



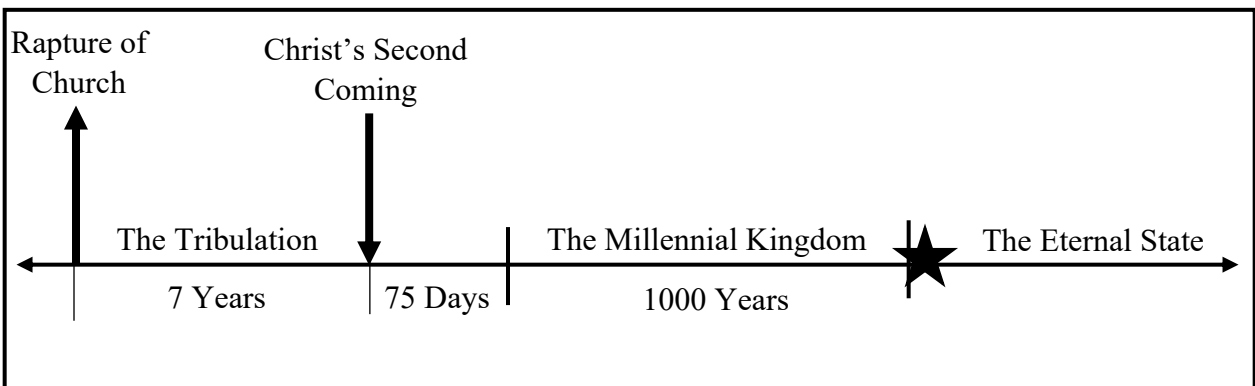
Eschatology – A Study of the End Times

Lesson 25: The Eternal State

Introduction

After Christ's millennial kingdom on earth, where there will still be sin and death, the end will come where sin and death will be no more. Revelation 20:14 says, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire." At this point in history all things will be ready for the establishment of the eternal state, the new heavens and the new earth. In this lesson, we are going to look at the details of the eternal state.

Timeline of End Times



Christ Delivers the Kingdom to the Father¹

First Corinthians 15:24 and 28 says, "then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power... When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all."

When will Christ abolish all rule and authority and power? At the end of the millennial kingdom when Satan is thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10) and the last enemy "death" is abolished (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14). All redemptive work will be finally completed, and the earth and

¹ The following is adapted from *The End Times in Chronological Order* by Ron Rhodes.

heavens will be re-created. At this time Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who although is equal with God and in subjection to the Father, will also hand the kingdom over to the Father.

When the Son gives over the kingdom to the Father, the Son won't stop reigning, but the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will reign as God and will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). The Son's work that He was sent to do by the Father, and the role that was given to Him as mediator will be complete. Christ will turn over the kingdom that He has won to His Father but will continue to reign as the second person of the Trinity. As John MacArthur says, "Christ will continue to reign, because His reign is eternal (Rev. 11:15), but He will reign with the Father in trinitarian glory, subject to the Trinity in that way eternally designed for Him."² Thus "God", not one person merely but the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, shall be "all in all," supreme in eternity.³

The Old Heavens and Earth Are Renewed

God created the universe perfectly and said it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). However, in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve sinned against God and the whole earth was judged with a curse (Gen. 3:17–18). Since that time, the universe has been subjected to futility and is now in bondage to decay (Rom. 8:20–22). Therefore, in order for the eternal kingdom to be manifested, God must deal with this cursed earth and universe.

The earth, along with the first and second heavens—that is, the earth's atmosphere (Job 35:5) and the stellar universe (Gen. 1:17; Deut. 17:3)—must be renewed. Just as all believers are "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23), so the heavens and the earth anxiously longs for its redemption (Rom. 8:19). The old must make room for the new.

Perhaps the most extended section that deals with the passing of the old heavens and earth is 2 Peter 3:7–13. Peter says,

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1984), 421.

³ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 686.

the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

At first glance, Peter's words seem to say that there will be a total annihilation of the earth, where God will start over and rebuild a new earth. However, the same Peter who wrote 2 Peter 3 also says in Acts 3:20–21, “and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” Peter speaks of the “restoration of all things” and apparently saw no conflict between this and what he wrote in 2 Peter 3.

Although “the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up,” this does not necessarily mean God will annihilate the present heavens and earth and start all over. God can destroy the earth and yet preserve the present earth. He has already done this before. He did it with the Flood. Peter says in 2 Peter 3:6–7, “through which the world at that time was *destroyed*, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (italics added). Peter acknowledges that there was a destruction of the earth through the Flood. But was the earth obliterated, ceasing to exist? No. The same will be true of the fire that will cleanse the earth and permanently eliminate sin and the curse that was brought about by sin.⁴

The New Heavens and New Earth

What will the new heavens and new earth be like? Theologians and Bible expositors have been careful to distinguish between the present heaven, where God now dwells and where believers go at the moment of death (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21–23), and the future heaven, where believers will spend all eternity (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). In fact, we could say about heaven that it has a past (the time prior to Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection), it has a present (the place where Christ is and where believers go when they die), and it has a future (the eternal heaven, or new earth). Many books on heaven have failed to distinguish between the intermediate heaven and the eternal state, using “heaven” as all-inclusive. But the Bible gives important distinctions when speaking about heaven. The present heaven is a temporary lodging place where believers go awaiting their bodily resurrection (Phil. 1:23). The eternal heaven, or new earth, is the believer's final home, the place where all believers will live forever with God and other believers (Rev. 21–22).

The eternal heaven (or new earth) will be this present universe—only it will be purified of all evil, sin, suffering, and death. The Greek word used to designate the newness of the cosmos is not *neos* but *kainos*. *Neos* means “new in time” or “new in origin.” But *kainos* means “new in nature” or “new in quality.” So, the phrase “new heavens and a new earth” refers not to a cosmos that is totally other than the present cosmos. Rather, the new cosmos will stand in continuity with the present cosmos, but it will be utterly renewed and renovated.

⁴ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 154.

The new earth, being a renewed and eternal earth, will be adapted to the vast moral and physical changes that the eternal state necessitates. Everything is new in the eternal state. Everything will be according to God's own glorious nature. The new heavens and the new earth will be brought into blessed conformity with all that God is—in a state of fixed bliss and absolute perfection.

Heaven and Earth Merged

One day heaven and earth will no longer be separate realms, as they are now, but will be merged. Believers will thus continue to be in heaven even while they are on the new earth. Theologian Anthony Hoekema writes, “The ‘New Jerusalem’... does not remain in a ‘heaven’ far off in space, but it comes down to the renewed earth; there the redeemed will spend eternity in resurrection bodies. So, heaven and earth, now separated, will then be merged: the new earth will also be heaven, since God will dwell there with His people. Glorified believers, in other words, will continue to be in heaven while they are inhabiting the new earth.”⁵

The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:2 says, “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.” In Revelation 21:10 we are told about the holy city, the new Jerusalem, “coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” John continues to describe this astounding city with words contained in Revelation 21–22 that no doubt represents a human attempt to describe the utterly indescribable.

We are told in Revelation 22:1 that in the new Jerusalem is “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” This means the new Jerusalem is heaven because heaven is where God dwells. This heavenly city will be far more wondrous than we can possibly imagine. One thing is certain. The city is designed to reflect and manifest the incredible glory of God.

What will the new Jerusalem be like?

Because you and I are so accustomed to living in a fallen world that has been viciously marred by sin and corruption, we cannot conceive of what life might be like in a heavenly habitat that is without such sin and fallenness. From birth to death, we are confronted with imperfection on every level. But in the eternal city, we will experience nothing but perfection. There are many things Revelation 21–22 tells us about the new Jerusalem.

First, this city will be very large. The heavenly city measures approximately 1500 miles by 1500 miles by 1500 miles. The eternal city is so big that it would measure approximately the distance from Canada to Mexico, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rockies. That is a surface area of 2.25 million square miles. (By comparison, London is only 621 square miles.) Put another way, the ground level area of the city will be 3,623 times that of London.

If the city has stories, each being 13 feet high, the city would have 660,000 stories. Someone calculated that if this structure is cube-shaped, it would allow for 20 billion residents, each having his or her own private 75-acre cube. If each residence were smaller, the city would have

⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, “Heaven: Not Just an Eternal Day Off,” *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2003/06/heaven-not-just-eternal-day-off/>.

room to accommodate one hundred thousand billion people with plenty of room left over for parks, streets, and other things you would see in any normal city. The cube shape of the New Jerusalem reminds us of the cube shape of the Most Holy Place in the Temple (1 Kings 6:20). God will live in the city, and it is His presence that will be its greatest feature.

Second, it will have high walls and open gates. Revelation 21:25 says, “In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed.” In ancient times, city gates were shut at night to guard against invaders. Gates were part of the city’s security. Those who live in the eternal city, however, will never have an external threat. Satan, demons, and unbelievers will be in eternal quarantine in hell. Revelation 21:24 says, “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” God Himself will dwell within the city and all will be welcome into the city.

Third, it will have a river, a tree, and healing leaves. Revelation 22:1 tells us that the river is flowing with the water of life. This stream seems to symbolize a perpetual flow of spiritual blessing to all the redeemed of all ages, who are now basking in the full glow of eternal life. There will also be the tree of life there (Rev. 22:2). The last time we read about the tree of life was in the Garden of Eden. Paradise was lost then, but now paradise is restored. The leaves on the tree are said to be “for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). But why would there need to be healing if the city was perfect? John MacArthur states, “Perhaps a better way to translate it [healing] would be ‘life-giving,’ ‘health-giving,’ or ‘therapeutic.’ The leaves of the tree can be likened to supernatural vitamins, since vitamins are taken not to treat illness, but to promote general health. Life in heaven will be fully energized, rich, and exciting.”⁶

Fourth, there will be no sun or moon needed. Revelation 21:23 says, “And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.” The presence of the Lamb, who is uncreated light (John 8:12), will be there and the radiance of Christ will continuously illuminate the city.

The eternal city—the New Jerusalem—will be staggeringly, incomprehensibly wonderful, far more than any human mind could possibly fathom or even begin to imagine. Christians are merely pilgrims enroute to the final frontier of the New Jerusalem, just passing through this brief dot of time on earth.

Application:

1. Set your mind on heaven. Paul says in Colossians 3:1–2, “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”
2. Praise Christ for the amazing future that we have in Him.
3. Live in light of heaven. Peter says in 2 Peter 3:14, after speaking of the new heavens and new earth, “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.”

⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12–22* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2000), 287.