, and we must never take the question lightly. Perhaps the best way of coming at it is this: we understand that God is both a loving God but that he is also a just God. And, actually, I want my God to be a just God. When I look at some of the atrocities there are in this world, I'm horrified and I don't think the perpetrators of wife abuse, of child sex abuse, of, let alone things like the holocaust, I don't think those perpetrators should be left simply to just get by with it all. So, I do want, at the end of the day, God to hold people accountable for the evil of this world. Now, of course, I've specifically stated some dramatic incidents, where I think probably everybody would agree, they shouldn't be allowed to get away with it, but it's an attempt to make the point that I want my God to be just as a judge. I also, of course, want him to show love and mercy, and the way the Bible portrays this is that God comes to us, all of us who have sinned, all of us who have rebelled against him, all of us who do things — you know, I might not think I've done quite as much that's as bad as the particular sins I just mentioned — but we have, the Bible says; “all have sinned” and fallen short of God's glory. And God comes to all of us, reaching out with his love and saying, “You are sinners. You are worthy of judgment, but if you will turn to Jesus, and if you will trust in him and believe in him, then forgiveness is available, and I will forgive, because the punishment has been taken by Jesus if you trust in him.” And I think that's really the only way of coming at what is a very difficult question. It is in the cross of Christ that we see both the perfect justice of God — sin is dealt with, sin is judged, the penalty is paid for sin — *and* we see God's perfect love, because for those of us who believe in him, whatever our past sin, as we repent, as we come to him in faith, that price for our sin has been paid by Jesus on the cross.

Dr. Samuel Lamerson

One of the most troublesome doctrines for Christians today is the doctrine of hell, and often I will have people come to me and say, it just doesn't seem fair that God should punish a person infinitely for finite number of sins. That is, it seems as if God ought to punish them for a finite period and then either annihilate them or let them go. And there are several things that we should realize. First is that the text, that is, the Bible, very clearly tells us, number one, that hell exists; number two, that it was prepared for the Devil and his angels; and number three, that there will be other people there with the Devil and his angels. That is, that hell is not just a place where the Devil and his angels will go, but it is a place where anyone who rejects Jesus Christ as Messiah will go... But in short, if someone were to ask me, why do you believe in hell? It's because Jesus Christ, the Messiah himself, taught me that hell exists and that I should believe in it.

Question 12:

Why is Jesus' bodily resurrection such an indispensable part of the gospel message?

Dr. Paul Gardner

The resurrection of Jesus functions in so many different ways in Scripture. It is something that is at the very core of the Christian faith, that Jesus rose from the dead, and that he rose *bodily* from the dead. So, the resurrection ends up showing to us all sorts of things. It shows to us that we too will be raised bodily from the dead eventually, when we have died, or when Christ returns and all people are raised from the dead. The resurrection of the dead, though, also confirms to us that we are justified by faith. So, what scriptures tell us is that the resurrection is, as it were, the evidence that God has accepted the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, that we have been declared not guilty, and the evidence is that Jesus, the one who was slain for us, is raised from the dead by the Father. The resurrection works in other ways as well because, of course, the resurrection is the precursor to the ascension and glorification of Jesus. As he is raised bodily from the dead that leads into the fact that he then ascends back into heaven and he's given all authority under the Father; he is given all authority to be able to rule the world, to be over, not just us but absolutely everything that is in this universe, this cosmos. And that resurrection means that we have a human being there on the throne over everything. God, yes, the Divine Lord Jesus, but a real human being who is there on the throne ruling everything. And in that sense he becomes the firstfruits of our resurrection. The Bible says that one day we too will reign with him ... that we will have bodies raised and be like Christ; we will see him face to face. So, the resurrection is just one of those core things of the gospel that speaks to us of our eternal future, of Christ's lordship, of the central place of created human beings in God's plan for all eternity.

Dr. Saul Cruz (translation)

Christ's resurrection is key to the Christian message, to the gospel message. Because if Christ had not been resurrected, everything else would just be a theories; everything else would be only ideas, postulations about life. Christ's resurrection proves that Christ was not defeated by death. Death could not hold him, nor could it capture him because he was innocent, because there never was sin in his life. Death can hold people for eternity, because they've sinned, because there is a sentence against them, but Jesus does not have a sentence against him, and so he defeated death. Death was unable to hold him, and as he defeated death, he created a way, a path, to be the new Adam, and therefore, all of us who believe in him, we will also be resurrected with him.

Dr. Peter Walker

The resurrection of Jesus is basic to the gospel because without the resurrection, with a dead Jesus, we have nothing. I mean, what help is there in a dead Jesus, crucified, failed? So, the resurrection in the New Testament is a sign that Jesus has been vindicated and if we talk about the forgiveness of sins coming about through his

death, well, if Jesus had died and not been raised again, we don't know that we're forgiven. The whole doctrine of salvation falls apart without the fact that Jesus is raised from the dead. But it's more than that, I mean, it means that Jesus Christ is alive today. And an essential part of the good news is that here is a living person that we can know and have our lives transformed by. We're not following just a dead hero. We're following a living person. But it's more than that, it's that there's actual new life beyond the grave, for those who believe in Christ. So, death is not the end. The resurrection is a sign that there is a new kingdom established and that we have hope beyond the grave. And it is even more than that. It's that God has got a purpose for his whole world. This creation which is subjected to frustration finds through the resurrection that there's a hope of new creation. And so, the resurrection turns out to be absolutely key, not just for individuals, but for the whole world.

Dr. Jimmy Agan is Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of Homiletics at Covenant Theological Seminary.

Dr. Danny Akin is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Randy Alcorn is Director of Eternal Perspective Ministries.

Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr. is Dean of Seminary at Africa Christian University in Zambia.

Dr. Matt Carter is the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, TX.

Dr. Gareth Cockerill is Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary.

Dr. Lynn Cohick is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Saul Cruz (1954-2014) Founder of Armonía Ministries in Mexico City

Dr. Paul Gardner is Senior Pastor of ChristChurch Presbyterian in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat is Associate Professor of Divinity in Old Testament at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Rev. Dan Hendley is Senior Pastor of North Park Church in Wexford, PA.

Rev. Clete Hux is Director and Counter-Cult Apologist at Apologetics Resource Center, a Christian ministry which encompasses the full range of Christian Apologetics.

Dr. Samuel Lamerson is President of Knox Theological Seminary and Professor of New Testament

Dr. Jeff Lowman is Senior Pastor at Evangel Church PCA in Alabaster, Alabama and Professor of Homiletics and Systematic Theology at Birmingham Theological Seminary.

Dr. Douglas Moo is the Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Amy L. Peeler is Associate Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Greg Perry is Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of City Ministry Initiative at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

Dr. Robert A. Peterson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis

Dr. Richard Phillips is Senior Minister of Second Presbyterian Church and Chairman of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology

Dr. Vern Poythress is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary and Editor of the Westminster Theological Journal.

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III is Senior Pastor at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL.

Dr. Stephen C. Roy is Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Dr. Simon Vibert is the former Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Wimbledon Park, UK, and is presently the Vice Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Director of the School of Preaching.

Dr. Peter Walker is Professor of Biblical Studies at Trinity School for Ministry.

Dr. Guy Waters is Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
THREE

THE COMING OF THE KING



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Three

The Coming of the King

INTRODUCTION

When couples are about to have their first child, they often go through a predictable process. They get extremely excited. They worry about getting everything ready for the baby. They ask friends with children numerous questions. They may even read books and articles. They want to learn everything they can about pregnancy, the birth process, and taking care of a new baby. And those of us who already have children understand why. Having your first child changes your life in ways that can be dramatic, exciting, and maybe a little scary. And something similar should be true when we look forward to the return of our Lord Jesus. His return is going to change everything. So, it makes sense that we would want to understand what's about to happen, and to live in ways that prepare us for his earthly kingdom. This is why we study eschatology.

This is the third lesson in our series *Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology*, and we've entitled it "The Coming of the King." In this lesson, we'll explore what the Bible says about Christ's return or "second coming," and its relationship to events that lead to the end of the age.

In prior lessons, we've defined eschatology as "the study of last things" or "the doctrine of last things." And we've said that individual eschatology is "the study of how individual human beings experience the events of the last days." In this lesson, however, our topics fall into a different subcategory known as "general eschatology." General eschatology is:

The study of God's universal acts of judgment and salvation in the last days.

It addresses some of the same issues as individual eschatology. But it emphasizes the *events* rather than how individuals *experience* the events.

Our discussion of "The Coming of the King" will divide into three parts. First, we'll examine what Scripture says about the return of Christ. Second, we'll consider the signs of the times that point to his return. And third, we'll survey the major evangelical views of the millennium. Let's begin with the return of Christ.

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Near the end of his earthly ministry, before he ascended into heaven, Jesus assured his followers that he would eventually return. We see this, for instance, in his

Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, 25, and in his Farewell Discourse in John 14–17. Then, at the moment he ascended into heaven, Jesus sent two angels to remind the apostles that he would come back. As Luke wrote in Acts 1:10-11:

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11).

Several other New Testament books also mention Jesus’ second coming. Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would be ready for it in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. And he reassured them that they hadn’t missed it in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2. The author of Hebrews associated it with salvation for those who waited for Jesus in Hebrews 9:28. Peter described it as the end and renewal of the world in 2 Peter 3:4-10. And in John’s apocalyptic vision in Revelation 22:12, Jesus told John to be faithful until he returned. Jesus’ return to earth is taught throughout the New Testament, and has always been a central article of faith in Christian theology.

Jesus is coming back; he told us in the Bible that he is coming back. We could look at his words in the upper room; we could look at the teaching of the apostles, Paul, Peter, John in the letters, and particularly in the Revelation. So, it is a fact of Scripture that Jesus Christ will return at the end of the age. And that’s a great hope for us because, as believers, we long to see our Savior, and when he returns, then that’s when death will be removed utterly from our experience, we will be made perfectly holy in soul and body, and we will be in the company of all the saints and the holy angels in the presence of Jesus forever. So, we not only confess that Jesus is coming back, but we do so with gusto and longing.

— Dr. Guy Waters

In this lesson, we’ll focus on two aspects of the return of Christ: first, the necessity that he return; and second, the manner in which he’ll come. Let’s look first at the necessity of Jesus’ second coming.

NECESSITY

Many Christians in privileged parts of the world don’t worry very much about Christ’s return. They are largely content to enjoy the blessings of this life, and look forward to life in heaven during the intermediate state. Like the rich young ruler in Mark 10:21-25, their wealth makes it hard for them to place sufficient value on the kingdom that Jesus will consummate when he returns. But in other parts of the world, Christians

suffer for their faith. So, it's easier for them to look forward to the perfect world Jesus will bring. They have no trouble at all recognizing the necessity of Christ's second coming.

It's necessary for Jesus to return because God's work is not done. God's plan is not completed. There is creation, there was a fall, there is redemption in Christ, and there will be consummation. History is coming to a close. God is going to wrap things up. All things that are wrong will be set right. And Christ has *promised* that he would return. He says in John 14 that he goes to prepare a place for us, and that if he goes and prepares a place for us, he'll return and receive us unto himself. Christ is also going to return to judge the living and the dead... There are a number of reasons that the return of Christ is important, not the least of which is that the *return* of Christ is sort of the consummation of the resurrection of Christ. He *is* risen. He is risen indeed. But he is risen *that he might come again*. And this is what we say in the Lord's Supper. Right? "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." This is central to the message of the gospel.

— Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.

There are numerous reasons for the necessity of Jesus' return. But for our purposes, we'll focus on his role as Abraham's heir, and his role as David's heir. Let's look first at Christ's role as Abraham's heir.

Abraham's Heir

In Genesis 15, 17, God's covenant with Abraham includes promises of land for Abraham and his descendants. And in both these chapters, the land is specifically identified as Canaan. In fact, that's the very reason that the Bible and theologians refer to Canaan as "the Promised Land." But in Genesis 17:5, God also promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations. In other words, while his inheritance would *include* Canaan as its centerpiece, it wouldn't be *limited* to Canaan. In Romans 4:13, Paul interpreted this promise to mean that Abraham and his descendants would inherit the entire world.

In addition, many years after the events of Genesis 17, God confirmed his covenant with Abraham at Mount Moriah. At that time, God tested Abraham by commanding him to present his son Isaac to God as a burnt offering. This was a shocking command for two reasons. First, God hadn't previously required human sacrifice. And second, in Genesis 17, Isaac had been identified as the heir to Abraham's covenant promises. So, if Isaac were to die, God's promises would appear to fail. But at the last moment, God spared Isaac from death. And then God confirmed his covenant with Abraham in a way that ensured all God's covenant blessings would now be realized

through Isaac. And God added more detail to the covenant vocabulary, so that it explicitly included the *whole world*. In Genesis 22:17-18, the Lord said to Abraham:

Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed (Genesis 22:17-18).

In the original Hebrew, these promises refer to Isaac, who was a type or foreshadow that prefigured Christ. First, the word translated descendants and offspring is “*zarah*,” which means “seed.” Now, in its singular form, *zarah* can still refer to a large number of seeds. But in this case, it takes a singular form of the verb “*yarash*,” here translated “take possession,” and a singular form of the possessive pronoun, here translated “their.” So, a more literal rendering of this passage would be:

Your descendant will take possession of the cities of his enemies, and through your descendant all nations on earth will be blessed (Genesis 22:17-18).

In other words, Abraham’s covenant promises would be realized through his special descendant Isaac. And these promises included taking possession of the Promised Land and extending that possession to all nations.

The expectation in Isaac’s day was that he would live in the land he conquered. Of course, as history progressed and God revealed more of his plans, it became obvious that the promises to Isaac would ultimately be fulfilled through his descendant Jesus. Jesus would also be offered as a human sacrifice to God. But this time there wouldn’t be a last-minute reprieve. Just as Abraham’s obedience had earned Isaac a place as ruler of God’s covenant people, Jesus’ own obedience would earn him that same right. And Jesus would personally bless every nation in part by living among them in the land he conquered.

One of the reasons that Jesus’ return is necessary is because of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. God swore that one of Abraham’s descendants would defeat his enemies and possess the *entire world* as his habitation. And the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the descendant through whom those promises will be realized. But in order to seize his enemies’ territory, and in order to live in the world he’s conquered, Jesus has to be here — on earth. He has to come back personally, so that the promises to Abraham and Isaac can be fulfilled.

Besides the necessity for Jesus to return as Abraham’s heir, he also has to return because he’s David’s heir.

David’s Heir

As we saw in a prior lesson, Isaiah 9:7 tells us God’s promise that one of David’s descendants would rule over Israel forever. We see similar ideas in 2 Samuel 7:16, and Ezekiel 37:24-28. And Daniel 7:14 adds the detail that David’s heir will actually rule

over, and be worshiped by, “all peoples, nations and men of every language.” But Jesus didn’t restore David’s throne during his earthly ministry, let alone establish a permanent, worldwide, earthly kingdom. And he certainly isn’t worshiped by everyone on earth yet.

Now, it’s important to point out that Jesus is already reigning as king over both heaven and earth. Just before he ascended into heaven, he told his disciples that he possessed complete authority over heaven and earth. In Matthew 28:18, he said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus is king over both heaven and earth; he has *all* authority. Paul talked about this in Ephesians 1:20-22. He explained that Christ reigns in heaven, and that his royal rank is higher than any other title that can be given, both in this age and in the age to come. And Paul repeated this idea in many other places, including in 1 Corinthians 15:25, and Colossians 2:10.

But at the present time, Jesus’ throne is in heaven, not on earth. So, in order to fulfill God’s promise to David, Jesus still has to return to earth, re-establish the Davidic throne over Israel, and from there, rule over the whole earth forever. As the angel told Jesus’ mother Mary in Luke 1:32-33:

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end (Luke 1:32-33).

Similarly, in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus himself specified that when he sits on his throne rendering royal verdicts on the wicked and the righteous, that throne will be on earth. Listen to Matthew 25:31-32 where Jesus said this:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-32).

The picture is of Jesus coming down from heaven, glowing in radiant splendor — or “heavenly glory” — and attended by armies of conquering angels. And to where is he coming? To earth, where the nations that he plans to judge are located.

All Christians should look forward to the future earthly reign of Christ that will begin when he returns. We see this hope reflected in the apostle John’s vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, 22. And it’s displayed in Jeremiah’s prophecies about Jerusalem in Jeremiah 3:17, and in his words about Davidic kings in Jeremiah 17:25 and 33:17-22. It was the belief and hope of Jesus and those who followed him in the New Testament, and it should be our belief and hope, too.

Having looked at the necessity of the return of Christ, we’re ready to consider the manner of his coming.

MANNER

Jesus has several important tasks left to accomplish in order to consummate God's earthly kingdom — and he'll be accomplishing those tasks personally. So, we know he's coming back. But *how* is he coming back? What will it look like? And how will we recognize him? In the simplest terms, Jesus will descend from heaven as the victorious, conquering King over all creation.

We'll mention four aspects of the manner of Christ's return. It will be personal, physical, visible, and triumphant. Let's look first at the fact that it will be personal.

Personal

As we've seen, it's necessary for Jesus to return to earth *personally* in order to fulfill the promises made to Abraham and David. He won't simply send his Holy Spirit to affect the next stage of the kingdom, although the Holy Spirit will certainly be involved. And he won't merely act through his church, although we'll definitely participate in the events that consummate his kingdom. His return isn't a metaphor that the New Testament uses to describe the large-scale conversion of the lost, or the spread of peace to all nations, or the victory of the church throughout the world. In fact, it's not a metaphor at all. Jesus really is coming back — in person — to finish his work.

After Jesus rose from the dead, but before he ascended into heaven, he spent 40 days teaching his faithful apostles about the kingdom of God. Then, in Acts 1:4, 5, he explained that he was going to send the Holy Spirit to empower the church for ministry. In response to this, in Acts 1:6, the apostles asked him:

**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?
(Acts 1:6).**

This question reveals an important assumption, specifically, that Jesus himself would restore the kingdom to Israel.

The apostles naturally wondered if Jesus' other eschatological works would quickly follow their reception of the Holy Spirit. But Jesus told them not to speculate about this timing, and only reassured them that the Holy Spirit would empower their ministries. Immediately after this, he ascended into heaven.

So, what were the apostles thinking at this point? It's probably safe to say that they were wondering how the kingdom could possibly be restored when the one who was supposed to restore it had just ascended into heaven. In fact, the very next verses suggest this was the case. As the story continues, two angels appeared and told the apostles that Jesus would *personally* return in the future, presumably to finish his work of consummating God's kingdom on earth. As we read earlier in Acts 1:11, the angels asked the apostles:

Men of Galilee ... why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

The fact that Jesus left didn't mean he'd forgotten about restoring the kingdom. On the contrary, he was coming back personally to complete his earthly kingdom. The apostle Peter was so persuaded of this reality that it became part of his gospel presentation. Listen to what Peter told the crowds in Acts 3:21:

[Jesus] must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything (Acts 3:21).

Many other New Testament writers and figures also argued that Jesus will return personally to consummate God's messianic kingdom on earth. But the idea is probably most common in Paul's writings. For instance, in places like 1 Corinthians 15:23, and Philippians 3:20, 21, Paul tied the personal return of Christ to the resurrection of believers. In 2 Timothy 4:8, he said that God would reward those who anxiously await Christ's return. And in Titus 2:12-14, he associated Jesus' personal return with the importance of godly living.

Having seen that the manner of Christ's return will be personal, let's explore the idea that his return will include a physical component.

Physical

It's important to remember that Jesus didn't give up his humanity when he ascended into heaven. He is one person — the Second Person of the Trinity. But he has two natures: a divine nature and a human nature. In his divine nature, Jesus is already present and working everywhere on earth. But he also has human work left to do. And for that, he has to return in his full humanity, including his body. For instance, he's the covenant heir of Abraham and David only according to his *human* nature. As a result, the promises made to Abraham and David can *only* be fulfilled through his *humanity*.

Similarly, in Acts 3:20-22, Luke argued that Jesus has to return in his human nature in order to complete his work as the prophet like Moses. And of course, the angels at his ascension said that he'd come back physically. Recall Acts 1:11, where the angel told the apostles:

This same Jesus ... will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

The apostles saw Jesus humanly ascend into heaven, and they were told that they would see him return the same way. That can only mean that he will return in his human body. Besides this, several passages compare our glorified human bodies to the glorified human body Jesus will still have when he returns. And that means that he'll be just as physical as we will be. We see this in places like 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, and Philippians

3:20, 21. The New Testament consistently teaches that when Jesus returns, he'll appear in his glorified physical human body — the same body that rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

Now that we've seen how the manner of Jesus' return will be personal and physical, let's address the fact that it will also be visible.

Visible

It might seem obvious to say that when Jesus returns in his glorified human body, we'll be able to see him. But there are actually some cults that deny Jesus' visible return. Often, this denial stems from the mistaken belief that Jesus has already returned. And since no one saw this return, they argue that it was invisible. One of the most obvious problems with this error is that the New Testament explicitly says that Jesus will be *seen* when he returns. For example, in 1 John 3:2, John wrote:

When he appears ... we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

And in Revelation 1:7, John prophesied:

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him (Revelation 1:7).

And in Matthew 24:27-30, Jesus himself described his second coming this way:

As lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man... [T]he nations of the earth ... will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory (Matthew 24:27-30).

The last two passages are particularly helpful because they indicate that Jesus won't just be visible to a few people. Everyone on earth will see him. And the reason for this isn't hard to grasp: Jesus' return will be an earth-shattering event. The radiance of his glory will be like the sun, and his heavenly armies will fill the sky. And then every last human being will have to face him on his judgment throne. As Jesus taught in Matthew 16:27:

The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27).

The New Testament tells us that just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be; that suggests it's going to be highly visible and indeed something

that's impossible to miss. And in the language of Paul's writings, he speaks of the second coming of Christ being accompanied with a shout and the sound of a trumpet. Again, these are things that suggest to me that the second coming is going to be something that we could not miss even if we wanted to, that God's going out of his way to make sure that we notice this cataclysmic, historical event. So, I would say it's *entirely* visible, noticeable, and *cannot* be missed by any human being that's still on earth at the time of Christ's return.

— Rev. Dan Hendley

So far we've described the manner of Christ's return as personal, physical, and visible. Now let's see how it's also triumphant.

Triumphant

During his first coming, Jesus appeared to be anything but triumphant. He was born to a poor, humble family. He never attained political or military power. And in death, he allowed himself to be condemned and executed like a criminal. As Paul wrote in Philippians 2:7-8:

[Jesus] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:7-8).

The Greek verb in the phrase “made himself nothing” is “*kenóo*.” Its use here is the basis for the theological term “kenosis,” which is Jesus’ act of veiling his divine glory during his first advent.

Some interpreters have wrongly understood Jesus’ kenosis as a loss of certain divine attributes. But God can’t stop being God. He can’t — even voluntarily — put aside any of his divine attributes. Rather, Jesus’ kenosis consisted in *hiding* his glory, especially by means of the incarnation and the indignities he suffered. But when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, his kenosis ended. At that time, the Father pulled back the veil to reveal the glory Jesus has always possessed as God. As Jesus prayed in John 17:5:

Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:5).

Jesus’ glory has never been veiled again. And when he returns, it will be on full display. He will come in radiance and splendor, riding the clouds of heaven and attended by hosts of angels. Matthew 24:30 says he’ll come “with power and great glory.” First Thessalonians 4:16 tells us that he’ll be announced “with the voice of the archangel and

with the trumpet call of God.” Second Thessalonians 1:7 tells us that he’ll come with blazing fire and angelic armies. And Revelation 19:11-16 tells us that he’ll be crowned with many crowns, followed by the armies of heaven, and carrying an iron scepter to rule the nations. In short, his appearance will be as a triumphant king leading his armies in victory. And everyone will bow before his power and authority. Listen to Philippians 2:9-11, where Paul described the results of Jesus’ kenosis:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

This is the ultimate victory. When Jesus returns and defeats his enemies, no one will be left to oppose him. Everyone, without exception, will bow and acknowledge his greatness, and submit to his rule. Revelation 22:3-5 teaches that his throne will be in the New Jerusalem, where his glory will be so bright that the city won’t need lamps or even the sun. And Revelation 11:15 indicates that his heavenly kingdom will spread out to encompass the entire world.

As believers, one of our greatest hopes is the future physical return of Christ. When Jesus returns, creation will be perfected and God’s glory will be seen throughout the world. Until that time, part of our job is to live in ways that anticipate and proclaim that ultimate victory. We’re to be holy, to honor our king, and to prepare his kingdom for his arrival. But in some sense, we’re also to be thankful for his delay. Why? Because every day Jesus waits is an opportunity for his enemies to repent, so that they receive his forgiveness now and his everlasting blessings when he returns.

Now that we’ve considered the coming of the king in terms of the return of Christ, let’s address our second major topic: the signs of the times.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

When we speak of “the signs of the times,” we have in mind the events that indicate the progress of God’s eschatological timeline. As we’ve seen in a prior lesson, the “last days” or “eschaton” unfolds in three stages: the *inauguration* of God’s earthly messianic kingdom, which took place during Jesus’ first advent; the *continuation* of the kingdom, in which we now live; and the future *consummation* of the kingdom that will occur when Jesus returns. In this section of our lesson, we’re primarily concerned with the signs leading to Christ’s glorious return.

We’ll discuss the signs of the times in three parts. First, we’ll see that the timing of Christ’s return is a divine mystery. Second, we’ll highlight some significant precursors to Christ’s return. And third, we’ll identify some interpretive strategies theologians have used to explain these precursors. Let’s begin with the fact that the timing of Christ’s return is a divine mystery.

DIVINE MYSTERY

In Matthew 24:3, Jesus' disciples asked him:

When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? (Matthew 24:3).

Before they even asked him this question, the disciples realized that Jesus was going to leave for a while and then come back. And they knew that he wasn't going to bring in the fullness of God's messianic kingdom on earth until he returned. But they still wondered *when* these things would happen.

In answer to this question, Jesus told them about the signs that would precede his return. In Matthew 24:27-30, he said that the sun and moon would go dark, and that he would then appear in the sky, arriving on the clouds and shining with great glory. But he didn't tell them when it would happen. In fact, he *couldn't* tell them because it was a divine mystery that even he didn't know. As he said in Matthew 24:36:

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Matthew 24:36).

From the perspective of his *human* nature, even Jesus didn't know when he would return! Sadly, many theologians throughout history have considered themselves to be wiser and better informed than Jesus, and have tried to set dates for his return. But they've all been proven wrong. As Jesus' said in Matthew 24:42-44:

Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come... [T]he Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Matthew 24:42-44).

Many other passages confirm that the timing of Jesus' return is unknowable, including Matthew 25:13, Mark 13:32, 33, Luke 12:40, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, and 2 Peter 3:10. If there's one thing Scripture says clearly about the timing of Christ's arrival, it's that only God knows when it will happen. No one else can predict it.

Having seen that the signs of the times won't reveal the divine mystery of when Christ will return, let's explore a few significant precursors to his second coming.

SIGNIFICANT PRECURSORS

Even though we can't know when Jesus will arrive, Scripture does mention several circumstances that are precursors to his return. Generally speaking, these precursors aren't absolute. As we saw in a prior lesson, God's prophecies are fundamentally conditional. Just as a potter can recast clay into a different vessel, God has freedom in how he fulfills prophecies about the future. Nevertheless, the circumstances

that Scripture says will precede Christ's return still guide us. They create legitimate expectations for how the future may unfold. And they warn and encourage us as we prepare for Christ's arrival.

We'll mention just three of the most prominent precursors to Christ's return, beginning with demonic opposition to God's kingdom.

Demonic opposition

Scripture teaches that Satan and his demonic forces have opposed the spread of God's kingdom throughout history. So, demonic opposition isn't anything new. But Scripture also teaches that a particularly terrible period of demonic opposition will precede Jesus' return. Revelation 7:14 calls this "the Great Tribulation" — a time when demons will empower false prophets to perform misleading signs and wonders. And similar ideas appear throughout John's visions in Revelation. For instance, in Revelation 16:13-14, John wrote:

I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs... They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs (Revelation 16:13-14).

Jesus also spoke of the great tribulation in Matthew 24:21, associating it with the events surrounding the end of the world. And, like John, he said it would be characterized by false signs and miracles. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:24:

False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible (Matthew 24:24).

Clearly, God's demonic opponents will use every trick and power they have to hinder his plans for his kingdom.

A second precursor to Christ's return is human opposition to God's kingdom.

Human opposition

Scripture describes many human beings that will cooperate with the demonic opposition to God. For instance, Revelation 13 indicates that Satan will use two beasts: one from the land and one from the sea. It doesn't indicate whether these beasts represent individuals, groups of people, or even institutions. But they do appear to be human. For one thing, they influence humanity in a way that implies control over societies and governments. For another, the beast from the land is identified by what Revelation 13:18 calls "man's number," or "humanity's number," or perhaps, "the number of a person." Beyond these beastly figures, a powerful "false prophet" is mentioned in Revelation 16:13, 19:20 and 20:10.

Human opposition to God's kingdom also appears in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10, which mentions a rebellion and "the man of lawlessness." The man of lawlessness will be satanically empowered to perform false miracles, and will eventually proclaim himself to be God. And less spectacular opposition will also exist, such as the false prophets and false Christs mentioned in Matthew 24:24, and the many antichrists talked about in 1 John 2:18.

When we read about demonic activity in the New Testament or about the Antichrist in 1 John, or the beast in the book of Revelation, we realize that all of those evil characters, all of those evil gods, if you will, they can only do what God allows them to do. And as a result of that, it's almost like the book of Job; Satan comes in and he asks Yahweh's permission about what he can do, and so, it's not as if God and Satan are in this dualistic battle, and we're not certain which one will win. It's as if God is working out his plan, and even the Evil One is one of those entities that he uses to make sure that his plan is worked out. So, *nothing* — whether it be the beast or an antichrist or the Evil One himself — nothing can stop the plan of God. And in fact, all of those entities are used to make sure that the plan of God comes forth in the way that it should.

— Dr. Samuel Lamerson

A third precursor to the second coming is successful worldwide evangelism.

Worldwide evangelism

In Matthew 24:14, Jesus gave this prophecy:

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

Despite the various forms of serious opposition God's kingdom faces, the kingdom will successfully present its gospel message to the nations.

Jesus repeated this idea at least twice after this prophecy. In the Great Commission, which he issued after his resurrection, he told the eleven faithful disciples to proclaim the gospel to the nations and to train those that received it. And he associated this work of evangelizing and training with the entire continuation of the kingdom until the end of the age. Listen to his words in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go and make disciples of all nations ... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus' reference to the end of the age suggests that he knew the eleven wouldn't complete this work, and that the church would have to continue it.

Jesus spoke similarly in the last moments before his ascension. In Acts 1:8, he told his faithful apostles that they would use the power of the Holy Spirit to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. And Scripture indicates that this worldwide evangelism will gain many converts. As a result, by the time Jesus returns, the church will include members from every tribe, language, people and nation. We can see this in several places, including John's heavenly visions in the book of Revelation. As just one example, here's John's report in Revelation 7:9:

Before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands (Revelation 7:9).

The white robes and palm branches carried by the multitude indicate those that were faithful to God. So, in this vision, John was looking at redeemed people from every part of the world. This tells us the messianic kingdom will push through its opposition and succeed both in announcing the gospel and in gaining converts.

So far our discussion of the signs of the times has covered the fact that the timing of Christ's return is a divine mystery, and several precursors to Christ's return. Now we're in a position to address some interpretive strategies for explaining these precursors.

INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES

All evangelicals agree that the church has always faced opposition, and that it will continue to face opposition in the future. We all agree that evangelism has been successful in the past, and we're determined to continue evangelizing until Jesus returns. Beyond this, we all recognize the importance of global missions, and rejoice that the church exists, perseveres, and thrives all over the world. But despite all this agreement, we sometimes interpret the precursors to Christ's return in very different ways.

In general, evangelical interpretive strategies exhibit four main tendencies. It's helpful to recognize these tendencies so that we can learn from them and improve our understanding of Scripture.

Some interpretive strategies focus on when the precursors to Christ's return will appear in history. These strategies tend between preterism and futurism. At one extreme, preterism says that these precursors appeared in our past and will not be repeated in the future. For example, a preterist might say that the Antichrist was a human being that lived during the first century, and that we shouldn't be looking for anyone like him in the future.

At the other extreme, futurism says that the precursors to Christ's return haven't appeared yet, but will appear in the future. For instance, a futurist is likely to say the Antichrist will live in the last generation before the second coming. And between these two extremes is a wide range of views related to the timing of people and events. For

example, some might say that the Antichrist is a *type* of person or human institution that lasts or is repeated throughout history.

Other interpretive strategies focus on how the precursors to Christ's return will be manifested in history. These strategies tend between historicism and idealism. Historicism relates these precursors to actual people and events throughout history. For instance, during the Reformation in the 16th century, many historicists believed that the Antichrist was the Roman Catholic pope, or even the papacy itself.

By contrast, idealism relates the precursors to Christ's return to abstract concepts and general principles. For example, an idealist might argue that the Antichrist is *anyone* that preaches falsehood and opposes Jesus. And between these two extremes is a wide variety of views that interpret the precursors to Christ's return with varying degrees of historicism and idealism. For instance, some might say that there have been several Antichrists throughout history, but not insist that they be connected through a visible institution like the papacy.

These four tendencies overlap in many ways. And individual interpreters often use different strategies, depending on the passages they're interpreting. A person might tend toward preterism in one passage, and futurism in another, or toward historicism in some passages and idealism in others. Sometimes an interpreter will even use different strategies *within* the same passage.

Each of these interpretive strategies has strengths and weaknesses, and evangelicals use all of these strategies to varying degrees. So, rather than thinking of them as systems that demand our loyalty, it's probably better to conceive of them as tools that help us understand various aspects of Scripture. And when it comes to interpreting a particular passage, we should let the context dictate which tool or tools we use.

Now that we've summarized the Bible's teaching on the return of Christ, and surveyed the signs of the times, let's turn our attention to our third major topic: the millennium.

THE MILLENNIUM

The term "millennium" literally refers to a period of one thousand years. But when we speak of the millennium, we have in mind the eschatological period of Christ's reign mentioned in Revelation 20:2-7. This is the only place in Scripture where this period is said to be a thousand years long. But many interpreters believe the millennium is also mentioned in other passages — especially in Old Testament predictions of a long period of prosperity for Israel.

With regard to the timeline of eschatology, all evangelicals believe that Christ reigns from heaven now. And we all believe that Jesus has to return before God's reign on earth is consummated. In this sense, we all hold to some form of inaugurated eschatology.

As we mentioned in a prior lesson, inaugurated eschatology is the idea that God's eschatological kingdom has begun or "been inaugurated" in Christ, but that it hasn't yet come in all its fullness. But despite our general agreement about the inaugurated nature of

God's kingdom, we often disagree over where to place the millennium in the eschatological timeline. In fact, this kind of disagreement has characterized the church since the earliest centuries.

For instance, Justin Martyr, who lived from approximately A.D. 100 to 165, wrote the following in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 80:

I and others ... are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged.

Here, Justin defended the view that Jesus would return before the millennium. But elsewhere in this same chapter, he wrote this:

I and many others are of this opinion ... but ... many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.

It seems that there have always been a variety of opinions about the timing and details of the millennium.

There are so many schools of thought regarding the millennium, and so many variations within those schools, that we can't possibly cover all their details in this lesson. So, our goal will simply be to introduce the four main systems, and to provide a brief description of each of them. But we also want to emphasize that each of these systems is held by Bible-believing, evangelical Christians. So, regardless of which system we find most reasonable, we should respect those that hold to other systems, and conduct ourselves with love and humility when we disagree with them.

In this lesson, we'll briefly describe four views of the millennium that predominate today: historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Let's look first at historic premillennialism.

HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM

Historic premillennialism is one of two premillennial systems we'll examine. In older writings, it's often called "*chiliasm*," from the Greek word "*chilioi*," meaning "thousand."

The term "premillennialism" itself refers to the belief that Jesus will return before the millennium begins. And the term "historic" denotes that this view has been held throughout church history, unlike the more modern dispensational premillennialism.

Historic premillennialism teaches that the church will go through the great tribulation just prior to Jesus' return. When Jesus arrives, he'll gather the believers that are still alive, bind Satan from influencing this world, and begin his physical, earthly millennial reign. And — this last point is critical — one of the key distinctions of premillennialism is that it looks for Christ to reign physically on earth during the millennium.

Some premillennial interpreters believe the millennium will be exactly one thousand years long, but most allow that “one thousand” might metaphorically indicate a long time of unspecified length. Similarly, historic premillennialism isn’t entirely unified on the details of the “gathering” or “rapture” of believers. So, we should pause to explain it more carefully. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Paul described the rapture this way:

The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The word “rapture” comes from the Latin version of these verses, which uses the verb “*rapio*,” where the English has “caught up.” So, the “rapture” is the event in which believers are *caught up* or *gathered* to Christ in the clouds.

Historic premillennialism teaches that those believers that remain alive when Jesus returns will be gathered to him in the air. Then they’ll immediately return to earth with him as part of his victorious military parade, and live on earth during his millennial reign. However, some historic premillennialists think the rapture will also include resurrected believers. But others argue that the resurrection of believers won’t take place until the final judgment at the end of the millennium.

In any case, during the millennium, believers and unbelievers alike will enjoy earthly blessings, peace and prosperity. This millennial period won’t be the final state of the new heavens and new earth; although, some historic premillennialists believe the final state will begin during the millennium. But they all agree that the millennium will be far more glorious than our current age. Historic premillennial theologians often see the millennium predicted in Old Testament passages that describe an era of blessed, but mortal life, such as Psalm 72:8-14, Isaiah 11:2-9, and Zechariah 14:5-21.

One of the distinctive components of both premillennial systems is that *unbelievers* won’t be resurrected until the end of the millennium. But, there will still be unbelievers living on earth during the millennium, and there will still be sin and corruption and death. Isaiah 65:20 is thought to refer to this time when it says:

Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed (Isaiah 65:20).

Premillennialists believe that Isaiah predicted a time when people will live much longer than they do now. And they argue that other Old Testament passages, like Isaiah 11:10, 11 suggest that sinners will still seek salvation at this time. Since these descriptions don’t match the present state or the final state, they are interpreted as references to the millennium.

At the end of the millennium, historic premillennialists say that Satan’s rebellion will take place. This will be followed by the resurrection of everyone that hasn’t been

previously resurrected. Then the final judgment will come. At that point, God's eternal reign over the new heavens and new earth will be fully realized.

I hold to a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, at bottom, because it is the most straightforward reading of the passage... I think it's natural to see that at the end of Revelation 19, the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire and then Satan is not—the dragon is not thrown into the lake of fire, he's bound for a thousand years. And then before the thousand years there's a resurrection of believers and they reign with Christ for a thousand years. And then, at the end of the thousand years, Satan is released, and then he's captured, and only then is he thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet already were.

— Dr. James M. Hamilton

Having seen how historic premillennialism views the millennium, let's look at the distinctive views of dispensational premillennialism.

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

As a premillennial system, dispensational premillennialism holds that Jesus will return and believers will be resurrected *before* the millennium. Jesus will reign physically on earth *during* the millennium. And unbelievers will be resurrected and judged *after* the millennium. But unlike historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism generally teaches that resurrected and still-living believers will be raptured to heaven before the great tribulation begins, and that they'll remain there until the end of the millennium.

One reason for this difference from historic premillennialism lies in the *dispensational* aspect of dispensational premillennialism. Dispensationalism teaches that God works in different ways during different eras or "dispensations." And one consequence of these dispensations is that God has a different plan for the Jewish people than he has for the church.

According to dispensationalism, God sent Jesus to be the Messiah for the nation of Israel in order to fulfill his promises to Israel in the Old Testament. But when Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God put his plans for them on hold. In their place, God raised up the Gentiles in the church. Of course, there are Jewish believers in the church, too. But God still intends to fulfill his purposes to *national* Israel. To accomplish this, God will rapture the church before the tribulation and deal primarily with Israel during the millennium.

Most dispensational premillennialists believe that those who remain on earth after the rapture will undergo the great tribulation, which will last for seven years. At the end of the tribulation, Jesus will return, and the millennium will begin. Jesus will restore the nation of Israel, and visibly reign over all nations from his throne in Jerusalem. During

this time, God will fulfill his Old Testament promises to the nation of Israel. For example, listen to what God said in Amos 9:11-15:

In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name ... I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them... I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them (Amos 9:11-15).

Dispensationalists believe that prophecies like these will be fulfilled for the nation of Israel in the millennium.

At the end of the millennium, Satan will instigate a rebellion, but God will completely defeat Satan and his armies. Afterwards, God will resurrect the unbelievers, plus any believers that came to faith and died after the rapture. Then the last judgment will take place, and the final state in the new heavens and new earth will begin.

I'm a progressive dispensationalist because I think it takes in the best of both covenant theology, which maintains that focus upon the one people of God and the covenant promises in the Old Testament, but also, it takes the best of the classic dispensational view that sees a future program and plan for Israel as well. So, I kind of get the best of both worlds.

— Dr. Danny Akin

Now that we've looked at the millennium from the perspective of historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism, let's explore postmillennialism.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

The term postmillennialism refers to the belief that Jesus will return after the millennium ends. This is in direct contrast to both premillennial systems, which say that he will return before the millennium begins. Another important contrast between premillennial systems and postmillennialism is the location of Christ during his millennial reign. Premillennialism places Christ physically on earth. But postmillennialism locates him physically in heaven while he reigns spiritually on earth.

In the postmillennial system, the millennium is an age of success for the gospel that prepares the earth for Christ's return. Some believe the millennium stretches from Jesus' ascension to his return; others think it will be the last thousand years before he comes back. But all postmillennialists hold that the general trajectory of history throughout the millennium will produce greater and greater success for the gospel and the church throughout the world. Christ's reign will ensure that the nations come to faith. Christian morality will characterize human society. And God's kingdom will eventually

cover the whole world. To support this idea, postmillennialists point to scriptures that ensure Christ's ultimate victory over his enemies, and interpret these as references to his reign during the millennium. For instance, listen to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:25:

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25).

Postmillennialists generally believe that verses like this teach that Christ will successfully defeat his enemies *before* he returns.

Postmillennialism sees the millennium as a time of increasing victory for the kingdom of God. So, it sometimes takes a preterist position with regard to the great tribulation, believing that it took place in the first century A.D. Still, nearly all postmillennialists acknowledge Satan's rebellion at the end of the millennium, and his defeat when Christ returns.

Like some forms of historic premillennialism, postmillennialism teaches that the rapture will include resurrected and still-living believers. These will meet the Lord in the air when he comes, and immediately return with him to earth as part of his victorious military parade. Unbelievers will also be resurrected at this time, and Jesus will render his final judgments on both believers and unbelievers. Finally, he'll usher in the new heavens and new earth, and the final state will begin.

I think one of the most compelling, biblical reasons to affirm a postmillennial view is when you take a look at redemptive history as a whole... In different times, postmillennialists have believed in a certain thousand-year golden age... But many today that say they're postmillennial don't necessarily believe in any kind of golden age. What they really mean is more of a positive approach to the realities of the gospel, that it's going forth and that the nations will ultimately come before the coming of the Christ, and that it will be an upswing... And when we look in Revelation, we see, as they look at the multitudes, the whole earth, in the new heavens and the new earth, is filled with imagers of God from every tribe, tongue and nation. And I think there's a progressive flow to all of Scripture, pointing to this reality that ultimately God's initial plan, his initial call to Adam and Eve, for the whole earth to be filled with his imagers, will come true. And it'll be the true people of God over the whole face of the earth who have been redeemed and renewed in the image of Christ.

— Prof. Brandon P. Robbins

Having surveyed historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism and postmillennialism, we're ready to address the fourth major eschatological system: amillennialism.

AMILLENNIALISM

The term “amillennialism” literally means “no millennium.” Its name refers to the belief that the millennium won’t literally be one thousand years long. Other systems also allow that the phrase “one thousand years” might be figurative. But all forms of modern amillennialism *insist* on a figurative reading.

Like some forms of postmillennialism, amillennialism views the millennium as the entire period between Christ’s ascension and return. During this time, Jesus reigns over the earth from his throne in heaven. And like *all* forms of postmillennialism, amillennialism believes that Jesus will return *after* the millennium.

What distinguishes amillennialism from postmillennialism is that amillennialism doesn’t *insist* that Jesus’ millennial reign will constantly expand the kingdom and improve the world. From an amillennial perspective, the church’s experience, success and growth will be determined largely by the actions of the church itself, and by God’s free acts of providence. So, it’s *possible* that the world might continue to become more and more faithful to God, but it’s also possible that it might not. With regard to the great tribulation, some amillennialists believe it occurred early in church history, and others associate it with Satan’s rebellion at the end of the millennium.

From this point forward, amillennialism is indistinguishable from postmillennialism. Jesus will crush Satan’s rebellion when he returns. He’ll rapture resurrected and still-living believers, and immediately return with them to earth. Unbelievers will be resurrected, and Jesus will render his final judgments on everyone. And finally, Jesus will usher in the new heavens and new earth, and the final state will begin.

There are several legitimate evangelical interpretations of eschatology, and my view is amillennial... It just seems to me that when you’re looking especially at Pauline eschatology — and of course, Geerhardus Vos wrote that wonderful treatment of Pauline eschatology — you’ll see a simplicity in Paul’s eschatology that Jesus Christ comes and there’s the end, and everything finds its fulfillment at that moment, and we’re ushered into the new heavens and the new earth, and it seems beautifully simple. And great beauty is simple. And it seems to me that biblical eschatology is simple.

— Dr. Sanders L. Willson

Regardless of which view we embrace — historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, postmillennialism or amillennialism — it’s important to remember that each of these views is held by evangelical Christians. And that should incline us to be humble, charitable and teachable as we study the millennial timeline.

One of the most important things to note is that all evangelical forms of millennialism — “*post*,” “*a-*,” or “*pre*” — believe in the future second coming of Christ, the general resurrection of the dead, the

final judgment, heaven and hell. There also seems to be in the last 20 to 25 years or so some growing consensus on some basic ideas, particularly what is often described as the “already and not yet” ideas. George Eldon Ladd, who was a historic premillennialist, was very important in promoting this idea of the “already and not yet,” this inaugurated eschatology idea. But we also see this among amillennialists and postmillennialists, understanding that the first coming of Christ is what inaugurated the last days... There does seem to be a growing consensus on this big idea of “already, not yet.” And I find that encouraging, that despite the differences of agreement, as we continue to study the Scriptures, we’re doing away with some of the problems that each of these views had in the past and coming to more and more agreement.

— Dr. Keith Mathison

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on “The Coming of the King” we’ve considered the return of Christ in terms of its necessity and manner; we’ve explored the signs of the times with regard to divine mystery, precursors to Christ’s return, and interpretive strategies; and we’ve discussed the millennium from the perspectives of historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism.

At many points in church history, differences over eschatology have led to strife and division. And this is just as true today as it’s ever been. But when it comes to the major evangelical eschatologies we’ve mentioned in this lesson, we should resist division. After all, every evangelical confesses that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. We all agree that he currently reigns from heaven. We all believe he’ll return bodily and visibly to continue God’s reign on earth, and that through him all God’s promises will be fulfilled. And we all place our hope in the fact that after the millennium, he’ll bring in the final state of the new heavens and new earth. Our disagreements pale in comparison to the things we hold in common. And our fellowship should reflect that.

Dr. Matt Friedeman (Host) is Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship at Wesley Biblical Seminary and founding pastor of DaySpring Community Church in Clinton, Mississippi. Dr. Friedeman earned his M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. He is a contributing columnist for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, a political analyst for WAPT-TV, chaplain for the Hinds County Penal Farm, and is very active in prison and pro-life ministries. He is also the author of several books including, *The Master Plan of Teaching*, *LifeChanging Bible Study*, and *Discipleship In The Home*.

Dr. Danny Akin is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr. is Dean of Seminary at Africa Christian University in Zambia.

Dr. James Hamilton is Associate Professor of Biblical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Preaching Pastor of Kenwood Baptist Church.

Rev. Dan Hendley is Senior Pastor of North Park Church in Wexford, PA.

Dr. Samuel Lamerson is President of Knox Theological Seminary and Professor of New Testament.

Dr. Keith Mathison is Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College.

Prof. Brandon P. Robbins is Staff Apologist at the Apologetics Resource Center for Birmingham Theological Seminary.

Dr. Guy Waters is Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Dr. Sanders L. Willson is Senior Minister at Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis, TN and serves on the boards of The Gospel Coalition, Union University and Reformed Theological Seminary.

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
THREE

The Coming of the King Faculty Forum



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Three: The Coming of the King

Faculty Forum

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Dr. Danny Akin
Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.
Dr. Gary M. Burge
Dr. D.A. Carson
Dr. Matt Carter
Dr. David W. Chapman
Rev. Larry Cockrell
Dr. Lynn Cohick
Dr. Paul Gardner
Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs
Dr. Benjamin Gladd

Dr. Lai-Chang Kang
Dr. Riad Kassis
Dr. Craig S. Keener
Dr. Jeff Lowman
Dr. Keith Mathison
Dr. Douglas Moo
Dr. Grant R. Osborne
Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.
Dr. Robert A. Peterson
Rev. Vernon Pierre
Dr. Vern S. Poythress

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
Dr. Stephen C. Roy
Dr. Philip Ryken
Rev. George Shamblin
Dr. K. Erik Thoennes
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Sanders L. Willson
Rev. Dr. John W. Yates

Question 1:

How do theologians distinguish between individual and general eschatology?

Dr. Stephen C. Roy

The word “eschatology” comes from the Greek adjective *eschatos*, meaning “last,” and so it’s the study of the last things, the things that will ultimately happen. And theologians have distinguished two broad forms of eschatology. We might call them “individual” eschatology and “general.” Both deal with last things, ultimate outcomes, but in different realms. Individual eschatology asks the question, “what will ultimately happen to me, to you, to any human as an individual?” And it speaks about what happens when this life is done. It speaks of the reality of death, of the intermediate state prior to final resurrection, and of ultimate eternal states, whether eternal blessedness in the new heavens and new earth or eternal conscious punishment in hell... General eschatology also deals with ultimate things, but now it’s not so much the ultimate destiny of individuals. Now, it’s humanity as a whole. It’s human history. It’s the created universe, the cosmos itself. General eschatology says not so much, “what will happen to me?” as, “what will happen to us?” What will happen in history? What will the final outcome of the universe be? And so, it deals with realities like the second coming of Christ. It deals with questions of millennium and rapture, and it deals with those eternal states, again of the new heavens, new earth, or of hell. So, it’s helpful to think in these two categories of individual eschatology and general.

Dr. Jeff Lowman

When we think about eschatology historically, it has been divided into individual and corporate eschatology. Individual eschatology is simply what happens to us at death, what happens to us in the future. It speaks about, often when you deal with individual eschatology, you're dealing with issues concerning the nature of death. You're dealing with issues concerning the intermediate state. You're dealing with the issues of the resurrection body and the nature of the resurrection body, drawing a lot, in that instance, from 1 Corinthians 15. When you talk about general eschatology, corporate eschatology, you're really talking about the second coming of Christ, and you're talking about his return. You're dealing with the basic four millennial views, and you're talking about the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. And so, the majority of the attention is usually placed on general eschatology. And from a more pastoral perspective, there needs to be a greater emphasis on individual eschatology.

Question 2:
Is Jesus coming back?

Rev. Dr. John W. Yates

One of the great questions we face as followers of Jesus is, is he coming back? Has he risen and left, or will he return for us? There's a wonderful scene in John's gospel where Jesus tells the disciples that he's going to the Father's side, where there are many rooms and that he'll prepare rooms for his disciples. And he says to them, "You know where I'm going." And Thomas, ever the realist and pragmatist, says to Jesus, "Well, we *don't* know where you're going. Tell us how to get there." And it's in response to that that Jesus famously says to Thomas in John 14:6,

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6, ESV).

It's a wonderful affirmation of the way to salvation in the *context* of the promise of Jesus' ultimate return, to bring us home to God where we will live eternally with him.

Dr. Matt Carter

You know, the answer to the question, "Is Jesus coming back?" is a very simple answer. The answer is, "Yes." And the reason that I believe that is because Jesus said he was. I think, as Christians we spend a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of our intellectual capacity trying to answer the question, *when* is Jesus coming back? And I think those are important questions to answer. I think eschatology is incredibly important to the church, and it's something we need to pay attention to, but there is something that, probably, we don't spend enough time dealing with, and that is, how should we live in light of the reality and the promise that Jesus said he is coming back? Whether that's soon or whether that's later, over and over again the Bible tells us to get ready. And I think, especially as young people, we have a tendency to think, I've got the rest of my life. I've got 80 years. I've got my whole life to live. The

second coming of Jesus is not something I need to spend any time thinking about or preparing for. But that's quite the opposite of what the Scripture tells us. Over and over again, in Thessalonians and different places throughout Scripture, the apostle Paul calls us to live in light of the second coming of Jesus, to be ready... And so, the answer is yes, he's coming back. We don't know when. We hope it's soon. But our calling as believers is to be ready when he does.

Question 3: **Why is it necessary for Jesus to return?**

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

It might be easy to think that because Christ died on the cross and ascended, because he said, "It is finished" that there's no reason for him to return. First, he said, "I'm coming back," so there's the fact that he said he's coming back, *period*, that we have to reckon with. Now, this other part of it though is, he's coming back as King. He's coming back to reign. And so, this is how God's rule is going to be established on the earth in the end. So, why does he need to come back? He's coming back to rule and to reign and for God's creation to be belonging fully to him in an undisputed fashion.

Rev. George Shamblin

Why is Christ going to come? There are a number of reasons. First of all, because he promised he would. He promised he would come a second time, and we trust the Scriptures. Also, when Jesus comes back, he's going to make all things right. What has been messed up by sin, what has been messed up in the past, Christ will make right by his return. It's a great thing to look forward to in expectation of when Christ will come and when that will happen.

Dr. Riad Kassis (translation)

The church has this glorious reassurance that Jesus is coming back in glory and he will "judge the living and the dead," as we repeat in the Nicene Creed. Without the second coming of Jesus, history loses its meaning. When Jesus comes again, this world will be corrected. We will see justice and love spread again. Evil, sorrow, diseases will disappear as we start living eternal life in the new heavens and new earth.

Question 4: **Is Jesus going to return physically or only spiritually?**

Dr. Douglas Moo

Christians have a lot of debates about what's going to happen in the future, and we can understand why. The Scripture is not always extremely clear on these things. It uses symbols to talk about some of these things, so it's natural that we have some differences here. But one of the things that Christians all, I think, need to be agreed about is that Jesus is returning again and returning physically in his body. One of the

points that we have to understand here is that having become incarnate, having taken on a human body, Jesus is always going to live in that body. There's really no such thing as the presence of Jesus apart from his body existence now. So, when he returns, I think Scripture's pretty clear in that he is returning in his physical body to earth to take those who love him to be with him forever, as 1 Thessalonians 4 puts it.

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

One of the things, of course, in the church of Jesus Christ that continually is asked is, is Jesus coming again? The answer is, "Yes." And then when he comes again, is this a spiritual return or does it include the physical testimony of his glorified body... Jesus went to the cross and in his body bore our sins, and then that body was put in the grave but did not suffer corruption. On the third day he bodily arose. He was seen. He made clear to everyone this is a *bodily* resurrection — Here, you can touch me; you can feel me. Here, I'll sit down and eat. And he said, "You got anything to eat?" And they gave him some broiled fish... They're able to see him; they realize him... He bodily — basically conducts a forty-day seminar with his disciples to prepare them. He ascends to heaven, and then the angels say, "Why do you stand here gazing? This same Jesus whom you have seen taken up will return in like manner." Well, how is he taken up? A bodily ascension... How will he return? He was taken up in the clouds. He will come back in the clouds. And how will he come back? As you've seen him go up. That is a bodily return of Christ.

Rev. Vernon Pierre

Will Jesus return only physically or spiritually? The very simple answer to that is what we see in Acts 1:11. The disciples are watching Jesus physically leave them, ascend into the sky. And two angels appear, and then the angels tell them, "Why are you standing there looking at heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." And so, that means the same way Jesus left is the same way he'll return. He'll return in physical form in the same way that he left.

Question 5:

How visibly noticeable will the second coming be?

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

You read the texts that describe Christ's second coming, and they are *cosmic* in nature. Everybody realizes, and everybody knows what exactly is happening. So, what we probably have then is not just Jesus coming on a couple clouds... What we have then, is we have, really, his coming being full and cataclysmic, and it really gets back to the nature of what is heaven and what is earth, and how do these two relate, because the New Testament talks in terms of presence — the word there for "coming" is not coming, the word there is "presence" — that when Christ returns, we're really seeing his presence all around us. It's just that this is giving way to that. It's a ripping, it's a... This dimension is giving way to that dimension so that everybody realizes, wow, this is what it's really... This is what reality really is. It's an invasion. It's an

invasion of the heavenly reality into *this* reality, and *this* gives way to *that*. That's what Christ's coming is probably going to be like.

Dr. Sanders L. Willson

The second coming is going to be very loud and very bright... Every eye is going to see. It's going to be our final coming out party where no longer are we incognito; no longer are we under wraps. Our true identity as the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ is going to be revealed. So, just as he's revealed and the lid is taken off and Jesus is revealed, so shall our identity be fully revealed. So, it's going to be some spectacular moment when he returns.

Question 6:

What does Scripture tell us about the timing of Jesus' return?

Rev. Larry Cockrell

The Scripture tells us regarding the timing of Jesus' return that it will be sudden. Scripture teaches that it will be like a thief breaking into a home, what have you. But saying that, we go on to learn that even though it will be like that, we do not know exactly when that time will be. Even Christ would tell his disciples that he did not know it, that the Father alone was the one who knew when that time would be. And obviously that time would be at his appointed time. And so, when that time is, we do not know, but we are charged with being faithful men and women of the Scriptures, living as it becometh the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that when that day does come, then we would be prepared and ready to be received by him.

Dr. Paul Gardner

The timing of Jesus' return has always been a much-debated question. We have had sectarian groups all the way through history where a prophet has got up and said, "I know Christ is coming at this time," or "I know Christ is coming at this time," and lo and behold, given that we're still here, we know he hasn't come yet. The Bible is interesting in what it does tell us and what it doesn't tell us. It certainly tells us Christ will return, and every eye shall see, and at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. The whole world will know clearly when Christ returns in glory. But it doesn't give us a time. It does say that this will be imminent, but what does imminent mean in the purposes of God? We don't know. It's designed to keep us on our toes. Christ may come today. He may come "like a thief in the night" is one of Jesus' own pictures of this. But we don't know. We have to live as people who are always ready of it. One of the interesting things is that the apostle Peter says that that delay before Christ comes is so that more people can come to faith, and I think to see it in that way is one of the great things. Clearly, when there is a persecuted church today all around the world, we long that Christ would come and would put all that to an end, would bring this world of suffering to an end. But on the other hand, when we look at the people out there who don't yet know and love the Lord and who will stand under his judgment when he does return, we long for a delay, because we would like to see more people come to faith. So, Christians live with that tension — I want the Lord to

come, I want the suffering to end, I don't want any more persecution and martyrs for the faith, and yet, I want some more time because we want to proclaim this great gospel of Christ to the world.

Dr. Philip Ryken

The Bible is remarkably consistent in what it tells us about the second coming and specifically the timing of the return of Jesus Christ, his glorious, visible return to make all things new. And the Bible consistently tells us that his return will be very sudden and unexpected; just whatever we're doing, whatever work we're doing, whatever relationships we happen to have, Jesus will return just right in the middle of that, and it'll be very unexpected and very sudden. And, the Bible consistently says — and this is true of the apostles who spoke about the second coming of Jesus Christ, and it's also true about the testimony that Jesus himself gave — that his return is coming very soon. It could be at any moment. And there's a sense of constant expectancy that we're encouraged to have for the coming of Jesus Christ. And I think we can draw a practical lesson from that. One is just to be always busy about the Lord's work. Whatever he's given us to do in the world, he wants us to be focused on that until the very moment when Jesus comes again. And I think the other lesson is that we should live with a sense of expectancy and hopefulness. Even today could be the day when Jesus comes again.

Dr. Robert A. Peterson

What is the timing of Jesus' return? I like to teach this by saying we have to be jugglers; we have to keep three balls in the air at the same time ... because there are *imminence* passages — those that teach we should live in the light of Jesus' coming. There are *interval* passages, interval passages, texts that say certain things have to happen before he can come back; and then most importantly there are *ignorance* passages, passages that say no man knows the day or the hour... So, a good pastor, a good theological juggler will keep in the air at the same time: imminence passages — the Lord wants us to love Jesus' appearing, his second coming, and to live in light of that return. Interval passages — he says certain things have to happen before Jesus returns, so we don't set dates and we do plan, the Lord willing, and live our lives, looking for Jesus to return and yet planning and living for him. But most importantly, we have to keep the ignorance ball in the air... The Lord says certain things have to happen before he comes, but most importantly, we do not know that time, so we leave it to the Lord and we get on with the business of loving him and living for him.

Question 7:

What events must occur prior to Christ's return?

Dr. Gary M. Burge

When Jesus taught about his own personal return, it is tied to his understanding of how history will end, and you can read about this in Mark 13, for example. But his understanding was that history is going to come to a great climax... That's my understanding of it, and some Christians disagree about parts, but nevertheless, it

seems as if Jesus understands that history is going to come into a very desperate time. Christians will be persecuted, there will be many wars, there will be tragedy all around us, and the great end of that, sort of the period of sort of crisis, is going to be Jesus' second coming. Now, one thing that Jesus says very clearly, however, is that we are not to predict exactly when that's going to take place. One clear teaching that I think the church needs to hold onto and repeat *repeatedly* is that we will be surprised at his return. So, he wants us to be aware of history, that God is watching history, that God is willing to intervene in history, and his final and climactic intervention in history will be when he stops history at the second coming of Christ, and then he will inaugurate the judgment.

Dr. Lynn Cohick

There are certain biblical passages that seem to indicate things need to happen before Christ returns, and there's a variety of these. Some of them I would suggest are descriptive and they form a pattern of, sort of, the woes that will happen in this pre-messianic period. That's very typical of first century Judaism. You had a strain that we call "apocalyptic" that was thinking about how the present situation would continue to get worse and bad things would happen, kind of birth pangs, if you will, before the messianic kingdom would begin. So, that's one type of aspect of this whole discussion about what needs to happen before Christ returns. Then there's another type of question, if you will, about what needs to happen before Christ returns, and that is statements like, "All the ends of the earth will hear the gospel, and then Christ will come"... I do think that there is an expectation that the church will, through the power of the Holy Spirit, preach the Word, that that's our job. And even the Son does not know exactly when the time will be when the judgment occurs, when that final judgment comes, and/or when Christ returns. So, there is some mystery to all of this. What we can know is that we're called to preach the gospel, and that even as we preach the gospel, we should not be surprised that things seem to be falling apart. Both of those things should happen: we should preach, and things will continue to look bad. We can rest assured that Jesus is coming again and that the Lord has all things in his hands.

Question 8:

How should we interpret passages that predict events that must occur prior to Christ's return?

Dr. D.A. Carson

What shall we do with passages that talk about apparent predictions of things that must take place before Christ returns? The question is really a very difficult one because there were some of those things that took place even within the first decades of the Christian church. For example, in John 21, Jesus predicts that Peter must die a certain kind of martyr's death, so does not that mean that Christ could not have come back before Peter died? I think it does. It becomes an absolute condition. That still could have meant that Christ could have, in theory, come back any time in that first

generation once Peter had died. It's not an open-ended condition, but nevertheless it is a condition. And so, that already warns us, since Christians even then are being told to live in the light of Christ's imminent return, that you can speak of imminence that may not be an any-second imminence. It may be an any-generation imminence, or it might be, "very soon; get ready," even though dear old Peter's got to go first... Jesus predicts that the gospel's got to go worldwide. Well, in one sense it goes worldwide — Roman-world worldwide — in the first century, but that means that you couldn't have expected Jesus to return in A.D. 35. The gospel just simply hadn't extended far enough. So, there are some of these first-century conditions already that teach us, while we're looking forward to Christ's impending return, the notion of imminence is better bound up, not with any-second, but with any-generation, or "very soon," or "be eager for it"... I would argue that many of the predictions, however — "there will be wars and rumors of wars;" "don't be alarmed; the end is not yet," those sorts of things that people often cite as signs — they're often predictions of things that are part of this entire age. They're signs that must take place before the Lord returns; there will be wars and rumors of wars. On the other hand, what century has not seen them? We've just come through the bloodiest war-torn century in the human race, in human history. And there's no particular reason for thinking that the twenty-first century has to be better. So, many of these things that are signs that point to the end, that must take place before the end — the end is not yet, Jesus says regarding wars and rumors of wars — are things that are pretty perennial, they keep coming back again and again and again.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.

You know, Jesus gave a teaching that we often call the Olivet, or eschatological, Discourse. It's preserved in Mark 13 and has parallels in Matthew and Luke that contains teachings that are very difficult and teachings that have been controverted to this day as to what exactly it means. So, Jesus is sitting with his disciples across the temple. They remark about the beauty of the temple, and Jesus surprises them by saying, "Do you see these stones? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on each other." Then he proceeds to give a scenario as to what the future holds, a scenario, which would seem to entail certain signs preceding the coming of the kingdom, preceding his return, at least as the Olivet Discourse has been traditionally understood. I believe that what's happening in Mark 13 is Jesus is talking about two separate things. In the first place he's talking about the destruction of the temple. That's patently clear because he says, "Listen, not one stone will be left on top of each other"... So, he's much preoccupied with the temple, but then on another level, he's looking forward beyond that mountain ridge to his eventual return. And so, this is very complicated because scholars differ from each other as to when he's talking about the destruction of the temple and when he's talking about the second coming, and I don't need to stipulate which is which right now, but I will say this, that the two events in some ways are very coordinated, because the temple is, in some sense, creation in miniature. The Jews always knew that, that the temple was a picture of creation. Jesus is talking about a two-step process. God is going to judge this temple, which he does in 70 A.D., so Jesus was right on that score. And then Jesus says, well, just wait; a new creation is going to come out of judgment as well.

Now, there's a lot of talk about, you know, what's going to happen and certain signs. Here's what we have to do when we're reading a text like Mark 13. We have to understand what's going on. Jesus is drawing on Old Testament vocabulary, Old Testament images and symbols, very familiar to Jews who were steeped in Old Testament Scriptures... Here's, I think, the point for Jesus. Jesus says this tribulation has already started in my ministry. It started with John the Baptist, it's going to continue under me, and you, my disciples, are going to face this very thing. You will be dragged in front of the synagogues — which we see happening very soon. The disciples will enter into this tribulation. In fact, the way I read it, the whole church age is marked by tribulation. What this means is we, as Christians, should expect to suffer many of the things that Mark 13 is talking about, and this will continue on until he comes. Jesus says it so we're not surprised, so we don't think it's an ongoing party. For Christians who read the Scripture and then read their newspaper and say, "Okay, I think it's happening anytime soon," I don't think that's what Jesus is about. I don't think Scripture ever really invites us to read the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other as if to draw correlations. What the Scripture wants us to do is obey, and once we get squared away as to what these symbols really mean, we'll get the picture: to obey despite the tribulation that's happening.

Dr. Riad Kassis (translation)

There are many passages in the Bible that talk about the end times and how there will be famine, plagues, earthquakes, and natural disasters. People interpret these passages to mean that when these things happen, Jesus is coming back, but the biblical truth tells us that the end times started at Jesus' incarnation. All these events happen in preparation for his second coming, but we are already living in the end times, and we must persevere and serve Jesus and live according to his commandments. So, in the present time, we look forward to his glorious return.

Question 9:

Can demonic and human opposition hinder God's plans for the last days?

Dr. Grant R. Osborne

Satan and the unbelievers are trying with everything they have to hinder God in the last days. Revelation 12:12 says it very clearly. It says, "Woe to you on earth because the Devil has gone down to you filled with wrath because he knows his time is short." Satan knows that he has already lost. He may be insane but he's not stupid, and he knows that it is over, but he is given this short time to cause as much, in a sense, mischief as he can. And so, Satan is spending all of his time trying to hinder God's plan, and Satan is fighting harder and harder as the time grows nearer. And that's one of the reasons why so many of us feel like Christ is going to return soon, because it seems like Satan's opposition is getting worse and worse and worse. But, he can hinder nothing from God's plan. God is absolutely sovereign, and Satan and all the

powers of evil can do nothing to stop God's will. And it's very clear — the Bible says it all the way through the New Testament — God knows the time. The time is unalterable. Every step of it will occur exactly as God has ordained, including — and this is an important aspect from the book of Revelation — namely that Satan is trying his best to oppose all that God can do, but God is in charge, and Satan can only do what God allows. There's one verb all the way through the book of Revelation, called, it is "given." And what it means is everything, even the dragon and the Antichrist do, they do only because God has given them permission to do it. God is in absolute charge.

Dr. Vernon Pierre

Oftentimes, I think we can think of human opposition, and particularly demonic opposition, as almost this equivalent power against God, and this war, this chess match, and we're hoping that God wins. The Bible doesn't describe it that way at all. In fact, the Bible seems to go overboard in describing how easily God wins, that Jesus appears on a white horse and speaks, and armies fall. It's really emphasizing the fact that God's plan will succeed, and in human opposition, demonic opposition is really judgment upon themselves. It's their rejection of the King, of King Jesus, of God reigning in the world. And so we have no need to worry that God will not be able to accomplish the things that he intends to accomplish. God's plan will succeed. His word will not return to him void, and his word is that Jesus will reign, and his people will live with him forever. And we can have great confidence in that.

Question 10:

What is your view on the rapture? Will the church be taken from this world prior to Christ's return?

Dr. Danny Akin

The timing of the rapture is a question that also is much debated among faithful Bible-believing Christians. Personally, I do hold to what is called a pretribulational rapture, which is the view that God will rapture out believers before the beginning of what is known as "the great tribulation," or Daniel's "seventieth week," or "the day of the Lord." People ask me why I believe this, and there are several reasons. And again, I want to be clear. I hold this view, but I hold it tentatively, humbly. I have too many good friends that love the Word of God but take a different view than I do. My primary reason is the doctrine of immanency. The Bible tells us in Titus 2 to look for the blessed hope. We're to be anticipating his coming at any moment at any time... So, immanency is one reason that I believe that a pretribulational rapture is the best view to hold. But also 1 Thessalonians 4, 5. In 4:13-18, he discusses the rapture. In 5:1-11, he follows with a discussion of the day of the Lord. Why does he cover the rapture before the day of the Lord? Well, I think the answer is because the rapture occurs before the day of the Lord. Furthermore, in 5:9 he tells the Thessalonians that they're not destined for wrath and in the context, I think the best understanding is he's talking about the wrath of the day of the Lord. So, you put those things together, and

again, though I hold it humbly and tentatively, I think that the understanding that the believers are raptured out before the tribulation has the best evidence from Scripture.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

In response to the question about, is the church going to be raptured, my response is to say that only in the sense that there is a meeting of the one who returns, but in that meeting of the one who returns, that's the one who is returning. In other words, there is no going away somewhere for seven years, in my view. The language that we see in 1 Thessalonians is language that, if you're in that context, when you hear the idea about a trumpet and someone returning, this was like a general, for example, returning after the end of a great battle, and the citizens come out to greet him, but they greet the victor who's returning to the city, not to take them away from the city. So, they come out, they meet him, and then they all process in like a parade or something. So, similarly, when Christ returns, to meet him is to greet the One that is coming to return, coming to reign, not to take us away. So, my position would be to say the church isn't raptured in the way that a lot of people think, but that we meet Christ in some way, and then the end of history begins.

Question 11:

Why do you believe that Scripture predicts a future revival for Israel prior to Christ's return?

Dr. Danny Akin

The question of Israel's destiny is a much debated question, and I've got good friends that take different positions. But when I look at the Bible, it seems to me that God made an unconditional covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 and to David in 2 Samuel 7 that there will be a Davidic king who has roots in Abraham who will sit upon a throne and reign forever and ever... I think Romans 11 is crucial because there Paul is dealing with the Jewish question, and he tells us that God has not set aside his promises to his people and, in fact, we should look forward to a day when all Israel is going to be saved. Zechariah 12:10, I think, is very crucial here because there we have a promise that God says there's coming also a day at the end when — speaking of the nation of Israel — they will look upon him whom they pierced and they will weep as for an only son. So, when you put all of that together, I think it's clear, number one, God has not set aside his promises to the Hebrew people; number two, we indeed can anticipate and look forward to a great ingathering of Jewish people who will come to recognize that Jesus is indeed their promised Messiah. They will repent and put their faith in him, and indeed they too will be a part of the large family of God that we know as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the church of the Lord Jesus.

Dr. Keith Mathison

Regarding the restoration of Israel, there is some debate on that among Reformed Christians and others. Among the Reformed Christians, the debate largely centers on the interpretation of Romans 11:25-26, the passage where Paul says, "All Israel will

be saved"... Some Reformed theologians have argued that this means, that "all Israel" there means all believers, Gentile and Jews. Others argue that "all Israel" there means all Jews throughout the entire present age. That view is associated with people like O. Palmer Robertson and others. Charles Hodge, John Murray, and so forth, have argued that "all Israel" there refers to the nation of Israel and that, yes, at the end of time, near the second coming, just before, that national Israel as a covenant whole, not every individual, will be restored, in the sense that they will turn to the Messiah, believe in Christ, and national Israel at that point will become true Israel.

Dispensationalists have a slight variation on this view where they argue that the restoration of Israel involves the restoration of the nation of Israel to a position of promise during the earthly millennium following Christ's second coming, with Christ sitting of the Davidic throne... My own view of the interpretation of Romans 11 regarding Israel is that Paul has a two-part answer in chapter 11, and in the first part of chapter 11, he's saying that there is a remnant of Jews being saved throughout this entire present age and, therefore, that alone would indicate that the promises of God have not failed. But I do think he adds something in the second part of Romans 11, from verses 11 forward, and that is that near the second coming of Christ there will be a restoration of the nation of Israel, restoration of Israel to their Messiah and to faith in Christ.

Question 12:

Why do you believe that Scripture does not predict a future revival for Israel prior to Christ's return?

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

Will either the nation or the majority of ethnic Jews come to believe in Christ before he returns? I don't think so. I don't think so. In fact, really, the only text that would allow for that, in my opinion, is Romans 11:25, there, "all Israel will be saved." Outside of that text, I don't see a hint of it anywhere else. In fact, in the Old Testament, you don't have any of the prophets saying that all of Israel will one day be converted. In fact, you have the opposite. They say that the majority of Israel will rebel and then only a remnant will be saved. We have this in Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel; we've got it in Daniel. I can't find one text in the Old Testament that says that the nation of Israel will be *completely* saved. And unless it's a radical mystery, unless it's this massive progressive revelation where the Old Testament is absolutely silent on... I just don't see it in the New Testament. In fact, in Romans 11 there, I think that Romans 11 is very much in keeping with the Old Testament, which is why you have one of the greatest, I should say, one of the largest density of Old Testament quotations and allusions in all the New Testament right in Romans 9–11. Why? Because God's story continues, it continues. It's patterned the same way after the Old Testament. So, will the majority of ethnic Jews, the nations of Israel turn once again and embrace the Messiah? No, I don't think so. I just don't see any texts that claim that.

Dr. Sanders L. Willson

There's debate about whether Israel will experience a revival shortly before the return of Christ. Some Reformed people who look at Romans 11 see strong suggestions in that direction, and I certainly hope they're correct, because nothing would please me more than any ethnic group turning massively to the Lord before his return, or at any other time for that matter. However, just looking at the text exegetically, and then looking at the relationship between Old and New Testament in general, I personally don't see any particular encouragement toward thinking that Israel will have a massive turning to Christ before his return. I see the text saying something else. It seems to me that, for example, in Romans 9–11, that Paul is using the idea of Israel in two different ways, and it seems clear from the ironic nature of the language of those chapters that he's saying that all *ethnic* Israel is not all *spiritual* Israel — he as much as says that — and, therefore, is free to use the term in two different ways in the same context. So, I would say that it's a little bit of wishful thinking that there is a prophetic indication in the Scriptures that Israel's going to have a massive turning. Now, having said that, Paul gives clear warning in chapter 11 of Romans that we should be aggressively evangelizing the Jewish people, because just because they were rejected because they rejected Christ, it doesn't mean they'll forever reject Christ, nor that he will forever reject them. So, even though they've been cut off out of unbelief in Christ, the Messiah, Paul says they can easily be grafted back in. If you wild Gentiles can be grafted in, certainly he can graft in the natural branch of Israel when they turn back to the Lord. So, I pray for their massive turning to the Lord, but I don't see it as a prophetic biblical promise that that will happen before the return of Christ.

Question 13:

What are some of the millennial views that Christians have held throughout history?

Dr. Simon Vibert

There are various millennial views that speak about the thousand-year rule of Christ, and sometimes they're described as: "premillennium," in other words, there will be a millennial reign of Christ *before* he returns; others speak of "postmillennium," that *after* Christ returns there will be a thousand-year reign, often taken pictorially rather than literally. And then there's the "amillennium," which is the belief that the whole time between Christ's ascension into heaven and his return *is* the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

Dr. Keith Mathison

The church, throughout its history, has held a number of millennial views. Today we tend to define them as postmillennialism, amillennialism, historic premillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism. Those are the four common millennial views today. It's actually a little bit anachronistic to try to read those back into early church history and medieval church history. But the church, in the early years of the church

we find variations on premillennialism. We also find, with Augustine, an early form of what might be termed anachronistically “amillennialism.” He held a view of the millennium, based on his view, paralleling human history with the six days of creation, and so for each day there was a thousand years, and he understood that we were in the sixth day, the sixth thousand years. In the Middle Ages, you start to find more historicist views where the book of Revelation describes some part or all of history. One early medieval theologian saw the book of Revelation describing history from the time of creation to the Nicene Creed... Augustinian views prevailed in the Middle Ages. There were millennialist movements among the laity and certain populist views, but Augustine really represents the millennial view of the Middle Ages. At the time of the Reformation ... you start to see more millennial movements. There was one movement that we all have heard of at Münster, where there was a number of men who came and declared that they were bringing in the millennium, and it resulted in mass chaos and death. Throughout the Puritan era, there were a number of millennial views. You had people arguing that the millennium began in the year around 300 with the time of Constantine and ended in the thirteenth century. Some said it ended earlier or later than that. One man, Thomas Brightman, argued that Revelation taught two millenniums, that Revelation 20:1-3 taught a thousand year period that was past, it was a golden age in the early part of the church, and that the Reformation began the second millennium described in verses 4-10. And it’s really... There are a number of variations on these views in the Puritan era that gradually developed into what we see today as amillennialism, postmillennialism and premillennialism.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

What are the major views of the millennium? Well, first we must recognize that all believers who believe in the divine authority of Scripture believe that Christ is coming; they hold that when he comes there will be a resurrection from the dead, there will be a judgment. The details are where they differ. There are three major millennial positions historically... Premillennialism says that Christ will return, the earth will be transformed, he will reign physically from his throne, and there will be a long period of time — some say exactly a thousand years — where he’s reigning on earth but there’s still some sin and death in the world. At the end of that time, there will be a new heaven and a new earth and a final judgment. That’s premillennialism. Postmillennialism puts a different order on the events, so this time of prosperity is at the end of the era we’re now in, because the postmillennialists think that by the preaching of the gospel more and more people will eventually become Christians, and the earth will be blessed by God and achieve a prosperity, but again, still some sin and death left. Then Christ returns and you get the new heaven and the new earth. The third position is the amillennial position and that’s saying — it’s the simplest — Christ comes, then new heaven and new earth. There’s also a more recent variant on premillennialism called “dispensational premillennialism” that has a two-stage second coming, but the details of that are complicated.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

I think sometimes we Christians who come from particular traditions, we tend to assume that everybody has always held our view. And I think it's instructive to see what some of the different views have been of Revelation, for example, with reference to the millennium, the thousand-year period in Revelation 20. You have many of the earliest church fathers — Justin Martyr and Papias seem to have believed in a future thousand-year period after the tribulation. They believed that Christians either were in the tribulation or were about to go through it. Some later church fathers believed that Christians were in the millennium. Especially from the time of Constantine onward, Christians believed they were in the millennium. Eusebius talks about how they found some premillennialists who were in error, but unlike other heretics, they were able to be talked out of their erroneous views. And Augustine was a very strong amillennialist, and that view predominated, usually, through the Middle Ages. Luther, Calvin, and many others, also amillennial. Then you had some other people who were premillennial, again, Isaac Newton for one. But throughout the nineteenth century in the United States, one of the dominant views of popular evangelicalism was postmillennialism. That accompanied the Great Awakenings. Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney and others were postmillennial. They believed that we would advance the kingdom of God on earth, and things would get better, and so we would prepare the throne for Jesus and then he would come back. And then around 1830 something arose called “dispensational premillennialism” which said that there would be a future thousand years. Jesus would come back before that, but he would also come back seven years before that to take the church out, which had never been taught before that period in church history. And today we actually have a variety of views among scholars, probably amillennial and premillennial ... but you have a variety of views today, and I think what that tells us most is we can't just say, well, everybody has always held our view. We need to really... We need to recognize that there are Christians that God has used who hold different views than our view.

Question 14:

Why do you hold to a premillennial view of the millennium?

Dr. Douglas Moo

Christians wonder about what the future's going to hold, and one of the issues that they wonder about is, what we sometimes call “the millennium,” or the thousand years. And again, this is a point where Scripture is perhaps not altogether clear. Revelation 20 is the only text in the Bible that actually uses the language of a thousand years, so clearly that's the text that we have to go to first. My reading of that text is that John is giving us a prediction for the future in which there is a resurrection of believers, then a thousand-year period, and then after that a resurrection of unbelievers. I continue to think that's the most natural reading of the passage. So, at this point I still hold to what's called the “premillennial view,” that Christ will return before a millennium is established because of my understanding of that text in Revelation 20. Christ returns and those who belong to him are raised at that time, then

you have this period of time — the thousand years could be a symbolic number, so I'm not going to fight over the exact number of years — but some period of time that we call “the millennium,” after which the rest of the dead will be raised and the judgment of God will take place.

Dr. David W. Chapman

I hold to what I would call and others call the historic premillennial view, which is a, on other terms, it would be termed a post-tribulational premillennial view, which is to say that there will be a time of tribulation that's described in the book of Revelation, that the church undergoes that, and yet then there is a hope, a time when Christ will come back and bring with him a thousand-year reign. The thousand years is not necessarily exact to the day, it may be more of a metaphor for an extended period of time. And during that reign, Christ will reign physically on this earth before there is a final judgment. And the principal reasons that I believe that, well, one is actually from the book of Revelation itself. If one were to read through the book of Revelation sequentially, it's most natural to see that sequence, that there is a tribulation followed by a time of Christ's return, followed by a thousand years, and then followed by another return of Christ that really brings with it a final judgment. I've looked at competing views. One is that there might be a series of cycles in the book of Revelation, and what I found to be difficult with those is none of them have a marker within the text of Revelation itself that is distinct that tells you when a new cycle would begin. So, it seems to me that the most natural way to read the book is to read it all the way through and that that would have been the original effect on the readers. And I think we get a sense that this is the original effect, in part because many of the earliest church fathers that we know, church fathers such as Polycarp, or Justin Martyr, or Irenaeus, seemed to have held a view that is akin to what I'm talking about, where there was going to be a literal thousand-year period of time when Christ is reigning on this earth in a physical form prior to the final judgment.

Dr. D.A. Carson

The most compelling reason to affirm historic premillennialism is a number of Scriptures that do not easily fit into any other pattern. It's as simple as that. Conceptually, the best of amillennialism is very close to the best of historic premillennialism. But passages, not only Revelation 20, but Isaiah 65, which speaks of a time coming when a young man dies at the age of a hundred, and no one will be dying really young, it sounds like a time of great blessing that is shy of resurrection existence in the new heaven and the new earth. And although some of my amillennial friends say that this is a symbol-laden way of talking about those things, yet elsewhere in the book of Isaiah the prophet is quite able to talk about eternal longevity. This still sounds like a peak that is not final peak, and because of this half-dozen or so of really awkward passages — awkward, that is, for any other system, although historic premillennialism is conceptually messy — it, in my view, best handles some of these passages on an exegetical basis.

Question 15:

Why do you hold to a postmillennial or amillennial view of the millennium?

Dr. Keith Mathison

My own millennial view could possibly be described as a hybrid between amillennialism and postmillennialism. I agree with amillennialists that the millennium described in Revelation 20 is symbolic of the entire present age between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. I agree with some postmillennialists that the progress of the kingdom will have more external manifestations. Now, in disagreement with theonomic postmillennialists, I can't say exactly what that will look like. I'm not as confident about interpreting that as they are. I also would incorporate, as opposed to some amillennialists, a preterist understanding of the book of Revelation and the Olivet Discourse in there, and by that I mean preterism as opposed to futurism or historicism. A futurist interpretation of Revelation sees those prophecies as still awaiting fulfillment for the most part. Historicism understands Revelation as describing the entire history of the church. A preterist approach to Revelation understands the bulk of the prophecies, from chapter 4–19, as primarily relating to first century events and then Revelation 20, 21 and 22 having to do with the millennium and things still in our future. I also understand the Olivet Discourse in a similar way as having to do with events leading up to, and associated with, the destruction of Jerusalem. Both of those are controversial views and I wouldn't live or die on those, but I think there are some strong arguments for that understanding of those passages.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

For me, the most compelling reason to affirm amillennialism stems from the fact that the New Testament authors will either cite or allude to Old Testament texts that talk about the new creation — for example, Isaiah 65, 66 — and what they'll do with that is they will affirm that it is indeed taking place here and now. And those Old Testament texts talk about the new heavens and new earth, and they say it's happening right here and right now, not in the future. I mean, sure, there's going to be a future component to this, but it's happening here and now. In fact, also in the Gospels, you have several passages that talk about Jesus speaking where he says, "in this age and in the age to come." It's not "in this age and then the next age, and then in the age after that." It's not two more ages, it's this age, and in the new heavens and new earth, the physical. So, I think it's fairly clear in my estimation, and I think it boils down to how you understand the Old Testament texts that talk about the new creation, and how they're being fulfilled in the New.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

You know, sincere Christians have different views of the millennium, Revelation 20 and so forth. The label I would put on my views are, the traditional term I think is "amillennial," that is to say that there is no literal millennium yet to begin, but rather the church is now living, the world is now living in that thousand-year period.

Obviously I'd understand that number symbolically. It would take a long time to explain why I hold that view, but the short answer would be that I think that Jesus of Nazareth has already fulfilled the promises to Israel in his own person, in his own ministry, and that Jesus himself *is* Israel. He is the people of God, and so the promises of the Old Testament that are given to God's people apply to Jesus in his own ministry and even — if I could say it this way — in his own body, that raised from the dead and having called *twelve* disciples — the number is not accidental — that his followers, both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, are the new Israel of God, living in the last days, living in the new age that has already begun. So, again, my millennial views, or amillennial views, are linked to the understanding that I have of how Jesus fulfills the promises of the Old Testament and now moves history forward from that point.

Question 16:

What are the major points of agreement between all Christians regarding the return of Christ and the millennium?

Dr. Danny Akin

You know, Christians who believe the Bible are all over the map when it comes to eschatology. You've got people that are premill, postmill, amill. You've got people that are pretrib, midtrib, posttrib, partial rapture, prewrath rapture, so they're looking at things radically differently. And yet, all of those who believe the Bible can agree on these things... We all believe that Jesus Christ is coming again historically, visibly and bodily. He is coming to separate believers from unbelievers. Believers will be in his presence forever with glorified bodies, the ravages of sin completely eradicated and done away with. Unbelievers, tragically, will face a final judgment; the Bible calls it the "great white throne" in Revelation 20:11-15. They will be judged for their rejection of Christ and the evil works that they've done and then confined forever in a place called hell, the lake of fire. So, no matter where you are in terms of your eschatological details, all of us agree he's coming again, he'll separate believers from unbelievers, believers will be with him forever in the new heaven and the new earth, unbelievers, tragically, will be separated from him forever in a place called the lake of fire, a place called hell.

Dr. Lai-Chang Kang (translation)

So long as your beliefs are orthodox, so long as you truly believe in trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, we all hold the belief that, as brothers and sisters, even if you don't understand what a millennium is, or if you have just recently come to faith and you don't understand these ideas, you're still in the kingdom of God, because when a person is reborn they are in the kingdom of God. The "millennium" is the thousand years of a kingdom full of joy spoken of in Revelation 20. As far as when and where this kingdom is to appear in man's history or geography, there are different interpretations... But so long as you trust in the Lord, then you have one thing in common, and because of this point of commonality we can say we are

brothers and sisters; we can love one another. We all believe that God's authority will be made clear on earth among men. The timing and place might be a bit different, but it will happen.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Among evangelicals, in their view of the end times, the return of Christ and the millennium, there are various views: premillennialism, postmillennialism, amillennialism. But among those views, the common theme is that Jesus is coming back, and he's coming back to judge the world and to make all things new, and wipe away every tear. The timing of that, the details of that may vary. And there are implications for those differing views, but this common truth that Jesus will return and there will be a judgment day, and Jesus will make all things new again, is the common theme among all those views.

Dr. Danny Akin is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College.

Dr. Gary M. Burge is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. D. A. Carson is Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Co-founder of The Gospel Coalition.

Dr. Matt Carter is the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, TX.

Dr. David W. Chapman is Associate Professor of New Testament and Archaeology at Covenant Theological Seminary.

Rev. Larry Cockrell is Senior Pastor of Household of Faith Church and faculty member of Birmingham Theological Seminary.

Dr. Lynn Cohick is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Paul Gardner is Senior Pastor of ChristChurch Presbyterian in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs is Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Dr. Lai-Chang Kang is Senior Pastor of Hsin-Yi Friendship Presbyterian Church in Taipei, Taiwan.

Dr. Riad Kassis is Regional Director for Overseas Council, an international training ministry for Christian leaders.

Dr. Craig S. Keener is the F.M. and Ada Thompson Chair of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Dr. Jeff Lowman is Senior Pastor at Evangel Church PCA in Alabaster, Alabama and Professor of Homiletics and Systematic Theology at Birmingham Theological Seminary.

Dr. Keith Mathison is Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College.

Dr. Douglas Moo is the Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Grant R. Osborne is Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D. is the Franklin S. Dyrness Professor of Biblical Studies and Dean of the Graduate School at Wheaton College.

Dr. Robert A. Peterson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis

Rev. Vernon Pierre is Lead Pastor for Preaching and Mission at Roosevelt Community Church in Phoenix, AZ

Dr. Vern Poythress is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary and Editor of the Westminster Theological Journal.

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III is Senior Pastor at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL.

Dr. Stephen C. Roy is Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Dr. Philip Ryken is President of Wheaton College in Wheaton, IL.

Rev. George Shamblin serves at Birmingham Theological Seminary and The Center for Executive Leadership.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes is Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Biola University and is a frequent guest speaker at churches, conferences, and retreats, in addition to co-pastoring a local church.

Dr. Simon Vibert is the former Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Wimbledon Park, UK, and is presently the Vice Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Director of the School of Preaching.

Dr. Sanders L. Willson is Senior Minister at Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis, TN and serves on the boards of The Gospel Coalition, Union University and Reformed Theological Seminary.

Rev. Dr. John W. Yates is Rector of Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
FOUR

THE END OF THE AGE



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Four

The End of the Age

INTRODUCTION

When God created the world, his goal was to turn the entire planet into his earthly kingdom. He began by setting up the Garden of Eden as his sanctuary. And he appointed humanity to increase in number, and to spread the borders of the garden to the ends of the earth. But, of course, humanity sinned, and plunged both the human race and creation itself into corruption and death. As a result, the earth still hasn't been prepared for God, and he still hasn't brought his kingdom to earth in all its fullness. But God hasn't given up on his plan. And at the end of the age, he'll fulfill it — perfectly. He'll restore his faithful people to life, purge his enemies from his world, establish the new heavens and the new earth as his permanent kingdom, and reign forever from his throne in the New Jerusalem.

This is the fourth lesson in our series *Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology*, and we've entitled it "The End of the Age." In this lesson, we'll continue our study of the last events of history that will finally end *this age* and fully consummate *the age to come*.

As we saw in our first lesson in this series, the Old Testament expected God's kingdom to unfold in three phases: the initial creation of the universe and its creatures; a long period of redemption necessitated by humanity's fall into sin; and finally, the everlasting eschaton, also called "the age to come." The eschaton is the ultimate state of the universe after redemption is complete, when God's heavenly kingdom fills the earth.

We also saw that the New Testament changed these expectations by dividing the eschaton into three stages. The age to come began with the *inauguration*, which spanned Jesus' life and earthly ministry, including the foundational work done by his first century apostles and prophets. During the inauguration, this age began to overlap with the age to come. This age is characterized by sin, suffering and death, while the age to come is characterized by God's blessings for his faithful people.

The second stage of the eschaton is the *continuation*, which began immediately after the inauguration and will continue until Jesus returns. During the continuation, we suffer the hardships of this age at the same time that we enjoy the beginning blessings of the age to come.

And the third stage is the *consummation*, which will begin when Jesus returns. In the consummation, God will completely end this age, and permanently replace it with the age to come. So, in this lesson, when we talk about "the end of the age," we have in mind the end of this age, and the full consummation of the age to come. Like our last lesson, this lesson will focus on matters of general eschatology. As you'll recall, general eschatology is:

The study of God's universal acts of judgment and salvation in the last days

And, in contrast with individual eschatology, general eschatology emphasizes the *events* of the eschaton rather than how individuals *experience* those events.

Our treatment of “The End of the Age” will address three sequential events. First, we’ll cover the general resurrection of the dead. Second, we’ll look at the final judgment. And third, we’ll describe life in the new heavens and new earth. Let’s look first at the general resurrection.

GENERAL RESURRECTION

The general resurrection is called “general” because it includes every person *ever*, whether regenerate or unregenerate — all the billions of human beings that have ever lived. And it’s called “resurrection” because the souls of the dead will be reunited with their reconstituted bodies.

All of the bodies of all who have died will be resurrected, not just believers, but everyone will be resurrected for a specific purpose, and that is to stand before God's appointed judgment and God's appointed judge, which is his Son, Jesus Christ. And in the judgment, it will be revealed who is in the Book of Life and who is judged by the books of their life. Those who are judged by the books of their life will hear the verdict, “Depart from me.” Those who are in the Book of Life will hear the glorious truth, “Enter in, Beloved,” not because we were better, but because we had given our lives to Christ, who with his blood wrote us in the Book of Life, having paid for our sins of omission and commission, all of them, all of our sins, all the sins of all of his people.

— Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

We can consider the general resurrection of the dead to be either one of the final events of the intermediate state, or one of the first events of the final state. It’s part of the *intermediate* state in the sense that, in the general resurrection, the unregenerate and the regenerate still haven’t reached their final conditions. But it’s part of the *final* state in the sense that our souls are no longer separated from our bodies. Regardless of how we classify it, though, the general resurrection ends all temporary punishments of unregenerate souls and all temporary blessings of regenerate souls, and prepares them for their final punishments and blessings.

We’ll explore the general resurrection in four parts. First, we’ll address some early controversies surrounding this doctrine. Second, we’ll point out God’s divine authority to implement this eschatological event. Third, we’ll talk about its effect on

creation. And fourth, we'll discuss its effect on human beings. Let's look first at the early controversies over the doctrine of the general resurrection.

EARLY CONTROVERSIES

In Jesus' day, there were at least two schools of thought concerning the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees believed that there would be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. But the Sadducees denied that there would be a physical resurrection of the dead. In fact, when Paul was arrested and taken before the Jewish court, called the Sanhedrin, he appealed to this controversy in order to defend himself. Listen to Luke's report of this event in Acts 23:6-8:

Paul ... called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all) (Acts 23:6-8).

The controversy between the Pharisees and Sadducees is rooted in each group's understanding of Scripture. The Pharisees accepted the entire Old Testament as inspired Scripture. But the Sadducees accepted only the five books written by Moses — Genesis through Deuteronomy, which we often call the Pentateuch. The general resurrection is clearly taught in passages like Isaiah 26:19, and Daniel 12:2. So, the Pharisees affirmed it. But the Sadducees denied it because they didn't see the doctrine taught in the books of Moses.

With regard to this controversy, Jesus, Paul, and the rest of the early church clearly took the side of the Pharisees. And to refute the Sadducees even more strongly, Jesus proved that they had misread Moses himself. In Mark 12:18-27, a group of Sadducees challenged him over the doctrine of the resurrection. In Mark 12:26-27, Jesus responded this way:

Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken! (Mark 12:26-27).

We can summarize Jesus' argument this way: God was still in a covenant relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And for that to be true, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still had to be alive as spirits. And if they were alive as spirits, then they would eventually be resurrected — presumably to inherit their covenant blessings, as Jesus indicated in Matthew 8:11. And if believers like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were to be resurrected, then the general resurrection was true as well.

Sadly, some in the first-century church also denied a universal, bodily resurrection. For instance, in 2 Timothy 2:18, Paul accused Hymenaeus and Philetus of believing that the resurrection had already taken place. Perhaps they thought the resurrection was merely spiritual. Or maybe they thought it was fulfilled in the resurrections that took place when Jesus was crucified, as recorded in Matthew 27:52, 53. But either way, Paul said that they rejected the truth and destroyed faith.

Paul also encountered resistance to physical resurrection in Corinth, as indicated by his defense of the idea in 1 Corinthians 15:12-34. Apparently, his opponents in Corinth found resurrection repulsive. So, Paul pointed out that if they rejected all resurrections, they also had to reject Jesus' resurrection. And if they rejected Jesus' resurrection, then they also had to deny the forgiveness of sins. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15:17:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).

On the other hand, if they accepted Jesus' resurrection, then they had no reason to deny anyone else's resurrection. Paul went on to identify Jesus as the firstfruits of the resurrection of all the regenerate, meaning that because Jesus has been resurrected, *our* future resurrections are absolutely certain. And in defending the resurrection of the regenerate, Paul also removed any objection to the general resurrection.

Christ's resurrection is the basis of the resurrection of all believers. As Berkhof said, Jesus' resurrection proves that he is the Lord of the resurrection, and his resurrection brings the resurrection of all believers. It is of utmost importance that Jesus is the Lord of the living. As Colossians 1:18 says, Jesus Christ was the first to be resurrected, and the firstfruits of the resurrection. Since he is the first to rise again of those who have fallen asleep, that means, in the future, those who follow him will also be raised along with him. The picture of a ripe harvest is used to represent the importance of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Just as when we see the trees begin to bear fruit in the harvest season, and we know that more fruit is to come, Jesus Christ's initial resurrection shows that there will be a group of people rising with him.

— Prof. Hezhuang Tian, translation

Having addressed the early controversies surrounding the general resurrection, let's turn to God's divine authority to raise the dead.

DIVINE AUTHORITY

We can define God's divine authority in a variety of ways. But for our purposes in this lesson, we'll describe it as:

God's legal and moral right to carry out his will.

When we say that God has the authority to do something, we mean that it's perfectly within his rights to do it, and that he commits no wrong if he does it.

Our discussion of God's divine authority in the general resurrection will divide into two parts: his authority over hell, and his authority over heaven. Let's look first at his authority over hell.

Hell

It's important to recognize that God has *complete* authority over hell. When unregenerate souls suffer in hell during the intermediate state, they suffer because God is punishing them. And when they're drawn out of hell in order to face judgment, it's because God has summoned them into his court.

Now, Christians have sometimes imagined that Satan is the ruler of hell. For instance, in John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, the character of Satan claimed it was "better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n." But the reality is that God rules over hell, and that he has complete control over Satan, the demons, and the unregenerate souls he imprisons there. As Peter wrote in 2 Peter 2:4, 9:

If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment ... then the Lord knows how ... to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment (2 Peter 2:4, 9).

There is some sense in which the Evil One has authority over his demons, and he can send them to do things and send them to do evil, but ultimately, the Evil One, all of his demons, all of the unregenerate who are in hell, they *all* are under the authority of Yahweh. They are under the authority of the God, the uncreated God who is the God of the universe. And so, there's a sense in which Satan has some power, but all the power that he has ends at the leash that Yahweh has on him, and at any time Yahweh can jerk that leash and bring him back and put an end to that power and do with him whatever he will.

— Dr. Samuel Lamerson

As the ruler and jailor over hell, God has the authority and power to summon the unregenerate from their prison, and to make them appear before his judgment throne. And in the general resurrection, that's exactly what he'll do.

With this understanding of God's divine authority over hell in mind, let's turn to his authority over heaven.

Heaven

While some Christians have been confused about God's authority over hell, none should be confused about his authority over heaven. Heaven is God's throne room — the place where his authority and glory are manifested more openly than anywhere else. As God put it simply in Isaiah 66:1:

Heaven is my throne (Isaiah 66:1).

Out of all creation, heaven is where God manifests his authority most directly. We find this same point in Matthew 5:34 and 23:22, and in Hebrews 8:1.

Many descriptions of God are figurative representations of spiritual realities. But the description of God ruling from his throne in heaven appears to be more literal. One reason to think God has an actual throne in heaven is that several prophets received visions of God seated there. For instance, the Old Testament prophet Micaiah saw him in 1 Kings 22:19 and 2 Chronicles 18:18. And Stephen, the first Christian martyr, had a similar vision in Acts 7:55, 56. In these cases, their visions don't appear to have been symbolic dreams or metaphoric representations, but rather apocalyptic unveilings of heavenly realities. In other words, they saw the real workings of the heavenly court, where God sits on his throne and reigns without challenge.

As Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer, heaven is the place where God's will is done perfectly. And that's why it's the model for the new heavens and new earth that God will create at the end of the eschaton. In Matthew 6:10, Jesus taught his disciples to pray that:

[God's] will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus was looking forward to the day when our world would be made perfect — the day when all of his enemies would be removed, and all of his people would live in sinlessness and peace. And he described that future world by comparing it to the present state of heaven.

Now that we've explored the general resurrection in terms of the early controversies and God's divine authority to bring it about, let's talk about its effect on creation.

EFFECT ON CREATION

The general resurrection's effect on creation will be felt in at least three different realms. First, it will significantly impact the natural world.

Natural world

As you'll recall, the events of the eschaton, and especially of its consummation, are designed to change the world into God's earthly kingdom. But the existing world is corrupted by sin and decay. So, God uses eschatological events to alter how the natural world works in order to prepare it for his presence. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 5, section 3, speaks of God's ability to alter creation in radical ways when it says:

God, in His ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure.

When the Confession speaks of "means," it has in mind things like cause and effect, human volition, and the physical laws of the universe. But God also works "without, above, and against" means. In other words, he can perform miracles whenever he wants to.

When humanity fell into sin, part of God's curse on us included a curse on the earth itself. It became a place of danger and death, and the ground itself resisted humanity's attempts to cultivate it. As God said to Adam in Genesis 3:17-18:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you (Genesis 3:17-18).

But in Romans 8, Paul looked forward to God's miraculous resurrection of the regenerate as the solution to this problem. He taught that in the resurrection, the earth itself would be rescued through the resurrection of redeemed humanity. Listen to what he wrote in Romans 8:19-23:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed... [T]he creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:19-23).

In this passage, Paul taught that the redemption of our bodies, that is, our resurrection, will complete our adoption as sons. That's when the sons of God will be revealed, and the creation itself will be liberated.

Put simply, just as the creation was corrupted through God's curse on humanity in Genesis 3, the creation will be purged of its corruption through God's powerful redemption of humanity. And this redemption will be completed when the regenerate are raised as part of the general resurrection.

According to the laws and theories of physics, chemistry and biology, the general resurrection would be impossible. But God is able to do *anything* he wants to do, so the physical laws of the natural world will give way to his commands. Billions of people will return to life — even those that have been dead for thousands of years. It will be an astounding display of God's power. And it will irrefutably prove that his authority is more fundamental to the function of the universe than even our most important scientific beliefs are.

The general resurrection's effect on creation will also impact hell, where the unregenerate and the fallen angels had previously been imprisoned.

Hell

When the unregenerate are resurrected, their souls will be removed from hell and returned to their bodies on earth so that they can face God's judgment. But it won't be just the unregenerate that will have been emptied from hell. Satan and the other demons will also have been removed by this point in the eschaton.

Some theologians understand Revelation 20 to teach that Satan, and perhaps the demons, will be released from their imprisonment in hell in order to participate in a final rebellion against God. As John reported in Revelation 20:7-8:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle (Revelation 20:7-8).

Other theologians point to passages like 2 Peter 2:4, which we read earlier, that says the fallen angels are being held in gloomy dungeons until the judgment. But in either case, it seems that hell itself will be empty: the demons will be released before the resurrection to fight in the rebellion; or they'll be summoned to judgment alongside the resurrected unregenerate.

A third impact of the general resurrection's effect on creation is that heaven will no longer be the residence of regenerate souls.

Heaven

Like the resurrected unregenerate, the resurrected regenerate will be returned to earth in order to appear before God's judgment throne. Heaven is a wonderful place, so it's easy to wonder why we would ever want to leave it. But God never intended us to live there forever. For one thing, we don't have bodies in heaven. So, there's an important sense in which we aren't complete human beings there. Besides that, after the resurrection, Jesus' throne will be on earth, not in heaven. And it's much better for us to remain in his presence. And of course, as wonderful as heaven is, God has something even better in mind for us in the new heavens and new earth.

Well, it's true that after death those that belong to God enjoy what some might call a state of bliss in God's presence, what we call the "intermediate state." The fact of the matter is this: God wants his creation to come to fruition. That includes humans coming to fruition, the ones that belong to him, in the end, the ones that are saved... So even though it is a great thing for people to be experiencing God's presence, the fact is, is that the fulfillment, the fruition of creation, is us being in bodies, and these bodies are God's idea. If we think that the best thing is for us to be outside of our body in God's presence, I think we're missing the point about God actually having a salvation that attends to his entire creation, and it does include salvation of our bodies, the transformation of our bodies. And in the end, of course, Christ is raised in a body. If he's raised in a body and that's the firstfruits, then what comes after that? The resurrection of our bodies.

— Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

In addition to being emptied of regenerate souls during the resurrection, heaven will also be emptied of angels. Matthew 25:31 says that when Jesus returns, he'll bring *all* the angels with him. And Matthew 24:31 says that their task will be to collect the resurrected regenerate from the furthest corners of heaven and earth, and to gather them to Christ.

In short, the general resurrection will place every human and every angel on the earth, assembling them for the final judgment. And as a result, both heaven and hell will be left completely empty.

Having described the general resurrection with regard to early controversies, divine authority and the effect on creation, let's take a look at the resurrection's effect on human beings.

EFFECT ON HUMAN BEINGS

The general resurrection will include all human beings that have ever lived, whether regenerate or unregenerate. As Jesus said in John 5:28-29:

A time is coming when all who are in their graves will ... come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).

As we mentioned in an earlier lesson, when the Bible talks about people rising from their graves in the resurrection, it doesn't mean that only people whose bodies have been preserved through burial will be raised. Rather, all who have died will be included. For example, in Revelation 20:13, John said that the sea would give up the dead that had been lost in it, and that all the souls in death and Hades would be raised again. The same idea is reflected in places like Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2, and John 11:24.

Regardless of *where* our bodies are — and even if they no longer exist — we will all be raised in the general resurrection. But what will our resurrected bodies be like? How similar will they be to the bodies we have now?

A lot of people would like to know what our resurrected bodies will look like after the general resurrection. The best way to answer this question is to study Jesus' resurrected body after he rose from the dead. His body had similar elements to his old body — Jesus ate, drank, and talked. Yet in other ways his body was different from the old body — Jesus walked through locked doors and disappeared. And the Bible refers to our resurrected bodies as being “glorious bodies,” just like Jesus' own.

— Dr. Riad Kassis, translation

Our resurrected bodies won't be entirely new. Instead, they'll be reconstituted versions of the bodies we have now. In death, our bodies are eventually completely destroyed by cremation, decomposition or other means. But God is able to do anything. In the case of those whose bodies still exist in some form, Scripture indicates that those bodies will be raised and restored. In the case of bodies that have been completely lost or destroyed, Scripture isn't explicit. But it's reasonable to believe that God can create new bodies that retain the identities of the originals.

And this point about identity is critical. It means that in our resurrected state, we'll still be the same people we are now — body and soul. God will redeem the regenerate as whole persons, and he'll condemn the unregenerate as whole persons. But even though we maintain our own identity with the same physical bodies, there will still be qualitative differences between our current bodies and our resurrected bodies. Concerning the regenerate, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says:

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

The resurrected bodies of the regenerate will be much more glorious, immortal and powerful than our current natural bodies. In fact, Scripture teaches that our

resurrected bodies will be like the body Jesus received when he rose from the dead. As Paul argued in 1 Corinthians 15:49:

Just as we have borne the likeness of [Adam], so shall we bear the likeness of [Jesus] (1 Corinthians 15:49).

And in 1 John 3:2, we read:

What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.

Scripture doesn't describe the resurrected bodies of the unregenerate. Certainly they won't be glorious like the bodies of the regenerate. But they'll have to be different in some way in order to last throughout the final state. Sadly, though, the resurrection will be a source of horror for the unregenerate. They'll be filled with terror and shame. Their new bodies will make them vulnerable to additional torments. And their final prison will be worse than the hell they've already endured.

Our discussion of the glorious resurrection of the regenerate and the terrifying resurrection of the unregenerate raises an obvious question: What happens to people who are still alive when Jesus returns? How can they be resurrected if they haven't even died? With regard to the regenerate, we'll be changed in an instant, so that our bodies become like those of the resurrected regenerate. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Paul gave this explanation:

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Here, Paul used "sleep" as a euphemism for die. So, those that don't die will be just like those that have been resurrected.

Scripture isn't entirely clear about the unregenerate, though. It may be that they will all be slain in the last battle of Satan's rebellion, before the general resurrection. This might be implied by passages like Revelation 20:7-10, where Satan's hordes are as numerous as the sand on the seashore. If that's true, then there won't be any unregenerate left alive when the resurrection happens. But it could also be that some of the unregenerate survive this battle. If so, it would make sense that they, too, would be changed in an instant, just like the regenerate. The difference would be that their resurrected bodies would be like those of the other resurrected unregenerate, prepared to endure everlasting punishment.

In any case, the result of the general resurrection will be the complete reconstitution of the human race — every person will exist as an everlasting soul in an everlasting body. We'll be whole persons, and together we'll constitute the whole human race. And in this way, humanity will be prepared to face our final judgment.

So far in our lesson on "The End of the Age," we've addressed the general resurrection of the dead. Now let's focus on the final judgment.

FINAL JUDGMENT

The final judgment is the eschatological event when God will formally declare the guilt of all his enemies for all their transgressions, and pronounce their everlasting punishment. And he will formally declare the innocence of all those who are in Christ, and pronounce their everlasting gifts and rewards. It will be a highly public event attended by the entire resurrected human race and the whole company of angels, both fallen and elect.

Our discussion of the final judgment will divide into four parts. First, we'll identify the judge of the proceedings. Second, we'll consider the parties that will be judged. Third, we'll mention the evidence the judge will evaluate. And fourth, we'll discuss the decisions he'll render. Let's turn first to the judge himself.

JUDGE

The New Testament teaches in many places that Jesus will be the judge at the final judgment. For example, we see this in Matthew 25:31-46, John 5:26-30, Acts 10:42 and 17:30, 31, and several other places. As just one brief example, 2 Timothy 4:1 says:

Christ Jesus ... will judge the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1).

This same belief has been echoed in Christian creeds since the early centuries of the church. For example, the Apostles' Creed, standardized around A.D. 700, says:

Jesus Christ ... will come to judge the living and the dead.

And the Nicene Creed, first formulated in A.D. 325 and revised in A.D. 381, says:

Jesus Christ ... shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead.

The right to render final judgment on all humanity, and on the angels, innately belongs to God the Father. But the Father has given this right to the Son. Peter talked about Jesus' appointment by the Father in Acts 10:42. Paul mentioned it in Acts 17:31. And Jesus himself claimed that he had received this honor because of his role as Messiah. Listen to Jesus' words in John 5:26-27:

The Father ... has given [the Son] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:26-27).

In this passage, "Son of Man" is a messianic title; it identifies Jesus as the Christ, the heir to the Davidic covenant and throne.

The Father has appointed the Son to be the arbiter of judgment, the one who metes out punishment. One of the reasons — not completely

the dominant — but one of the reasons why God has appointed the Son to do so is because it's in fulfillment of Daniel 7. In Daniel 7, there the Son of Man is the one who "takes care of business" with the four beasts, and he emerges victorious, and he goes into the presence of the Ancient of Days, and there his role, really, the main reason why the Son of Man is mentioned in Daniel 7 is because he is the one that judges these rebellious kingdoms... In other words, the Son of Man executes the will of the Ancient of Days.

— Dr. Benjamin Gladd

The New Testament also teaches that the elect or righteous angels will assist Christ in his role as judge. For instance, in the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13:41, 42, Jesus compared the angels to gardeners during a harvest. In particular, he identified the weeds as those who do evil, or the unregenerate, and said that his angels would gather them and throw them into a fiery furnace. This may mean that the angels will escort the resurrected prisoners from hell to the last judgment, and then will help carry out their final sentences. And in Matthew 24:31, Jesus indicated that the angels have a corresponding role in gathering the elect, or the regenerate, for the day of judgment.

Moreover, 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3 suggests that the regenerate will assist the Lord in judging both the unregenerate and the fallen angels. And Revelation 20:4 indicates that some of Christ's people will play an even more prominent role in that judgment. Beyond this, Psalm 149:5-9 predicts that the regenerate will actually help Jesus carry out the sentences of those he condemns.

Having identified the judge that will govern the final judgment, let's focus on the parties he'll judge.

PARTIES

Scripture mentions three separate parties or groups that will face the final judgment. The first we'll mention is the fallen angels, also known as demons.

Fallen angels

Both 2 Peter 2:4, and Jude 6, report that the demons used to be angels that held authority from God. But they rebelled against him, and abandoned their heavenly homes and their authority. As a result, they're now chained in gloomy dungeons awaiting Christ's judgment.

The elect angels — that is, those who haven't fallen — won't be included in the judgment, because they've never sinned against God. So, there's no reason for them to be accused.

The second of the parties facing judgment will be the unregenerate.

Unregenerate

Several passages of Scripture teach that when the resurrected human race appears before Christ's judgment throne, the Lord will separate the unregenerate from the regenerate. Paul talked about this separation of the wicked from the righteous in Romans 2:5-8. And John received visions of it in Revelation 11:18 and 20:11-15. And Jesus himself talked about it in his Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25. And in each of these passages we are told that, at the final judgment, Christ will condemn the unregenerate. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 25:31-46:

The Son of Man ... will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another ... Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me" ... Then they will go away to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46).

The third of the parties judged by Christ will be the regenerate.

Regenerate

After Jesus separates the unregenerate from the regenerate, he'll also render judgment on the regenerate. We see this in many places, including Romans 2:7, Revelation 11:18, and again in Matthew 25, where Jesus compared the unregenerate to goats and the regenerate to sheep. Listen to what Jesus said about the regenerate in Matthew 25:33-34:

He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:33-34).

Now, we should point out that some Christians mistakenly believe that the regenerate won't be judged at all. This is because John 5:24 can be translated as saying that believers don't come into judgment. But many translations, and most interpreters, rightly take this verse to mean that believers won't be *condemned* in the final judgment. In fact, as we'll see later in this lesson, if the regenerate were to miss the judgment, they wouldn't receive their everlasting rewards.

Now that we've explored the final judgment in terms of its judge and the parties that will stand before him, let's turn to the evidence he'll consider.

EVIDENCE

God will consider every imaginable piece of evidence in order to ensure that perfect justice is upheld. He'll evaluate everything we've done, thought, and said. He'll look into our secret motives. He'll consider the covenants that govern our relationship with him, and the revelation we received in life. He'll listen to witnesses, and weigh extenuating circumstances. Nothing will be left out, and nothing will be inadmissible. And all of this will be done in pursuit of perfect justice, so that every reward and every punishment will perfectly fit everyone who is judged. Ecclesiastes 12:14 summarizes the broad scope of the evidence this way:

God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Matthew 12:36 adds that:

Men will have to give account ... for every careless word they have spoken (Matthew 12:36).

And 1 Corinthians 4:5 says:

He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Similar ideas are found in Psalm 62:12, Proverbs 24:12, Matthew 16:27, and Romans 2:5-11.

As we've mentioned, however, not everyone will be held to the same level of accountability. Rather, we'll each be judged according to our own situations. For instance, those who have sinned more blatantly, and with more knowledge of God's requirements, will be judged more harshly. Listen to how Jesus rebuked those who rejected him in Luke 10:13-14:

Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you (Luke 10:13-14).

Psalm 50:4-6 indicates that Christ will also hold us accountable to our covenant obligations in the judgment. The implication is that those of us who are bound to God in covenant are more greatly obligated to obey him. And James 3:1 says that teachers within the church will be judged even more strictly.

However, we need to be very clear that even those that have never heard the gospel will still be judged and condemned. Their guilt will be less than that of those who

explicitly reject Christ and knowingly rebel against God and his law. But their fates will still be similar.

That's why in Acts 20:26, 27, Paul argued that he was "innocent of the blood of all men" because he had proclaimed "the whole will of God." His point was that if people didn't hear the gospel, they would die in their sins and perish forever. And, if he hadn't done his work as an evangelist, he would bear a measure of guilt for having withheld the words of life from them.

People who have never heard the gospel can, and in many cases will be condemned at the last judgment because they do know something about God and about his righteous requirements of them. Romans 1. The apostle Paul there makes it very explicit that God has revealed things to every human being about himself through creation, so that even those who haven't been blessed with the knowledge of the story of Jesus are without excuse, because they do know things that are true about God and what God expects of them, and as Romans also teaches us, have violated God's law. So, they will be judged based upon the knowledge that they've received, the light of God's character and will that they have received by nature. Some of us have received more through the Scriptures and through the gospel message of Jesus. We're responsible for that. But all men are responsible for the knowledge that they've received about God from creation, and for that they will be held accountable. Jesus makes it very clear in the Gospels that we're going to be responsible for the light that we've received and how we respond to it.

— Rev. Dan Hendley

Having spoken of the final judgment in terms of its judge, parties, and evidence, we're ready to discuss the decisions Jesus will render.

DECISIONS

There are many great injustices in our world. Liars and bullies frequently suffer no consequences for their words and actions. Criminals often remain free. Those that harm or steal from others don't make reparations. People are oppressed. Dedicated Christians are persecuted terribly for their faith. Laws are exploited to harm the very sorts of people they were intended to help. The list could go on and on. But Scripture teaches us to look to the final judgment to right all these wrongs — to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous. The final judgment is the event where God balances the equations, where good really does produce blessing, and where evil results, not in profit, but in curse.

In general, we can say that there are two types of decisions Christ will render: curses for those that have done evil, and blessings for those that have done good. We'll briefly describe each of these decisions, beginning with his curses on the wicked.

Curses

Scripture usually describes the punishment of fallen angels and the punishment of the unregenerate in different places. But their fate is ultimately the same. Put simply, all God's enemies, whether angelic or human, will receive just punishment for their opposition to Christ, for their mistreatment of his people, and for all the sins they've committed in rebellion against God's character and law. As Paul told his readers in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ... He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

When Paul said that the wicked would be punished with everlasting destruction, he didn't mean that they would be annihilated or cease to exist. Rather, he had in mind a crushing punishment that would destroy the lives of the wicked, and that would leave them in a state of devastation forever. We see this same idea in Daniel 12:2, Matthew 25:46, John 5:29, Romans 2:7-12, and Jude 7.

The punishment of the wicked is briefly described in Revelation 20:10-15. There, we're told that Satan will suffer forever in a lake of burning sulfur, also known as the lake of fire. And his followers — including the beast and the false prophet mentioned in Revelation 13–20 — will receive the same punishment. And so will all the unregenerate. Jesus will condemn his enemies to this same everlasting, conscious punishment. In addition, passages like Matthew 11:23, 24, and Hebrews 10:29, teach that the greater their sins, the greater their suffering will be.

Having seen that Christ's decisions will include curses for the wicked, let's look at his blessings on the righteous.

Blessings

Because of God's mercy in Christ, the regenerate will share in the eternal covenant blessings that Jesus earned. By his perfect life, obedient death, and powerful resurrection, those who are *in Christ* will receive things like forgiveness of sins, and eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. And these gracious gifts will be accompanied by rewards for the good works that God foreordained and that the Holy Spirit has accomplished in the lives of the regenerate. This is why, in passages like Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21, and Luke 12:33, 34, Jesus placed so much emphasis on laying up treasures in heaven.

These two types of blessings — gifts and rewards — are illustrated in John's vision of the final judgment in Revelation 20. This is the same vision in which the demons and the unregenerate are cast into the lake of fire. In Revelation 20:12, 15, John provided this report:

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books... If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:12, 15).

In John's vision, many books contained the deeds committed by humanity — both good and bad. Sadly, everyone who was judged solely on the basis of those books was condemned, because no one is righteous enough to earn his way into God's blessings. But there was also a special book called "the book of life." It contained the names of all the regenerate. That book was a legal record stating that Jesus had paid the price of death for their sins. So, everyone listed in the book of life received God's gracious gifts like forgiveness and eternal life, along with eternal rewards for the good works that God's Spirit had produced in their lives.

In the last judgment, anyone who is judged solely on the basis of his or her works will be condemned to the lake of fire. But if we believe in Jesus' gospel, and repent of our sins, we'll be completely forgiven. In fact, if that's true of us, our names are *already* written in the book of life. There's no way we can be condemned — because we belong to Jesus, and he died to purchase us as his personal covenant inheritance. So, instead of being condemned, we'll enjoy his blessings forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

Now that we've examined the Bible's teaching on the general resurrection and the final judgment, let's turn our attention to our last major topic: the new heavens and new earth.

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

The new heavens and new earth will be the last stage of redemptive history — the final event of the consummation of the eschaton. The effects of humanity's fall into sin will be completely removed. Creation will be completed and perfected as God's heavenly kingdom expands to encompass the earth. And God's people will dwell with him and enjoy him forever in its beauty, peace, health and prosperity.

We'll describe the new heavens and new earth in three steps, focusing first on their purity, second on their newness, and third on their geography. Let's begin with their purity.

PURITY

In an earlier lesson, we saw that God's plan has always been to fill the earth with his images, and for his images to serve and honor him by ruling over creation on his behalf. We also saw that our rule is governed, in part, by the cultural mandate, which requires us to cultivate the whole planet until everything resembles the Garden of Eden. So far, though, our sin and its consequences have kept us from reaching that goal. But after the final judgment, God will purify creation so that his plans can be fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth.

As we've seen, at the last judgment all the demons and unregenerate will be cast into the lake of fire. Their condemnation will ensure that they don't inhabit or corrupt the new heavens and new earth. But this will only be the first part of creation's purification, because the heavens and earth need to be cleansed, too. The effects of sin permeate creation itself, preventing it from becoming the world God plans for it to be. And the reason lies in God's curse on Adam. In Genesis 3:17-19, God issues this curse:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you ... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food (Genesis 3:17-19).

Moreover, God's curse didn't just impact agriculture. It certainly resulted in problems such as natural disasters and attacks by wild animals. But Paul suggested that the problems went even further. In other words, *all* of creation fell short of the glorious final state God had planned for it — at least until God brings about the final consummation of history. Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 8:20-21:

The creation was subjected to frustration ... by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:20-21).

Peter compared the future purification of the world to the flood that happened in Noah's day. At that time, God removed most of sinful humanity from the planet. But he left his curse on the earth itself, and the demons were still free to cause trouble. But according to Peter, the final judgment will be followed by a fiery cleansing that will remove all the remaining influences and effects of sin. As Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:7-12:

The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men... The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat (2 Peter 3:7-12).

According to Peter's description, God will send fire to destroy the "elements." Many modern readers associate this term with the physical components of the world, like earth, water, and air. But the Greek word translated "elements" — *stoicheia* — might actually refer to basic principles, or even demonic powers that will be punished forever in the lake of fire. This is how the word is used everywhere else in the New Testament, including in Galatians 4:3, 9, Colossians 2:8, and Hebrews 5:12.

In essence, Peter described a process of purification by fire that would leave the earth uninhabitable, or in his words "laid bare," but free from sin. We might even say that it will look much like it did in the beginning of Genesis 1, before God formed the universe during the creation week.

Peter talks about the Noahic deluge. What we really have here is, this world will be destroyed as Noah's world was destroyed. So, we really have the picture of three worlds here: Noah's world before the flood, the world that came after the flood, and the world that will come after the return of the Lord. And these three worlds are distinguished by two catastrophic events: the flood and the destruction by fire. But God's only created his world once, and it's still here, so the Noahic flood did not destroy the world, it purged it; it cleansed it. And the language of purgation is actually fairly common in Scripture. It's there in Malachi to speak about the world to come. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians to speak in this way. And I think, on balance then, just within the text itself, on the analogy of the Noahic flood, God is not going to destroy his world and replace it with some other world, he is going to cleanse it. Now, a radical cleansing that will be. He's not simply going to come and pick up the trash, but it will not be a complete destruction.

— Dr. Michael D. Williams

Now that we've described the purity of the new heavens and new earth, let's address their newness.

NEWNESS

The phrase "new heavens and new earth" first appears in Isaiah 65:17. And the phrase "the new heavens and the new earth" occurs in Isaiah 66:22. In both these verses, the Hebrew word for "new" is *chadash*, which can mean either "brand new" or simply "renewed." In its context in Isaiah, though, it means, "renewed." Listen to Isaiah 65:17-19:

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind... I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over

Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more (Isaiah 65:17-19).

Notice that the new heavens and new earth would include a newly created Jerusalem. But that Jerusalem would be the same one that already existed, in which people were weeping and crying at the time of Isaiah's ministry. Moreover, God was also going to create his people to make them a joy, meaning that he would radically change their lives, not that he would create a brand new people.

And just as the Hebrew word *chadash* can mean either "brand new" or "renewed," the same thing is true of the Greek word *kainos*. Both 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 use *kainos* when describing the new heaven and new earth. Moreover, the description of the new creation in Revelation 22 also points to the fact that the earth has been renewed rather than replaced. In Revelation 22:3, John said,

No longer will there be any curse (Revelation 22:3).

The phrase "no longer" implies that there once was a curse, but that it will have been removed. In other words, our cursed world will be repaired, not replaced by one that has never been cursed.

A helpful way to think about the newness of the new heavens and new earth is to compare it to the resurrection of the regenerate. Our new bodies will be qualitatively different from our old ones. But they'll also have a great continuity with them. The same bodies that lie in the grave will be raised. And in a similar way, the same heavens and earth that are now corrupted by sin will be remade in the future. But they'll be qualitatively different. Wild animals won't be hostile to each other or to human beings. Disease will be unknown. There will never be another natural disaster. And as Revelation 21:1 indicates, even the saltwater oceans will be replaced by life-giving fresh water.

Another way to think about the newness of the heavens and the earth is to remember God's plan for creation. In Genesis 1:27, 28, which we earlier identified as the cultural mandate, God tasked humanity with cultivating the entire earth. The goal was to expand the borders of the Garden of Eden until it filled the whole world. Since then, humanity has largely succeeded in spreading human culture throughout the earth. But because of our sinfulness, the culture we've built doesn't resemble the paradise of Eden. So, when God renews the earth, he'll first sweep away the sinful work of humanity. And in its place, he'll establish the worldwide garden he's always intended.

When Christians think about creation they have often made some really tragic mistakes. We think about our life here in this world in creation and we think that our salvation is really about us leaving this world. When we think of this world and we think of all of its problems, we think that at the end of time what God really is going to do is dispose of this creation and give us another life in heaven. And so, Christians historically have detached themselves from creation... We need to think more biblically about this. God *loves* his creation, he's devoted to his creation; this creation is something he imagined at the very beginning of time and, therefore, his project in the world is

the reconstitution of creation; it's the restoration of creation. So, when the promise at the end of time is that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, it isn't as if this earth will be thrown away. This earth will be *renewed*. So, as a person who is a Christ follower, I want to be participating in God's devotion to his creation, and I want to anticipate that time when this world is going to be filled with the beauty and glory and wonder that God had intended for it at the very beginning of time.

— Dr. Gary M. Burge

Having looked at the new heavens and new earth from the perspective of their purity and newness, let's briefly survey their geography.

GEOGRAPHY

At least two aspects of the geography of the new heavens and new earth are worth noting. First, they will be a single unified kingdom.

Unified kingdom

Before God created the material universe, which theologians often call the “natural realm,” he created and ruled over the *preternatural* realm of heaven. The preternatural realm is the spiritual world of angels and demons. It exists alongside the natural world, and creatures can pass between both realms as God permits them. For example, our souls enter the preternatural realm when we die, and angels and demons influence the natural world in various ways. But as we've mentioned throughout these lessons, God's goal for the natural world has always been for it to become an extension of his preternatural, heavenly kingdom. Listen to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-10:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God to bring his heavenly kingdom to earth, and make the earth as fully obedient to him as heaven already is. Simply put, we're to ask God to extend his preternatural kingdom of heaven to encompass the natural kingdom of earth. In the past, God allowed heaven to intersect with earth only in special places, such as the Most Holy Place in Moses' tabernacle, and later in the temple. As we read in Hebrews 8:5:

[The high priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about

to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:5).

The Most Holy Places in the tabernacle and temple were replicas of God’s heavenly throne room because that’s where heaven and earth intersected. The Most Holy Places existed simultaneously in heaven and on earth. And according to Leviticus 16:2, they offered access to God’s immediate presence. This is why it was only safe to enter them as God commanded. It also explains Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6:1, where he saw the Lord seated on his heavenly throne, while the train of the Lord’s robe flowed down and filled the earthly temple.

But in the new heavens and new earth, God will establish his heavenly throne on earth. This is clear from Revelation 21:1-5 and 22:1-3. And significantly, Revelation 21:22 says that there won’t be a temple, or a Most Holy Place, because God will manifest his presence with his people everywhere. We won’t need to find a special place where heaven and earth intersect. And access won’t be limited only to the high priest once a year. Instead, all God’s people will have access to his presence all the time.

What benefits will we receive from being in God’s immediate presence in the new heavens and the new earth? We’re told in Revelation 22, we shall see God. That is an amazing statement since we’re told elsewhere — the Old Testament — that no man shall see God at any time. And then we’re told that Jesus made God visible. John 1, he became the incarnate God, he tabernacled among us. To be in the presence of God is what the ancients called the “beatific vision,” which means “the happy-making sight.” To see God is to be joyful — they’re synonymous — to see God as redeemed people covered with the righteousness of Christ. To see God *not* covered with the righteousness of Christ is dreadful because of being overwhelmed with his holiness. But we will have such a relationship with him, a oneness with him. He is Abba, Father, Papa. We will be able to be in his presence, to see his face, and to enjoy his presence. It will be the happy-making sight. We will be happier than we’ve ever been, happier than we’ve ever dreamed of being, to be directly in the presence of God.

— Dr. Randy Alcorn

The second aspect of the geography of the new heavens and new earth that we’ll mention is the New Jerusalem.

New Jerusalem

Revelation 21, 22 describes the New Jerusalem as the capital city and centerpiece of the new creation. It will shine with God’s glory, and be adorned with every precious

jewel. And the fact that it will descend from heaven confirms what we've said about the new heavens and new earth being a unified kingdom where God dwells with his people.

God did this in the past in the Garden of Eden. He did it in the days of Moses when he led his people through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. He did it in the days of Solomon when his temple was built. And he has always indwelt his faithful people through his Holy Spirit. But the new heavens and new earth will eclipse all of these, because God will manifest his glory among all of us, and we'll live in his glorious presence forever.

Interestingly, the New Jerusalem will be a perfect cube: 12,000 stadia wide, long, and tall. This is roughly equivalent to 1,400 miles wide, long and tall! Now, John's visions in Revelation are highly symbolic, so we can't be confident that his descriptions will be fulfilled strictly literally. Even so, these symbols indicate that the New Jerusalem will be overwhelmingly large, and sufficient to receive all redeemed humanity into God's presence.

Moreover, the cubic shape of the New Jerusalem also confirms God's abiding presence. In the Old Testament, the Most Holy Places in the tabernacle and the temple were also cubes. So, just as God manifested his glorious holy presence in the Most Holy Places, he'll also manifest his glory to his people in the New Jerusalem. In fact, Revelation 21:23 says that God's glory will be so bright that the New Jerusalem won't even need the sun to shine on it.

We should also point out that the dimensions and descriptions of the New Jerusalem frequently mention the number twelve. In the Old Testament, this number is associated with the twelve tribes of Israel, representing God's people in that age. And in the New Testament, the number twelve is associated with the twelve apostles, representing God's people in the current age. This suggests that in the New Jerusalem, God's people will be present in all their diversity, and perhaps even in all their distinctive cultures. As we read in Revelation 21:24-27:

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it... The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:24-27).

In the new heavens and new earth, God's creation will be fully renovated and renewed. He'll eradicate sin and all its effects from the world. And he'll extend his heavenly kingdom so that it fills the entire world. As a result, we'll never again face the threat of death, or sickness, or mourning, or crying or pain. But the glory of the new heavens and the new earth won't simply be one of a perfect world. Its *greatest* blessing will be that we'll live in God's presence forever, in perfect peace and fellowship.

The scriptural teaching on the new heavens and the new earth sometimes are a shock to Christians today because often it's thought that we die and go to heaven, which is thought to be some sort of disembodied existence floating on a cloud; whereas actually, the Bible is quite clear that there will be a creation of a new earth as well as a

new heaven, and that we will know a human bodily existence in a new creation. There will be no more sin; there will be no more crying; there will be no more death in this new creation. But when Jesus taught us to pray “Your kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven,” it’s an expectation that we should be working towards the new heaven and the new earth now, but we can, when Jesus comes back, be guaranteed that that work will be complete.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on “The End of the Age,” we’ve examined three major topics of eschatology. We’ve looked at the resurrection of the dead with respect to early doctrinal controversies, God’s authority, and the resurrection’s impact on creation and human beings. We’ve studied the final judgment by looking at Jesus as the judge, the parties he’ll judge, the evidence he’ll review, and the decisions he’ll make. And we’ve considered the new heavens and new earth in terms of their purity, newness and geography.

In this series, we’ve explored several aspects of the doctrine of eschatology. We’ve seen that God is King and Lord over all creation. We’ve looked at the implications of that fact for our lives as regenerate and unregenerate human beings. And we’ve learned that he’s unswervingly guiding history toward its ultimate goal: the consummation of Christ’s messianic kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. There will, of course, be casualties, since Christ will preserve perfect justice in the final judgment. But the outcome will bring glory to God, and immeasurable blessings to us, as we live in his presence forever.

Dr. Matt Friedeman (Host) is Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship at Wesley Biblical Seminary and founding pastor of DaySpring Community Church in Clinton, Mississippi. Dr. Friedeman earned his M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. He is a contributing columnist for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, a political analyst for WAPT-TV, chaplain for the Hinds County Penal Farm, and is very active in prison and pro-life ministries. He is also the author of several books including, *The Master Plan of Teaching*, *LifeChanging Bible Study*, and *Discipleship In The Home*.

Dr. Randy Alcorn is Founder and Director of Eternal Perspective Ministries.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College & Graduate School.

Dr. Gary M. Burge is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College & Graduate School.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Rev. Dan Hendley is Senior Pastor of North Park Church in Wexford, PA.

Dr. Riad Kassis is International Director of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education.

Dr. Samuel Lamerson is President of Knox Theological Seminary and Professor of New Testament.

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III is Senior Pastor at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL.

Prof. Hezhuang Tian is Dean of China Logos Theological Seminary.

Dr. Simon Vibert is the former Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Wimbledon Park, UK, and is presently the Vice Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Director of the School of Preaching.

Dr. Michael D. Williams is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary.

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
FOUR

The End of the Age Faculty Forum



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Four: The End of the Age

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Jimmy Agan
Dr. Danny Akin
Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.
Dr. Gary M. Burge
Dr. Constantine Campbell
Rev. William W. Carr, Jr.
Dr. Matt Carter
Dr. Lynn Cohick
Dr. Paul Gardner

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs
Dr. Mark Gignilliat
Dr. Benjamin Gladd
Dr. Riad Kassis
Dr. Scott Manor
Dr. Grant R. Osborne
Dr. Amy L. Peeler
Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.
Dr. Greg Perry

Dr. Richard Phillips
Rev. Vernon Pierre
Dr. Vern S. Poythress
Rev. Rico Tice
Dr. Daniel Treier
Dr. Guy Waters
Dr. Michael D. Williams

Question 1:

What is the general resurrection of the dead?

Dr. Constantine Campbell

The general resurrection from the dead is the Jewish belief that begins to develop in the Old Testament, that at the end of time, on judgment day, *all* people will be raised physically from the dead for judgment. And so, we see that in Daniel 12:1-2, and the expectation includes that, at that judgment point, some will go on to everlasting life, a kind of good destination, and others will come under eternal judgment. We see that idea picked up in the New Testament as well by Jesus. In John 5, he says the exact same thing: all will be raised from the dead, some to everlasting life and some to eternal condemnation. And that means that the general resurrection from the dead is tied to judgment and vindication/righteousness kind of ideas.

Dr. Guy Waters

The general resurrection of the dead refers to the fact that when Jesus comes back at the end of the age, then all people are going to be raised bodily. Jesus' people will be raised in glory, their bodies conformable to his. The Scripture does not say much about the character of the resurrection body of the wicked, but that they will be raised in their bodies is taught in the Scripture. And that is important, not only as a matter of fidelity to biblical teaching, but that we're going to appear before God and to experience eternity in soul and body as the human beings that God made us to be. And it tells us now that our bodies matter to God, and what we do without bodies matters to God. And the body is not a shell that we're going to cast off forever at death, but that we're going to live eternally, soul and body, and if in the presence of Jesus Christ, that's a great hope that our soul and body will be joined together, conformable to his glorious humanity.

Dr. Riad Kassis (translation)

The general resurrection of the dead is an important belief in our Christian faith. We call it the general resurrection because *every* person will be resurrected from the dead and their souls will reunite with their bodies, regardless of whether they are believers or sinners. This resurrection of the bodies of the dead is a general resurrection because *everyone* will be resurrected one day, and they will give account and be judged in front of God for what they did in this life. According to Matthew 25, the ones that believe in Jesus and lived a true Christian life will be resurrected and live in the new heavens and the new earth, and whoever refused Jesus' love and lived far from him will face eternal torment.

Question 2:

Why is it important that our future resurrection will be a physical resurrection?

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

It's important for our physical bodies to be resurrected, not just as spirits, but as a physical entity, for two reasons. I mean, there are plenty, but here are two. The first is because we're made in the image of Christ. Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 15, that he fashions us after his own image. What's his image? It's a completely new... It is a body that is fit for the new heavens and new earth. And if Christ's body is like that, then our body, too, must be like that. Must be. And secondly, in order for us to be in the new heavens and new earth, we have to have a new body. We can't be in the new heavens and new earth with our old body or with just our soul. It's not designed, the new heavens and new earth are not designed to just house souls. They are designed to house people, and God dwelling with physical people.

Dr. Guy Waters

It is important that the future resurrection be a physical resurrection of our bodies. One reason, of course, is that our Lord Jesus Christ himself was raised in his humanity and did that for us, so that, were our bodies not to be raised, then we would not experience all that he has won for us as our Savior. And the Bible teaches that Jesus came to save us, and not *part* of us, not to extract our souls from our bodies, but to save us as whole persons, soul and body. And one of the great things about the work that Jesus has done for us is that we are freed from death. Death is conquered, and we have the hope in Christ that death will not have the final say on any part of us because Jesus has conquered death in his resurrection.

Dr. Richard Phillips

The human being is a physical body with a soul. And we will not be complete without that... One thing I like to say as a pastor — in fact, I said this just the other day with a dear friend of mine who died and his family — “You will see this body again.” Satan will not win one inch of this person. Christ has redeemed the whole. And the soul will go to heaven, the body will go into the grave, but when the final trumpet sounds, the

Lord will return, and the body will be raised in glory. What was sown in weakness will be raised in power. And my father, who I cannot see anymore, I cannot hear his voice, but he died in Christ, and I will look into those eyes again, I will hear that voice, that manner of speech in a glorified way that will bless me... We are bodily creatures. I would not be saved if my body was lost or if my body was ravaged by disease eternally or corrupted by sin. No, no, no. We will be glorified in body and in soul.

Question 3:

How did the Christian doctrine of the resurrection confront the Greek and pagan beliefs of the first century?

Dr. Constantine Campbell

It's a Greek and pagan idea to assume that the flesh is somehow evil and that at death we escape the flesh and just our spirit lives on. But that is not the biblical idea. The biblical understanding of humanity, the Bible's anthropology is fully orb'd so that the body actually matters and is inherently good, though corrupted through sin and the Fall. So, the body will be resurrected to an immortal body, a perfect body and not capable of sin, but it's very important that it is a real physical body in line with Jesus' own physical resurrection from the dead.

Dr. Daniel Treier

As N. T. Wright has shown, the ancient world was fully aware that people don't normally rise from the dead, and yet the early Christians claimed this for Jesus, and eventually for us, anyway. Caroline Walker Bynum and other historians have shown that the early Christians were profoundly committed to the resurrection of the *body* and that this was very counter-cultural in contrast to almost every reigning philosophical alternative. It was scandalous for Christians to be saying that our bodies were going to be raised from the dead and that there was going to be some kind of continuity of bodily identity between our earthly bodies lying dead and the bodies that God will give us in the resurrection. There were all sorts of explorations about how God would do this, depending on what had happened to our earthly bodies, and what age we would be, or what condition our bodies would be in when they would be raised. Christians didn't agree on all these questions, but they agreed that exploring them was important because they were so committed to the resurrection of the body and not to any of the reigning alternatives, such as, for instance, reincarnation or other substitutes that might look like resurrection but really aren't resurrection. But what difference does it all make? Well, as Oliver O'Donovan and others have shown, the resurrection is a profound point of focus for Christian ethics and gospel witness. God doesn't simply redeem us out of this created order, but God reaffirms in the resurrection of Christ his commitment to the world he has made, including its material aspects, including its embodied and social character. Our bodies might be, in the ancient world, one of the most scandalous components of ourselves, but God commits, in the resurrection of Christ, to redeeming all that he has made including

our bodies. And that has profound implications for what we imagine our future to be; we're going to live on a new heavens and a new earth in which people and place come together, in which righteousness dwells. And Paul seems to envision that until then, when we die, we feel naked without our bodies. Yes, we're present with the Lord, but 2 Corinthians 5 seems to suggest there's a longing for the fullness of how God made us to be, and that fullness lies in our embodiment. So when, by the Spirit, God raised Jesus from the dead, God was making a promise that he would make all things new including the bodies that he gave us.

Question 4:

How did Paul view the future resurrection of the dead?

Dr. Gary M. Burge

When Paul thinks about the resurrection of the dead, he's got two ideas in mind. First, there is no doubt that in Paul's mind he believes that when we die we will be in the presence of Christ. In fact, in 2 Timothy, when he contemplates his own martyrdom, he thinks about that very thing. He will be in Christ's presence immediately. On the other hand, he understands that at the consummation of history, at the end of time, there is going to be a physical sort of corporeal resurrection of our bodies. And so, as we try to put together this end-time sort of resurrection of the body and this present sort of death bringing us directly to Christ, theologians have had to understand how these two work together. And so, what many of us think is that what will happen is that we will have a kind intermediate state in which we go to be with Christ and we await the, sort of, the completion of our resurrection at the end of time. But in everything that Paul teaches about the resurrection, one thing has to be true: when we imagine the resurrection, we have to imagine Christ's resurrection. That is clear in Romans 6. If we are going to be identified with him in a death like his, we will also be connected to him in a resurrection like his. So, as Christ was raised from the dead to eternal glory, so likewise we are going to be raised from the dead, and we will enjoy the kind of life that Jesus enjoys today.

Dr. Jimmy Agan

Paul had a view of the future resurrection of the dead that was completely consistent with his Jewish upbringing, but radically out of step with the secular world around him. You see, Paul believed in a resurrection of the dead that really was physical, that actual bodies would be raised from the dead and that our bodies, as physical as they are now, will be raised again and renewed. Paul didn't think of resurrection as a merely spiritual idea, that somehow our spirits would live on. For Paul, resurrection meant, no, our spirit rejoined to a body as God intended from the very beginning in Genesis 1. So, Paul's view of the resurrection was physical. It's also historical. Paul expects this resurrection from the dead to be a time and space event, really because he believes that about the resurrection of Jesus: if Jesus was raised in our time and space, then we will be raised in time and space... Paul believed that the resurrection, the future resurrection of believers, was also a source of great strength for the present,

and so Paul could look forward to our future resurrection as a way of comforting people who are grieving the loss of loved ones. First Thessalonians 4 is a great example of this, where Paul says those who are sorrowing because their loved ones have passed away, they need to understand that Jesus is going to come and raise us from the dead. That's not just future blessing, but it gives us strength to face grief and sorrow in the present.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

For Paul, the promise that believers in Christ will be raised to everlasting life is absolutely central to the Christian message, and not least because it's connected to the resurrection of Jesus himself. In Corinth, as you know, 1 Corinthians 15 — that's the great resurrection chapter — the problem presented by the Corinthians there is not that they seem to be denying that Jesus was raised from the dead, nobody's denying that, but they're denying in some sense that they would be raised from the dead. But for Paul, that's the same thing. It's just a question of timing... So, the fact that they were denying, in some sense, that they would be raised from the dead, Paul says this means that you're denying that Jesus was raised too, because he is the firstfruits of the one harvest, and if you deny there is going to be a harvest, you're denying that there are firstfruits... All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. On the day of resurrection, the glory will be restored; we will fully be what God has intended us to be all along. It's an exciting day. I'm looking forward to it.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

Well, the apostle Paul talks about the future resurrection from the dead in 1 Corinthians 15, and he uses as his starting point the resurrection of Christ. It's Christ's resurrection which is the model for understanding the resurrection of each Christian believer. So, Christ is raised from the dead never to die again. He is filled with the Spirit, he has a resurrection life, and he is also our representative, so that when the time comes for the resurrection of our bodies, they will be like his. They will be heavenly bodies as opposed to the earthly body of Adam.

Question 5:

What is the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of believers?

Dr. Lynn Cohick

Paul connects the resurrection of the body — Jesus' resurrection — with the defeat of sin. So, first and foremost, Jesus' resurrection, not simply his death on the cross, but his *resurrection* from the grave, shows us that death is defeated. And because death is defeated, thus sin is defeated. Now, Paul will talk about how Jesus' death and resurrection, in that he'll use this term called "firstfruits," which is an unfamiliar term to most of us today, but back in Paul's day it was related to the sacrifices and the tithes that the Jews would bring to the temple. You gave the firstfruits of the land to thank God, and those firstfruits were symbolic of your whole harvest. So, when Paul

is saying that Jesus is the firstfruits, what he's saying is, God is promising that our bodies, believers' bodies, will also be raised. And so, that "firstfruits" language is a wonderful promise to us. The believer's raised body, Paul says, will be a glorified body. It will be imperishable and immortal. It's important for us to remember that Jesus lives now eternally in a raised body, so that when believers die and we enter into our final home, we will have a glorified body. We don't know what exactly it will look like, but we won't be spirits floating around in the air. We'll live in the new heavens and the new earth, immortal because our life is hidden in Christ.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.

You know, the resurrection is a concept that undergirds the whole New Testament. You might even say it's the central core of the New Testament itself. We have isolated passages in the New Testament that speak very directly to resurrection. Perhaps the classic passage is 1 Corinthians 15. The Corinthians are under-informed about the resurrection, and so Paul goes to great length as to the nature of the resurrection. One of its key arguments is that our resurrection is going to be qualitatively similar or analogous to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is the firstfruits, Paul says. Well, what does that mean? Well, Jesus was already crucified, dead and buried and raised. He was raised bodily. Bodily physically, yes, but in a way that's not quite physical the way we think about this. Now, I'm not altogether sure how this really works. Jesus is physical enough so that when he says, "touch my hands," you touch him without your hand going through, and at the same time he can eat and, you know, actually eats. But then again, he suddenly appears in rooms where the doors have been locked. So, how does that work? Is he really physical? I think the Bible's answer is, yes, he's completely physical, but he's able to move in different spheres and in different dimensions, if you will, that we don't have access to... Well, if Jesus is raised that way, the promise is, we will be raised exactly that way.

Dr. Amy L. Peeler

One of my favorite texts in the New Testament is 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul is talking about the resurrection. Now, an interesting thing seems to have happened in this community. They believed that Jesus rose from the dead, but they don't think that means anything for them. Well, they're already experiencing the resurrection. They have spiritual gifts, they can do whatever they want, and so Paul seems to indicate that some of them have stopped believing that their bodies are going to be resurrected, and he has some strong words for them. He says, if that's the case, if we don't believe in the resurrection, then we, of all people, are most to be pitied. And he makes this very tight connection that Jesus' resurrection from the dead *guarantees* that the future resurrection for all people is coming, a bodily resurrection. Jesus is the beginning of a process that will be brought to fruition at the end of time. And this aligns well with Jewish ideas that, in the end, all people would be resurrected to bring an account to God. What's interesting about Christianity is Jesus is the first person to have experienced this, and his experience of resurrection is a promise that that day is coming for everyone else.

Dr. Matt Carter

Jesus was not the first person to come back from the grave, yet they call him the firstfruits of the resurrection. And the answer to the question of “why?” is very different. You see, when Lazarus died and was resurrected by Christ, he eventually got sick, he got old, and he died again. But Jesus, when he rose from the grave, he was the firstfruits of this new bodily resurrection. He’s the first person in history who rose from the grave in a new body, never to die again. That’s why they call him the firstfruits of the resurrection. And though Jesus was the first to rise from the grave into a new resurrected body, never to die again, him being the firstfruits means he won’t be the last. It means that when we’re resurrected, we’re not just resurrected spiritually, we’re not just having a spirit that goes somewhere, but we’re actually going, at the coming of Christ, to receive new bodies. We’re going to be with him forever in a physical way, enjoying the new heaven and a new earth, and Jesus’ resurrection was a foreshadowing of that.

Question 6:

Since we know our suffering will end when we die and our souls go to heaven, why should we look forward to the general resurrection?

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

Christians have confessed for a very long time that — in various confessional statements — that we believe in the “resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” We say that at the end of the Apostles’ Creed. We say it at the end of the Nicene Creed. This is at the core of Christian confession. We believe in the resurrection of the dead. And that’s a bodily resurrection. For multiple reasons... We can look at Paul in 1 Corinthians, for example and see that Paul emphasizes the importance of the bodily resurrection... And I think, for a long time in a certain pietistic strand of Christian belief, leaving our bodies and being disembodied spirits seems to be the ultimate goal of what Christian existence is about. And that’s simply not the way the Bible emphasizes the resurrection and what the final day will be. It emphasizes that our bodies and our souls need to be combined one with the other; it’s not right to be bodiless souls. So, our confession about the resurrection of the dead is a confession that sees bodies and souls together, and that’s the ultimate goal. And our souls in the intermediate period are waiting for our bodies to be joined to them again, and *that* is the final moment of the resurrection of the dead.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

In the new heavens and new earth, we will be fully restored images. That is, we will probably play sports; we will eat, we will work; we will organize; we will worship; we will have amazing relationships; we will enjoy all of these things. Everything that we enjoy now in part that is righteous and just, we will enjoy to the fullest, to the max, there. Why? Because our bodies and our spirits will finally be completely restored... A person is not able to enjoy those things fully in heaven right now as a soul. You’ve got to have a body to eat, you’ve got to have a body to do all the... To

really be in the image of God, you've got to have a body. And so, really, the question is, what does being in the image of God look like in the new heavens and new earth? That's the question.

Question 7:

How similar will our resurrected bodies be to our current bodies?

Dr. Constantine Campbell

It's clear in the New Testament that there is a continuity and discontinuity between our current bodies and our future resurrected bodies. The key information for this is Jesus' own bodily resurrection. It's clear that this was Jesus himself. He was no longer in the tomb. His body was not somewhere else and the apostles were meeting a spirit. He was embodied in his body with the wounds from his crucifixion. He was able to be touched, he was able to eat food, etc., and he was recognizable. Although what's interesting is, apparently not immediately recognizable as we see in, say, Luke 24 where many people encounter the resurrected Jesus and don't immediately realize it's him. We're not told why that's the case, but it does suggest that maybe there's something about his resurrected body that is not immediately recognizable. Also, there's discontinuity in the fact that apparently Jesus can move from one place to another and go through walls, kind of transporting immediately and those sorts of things... We see Paul flesh this out, so to speak, a little bit in 1 Corinthians 15 where he talks about the fact that our bodies will be raised immortal, and they will be glorious, and that we will no longer sin or even have the capacity to sin. All of those things are new elements that will be different about our resurrected bodies compared to our current bodies... Our resurrection body will be our real body, but transformed through the resurrection.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

When we speak of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, we're really in a realm that's clouded with mystery. There's so much about that future moment that we don't know, and so I think reservation and pause is probably wise when we begin to give definitive answers about what the future coming day will be like. But with that said, there does seem to be, when we look at the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, there does seem to be a continuity, a strong continuity between the resurrected body of Jesus and his pre-death body. And we see that significantly in the fact that he wants his disciples — Thomas, for example, and then on the road to Emmaus as well when he shows up in the upper room after that — he wants them to see his hands, and he wants them to see his side and his feet, the places where those wounds that happened in his earthly life, how they're still marked on his glorified body that seems to appear in rooms out of nowhere. So, again, we're in a realm that's shrouded with mystery, but there does seem to be some continuity, some recognizable continuity between our bodies in our pre-resurrected state and in a resurrected state.

Question 8:

How can we say we will have resurrected bodies if they have already decayed in the ground?

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

Many people wonder how we can have resurrection bodies because if we die in this life, then our bodies decay into the ground. Well, the Bible has an answer that focuses on the power of God rather than giving us a technical explanation. God knows what he's going to do. First Corinthians 15, there is an explanation of this, and it says that the bodies that we will have will be transfigured bodies. They won't be exactly the same, but it's kind of the difference between the seed and the plant that comes from the seed. You can illustrate this with the resurrected body of Jesus because it was identifiable as Jesus, but there was also the change — he was glorified. He was no longer subject to death. Now, that's a mystery to us because all our experience is related to this life, but it's not a mystery to God because he's the Creator, so he is going to take care of it. You don't need to worry about it.

Dr. Paul Gardner

At the end of the day, the resurrection of Jesus is the firstfruits of our resurrection, and Jesus is raised bodily from the dead. Now, it's true his skeleton was there and his body was there in the grave, because that's the way they did it in those days, but whatever, it was the most extraordinary miracle. For a completely dead skeleton with no spirit present or whatever, for that to rise from the dead requires the extraordinary miracle of the resurrection. And a God who can raise the dead can surely draw together the molecules or the bits of a person from anywhere and everywhere... Can God bring that together as a body again? Yes, he can because he's God. God can make and do with matter and with his creation whatever he wants to do. And this is the miracle of the Christian faith. It is that we believe there will be a bodily resurrection for all people... He will raise them from the dead like he will raise us from the dead. So, I don't think we need to worry about decaying bodies or whether we're cremated or whether we're buried at sea or whether tragically, as happens these days, body parts are thrown in different directions because of a bomb. We do not need ultimately to worry, however hurtful and painful these things are, because God is all-powerful. God is the miracle worker, and the resurrection is the greatest miracle.

Question 9:

How can people that have never heard the gospel still be condemned in the last judgment?

Dr. Guy Waters

The Bible teaches that even people who have never heard the gospel preached will be condemned at the last judgment. Paul tells us in Romans 1 that God makes himself known through the creation, his wisdom and his power and his goodness. And he also teaches that every human being, by virtue of being made in the image of God and

living in God's world, knows God through the things that are made. Sadly, the response of sin to that knowledge is ingratitude and rebellion. And so, when all people stand before God on the day of judgment, they will not stand before one whom they don't know, but they'll stand before one who has made himself known through the creation and whom they have chosen to rebel against.

Rev. Vernon Pierre

People wonder how someone can be condemned if they've never heard of the gospel at the last judgment. And, you know, it's a question that you want to sympathize with and understand. Really, it's a question that people are wondering, "It seems as if God is unfair." And I think we have to begin with understanding if we're going to take the Bible seriously. The Bible speaks of God being more fair or more just than any of us can imagine. I think of Deuteronomy 32:

The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he (Deuteronomy 32:4, ESV).

So that's the baseline, that God is just and perfect in all that he does. And then when we think of why people are condemned, it's actually not because they haven't heard the gospel, it's because they reject God. Romans 1 tells us that "God's invisible attributes, his divine power, his divine nature, they've been seen since the creation of the world, and yet we reject it. And so — and this is a really important phrase here — "so they are without excuse." That means human beings, we are without excuse. When you stand before the Lord God, there will be nothing that could be said, there's no argument that can be said, no evidence that can be brought in that would say, "Well, I have an excuse for why I rejected you." The Bible says it's on that basis that people are condemned and judged. So, there's no one in hell really with an alibi and the ability to say, "Yes, this is unfair and I had a good excuse." The Bible says we are without excuse. But of course, that does mean we should continue to share the gospel with people all the more, so that people would have that opportunity, by God's grace, to believe in him.

Question 10:

Given that all Christ's enemies will be condemned in the final judgment, what attitude should we have toward unbelievers?

Dr. Paul Gardner

As we think of those who will be condemned at the final judgment, the question does come up for all of us, so, how are we to regard those who are sinful, those who are in rebellion against God? How are we to regard them now? If this is who they are, if they are the ones who are persecuting and putting to death the followers of Christ in some countries, as they are today, what should be our attitude? What should be our attitude even to the boss who won't give a promotion to somebody because they're a Christian? And difficult as that question is in practice in our hearts, from Scripture,

it's actually a relatively easy question to answer, because what we have in front of us is the picture of Christ. We are to be as Christ was. Christ comes to a whole world that is in rebellion against God, and Christ comes with compassion, with love, with mercy, with arms that reach out to draw people to himself. He comes urging people to turn to him and to follow him, and that should be our message too, and that should be our attitude. You see, it's very easy for us to become vengeful, especially if we are hurt for our faith, if somebody is judging us, or not dealing with us properly, or lying about us for our faith, it's very easy to be vengeful. How do I have a right attitude to that person? And to us, Jesus says, well, love your enemies. Jesus says, well, turn the other cheek. We are called to witness to something far greater than just our emotional reactions. But you know, we have to learn that. This takes time. This is not something that's instinctive within us. I'm a fallen human being. I have sinful reactions to those I see around who are blatantly disregarding God and sinning in most atrocious ways sometimes, but it is those very people that God says, "Love them; reach out to them; show my love; speak of my mercy to these people, because it may be in my plan to draw them to myself as well." The greatest example of this in the New Testament is surely the apostle Paul himself. There he is, going to Damascus actually to persecute Christians, to put them to death, to imprison them, and Christ comes to him and speaks to him directly. And Paul comes to faith. And then Paul goes out with the same compassion to people all over the world. That's what we're called to do. It's a hard job sometimes, because emotionally we often have real difficulty with doing that.

Rev. Rico Tice

How should we feel about the final state of the wicked? You know, the problem in England is people don't ask themselves that question. So, they don't really sit there and think, "What will it be like for people to be in eternal torment?" They dismiss what the Bible says in vast numbers in terms of eternal torment, so they don't really sit and think about it. Now, once I am beginning to think about that, the response is tears. So, in Romans 9, Paul weeps for the state of his people. He says, "I'd rather be cut off knowing that they will be." Jeremiah 20, he weeps and says, "I've got to speak." Once we've pondered the fact that sin leads — because it's so serious if it's not paid for by Jesus — it leads to a place where I pay myself, well then the response is that we weep. And then we long to warn ... because they'll have to pay for their sin themselves. So, to weep; ultimately the answer to this is to weep. How should I feel? It should lead me to weep and then to warn.

Question 11:

How did the Old Testament portray the new heavens and the new earth?

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

Well, there are at least two passages in Isaiah that use the expression "new heaven and new earth." One of them is Isaiah 65:17, and then there's a description that

follows it. The interesting thing is that the description is very like the first heavens and first earth, except that it's transformed. It's better. It's blessed. It's blessed with God's presence and with the suppression of sin. And so, that's the background, actually, for the discussion of the new heaven and new earth in the New Testament. We believe that God will bring a transfiguration of this present heavens and earth when Christ returns.

Rev. William W. Carr, Jr.

The language of the new heavens and the new earth occurs twice in the book of Isaiah, once in chapter 65 when God announces "I am creating new heavens and new earth" and then again in chapter 66 when he elaborates a little bit more about what it will be like in that new heavens and new earth. I think that we use "new heavens and new earth" as perhaps a kind of umbrella term that we gather elements from different parts of the Scripture and sort of bring them together in that kind of conceptual term... That reminds us of our ongoing stewardship under God for the present world, but it also reminds us, and we hold to the promise, that there will indeed be a time when war is no more, illness no more, when as Isaiah says in chapter 25, every tear will be wiped away because God will have swallowed up death forever.

Question 12:

Will the current heavens and earth be destroyed in order to make way for the new heavens and earth?

Dr. Scott Manor

Well, it's an interesting question to ask, whether or not the new heavens and the new earth will require the destruction of what exists now. And one thing I would say about this is that there's a difference of opinion, depending on, sort of, which theological camp you might come from. From my point of view... There's a saying that I learned in seminary and it goes like this: "God doesn't make junk, and he doesn't junk what he makes." And to unpack that a little bit, when God made the heavens and the earth, he declares them good. And of course we know that sin enters into the world and it changes that, it infects it. But that doesn't mean that all of a sudden it's bad, discardable in some sense, and so when we think about what God's redemptive purposes are for, and the scope of his redemptive purposes, we need to realize that that's not just for you or for me, but that it's for the entirety of his creation. It's for all of his creation. And so, in that sense, when you think about even the way God preaches the kingdom of God, when Christ is preaching that in his gospels, a lot of times you see him healing someone of some sort of illness, making something right that was not quite the way it should be — the blind seeing, the lame walking. And all of those, to me, are indicators of the way he's not only just restoring us in our relationship with Christ, but also restoring his creation. It's a full scope of his redemptive purposes. And so, the answer really in my mind is that the new heavens and the new earth don't eradicate what exists now. It's more of a question of a full restoration of what does exist now at a time when it will be completely free from sin.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

There are biblical texts that seem to suggest that there's going to be a great cosmic catastrophe at the end of times, but I think we have to think about what is being told to us in a text like Romans 8:19-22 where it talks about the creation groaning for its redemption, and texts like that seem to tell us that there's some kind of continuity between what there is now in the cosmos and what there will be... God is *renewing* the heavens and the earth. And certainly there's apocalyptic language that talks about some kind of transformation, but I think that's more like a refiner's fire. Another reason I say that it's important to think about this is, think about the beginning of the Bible and the end of the Bible. You begin with a garden; you end with a city. There's a lot of similar imagery there. Now, is that similar imagery there because God is starting with a new one, or is that similar imagery there because this is the bringing to fruition of what God has created? And I think it's the bringing to fruition of what God has created.

Dr. Michael D. Williams

Second Peter 3, at first glance, Peter is using a very vivid string of terms to speak about the day of the Lord, the comings of the new heavens and new earth, and it's been very typical for Christians to go to a text like this, especially from the King James reading of, say, verse 10: "This world will burn up. It will be consumed in fire. It will be destroyed." Sound biblical exegesis, however, in the last number of years has pointed out, and I think convincingly, that the language that Paul, excuse me, that *Peter* actually uses here is not destruction language, but is purgation language. The best manuscripts, instead of using — for "consumed with fire" — instead of using a term that comes from a verb meaning "to consume," actually comes from a verb meaning "to establish" or "to find," and it does create the idea of purgation... Further, I would just add to that, when we come to a text, we come to it with the rest of Scripture. There are other texts and things in Scripture that should inform how we come to a text like that... You know, you've got to think here in terms of what Paul says in Romans 8, that the world itself cries out for the liberation of the sons of God. Why? Because our redemption will be the redemption of the world. John Calvin had no problem whatsoever thinking about Romans 8:20 and saying that all of creation cries out for resurrection. We could... Other things we could bring in here and would shed light on this — the resurrection of Jesus. Everything that went into the tomb came out. It was a *bodily* resurrection. It wasn't a spiritual resurrection, if you will. Our resurrection is going to be like unto his... God is going to restore rather than annihilate his world.

Dr. Danny Akin

You know, there's a lot of question about the relationship of the current world to the new heaven, the new earth, the New Jerusalem. Some people believe that this present order will be completely destroyed, and then God will reconstitute *defacto, ex nihilo*, a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem. I don't think that's exactly what the Bible teaches. I think the Bible teaches that this creation — Romans 8 — is groaning and looking forward to the redemption, the ultimate salvation of the sons and

daughters of God, and when we are glorified, this creation that exists right now likewise will be glorified. So, there is genuine continuity between the present order and the future order. But the future order — I like to say it this way when I teach theology — the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem is going to be Eden regained and more. We'll get everything back we lost when Adam and Eve failed, but it will be even more, even far beyond what we could ever hope or imagine. So, there's continuity, but what we're going to receive is going to be so much more glorious because all the ravages and effects of sin and the curse will be removed, banished forever. As it says in [Revelation] 21:4, "no more crying, no more pain, no more sorrow and no more death." He's making all things new. It's going to be a great, great order for all of eternity.

Question 13:

What will the new heavens and new earth be like?

Dr. Paul Gardner

I love the expression "the new heavens and the new earth" in Scriptures. We find it back in the Old Testament prophets, and then we find it again, of course, in the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter in the New Testament. And they are talking about the re-creation of all things, or the new creation of all things once Christ has returned in glory. I don't think the Bible tells us an awful lot about what the new earth will be like, or even the new heavens. There seems to be, just by the expression, there seems to be a greater "to-ing" and "fro-ing," if you like, between what we consider the spiritual realm of the heaven, the place where the Lord is and the earth where we live, and we know that the new earth will be ruled by Christ who will be there with us, and will see him face to face. So, there seems to be a much greater sort of coherence, if you like, between heaven and earth when all things are made new. But I guess the closest we get to some sort of a description is in Romans 8. At the moment, we are given this picture that all creation — and that's the physical creation, not just human beings — is groaning like the pains of a mother in childbirth, we're told, waiting for the sons of God — that's God's people — to come into this inheritance of the new earth. And at least the implication of that seems to be that when the new earth does come, creation, as we know, it will function properly and will be looked after properly by us. So, I like to think of the new earth as a place where, finally, we shall work for the Lord in an environment which is working well and not under the Fall, the curse of the Fall, the judgment of God that happened when Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, but where everything is integrated well. So, that earth, which we're supposed to look after well, we will look after well. Those end-of-day feelings that we have of, "Have I accomplished anything?" if we do come back and go to sleep in the new earth, I think I will go to sleep feeling I have accomplished what I was set out to accomplish because I have been perfected, and I'm living in this perfect earth. And the Lord I know, who is seated in the heavens, who is seated in glory, I see with me. I see him face to face day by day.

Rev. Rico Tice

What will the new heavens and the new earth be like? Well, two things. First of all, this is guaranteed because Christ rose from the dead. So, the fact he got through death himself means that he can get me through, and it opens up the wonder of this new world that we're going to. So, this isn't just "pie in the sky." That past certainty gives me this future hope. What will it be like? Well, Revelation 21:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:1-4).

Interesting, isn't it, that verse that, "he'll wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, no mourning, no crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." So, what I learn from that is there'll be no more handkerchiefs — "no more crying," no more hearses — "no more death," no more hospitals — "no more pain." And so, I look ahead to a world where there'll be no curse. So, the curse that came into the world because of Adam and Eve's sin against God has been removed by the curse-bearer, Jesus Christ. And I can know that this will be a real physical place, because it's a new heaven and a new earth. Now, the word "new" here is *kainos*, which means "renewed." It'll be like this earth and yet utterly renewed. So it will be physical — we'll have physical bodies — but it won't be a world that is under curse and that is falling apart. And it comes down from heaven like a bride beautifully prepared for her husband. So, a bride is prepared for her wedding place, for her wedding day. It's a prepared place that has been put together for me. But I suppose, yeah, that the big thing here is mourning or crying or pain; all are gone because God has wiped those away in a world where sin has been dealt with by the death of Jesus.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

People try to imagine what the new heavens and the new earth will be like. The Scripture gives us pictures, of course, images. By saying that, I don't mean to imply that they're not true. They are true. Maybe the best way to think about that is that it will be like the present creation, but unlike. I think that it's important to say both things. This world is God's; he made it. He owns it. It's deeply corrupted by sin and death. But God has apparently no intention of handing over this creation to sin and death ultimately. And yet, it does have to be purged. I think this is why the Bible often uses the image of fire when talking about the judgment day. So, we should think of that fire as a cleansing fire. It will be a very terrible and "awe-full" day, "awesome" in that sense. But the new creation that will emerge out of that act of power and mercy on God's part will be recognizable, I think, as a renewed creation, because

God loves all that he has made. And so, the images and pictures we have are of banquets and of gardens and of rivers — Revelation 21–22, of course, the parables of Jesus. It will be creation, and our bodies as part of it will be holy. I think sometimes we think, maybe too often, of physical health with our resurrection bodies and so forth, and that's true, it's right to think that way, but sickness and decay and death are the result of sin, that's the primary cause. And so, raised from the dead and the creation renewed, it will be holy and whole in the Old Testament sense of *shalom* and, although I don't have a Bible verse for this, I think we can imagine God looking at his renewed creation and saying again, "It's very good."

Rev. Vernon Pierre

What will the new heavens and the new earth be like? We don't have every detail about it, but the Bible tells us a whole lot, in Revelation 21–22 particularly. It speaks of heaven coming down and becoming part of earth, and one of the things I'd like to emphasize there, it's not as if the earth goes away. It's a new heavenly world, if we can put it that way. And this new heavenly world is a place where God is always present. It's a place where the Bible says there's no more tears, there's no more pain, there's no more suffering, and most especially, there's no more sin. In many ways it's humanity in the way that it should have been, the way that it never has been since Adam sinned and humanity has continued to sin and reject God. All that is wiped away and human beings are able to honor God and follow God and worship God in the ways that they should. It's going to be a place characterized by love and by beauty and by joy in the most perfect and pure form, because we will be in the presence of love and joy and beauty, in the presence of God forever. So, new heavens and new earth will be an incredibly special place. It's a place for us to look forward to, to motivate us to live in the earth now, knowing that this earth and heavens... There's more, there's better to come.

Question 14:

What benefits will we receive from being in God's immediate presence in the new heavens and new earth?

Dr. Grant R. Osborne

We can't even begin to spell out all the benefits of what happens when we're in God's immediate presence in the new heavens and new earth. Basically it's found in Revelation 21:3-5, and what it really is, is that, remember, Moses could not look upon the face of God and live. We will not just look upon the face of God, we will walk hand in hand with God, and it says there clearly, "He will be our God, we will be his people." We will have this absolute physical proximity and awareness and fellowship and love, and we will look upon the face of the God who created the heavens and the earth. We will look on eternity. We will have all... The joy will be, I think it's a joy that can't even be described in human language. There's just no language to attest. And really, Revelation 21 is merely a human attempt to get at the glory and the joy and the incredible nature, the majesty that will be ours when we are with God in the

new heavens and new earth. It's beyond compare. But it primarily will be, we will be in his absolute presence. We will be eternal beings. All of the pain, all of the suffering, all the mourning, all the hurt will be gone forever. And the joy is something that I think that nothing can approximate the joy that we'll have at that time.

Dr. Greg Perry

We get a vision of what the new heavens and the new earth will be like in Zechariah 8. The prophet is talking about the most important characteristic of this new city is that God, once again, will dwell with his people and that that's going to make all the difference in every sphere of life. And so, the prophet begins to talk about how the old women and the old men will once again sit in the streets. And there's such a sense of public safety. The kids, the boys and the girls are running and playing in the streets, and there's a reconciliation between the generations; the old and the young, they want to be together. And the prophet talks about how in the former times you didn't have any wages, and your beasts didn't have any food, but in this time when God returns, you will have what you need. There'll be economic renewal as well. And your work is going to be productive, you're going to produce surpluses, and you're going to have, to be able to share with one another. And then he talks about how there will be also ecological renewal, that once again the grains will grow and the earth will have rain and will have dew that you need, and the vineyards will produce wine. And so, what we see in terms of the new heavens and the new earth is that every area of image bearing will flourish once again as God comes to dwell with his people and he completely renews our role as his image bearers in the world.

Dr. Danny Akin

You know, the new heavens and the new earth are going to be wonderful in so many ways... I'm often asked, "Will we be able to interact with our God in heaven?" After all, the Bible does say that no man can see God and live. And that's true in our fallen state. In our sinful state, we cannot see him in all his glory. We would be consumed. But the good news is in heaven we're not fallen. In heaven, we're glorified. In fact, it says in 1 John 3 that when the Lord Jesus comes again we will be like him, where we will see him as he is. And Revelation 21–22 also affirms that we will be in perfect communion with our God. So, we're going to be able to interact with all of God's good creations including his good creatures like angels. But even better than that, we will be able to interact directly with our Creator as well, who will not only be our Creator, but he's also our eternal Father.

Dr. Richard Phillips

There's not one square inch of the entire cosmos that Satan has overrun and marred and vandalized by sin that will stay that way. In the end of the ages, everything that God made and designed will fulfill the end for which he designed it. And we are destined to live in a glorified cosmos in glorified bodies with the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus returns, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, and so Christ will have victory over all that God has made, and our enemy will have nothing but the dust that God has made him to eat.

Dr. Jimmy Agan is Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of Homiletics at Covenant Theological Seminary.

Dr. Danny Akin is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College.

Dr. Gary M. Burge is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Constantine R. Campbell is Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Rev. William W. Carr, Jr. is Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary.

Dr. Matt Carter is the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, TX.

Dr. Lynn Cohick is Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Dr. Paul Gardner is Senior Pastor of ChristChurch Presbyterian in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs is Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat is Associate Professor of Divinity in Old Testament at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Dr. Riad Kassis is Regional Director for Overseas Council, an international training ministry for Christian leaders.

Dr. Scott Manor is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Dean of Faculty at Knox Theological Seminary.

Dr. Grant R. Osborne is Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Dr. Amy L. Peeler is Associate Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D. is the Franklin S. Dyrness Professor of Biblical Studies and Dean of the Graduate School at Wheaton College.

Dr. Greg Perry is Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of City Ministry Initiative at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

Dr. Richard Phillips is Senior Minister of Second Presbyterian Church and Chairman of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology

Rev. Vernon Pierre is Lead Pastor for Preaching and Mission at Roosevelt Community Church in Phoenix, AZ

Dr. Vern Poythress is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary and Editor of the Westminster Theological Journal.

Rev. Rico Tice is Associate Minister of All Soul's Langham Place in London and Founder of Christianity Explored Ministries.

Dr. Daniel Treier is the Blanchard Professor of Theology at Wheaton College.

Dr. Guy Waters is Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

Dr. Michael D. Williams is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary.