

THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation —————
————— to New Creation



sixteen ► All Things New!



Sunrise in Huangshan, China. *“And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’” (Revelation 21.5).*

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Jesus’s Second Coming

Our journey nears its destination. Soon, Jesus will come again. He’ll destroy Satan and his kingdom, renew this spoiled and ravaged Earth, and usher in a new chapter of human history.

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus taught us to pray: *“Our Father . . . Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6.9-10). God’s Kingdom is where God reigns and His will is done.

But the first human pair refused to do God’s will. They obeyed Satan, and the kingdom of darkness gained a foothold on Earth. From that moment, God worked to destroy Satan’s domination. He is establishing His Kingdom on Earth – so His will is done on Earth as it is in Heaven, just as Jesus taught us to pray. When Jesus returns to this Earth, God’s Kingdom will arrive in its full and final glory (see 2 Timothy 4.1).

When Jesus comes

There’s much debate about what happens when Jesus returns. The key events are as follows. Their precise sequence is uncertain; some may well occur concurrently:

► Jesus Christ returns to Earth (for example, Acts 1.11, 2 Thessalonians 1.7, Titus 2.13).

► Jesus completes His conquest of every evil power (1 Corinthians 15.24-28, see Revelation 19.19-21, 20.7-10).

► At His coming, *“the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”* (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17). Dead believers are raised in their resurrection bodies. Living believers are ‘caught up’ or ‘raptured’ and receive their resurrection bodies. All

believers meet Jesus. All those who have resisted God meet Jesus, too.

► Jesus judges everyone - believers and unbelievers. He assigns each one to their eternal destiny (Revelation 20.11-15).

► Jesus transforms Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21.1-5).

► Humanity, headed up by the Man Christ Jesus, and all creation is now under the Father's rule (see 1 Corinthians 15.24,28). Evil will never trouble creation again. God's plan of redemption is complete.



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Lightning over Sydney, Australia: "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24.27)

The signs of His coming

Jesus's disciples asked Him: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matthew 24.3). That's the question we'd all like to ask! The Bible makes it clear that certain things must happen before Jesus comes:

► The gospel will be preached to all nations (see Matthew 24.14). And it will impact the nation of Israel in a wonderful way, too. Remember that the Church was almost entirely Jewish at first - including a great many priests (Acts 6.7). Though there was fierce resistance to the gospel from many Jews (see, for example, Acts 13.45,50, and compare 1 Thessalonians 2.14-16), there were also Jews who believed through the ministry of Paul (see, for example, Acts 17.11-12). In recent years, too, God has been bringing a significant number of Jews to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. This may well gain pace as the end of this age draws near. God has promised the salvation of "all Israel" (Romans 11.25-27). This passage in Romans most probably means there'll be a large-scale conversion of Jews in the closing period of this age, not long before Jesus's return.

► Satan will attempt to establish and consolidate his kingdom across the Earth, in the final great "rebellion" (2 Thessalonians 2.3) and the appearance of the Antichrist, as we saw in the previous session.

How will Jesus come?

► He's coming **in person** - not symbolically or mystically, but in His physical body.

► He's coming **with clouds** (Matthew 24.30 and parallels in Mark and Luke, and Revelation 1.7). The Jews called God's presence among His people the *shekinah*, a word

derived from the Hebrew *shākan*, meaning 'to settle', 'to dwell'. And His presence was often made visible as cloud. He guided Israel through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13.21-22). He presented Himself on Mount Sinai in thick cloud (Exodus 19.9,16, 24.15-18, 34.5). When He took up residence in the Tabernacle and the Temple, His *shekinah* glory was manifested as cloud (Exodus 40.34-38, 2 Chronicles 5.13-14). The *shekinah* cloud also appeared during Jesus's transfiguration and ascension (Matthew 17.5, Acts 1.9). And Jesus will return to make His home on Earth attended by the clouds of His divine glory.

► He's coming **in power**. Jesus once came as a helpless infant; He will come again in great glory and authority, attended by legions of mighty angels (2 Thessalonians 1.7).

► He's coming **openly**. Jesus's first coming was in obscurity - a baby nestling in a lowly stable in a troubled corner of the Roman Empire. Few people saw Him then. But when He comes again, every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1.7).

► He's coming **unexpectedly**, like a thief in the night (Matthew 24.36-44, see 1 Thessalonians 5.1-6, 2 Peter 3.10). His return will ensnare this careless world (see Luke 21.34-35). But His faithful people are not in darkness; His return won't overtake *them* as a thief. We don't know exactly when He'll return - there's a long history of failed predictions! But those who are close to the Lord will become increasingly aware of the approach of that day. But we must be ready (Matthew 24.44); He commands us to stay awake (Mark 13.37). We're to "*abide*" in Jesus (1 John 2.28) - that is, we're to keep close to Him and do nothing that would cloud our relationship with Him. If we do so, we won't "*shrink from him in shame at his coming*" (1 John 2.28).

"The appearance of His coming"

As we've seen, we may expect a climactic, satanically inspired revolt by mankind against God before Jesus's return. This final rebellion of the anti-Christian world system crystallises around Antichrist's leadership. But at His coming, Jesus will destroy all the powers and systems of darkness:

(1) He'll overthrow the man of sin, undoubtedly the same as the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2.8), bring the rebellion to an end, and destroy all the powers of darkness.

(2) He'll crush Babylon, the counterfeit of the Church - mankind's god-defying and humanistic civilisation under satanic domination (see Revelation 18.1-19.4).

(3) He'll demolish the satanic power structures (the beast of Revelation 13.1-10, 17.3,7-14,16-17) that Babylon is in league with (see Revelation 19.20).

(4) He'll destroy the false religion, ideology and philosophy (the second beast or false prophet of Revelation 13.11-18) that lures people into giving their allegiance to the world system (Revelation 19.20).

(5) And Jesus will defeat everyone who belongs to the world system (compare 1 John 4.5) - Satan's offspring (compare 1 John 3.10, John 8.44), enemies of God's people, who "*refused to love the truth and so be saved*" (2 Thessalonians 2.10, and compare 2 Thessalonians 1.8, John 3.19-20). They will be slain by His sword (Revelation 19.15,19,21), and by God's consuming fire (Revelation 20.7-



'The End of the World' (commonly known as 'The Great Day of His Wrath') by John Martin (1789-1854) and held by Tate Britain, London. This was inspired by John's vision of the Last Judgment in the Book of Revelation. The artist presents a cataclysmic vision of destruction, featuring an entire city being torn up and thrown into the abyss. This graphic image recalls the destruction of Babylon – representing fallen mankind's civilisation under Satan's domination (Revelation 17.1-19.4).

9 and see 2 Thessalonians 1.7-8). God's sword is His word of truth, which condemns and executes judgment against all falsehood and evil. Fire is regularly used in Scripture as an image of God's judgment (see, for example, Isaiah 66.15-16).

(6) Jesus will complete His conquest of every evil power (1 Corinthians 15.24-28, see Revelation 19.19-21, 20.7-10). Clinton Arnold explains that, in this verse, "Uppermost in Paul's mind are all of the supernatural evil spirits and angels with whom the church has struggled throughout its existence. . . . They are the evil forces that have made their influence felt in every kind of human opposition to God and every form of structural evil."

(7) And He'll consign Satan himself to eternal torment (Revelation 20.10).

Exactly *how* does Jesus destroy the forces and structures of evil?

► **By His presence** (see 2 Thessalonians 2.8: "*the*

appearance of his coming"). Demons flee before His presence; people will cry to the rocks to cover them from His face, driven back by His burning purity (Revelation 6.15-17). Remember what happened when God came down to Earth on Mount Sinai in fire. The smoke-shrouded mountain quaked; thunder and lightning deafened and dazzled the trembling people gathered at its foot (Exodus 19.16-18, Deuteronomy 4.11-12). The consuming fire of God's presence executes judgment on those who reject Him (compare 2 Thessalonians 1.7-8, Revelation 20.9).

► **By His word** John sees all the human forces of evil overthrown by God's word - pictured as a sharp sword issuing from the mouth of Jesus, the Word of God (Revelation 19.15,21, and compare 1.16, 2.12,16). His truth exposes lies; it condemns and executes judgment. Satan, the father of lies (see John 8.44), will stand unmasked and condemned. His kingdom, founded on falsehood and built through deceit, will collapse into ruins and be utterly destroyed.

The Millennium

Revelation 20.1-10 tells us about a 1,000-year period in which Satan is bound and cannot "*deceive the nations*".

During this period "*the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark came to life and reigned with Christ This is the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign*

with him"

When this period of 1,000 years is over, Satan will be released and "*will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle*". They will surround "*the camp of the saints and the beloved city*" but God will send fire from heaven and consume them. The Devil will be "*thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were*" and suffer everlasting torment.

This period of 1,000 years is commonly called the Millennium. This is a word derived from the Latin *mille* (meaning ‘thousand’) and *annus* (meaning ‘year’). How do we interpret this period of time? That’s hotly debated. In very simple terms, views about the Millennium fall into two broad groups:

- Many believe that Jesus will return *before* the Millennium - hence, this view is called **premillennialism**.
- Many others believe that Jesus’s second coming occurs *after* the Millennium – hence this view is called **postmillennialism**.

Premillennialism

Premillennialism has two main versions. The first, called **historic premillennialism**, is so called because it is a view that’s been around since the early days of the Church. The second, called **dispensational premillennialism** is relatively recent, and is a good deal more complicated.

► The historic premillennial view

This view holds that Jesus will be bodily present and reign on this present Earth for a literal 1,000 years – or at least a long period of time - after His second coming, but *before* the creation of the new Heaven and Earth.

At the end of this present Church age, wickedness and opposition to God’s people will intensify, culminating in a period of great tribulation during which the Antichrist will take control of the world. Then Jesus’s second coming will occur. He’ll return bodily to Earth, kill Antichrist, defeat all the forces of evil, destroy the satanic world system, and bind Satan. During the final tribulation, or when Jesus returns, the majority of the nation of Israel will be converted, too.

When Jesus returns, living believers will be “*caught up*” or ‘raptured’ and receive their resurrection bodies, and dead believers will be raised in *their* resurrection bodies (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17). This is the first resurrection.

Jesus will rule the nations from Jerusalem for the Millennium. Believers, in their resurrection bodies, will rule with Him. Jewish believers will receive a place of special prominence in the Millennium and many of the Old Testament promises for Israel will then be fulfilled. But the believing Jews will be an integral part of the Church (unlike traditional dispensationalism, which we’ll look at next).

The Millennium will be a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity. People will still marry, bear children, and die – but health will be far better and longevity far greater than in today’s world. Nature will be renewed and enjoy great blessing (as prophesied in Isaiah 11.6-9, 65.17-25). Sin and death will still exist, but Satan will be bound and evil firmly restrained.

After the Millennium, Satan will be released. He’ll deceive the nations, and those he deceives will make the final assault on God’s people (Revelation 20.7-10). Jesus will defeat them, put the rebellion down and consign Satan to Hell.

Then there’ll be the second resurrection – the resurrection of unbelievers and, presumably, believers who didn’t take part in the first resurrection. Then follows the Last Judgment, the creation of New Heaven and Earth and the eternal age.



Tuscan landscape, Italy. Premillennialists (historic and dispensational) typically believe that nature will be renewed and enjoy great blessing during the Millennium, before the creation of the new Heaven and Earth.

► The dispensational premillennial view

This is quite a recent view. It began to take shape in the first half of the 19th century. The traditional version of this view has been very popular and influential, especially in the United States (though it now seems to be in decline).

The term ‘dispensational’ refers to the series of periods (or ‘dispensations’) into which God’s dealings with mankind can be divided - the final one being the dispensation of **the Kingdom** (this is the Millennial period).

It’s a very complicated view and there are many variations. We won’t attempt a summary; instead, we’ll just point out the key ways in which mainstream dispensationalism differs from historic premillennialism:

- It holds that there’s an eternal distinction between Israel and the Church – they’re two distinct peoples of God, and will remain so for ever.
- It teaches that, if the nation of Israel had believed in Jesus, He would have restored them as a nation, ascended David’s throne and ruled them from Jerusalem. But the Jewish nation rejected Him. So He suspended His dealings with Israel and, instead, gathered a predominantly Gentile people (the Church). The Church is thus a ‘parenthesis’ in God’s programme for Israel. The Kingdom blessings for Israel, instead of being fulfilled in Jesus’s time, are now postponed until the Millennium.
- Most mainstream dispensationalists think that the ‘rapture’ of living believers and resurrection of dead believers (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17) won’t occur at Jesus’s second coming, but *seven years before it*. Images of millions of Christians suddenly vanishing without trace have been spectacularly dramatised by writers and film producers - for example, in the best-selling ‘Left Behind’ books.
- Jesus’s Millennial reign will fulfil Old Testament prophecies and promises relating to the nation of Israel in

earthly, economic and political ways – the restoration of Israel to their promised land, with Jerusalem as its capital, and a restored Davidic kingdom. Unlike the historic premillennialism view, Israel will be the leading people on Earth, not the Church.

◆ Progressive dispensationalism ◆

A new movement within dispensationalism has arisen in recent years, called progressive dispensationalism. It's a view very similar to historic premillennialism. One key belief is that ultimately there'll be no distinction between Israel and the Church.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism holds that the Millennium occurs *before* Jesus's second coming, not after it. There are two main versions - **'golden age' postmillennialism** and **amillennialism**. Here's a basic outline of them (though there are divergent viewpoints within both of them).

► The 'golden-age' postmillennial view

The traditional version of this view sees the Millennium as a time when the gospel comes to penetrate human society so deeply and extensively that the world experiences a long and glorious 'golden age' of peace and righteousness. The gospel will enjoy great success among the nations, and the world will enjoy unparalleled righteousness, peace and prosperity, though sin will still be present. Most postmillennialists also expect a large-scale conversion of Jews to take place. Some believe the Millennium began in the first century AD.

After the Millennium, Satan will be released and the final rebellion of Revelation 20.7-10 will occur. Then Jesus will return bodily to Earth, put down the rebellion and consign Satan to Hell. Living believers will be 'raptured', and the general resurrection and Last Judgment will take place. The eternal age will begin with the establishment of the new Heaven and Earth.

◆ Dominion Theology ◆

A recent version of postmillennialism is Dominion Theology. One branch of Dominion Theology is Christian Reconstructionism. Those who hold this view believe that Christ's Millennial reign will be expressed in the reordering of society in conformity with Biblical principles – for example, by applying the Law of Moses. Christians, they believe, are required to bring about this Biblical reconstruction of society in all its aspects – political, economic, legal and social.

Another version of Dominion Theology is Kingdom Now Theology. This comprises a diverse range of movements that view the charismatic revival of the mid-20th century as God's means of equipping the Church for its task of taking this world out of Satan's control and reclaiming it for God. This includes reclaiming the world's material wealth, its politics, its social institutions, the arts and science, etc. In this way God's Kingdom will be established on Earth, and this will in turn pave the way for Jesus's second coming. This version of Dominion Theology had its roots in the 'Latter Rain' movement; it found its classic expression in the 'Manifested Sons of God' and related movements.

► The amillennial view

Amillennialism literally means 'no millennial-ism'. Strictly speaking, amillennialists *do* believe in the Millennium - it's just that they think it covers the whole Church age from Jesus's first coming to His coming again, rather than a period of peace and righteousness either before His second coming (the traditional postmillennial view) or after it (the premillennial view). Amillennialism is very widely held. In fact, over the entire history of the Church as a whole, this has been the predominant view of the Millennium.

Amillennialists think that Jesus bound Satan by His sacrificial death, resurrection and ascension (Revelation 20.1-3; see John 12.31-33, Colossians 2.15, Hebrews 2.14). Satan is clearly now bound in crucial ways. He can't condemn God's people and he's ultimately powerless to thwart the gospel outreach to the nations and prevent a vast multitude from being saved.



Image © Ferrell Jenkins <http://ferrelljenkins.wordpress.com/>
An excellent example of an ancient rolling stone tomb, of the kind in which Jesus's body was laid. It dates from Roman times. Amillennialists believe that Jesus bound Satan through His death, resurrection and ascension.

Unlike the other views, amillennialism doesn't see the Millennium as a period of peace and prosperity. The Millennium – that is, the Church age – is a time of conflict of varying intensity between the kingdom of darkness and God's people. But the gospel will be preached and a great multitude of people will be saved. Satan is powerless to prevent this. Mainstream amillennialism holds that this conflict will intensify towards the end of the Church age, culminating in a period of severe tribulation during which the Antichrist will take control of the world. Most probably, too, a great number of Jews will be converted as the Church age draws to a close.

Then Jesus will return bodily to Earth, conquer Antichrist and all his forces, overthrow the satanic world system and consign Satan to Hell. Living believers will be 'raptured'; the general resurrection and Last Judgment will take place and the eternal age will begin with the establishment of the new Heaven and Earth.

● The first resurrection ●

John sees *"the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast They came to life and*

reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20.4). This is “*the first resurrection*” (Revelation 20.5). Over these resurrected souls “*the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years*” (Revelation 20.6).

These “*souls*” are believers. Many amillennialists and postmillennialists think they’re believers who have died. Some restrict these dead believers to the martyrs – believers who lost their lives because they were Christians. Either way, they think that this passage refers to believers’ death and passing into heaven, where they reign with Christ for the Millennium.

But many take another, more likely, view. On analogy with John 5.21,24-25, it seems highly plausible that “*the first resurrection*” is the resurrection Paul speaks about in Ephesians 2.5-6 and Colossians 2.12 – a spiritual resurrection that occurs when a believer passes from death to life (1 John 3.14). We, God’s people here on Earth, are indeed His priests (1 Peter 2.9, Revelation 1.6). Christ now reigns (1 Corinthians 15.25) and He has made us kings (Revelation 1.6); even now, we sit with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2.6).

A first resurrection presupposes a second. In this view, the second resurrection would be our bodily resurrection at Jesus’s second coming.

Foot Note The drama of history

Most amillennialists and some postmillennialists think that what John sees in Revelation 20.1-15 covers the whole period from the Lord’s death to His second coming.

In fact, the central part of the Book of Revelation (6.1-20.15) seems to retell the story of the Church age several times. Revelation 20.1-15 is the last in this series of panoramic views.

For example, the three series of judgments – the seals (6.1-8.1,3-5), the trumpets (8.2,6-11.19), and the bowls (15.1,5-16.21) – seem to be broadly parallel, all covering the period between Jesus’s first coming and His second coming. This is supported by the fact that all of them end in thunder and lightning and an earthquake (Revelation 8.5, 11.19 and 16.18). Again, the battles of Revelation 16.12-21, 19.11-21 and 20.7-10 all seem to depict the cosmic conflict told in different ways. This conflict began at Jesus’s death, resurrection and ascension. It rages throughout the Church age, and climaxes at Jesus’s second coming.

Together, these panoramas present an in-depth three-dimensional picture of the conflict of the ages and God’s judgment and victory. But there’s also a clear progression as we read through Revelation. Judgments increase in severity; our Lord’s victory comes more fully into focus.

The Last Judgment



A sunset harvest scene. The Last Judgment is a harvest (Matthew 13.30,39; and also Revelation 14.14-20, which draws on Joel 3.12-13).

The great resurrection and judgment

The simplest view of the general resurrection and last judgment of mankind is as follows (this is an amillennial view):

► The general resurrection is a single event that takes place at Jesus’s second coming (rather than two or more, as premillennialists believe). Everyone – both believers and

unbelievers – is resurrected (see John 5.28-29). Believers who have died are resurrected to life in a new, glorious resurrection body (John 6.39-40,44,54, Romans 8.10-11, 1 Corinthians 15.35-54, 1 Thessalonians 4.16). Unbelievers also, we must assume, receive resurrection bodies of some kind, though the Bible doesn’t tell us what these will be like.

► Believers who are still alive are transformed and receive their new resurrection bodies without passing through

physical death. They *“will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”* (1 Thessalonians 4.17). This act of being *“caught up”* is often called ‘the rapture’. (Unbelievers who are still alive presumably receive their resurrection bodies, too.)

► All believers, in their resurrection bodies, meet the Lord as He returns to Earth to reign in glory.

► Jesus judges everyone - believers and unbelievers - and assigns each one to their eternal destiny (Revelation 20.11-15).

It seems quite feasible that these three events – the resurrection, the ‘rapture’ and the last judgment – occur seamlessly and perhaps even simultaneously as the single great final event of world history.

At God’s judgment seat

After death, we will all stand before God’s judgment seat (Romans 14.10, Hebrews 9.27, Revelation 20.11-13). In Revelation 20.11, John does not say whether the Father or the Son is seated on the *“great white throne”* of judgment. But other passages in the New Testament make it reasonable to suggest that it’s the Son. The Father has handed over all judgment to the Son (John 5.22,27, Acts 10.42, 17.31, Romans 2.16). Jesus will be our Judge.

Why has God given Jesus this role? One reason is surely this: because Jesus is not only God, but *a human being like us*. People can’t say to Him: *“You have no right to judge us; you don’t know what it’s like to be human - you’ve never suffered like we have, you’ve never been tempted”*. He has. In life as well as in death, Jesus suffered more than we could ever know. He was tempted just as we are (Hebrews 4.15).

At death - or when Jesus returns - we shall all stand before Christ. Everyone who has ever lived will find themselves in His presence. And it’s His very *presence* that will judge people. Jesus’s presence always does that. An encounter with Jesus always reveals what is in someone’s heart. In the end, nobody can sit on the fence in their attitude to Jesus - they’ll either be for Him or against Him (see Luke 11.23); they’ll either love Him or hate Him. Even in His earthly life, Jesus caused division (see John 7.43, 9.16, 10.19, see Matthew 10.34-36). When people meet Him in glory, they’ll either fall at His feet in adoration, or they will flee the burning purity of His being.

Everyone’s life - even their most secret thoughts - will be weighed in the balance (see 1 Corinthians 4.5). Each one of us *“will give an account of himself to God”* (Romans 14.12). The Lord *“will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart”* (1 Corinthians 4.5). Sam Storms comments: *“Is it not sobering to think that every random thought, every righteous impulse, every secret prayer, hidden deed, long-forgotten sin, or act of compassion will be brought into the open for us to acknowledge and for the Lord to judge? And all this, we are reminded, without any ‘condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 8.1).”*

God gave mankind free will. That means we’re accountable for our lives. In the end, none of us can blame heredity or environment, or what others have done to us, for the kind of person we are. It’s our reactions - what we have thought and said and done *in response to* the circumstances of life - that makes us what we are at the moment of death. And those reactions, in the end, are a matter of our choice.

The judgment of believers

Believers are judged (see 1 Corinthians 3.12-15), but not in the same way as unbelievers. We’ve already passed from death to life (John 5.24). Our names are written in the Book of Life (see Revelation 13.8, 20.15, 21.27). Yet we are judged by what we’ve done (2 Corinthians 5.10). Faith is proved by acts of obedience (James 2.14-26). Have we yielded our lives fully to God, regardless of the apparent personal cost? Have we walked in the Spirit, and not in our own strength. Have we resolutely trusted God, come what may? Have we obeyed Him? Have we overcome temptation, compromise and persecution for Jesus’s sake? Have we loved? Have we forgiven?

There are degrees of reward in heaven. Paul writes: *“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”* (1 Corinthians 3.11-15).

C.S. Lewis assures us, *“We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no natural connexion with the things you do to earn it, A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle”* And if that general is promoted to allow his competence and experience to bring victory on a larger field of battle, that, too, is an appropriate reward of his success.

Our rewards in heaven must be thought of in the same light. Our degree of glory and our ministries and responsibilities in eternity will flow naturally from how we’ve lived our lives here.

Our formative years

Our childhood years were our ‘formative’ years. They determined, to a large extent, the kind of person we are now. Our present life on Earth, too, is like a childhood. These are our ‘formative years’ - a period of training and maturation that is preparing us for our life in glory. As



Our lives on this present Earth are like childhood. These are our ‘formative years’ - a period of training and maturation that is preparing us for our life in glory.

Russell Crowe said to his followers in the film 'Gladiator': "*What we do in life echoes in eternity*". We will reap what we sow (Galatians 6.7-9).

God is laying a foundation in our lives, and we must cooperate with Him. How much do we allow God's Spirit to mould us into the image of His Son (see 2 Corinthians 3.18)? Are we presenting our bodies "*as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God*" (Romans 12.1)? Are we allowing the Spirit of God to transform us by the renewing of our minds? Are we allowing Him to refashion the way we think? Are we, by His Spirit, coming to see things as

God sees them - so that we discern what His will is, agree with it and do it (Romans 12.2)? And how faithfully do we obey God (see Matthew 25.21, Luke 19.17) – obedience that is, more often than not, unseen to anyone but Him (compare Matthew 6.4,6,18)?

So, as Peter writes: "*... make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.*" (2 Peter 1.5-7 NIV).

Hell



Burning cattle carcasses caught on film in 2001, during a devastating outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK. It's a vivid picture of Gehenna - the New Testament term for Hell. Image copyright © www.FreeFoto.com (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)

Before we look at the New Heaven and Earth, and what life will be like there, we need to address the subject of Hell. What are we to believe about Hell?

God made mankind in His image. God is love (1 John 4.8,16). We reflect Him in being able to love - to love Him, and each other. But love cannot be forced or 'programmed in' - otherwise it would not be love. So we may choose not to love God. We may choose, instead, to reject Him. C.S. Lewis wrote: "*From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the centre is opened to it.*"

God loves each one of us with an unimaginably vast, measureless love - a love supremely demonstrated on the Cross. He's not willing for anyone to perish (see Ezekiel 18.23,31-32, 1 Timothy 2.4, 2 Peter 3.9).

And, because we're made in the image of God Himself, each one of us is immensely valuable. Jesus said: "*What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*" (Matthew 16.26 NIV). He asks us to compare our souls - our 'selves' - against "*the whole world*", or what Richard Lenski describes as: "*all the world's wealth, power, pleasure, glory, . . . all enjoyments, all achievements, all satisfactions.*" Each one of us is worth more – infinitely more – than all this.

God will make it as difficult as He can for people to refuse Him. He does this because of His great love. And He does this because of the great value He has invested in us by making us in His image. But, because He has given us free will, He cannot make it impossible for us to refuse Him. Some choose to reject Him. They choose to forfeit their souls.

The Bible portrait of Hell

The Old Testament reveals little about Hell. A relevant Old Testament word is *sheol*, found over 60 times (for example, 2 Samuel 22.6, Job 11.8, Psalm 139.8, Proverbs 7.27 and Isaiah 14.9). *Sheol* is the abode of the dead, where everyone - both good and evil - goes at death. *Sheol* is a shadowy underworld; a place to be dreaded.

The nearest Greek equivalent for *sheol* is 'Hades'. In Acts 2.27,31 'Hades' directly translates the Hebrew *sheol* in a quotation of Psalm 16.8-11. In Revelation, Hades is always paired with death. Hades is the realm of the dead – a realm over which Jesus is victorious and whose followers share in that victory (compare Revelation 1.18, Matthew 16.18, 1 Corinthians 15.54-55). In Matthew 11.23 and Luke 10.15 Hades is a place of judgment. Luke 16.23 definitely names Hades as a place of torment for the wicked.

Daniel is the first Biblical writer to speak definitively about the general resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. God's angelic messenger told Daniel: *"many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt"* (Daniel 12.2). Here is the first clear Biblical statement of the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Here, too, is the most definitive statement in the Old Testament about Hell as a place of eternal torment and judgment. The word *"contempt"* here denotes a feeling of revulsion and abhorrence. In Daniel Block's words, it *"describes the disposition one has toward the putrid and malodorous carcass of a dead animal infested with maggots and in an advanced stage of decay"*.

The Hebrew word for *"contempt"* also occurs in one other Old Testament text, Isaiah 66.24, where it's translated *"abhorrence"*. Here, Isaiah depicts God's judgment on those that rebel against Him. God says, *"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."* Jesus echoes these words in Isaiah's prophecy, to portray the fate of the wicked in Hell: *"where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched"* (Mark 9.48).

The basic New Testament word for Hell is *gehenna*. It occurs 12 times in the New Testament (for example, Matthew 5.22,29-30). In each case, the ESV translates it as *"hell"*. It's the place of eternal punishment for the wicked. *Gehenna* derives its name from a valley outside Jerusalem called *"the Valley of the Son of Hinnom"* (Joshua 15.8, 18.16). This was once the place where children were sacrificed by fire to a pagan god (2 Chronicles 23.10, 28.3, 33.6, Jeremiah 7.31, 32.35). These abominations called down God's judgment: *"... the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, . . ."* (Jeremiah 7.32-33). The combination of fire, God's judgment, and slaughter, made the Valley of Hinnom a vivid image of the destiny of the wicked.

The strongest warnings and most graphic images of Hell in the Bible come from Jesus's own lips (for example, Matthew 22.13, 25.41,46, Mark 9.43, Luke 12.4-5, 16.19-31). Undoubtedly, much of the language that the Bible uses to describe Hell is symbolic. But it reflects a terrible reality. It's an unquenchable inferno (Jude 7); a lake of fire and sulphur (Revelation 20.10, 21.8); a place where *"their worm does not die"* (Mark 9.48). It's a place of darkness (2 Peter 2.17), *"weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 8.12), eternal destruction and exclusion from God's presence (2 Thessalonians 1.9) and everlasting punishment. It's called *"the second death"* in Revelation 2.11 and 21.8.

J.I. Packer comments: *"... the 'worm' that 'dieth not' (Mark 9.47, KJV), an image, it seems for the endless dissolution of the personality by a condemning conscience; 'fire' for the agonising awareness of God's displeasure; 'outer darkness' for knowledge of the loss, not merely of God, but of all good, and everything that made life seem worth living; 'gnashing of teeth' for self-condemnation and self-loathing"*.

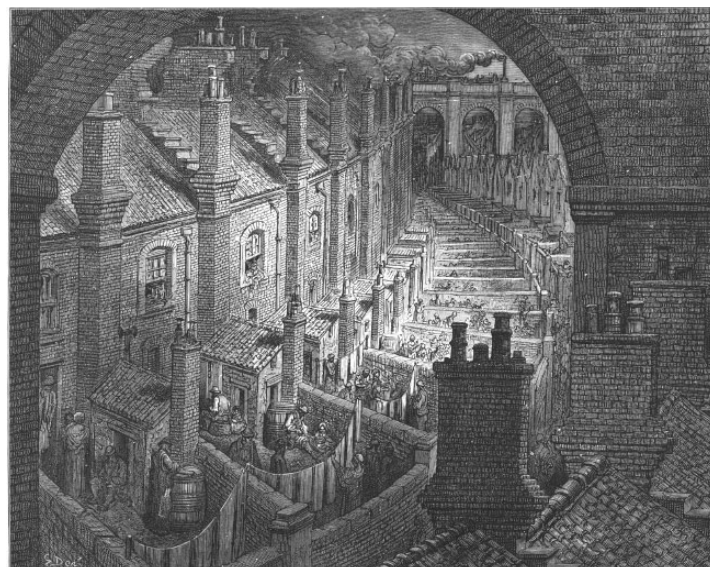
There will be degrees of damnation in Hell (compare Luke 12.47-48, and Matthew 11.20-24) and degrees of reward in

Heaven (see 1 Corinthians 3.12-15). But Hell doesn't merge into Heaven. There's a great chasm fixed between them (compare Luke 16.26).

What is Hell like?

Banishment from God's presence

The underlying element of Hell's punishment is exclusion from God's presence (see Matthew 7.23, 25.41, Luke 13.27). It's God's presence that makes Heaven heaven. His absence makes Hell hell. It was exclusion from God's presence that Jesus suffered for us on the Cross – *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27.46). God made us for relationship with Him. To be cut off from Him is to lose everything that makes life worth living. The loss of someone we loved dearly can be almost unendurable – what would the loss of God be like?



'Over London—By Rail'. An engraving by Gustave Doré (1832-1883) for the book 'London: A Pilgrimage' illustrated by Doré and with a text by Blanchard Jerrold, and published in 1872. It depicts a scene from the East End of London in Victorian times. A steam train crosses a bridge in the background. Houses are crammed together. In the claustrophobic back yards, washing hangs in air thick with sooty smoke from the trains that clatter above them. No trees or grass or flowers relieve the gloom. It is an urban hell. In his book 'The Great Divorce', C.S. Lewis pictures Hell in a similar way, as a dismal urban landscape: "Evening was just closing in and it was raining. . . . I found only dingy lodging houses, small tobacconists, hoardings from which posters hung in rags, windowless warehouses, goods stations without trains, . . ."

The cramped little world of self

The essence of sin is **self** - where my little world revolves around me, where my satisfaction, my pleasure, my fulfilment is all that counts. Sin is to say to God: *"My will be done, not yours"*.

Hell is the final fixing of that self-centredness and self-will for all eternity. Hell is the cramped and claustrophobic little world of self, without end. George Macdonald wrote: *"the one principle of hell is—'I am my own. . . .'"*

Those in Hell have chosen not to love God; they have chosen not to love other people. That choice becomes their destiny – they become incapable of love. Dostoevsky wrote that Hell is *"the suffering of being unable to love"*.

Remember that God made mankind in His own image. Central to that image is our *relational* nature. And at the heart of that relational nature is our ability to *love*. So when people choose not to love, when they choose to live only for themselves, *they cease to be fully human as God intended them to be*. Those in Hell cease finally to bear God's image.

They're like a coin so worn that no trace of its image or inscription can be detected. They are shrunken, shrivelled souls. They are (to borrow C.S. Lewis's expression) mere "remains" of what God made them to be.

The final choice

Those in Hell end up there because of their own choice. J.I. Packer says, "God's wrath in the Bible is something which people *choose* for themselves. Before hell is an experience inflicted by God, it is a state for which a person himself opts, by retreating from the light which God shines in his heart to lead him to himself." After explaining the imagery of Hell, Dr. Packer comments, "These things are, no doubt, unimaginably dreadful, But they are not arbitrary inflictions; they represent, rather, a conscious growing into the state in which one has chosen to be. The unbeliever has preferred to be by himself, without God, defying God, having God against him, and he shall have his preference. Nobody stands under the wrath of God save those who have chosen to do so."

In the end, God gives people up to their own will (see Romans 1.24,26,28). Jesus said: "*Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*" (John 3.19 NIV). As in Milton's 'Paradise Lost', they say, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven!" For them, to love and serve God in Heaven would be intolerable. So God hands them over to their own wishes. Their decision to refuse God, which they made during their lives, is fixed at death for eternity. They are banished from His presence, and excommunicated from the community of His people.

Under God's wrath

But God will do more than just hand those who reject Him over to the consequences of their sins. They stand forever under our holy God's displeasure. As Christians, we've all known the agony of guilt and shame because of our sins. To suffer God's displeasure for eternity would be unendurable. And justice demands that those in Hell *should* know the unspeakable horror of their sin. C.S. Lewis asks us to

picture a man: "who has risen to wealth or power by a continued course of treachery and cruelty, . . . who, having thus attained success, uses it for the gratification of lust and hatred Suppose, further, that he does all this, not . . . tormented by remorse or even misgiving, but eating like a schoolboy and sleeping like a healthy infant . . . , without a care in the world, unshakeably confident to the very end . . . that his way of life is utterly successful, satisfactory," God will not allow such a man to remain under this hideous illusion. In the blazing light of God's presence, that man will wake up to the appalling horror of what he has done with his life. He must live with that horror for eternity.

❖ What about those who never heard the gospel? ❖

What about those who have never heard the true gospel? And what about the stillborn, the miscarried and aborted, those who died in childhood, or the mentally incapacitated?

Two anchor points for our thinking are these: (1) Jesus's sacrifice on the Cross is sufficient to atone for everyone who has ever lived (see, for example, 1 John 2.2). (2) No-one can be saved except through Jesus (see John 14.6, Acts 4.11-12, 1 Timothy 2.5-6).

It's reasonable to think that only people who consciously rebel against God are lost. Perhaps everyone's name is written in the Book of Life, and only those who consciously refuse God have their names erased. On this basis, those who die before the age of moral accountability, and the mentally incapacitated, are saved.

Those who do reach the age of moral choice will be judged on the basis of the light they have had. God speaks through nature (Psalm 19.1-4, Romans 1.19-20) and through the innate moral faculty imprinted on each person's conscience (Romans 2.14-15). The idea of a Supreme God has been found in hundreds of cultures throughout the world. God has not left Himself without witness. Perhaps Terrance Tiessen is right when he said: "All people meet Jesus Christ personally at the moment of death, and they respond to him in a manner consistent with the response they had been giving to God and his revelation during their lifetime."

A new Heaven and Earth



Image by NASA

'Earthrise' – an image of Earth above the lunar horizon taken by Apollo 8 crewmember Bill Anders in 1968, while in orbit around the Moon. The three astronauts on this mission were the first humans to see the Earth as a whole planet. Our world is a beautiful place – think how wonderful the new Earth will be!

There will be a new Heaven and a new Earth (Revelation 21.1, 2 Peter 3.13). But isn't this just a picture of what Heaven will be like? Isn't God going to destroy this physical creation and take us all to Heaven to be with Him there?

No - it's the reverse. Jesus is returning to Earth so He can live with us here. God is establishing His rule *on Earth*. In the final scene of the Book of Revelation, we see New Jerusalem. It symbolises God's new humanity living in perfect communion with Him in paradise. In his vision, John sees this city *coming down from Heaven*. We shall live on Earth - and we shall be in Heaven, too! The barrier between Heaven and Earth will be dissolved. There'll be Heaven on Earth for all eternity.

The new Earth may differ from this present world in many ways. But we can be sure it will remain physical and solid, just like it is today – in fact, probably even more so! Harry Blamires comments: ". . . many people tend to picture the afterlife as something *less solid, less substantial* than our



Knuckles Mountain Range in Sri Lanka - a scene that foreshadows the beauty of the New Heaven and Earth.

earthly life, an existence in some ethereal and virtually disembodied state. In this respect, much current thinking is topsy-turvy. The one thing we can with certainty say about life in heaven is that it is *more real* than life on Earth.”

Foot Note The new creation has begun!

Jesus Himself is already part of the new creation. He already has His new body. One day, God's people, too, will receive new bodies, and the Earth itself will be renewed. Then the new creation will be complete.

But though we haven't received our new bodies, we're already - if we belong to God - part of the new creation. Paul said: “. . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. . . the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5.17). Our spirits have been renewed. Our souls are being renewed. One day we'll have new bodies, fit for life on the new Earth.

Transformed and renewed

Jesus is the Pioneer of the new creation. When He returns to Earth, creation will be transformed around Him. But will the new Earth be connected with this Earth? It seems certain that it will. Two pieces of Biblical evidence tell us this.

“Very good”

Firstly, God declared His creation to be *“very good”* (Genesis 1.31). The natural realm suffers from the effects of human sin. And our own bodies are prey to disease, and grow old and die. But neither the natural world nor our

bodies have become intrinsically evil. So God does not need to destroy them.

God will not discard and destroy this Earth. On the contrary, He's going to renew and transform it. Paul affirms this in Romans 8.21: *“the creation . . . will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God”* (Romans 8.21). Liberation isn't annihilation. It's a setting free, a restoration. *That's the whole point of salvation: to save is to rescue*, not to replace. The present creation will be liberated and transformed, not destroyed to make way for a newly created replacement.

God isn't going to snuff out this Earth and start all over again. As N.T. Wright explains, *“God is not going to abolish the universe of space, time and matter; he is going to renew it, to restore it, to fill it with new joy and purpose and delight, to take from it all that has corrupted it.”* What *will* be utterly destroyed is the old order of things - Satan's evil kingdom, and the world system that exists in rebellion against God.

Jesus's resurrection body

In particular, we know for certain that Jesus's own resurrection body was the very same body that He had during His earthly life (as we saw in Session 11).

Our new bodies, too, will have definite continuity with our present bodies. They are 'resurrection' bodies; resurrection presupposes *continuity* from old to new. Like our physical bodies, the physical creation we live in will be (so to speak) 'resurrected' - transformed and renewed, rather than annihilated and replaced.



Jesus's coming will transform this creation: "... we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, ..." (2 Peter 3.13, NIV)

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"The first earth had passed away"

There are, however, Scriptures that suggest that the present Earth will be destroyed. In Revelation 21.1, where John records "... for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, ..." It may well be that what had passed away was *the old order of things*, not the Heaven and Earth themselves. Jesus, too, speaks about Heaven and Earth passing away (Matthew 5.18; and Matthew 24.35 and its parallels in Mark and Luke). This may well mean the end of this Earth and Heaven in their present form at His coming; it doesn't necessarily imply their physical annihilation.

"Stored up for fire"

Another Scripture that suggests the destruction of this present Earth is in 2 Peter. Peter tells us: *"But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly. . . . But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. . . . the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."* (2 Peter 3.7,10,12-13).

This passage seems to suggest that this old Earth will be completely burned up and destroyed. But there are three pieces of evidence which suggest that this isn't so:

- Peter uses the terms *"melt"* (verse 12), translating the Greek *tēkō*); *"burned up"* (verse 10) and *"burn"* (verse 12), both translating *kausoomai*; and *"be set on fire"* (verse 12), translating *pyroō*. A.M. Wolters says that "... the words for

'burn' used here commonly refer to a state of intense heat . . . , as when a person is 'burning' with fever, or a piece of metal is red hot. In fact, *pyroomai* is regularly used of metals being heated in a smelting furnace. Conspicuous by its absence is the common verb *kaiomai* and its compounds, which mean 'to burn' in the sense of going up in flames. . . . The apostle is describing the Day of the Lord in the terms of cosmic elements which, as the result of intense heat, become incandescent and melt. They do not 'burn up,' . . . To use the language of contemporary scientists in describing nuclear accidents, the future cataclysm is not a 'burnup' but a 'meltdown.'" This suggests that the Earth will be transformed, rather than trashed and replaced. There will be continuity between the old and new Earth and Heaven.

- Another clue lies in the Greek word (*luō*) translated *"dissolved"* in 2 Peter 3.10,11,12. (In the NIV the corresponding translation is *"destroyed"* in 2 Peter 3.10,11 and *"destruction"* in 2 Peter 3.12.) Douglas Moo explains, "Destruction' does not necessarily mean total physical annihilation, but a dissolution or radical change in nature". He quotes one dictionary's definition of this word *luō*: "to destroy or reduce something to ruin by tearing down or breaking to pieces". We can picture something of the idea by a set of toy building blocks. A model house made from these blocks can be dismantled - and hence destroyed. But the pieces remain and the child can use them again to construct a new and improved model building.

- Scripture regularly uses fire as an image of God's **judgment** (see, for example, Isaiah 66.15-16); and that's almost certainly the case with this passage in Peter. In the words of the Book of Hebrews, *"our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrews 12.29, cited, in modified form, in Deuteronomy 4.24). F.F. Bruce comments: "He who descended on Mount Sinai in fire . . . still consumes in the white heat of his purity everything that is unworthy of himself." Our holy God will execute judgment on every

being, human or spirit, who clings to their rebellion against Him. His holy presence will purge His creation of everything unholy and impure.

Our resurrection bodies

God will transform believers' frail and ageing bodies into bodies like Jesus's (Philippians 3.21). We won't be disembodied ghosts floating about on clouds! We will have physical bodies; we wouldn't be complete humans without them. Our bodies are as essential to us as our spirits. Paul didn't look forward to being released from bodily life when he died. Rather, he looked forward to being clothed with his new resurrection body (see 2 Corinthians 5.1-4). Jesus Himself has a new body - a Man with a human body already lives in heavenly places and will one day rule the new Earth! We will rule there with Him in our new bodies.

What will our new bodies be like? Paul tells us that they'll be "*spiritual*" bodies (1 Corinthians 15.44). That doesn't mean they won't be physical - it means they'll be supernatural. It may be significant that Jesus described His own resurrection body as "*flesh and bones*" (Luke 24.39). He didn't call it 'flesh and blood', which is used with reference to life in our present human bodies elsewhere in the New Testament (see, for example, Hebrews 2.14). Our new bodies will be physical, but different from our present physical bodies. They'll be transformed, radiant with glory, powerful, incorruptible and immortal. They'll be unable to suffer pain or injury, and free from weakness and disease. They'll be endowed with new and amazing properties unknown to us now.

❖ Metamorphosis ❖

John Piper compares what will happen to this old Heaven and Earth with the metamorphosis of a caterpillar. A radical reconstitution of the caterpillar's body transforms it into the winged splendour that emerges from the pupa. There's total transformation - you'd hardly think that the caterpillar and the butterfly were actually the same individual. And yet they are.



Image © Diego Delso : Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

A monarch butterfly emerges from its pupa. A humble caterpillar is transformed into this winged beauty. It's hard to believe the caterpillar and the butterfly were the same individual. And yet they are. So it will be when our present frail bodies are transformed when Jesus returns.

The famous evangelist, D.L. Moody, once remarked: "Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; . . ." Our intellects will be sharper, our minds more perceptive, our sight more penetrating, our hearing more acute, our sense of touch more sensitive. C.S. Lewis wrote: "To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth."

We shall be perfect in spirit, soul and body, untroubled by temptation and incapable of sin. Jesus's atoning death saved us from the **penalty** of sin. His life in us now through the Spirit saves us from the **power** of sin. When He comes, we shall be saved from the **presence** of sin. We shall have glory (see, for example, Romans 5.2, 2 Corinthians 3.18). We shall - at last - bear God's image clearly and fully, as He has always planned.

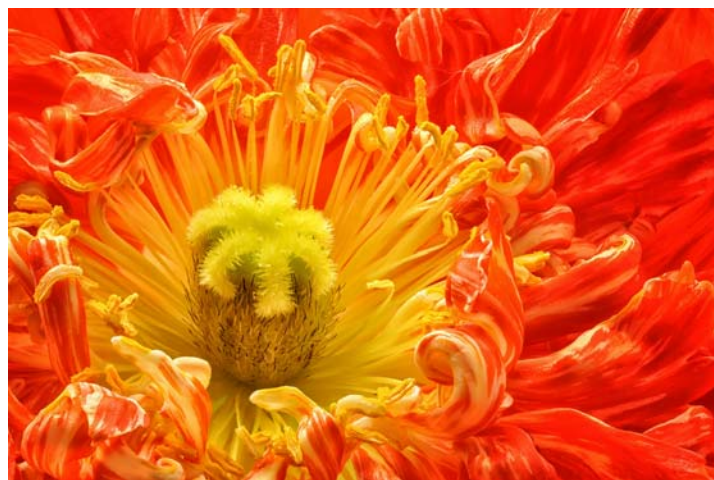


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A poppy in radiant red. Paul pictures how the resurrection body corresponds to the present earthly body by the analogy of a plant growing from a seed. Our bodies will be "*sown in dishonour; . . . raised in glory*" (1 Corinthians 15.43).

❖ The transformation of our bodies ❖

The new Earth will be this old Earth renewed and transformed. It will be the same with our resurrection bodies! Our new bodies, too, will be our old bodies renewed and transformed. Remember that Jesus's own resurrection body was the selfsame body He had during His earthly life.

But after death, our bodily remains decay and vanish into dust. Their atoms and molecules are dissipated and recycled through the biosphere. So how will God recall them and assemble them again into our new resurrection body? Remember that, even in life, there's a constant turnover of the molecules in our body - it's said that we change our whole body every seven years or so. So, even in this life, our identity doesn't depend on the actual physical molecules in our body.

Paul pictures how the resurrection body corresponds to the present earthly body by the analogy of a plant growing from a seed (1 Corinthians 15.35-38,42-44). The plant is very different from the seed. Very little of the seed's physical substance may end up in the plant that grows from it. But there's true continuity between them, nonetheless.

And it will be rather like that for us. None of the physical elements of our old mortal bodies may ever find their way into our resurrection bodies. But there will be real continuity between them. We will recognise our new bodies as our own. And we'll recognise each other, too!

And we'll see God in all His glory, face to face (Revelation 22.4, see 1 John 3.2). Jesus rose bodily from the tomb. He still has His glorious resurrection body, and will have it for all eternity. So we can be sure that He'll be present on the new Earth in bodily form as a Man. God in Christ will walk among us, resplendent in glory. We shall see Him as He is!

Foot Note Jesus – forever Man

The Son of God has ruled creation from when He first made it. But now He rules it as a Man, too.

Jesus has always existed and will always exist as the Divine Son of God. But at His incarnation, He also became a Human - something He was not before.

When He returned to His Father at His Ascension He did not stop being a Man. Being human wasn't just a temporary condition that He assumed on Earth and then divested Himself of when He returned to Heaven. He will be a Human – a Member of our human race - for all eternity. The Son of God will live with us on the new Earth as a Man, with a human spirit, soul and body.

Heaven on Earth

We tend to think of Heaven and Earth as two separate locations within creation. But actually they're two interconnecting dimensions. Radio waves pass right through us, but we're unaware of them until we switch on the radio or TV. In a similar way, Heaven is all around us, but we're simply not aware of it unless God 'tunes us in' - as He did to Elisha's servant (2 Kings 6.15-17), the shepherds near Bethlehem (Luke 2.8-14), and the dying Stephen (Acts 7.55-56).

But there *was* one special place where Heaven touched Earth in a special way. That was the place where God lived. At the beginning, He lived in Eden. Then, centuries later, He lived in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple on Mount Zion. Then God lived in the Person of Jesus, the One Who came down from Heaven (see John 3.13, 6.51).

Now *we*, God's people, are the place where Heaven touches Earth. God lives in *us*. Though we live on Earth, we also live

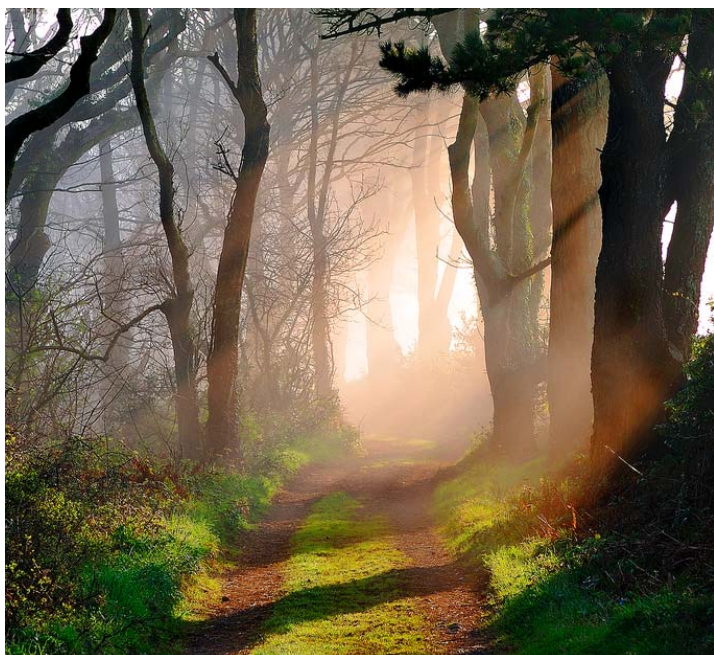


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Sunlit path in Godolphin Woods, Cornwall, England. One day, God's presence will fill the whole Earth. Heaven will invade Earth; Heaven and Earth will be blended in a way we cannot now imagine.

in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2.6). But one day, God's presence will fill the whole Earth. Heaven will invade Earth; Heaven and Earth will be blended in a way we cannot now imagine.

When will this happen? At Jesus's coming. The Bible says He *"will descend from heaven"* (1 Thessalonians 4.16, see 1 Thessalonians 1.10, 2 Thessalonians 1.7). He won't literally descend out of the sky onto the Earth's surface - otherwise not all would see Him. At His coming, Heaven and Earth will, it seems, suddenly be transparent to each other. And that transparency means that everyone - wherever they are - will see Him when He comes (Revelation 1.7, Matthew 24.30).

Greg Beale explains: "When Christ appears, he will not descend from the sky over Boston or London or New York City or Hong Kong or any other localized area. When he appears, the present dimension will be ripped away, and Christ will be manifest to all eyes throughout the earth (see Matthew 24.27). . . . How this is possible in literal geographical terms is certainly unclear, but the answer lies in recalling that a new dimension will break into the old physical dimension, and the possibilities of new kinds of perception and of existence beyond present understanding will then be realized."

Believers who are alive at Jesus's return will join the resurrected believers and will be *"caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"* (1 Thessalonians 4.17). The 'clouds' here are not meteorological phenomena. They're the visible manifestation of God's presence among His people, the shekinah glory. And *"the air"* may not be the atmosphere that clothes our Earth. It may instead denote the heavenly realms that Paul calls *"the air"* in Ephesians 2.2 - but now cleansed of the evil powers that once lodged there.

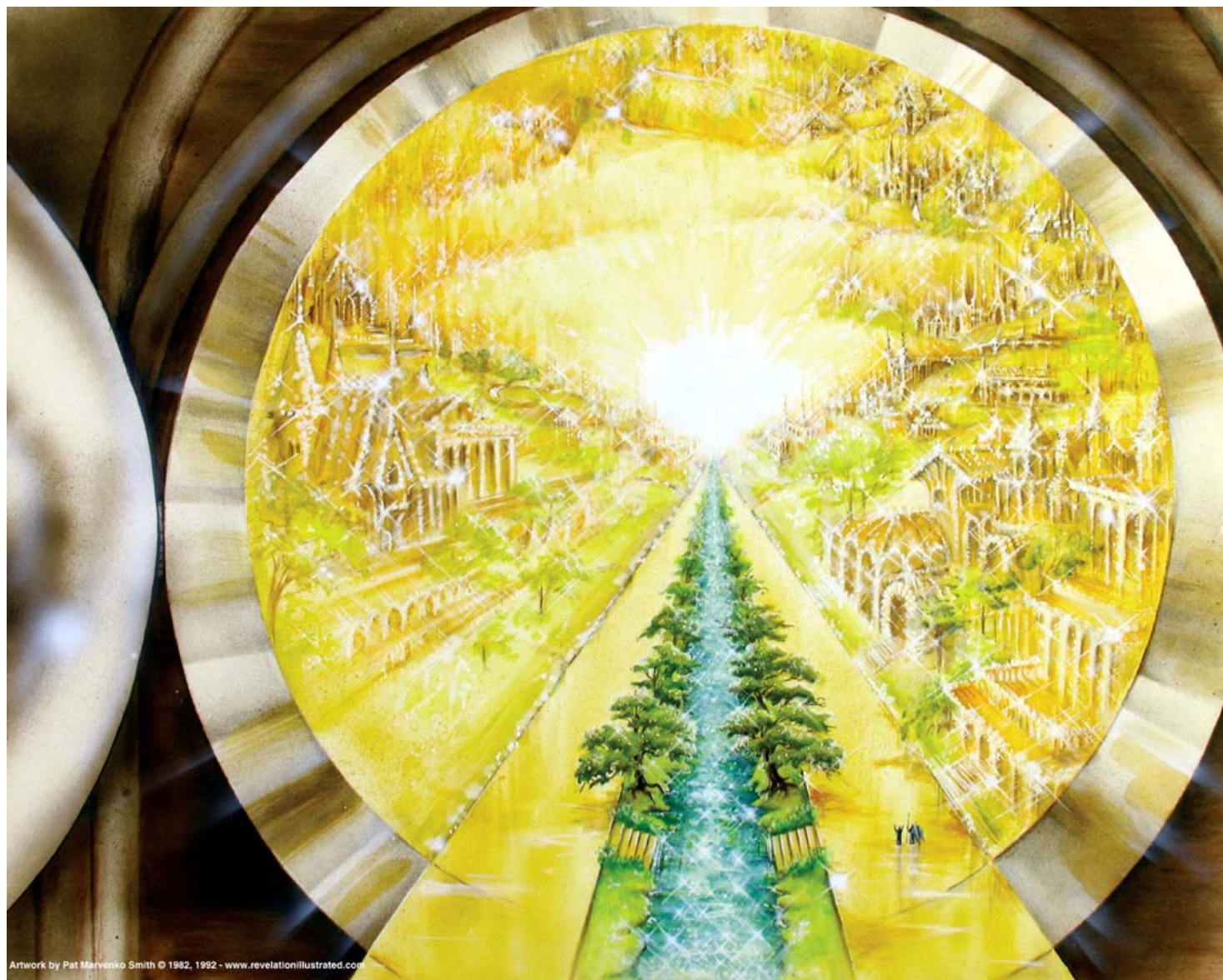
Paul is using metaphors here. We're not going to rise bodily to meet Jesus in the stratosphere, and then escort Him down to Earth. Rather, at His coming, He will transform and merge Heaven and Earth. All creation will be filled with God's presence. We'll find ourselves in God's presence, on the new Earth and, at the same time, we'll be in Heaven, too. Jesus's Second Coming will usher in the Kingdom of God in its full and final glory.

Foot Note The intermediate state

What happens to us if we die before Jesus's return? A common view is that we enter what's called the 'intermediate state'. This is typically viewed as a temporary condition in which believers enjoy the presence of God in 'paradise'. There they wait for Jesus's second coming and for the resurrection of their bodies. Those who've rejected God, on the other hand, wait in a gloomy underworld for their judgment and doom.

But to have a body is essential to being fully human. As we've seen, Paul longed, not to be *"naked"* (that is, disembodied), but *"clothed"* with his resurrection body (2 Corinthians 5.1-4). The idea of the 'intermediate state' depends on time in heavenly realms being in step with time here on Earth - and we don't know whether it is. Paul died 2,000 years ago; has Paul been waiting all this time for his resurrection body? Perhaps everyone who dies finds themselves immediately at the moment of Jesus's return, the moment of resurrection and final judgment. That's possible. But we can't be sure.

The city of God



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Each of the gates of New Jerusalem is made from a single pearl (Revelation 21.21), and its gates are always open (Revelation 21.25). In this painting by Pat Marvenko Smith, we're looking through one of these open gates. We see the river of living water flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city; the tree of life flourishes on either bank (Revelation 22.1-2).

In his final vision, John sees God's city, New Jerusalem (Revelation 21.2,9-27). At the beginning, God placed mankind in a garden. And there's a garden at the end, too. There's a river of living water and trees flourishing on its banks (Revelation 22.1-2), reminding us of the Garden of Eden.

But there's also a city. God started with a garden, but in that garden He's planning to build a city. This city is the New Jerusalem.

A city is a seat of government, a hub of commerce, a centre for science, culture and the arts, an interdependent community of people. A city symbolises society, civilisation, a kingdom, a world. God's city and Satan's city Babylon represent, in T. Desmond Alexander's words, "contrasting worlds".

Babylon pictures "this present world" (a phrase that Paul uses in 2 Timothy 4.10). Babylon is fallen mankind's civilisation under Satanic domination (see John 12.31, 14.30, 16.11) and in rebellion against God - a world order that will one day collapse into ruins (Revelation 18.1-19.4).

New Jerusalem symbolises the Kingdom of God - God's

perfect world where He reigns. It's the paradise where God lives with His faithful people, drawn from all ages and races (see Revelation 7.9). Here is the final fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth would find blessing (Genesis 12.2-3). The repeated reference to "the nations" in Revelation 21.24,26 and 22.2 emphasises that God's people will be drawn from all nations and ethnic groups - "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5.9). You can hear so clearly the echoes of God's original covenant promises to Abraham.

Notice, too, that all God's pictures of the heavenly world are corporate. Cities are communities. God's people will gather together around Jesus when He returns (see 2 Thessalonians 2.1). They'll be a family bound together in warm and intimate fellowship. Heaven is a corporate gathering, a general assembly of God's people (see Hebrews 12.22-23). So much of our joy and fulfilment is bound up in relationships with our fellow believers - how much more will this be true in glory!

And a city is an *interdependent* community - each one contributing to the wellbeing and edification of the whole

community in their special way, using their particular God-given gifts. Using our spiritual gifts to build up our fellow-believers is just a foretaste of what we shall be doing in the world to come.

God's glory fills the earth

God Himself is personally present on Earth. God's first home here was the Garden of Eden. After sin spoiled this world, He set about creating a sanctuary so He could continue living here - the Tabernacle and the Temple. But on the new Earth, God doesn't need a special sanctuary. There's no sin to make that necessary. So there's no physical temple in the city (Revelation 21.22) - *"its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb"*. The whole city is the temple, the dwelling-place of God. God's presence fills the entire city.

The city's shape tells us that. It's a cube (Revelation 21.16). That's like the Most Holy Place, both in the Temple (1 Kings 6.20) and in the Tabernacle (this can be calculated from the description in Exodus 26.1-37). The Most Holy Place was the innermost sanctuary. It contained the Ark of the Covenant, on which was placed the *"mercy seat"* or *"atonement cover"* (Exodus 25.17 ESV and NIV respectively). The Tabernacle was God's royal palace. The Most Holy Place was His throne room, the place of His immediate presence (see Exodus 25.22, Numbers 7.89).

The city is a cube, like the Most Holy Place. The *whole city* is a Most Holy Place, the place where God lives. So *everyone in the city* is in the Most Holy Place, too. Once, only one man could enter this sacred place, and only under the strictest conditions. Now *all* God's people live there in His immediate presence. That fulfils what God has wanted right from the beginning.

New Jerusalem is so huge that it seems to fill the entire new Earth. And that's what God has always planned. God lived in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. But as the human family grew ever larger, mankind was to extend the garden - and God's presence with it - out to the whole Earth. The whole Earth will be God's dwelling-place; the whole Earth will be His temple. Earth will be saturated with His presence and glory. Habakkuk's prophecy will then have come to full fulfilment: *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2.14 and see Isaiah 11.9).

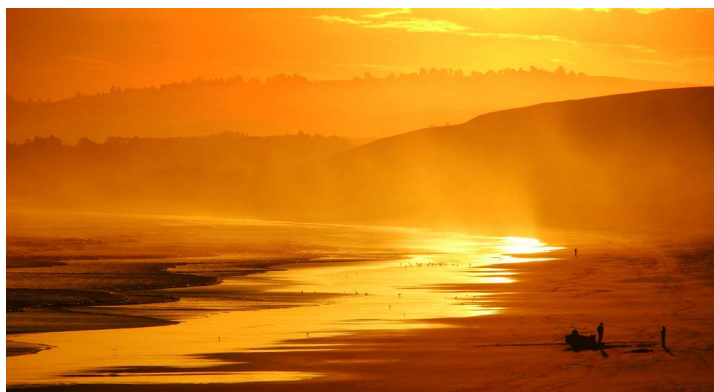


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"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2.14)

The River and the Tree of Life

There'll undoubtedly be trees and rivers in the world to come - it will be a place of exquisite beauty. But the river and trees of Revelation 22.1-2 are symbolic. They capture truths

seen throughout the Bible.

The **river of life**, in Michael Wilcock's words, *"flows . . . through the length of Scripture"*. It springs up in Eden (Genesis 2.10-14) and flows through Psalm 1.1-3, Jeremiah 17.7-8, Ezekiel 47.1-12, Joel 3.18, Zechariah 14.8, and John 4.14, 7.37-39, and Revelation 21.6 and 22.17. This river pictures God's life - eternal life, life in the Spirit, life in fellowship with God, abundant life (see John 10.10), a life that brings fruitfulness, fulfilment and joy without limit.



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A woodland stream in Cornwall, England. An image that evokes Revelation 22.1-2: *"the river of the water of life, . . . also, on either side of the river, the tree of life . . ."*

We meet the **tree of life** first in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.9). In the Book of Revelation we see what seems to be a whole grove of them flourishing on either bank of the river. They yield fruit every month and bear leaves that bring health and well-being (Revelation 22.2) - just as Ezekiel had prophesied (Ezekiel 47.12). When mankind sinned, God had to bar them from this tree (Genesis 3.22-24). Now its life-giving fruit and health-giving foliage (compare Ezekiel 47.12) are freely available to His people through Jesus (Revelation 2.7, 22.14, and compare John 6.35, 51, 1 John 5.11) The curse is no more (Revelation 22.3).



Foot Note The Kingdom Has Come!

When Jesus returns, God's Kingdom will arrive in its full and final glory (see 2 Timothy 4.1). Peter Leithart explains that the Kingdom of God is: ". . . the new world-order, in heaven and on earth, produced by the revolutionary changes brought about in Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Covenant in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension." It's a world that God rules as King. We, His people, are its citizens (see Ephesians 2.19). God's Kingdom is symbolised by New Jerusalem - God's new mankind living in God's presence in His new creation.

Remember that from the beginning God appointed mankind to be His vice-regent - to rule the Earth on His behalf (Genesis 1.26, 28, and Psalm 8.4-8, part of which is quoted in Hebrews 2.6-8). That's what will happen in the new Heaven and Earth. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, *"it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come"* (Hebrews 2.5). It is to mankind.

The first Adam failed to act as God's vice-regent. Jesus is the Second Adam. In Him, humanity's vice-regency is restored. Jesus has always and will always rule creation as the Son of God. In the new Heaven and Earth, He will also rule as a Man, a member of our race with a glorified human body. And He will share that role with us, His people. Mankind will rule the Earth as God has always planned.

God's bride and sons

So deep is God's love for His people, that He describes it in terms of the two most intimate human relationships we can know - the bond between a man and his wife, and between a parent and their child.

Jesus's Bride

John sees the New Jerusalem *"prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Revelation 21.2). God's people are a **bride** - the Lamb's wife (Revelation 19.7-9, 21.2,9, and see Ephesians 5.23-27,29-32 and 2 Corinthians 11.2). Jesus is our Bridegroom (see Mark 2.18-20 and parallels in Matthew and Luke, and John 3.29).

Before a man and woman were married in New Testament Jewish culture, they were betrothed (compare Luke 1.27). This was like our engagement, but much more binding. While she waited for the wedding day, the bride made herself ready for marriage. As God's people, we are betrothed to Jesus; this is our time of preparation for marriage to Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 11.2.)

Just before the wedding, the Jewish bride in New Testament times bathed. The Church, too, is washed; Jesus loved the Church and gave Himself for her *"that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish"* (Ephesians 5.26-27; compare Ezekiel 16.8-9). The bride would array herself in special clothes and adorn herself with ornaments and jewels. Jesus's Bride will be arrayed *"with fine linen, bright and pure"* (Revelation 19.8 and see Revelation 21.2).

Jesus will marry His Bride when He gathers her to be with Himself to live with Him for ever in the new Heaven and Earth (see Revelation 19.7, 21.2-3, and compare 1 Thessalonians 4.17, 2 Thessalonians 2.1).

And every wedding was celebrated by a feast (see Matthew 22.1-14). When we're married to Jesus, we too shall enjoy a feast - the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19.9). God will finally and fully establish His Kingdom at Jesus's return. The Bible pictures this final phase of God's Kingdom as a banquet (see, for example, Luke 14.15-24). As we saw in Session 13, eating with someone is an act of committed fellowship with them. The Lamb's marriage supper pictures the fellowship between God and His people in the age to come - a fellowship that believers have already begun to enjoy here and now.

When we eat the Lord's Supper, we foreshadow this Kingdom banquet in a special way. Jesus Himself alluded to eating and drinking in God's Kingdom when He instituted

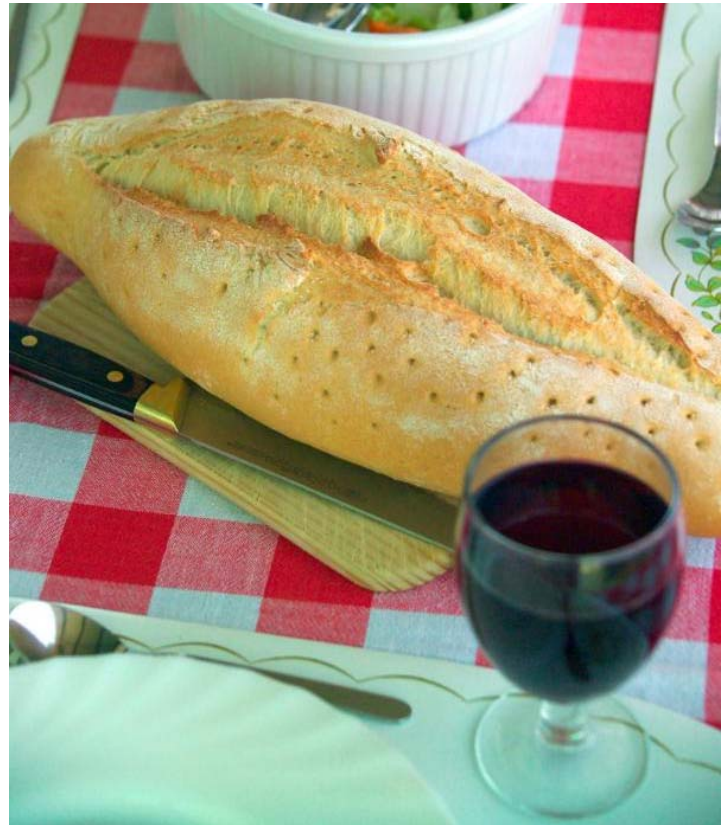


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His Supper (Luke 22.15-18,29-30). Jesus is our Host at the Lord's Supper; we eat together in His presence. It's a special time of communion with Him and with each other. And it's a foretaste of our fellowship in the new Heaven and Earth.

Our communion with God and with each other was made possible by the **New Covenant**. That covenant was sealed by Jesus's sacrificial death. Through the New Covenant, God forgives us, cleanses us from sin, fills us with His Spirit and unites us with Himself and each other in a sacred bond of friendship and fellowship. This New Covenant is ultimately fulfilled in the marriage supper of the Lamb - in full, unhindered, unsullied, unbreakable fellowship with God and each other for all eternity. Then *"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."* (Revelation 21.3 NIV). That's something that God had planned from the beginning - see, for example, Leviticus 26.11-12, Jeremiah 31.33 (quoted in Hebrews 8.10) and Ezekiel 37.27.

God's children

► We read, too: *"The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son."* (Revelation 21.7). As a body, God's people are His bride. Individually, they are His **sons**.

At home and at rest

What will life be like on the new Earth? It will be a place of spotless holiness (see Revelation 21.27), and more wonderful than we can imagine. Yet we'll feel more at home there than we've ever felt on this Earth.

Remember, this Earth will not be destroyed, but *transformed*. So the new Earth will, somehow, be familiar to us. We shall say, like C.S. Lewis's Unicorn in "The Last Battle": *"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I*

belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life . . ." We humans have never forgotten paradise. We're homesick. We long to return to Eden.

And we'll be at rest on the new Earth. Those who remain faithful to God will rest from their labours (Revelation 14.13, compare 2 Thessalonians 1.6-7). They'll enjoy relief from the hardships, troubles, temptations and opposition that assail them in a godless world.



A butterfly in ravishing blue. A foretaste of the new Earth.

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But above all, God's people will enter fully into the rest that was foreshadowed by the Sabbaths and Jubilee of the Old Testament. We already enjoy rest in Jesus (see Matthew 11.28-30), but then we shall enjoy it to the full (Hebrews 4.1-11 – this passage, at least primarily, refers to our eternal rest).

What is that rest? It isn't idle inactivity or relaxation! Our rest is nothing less than **full salvation**. Sin brings unrest – strife and turmoil, pain and suffering, misery and sorrow. God's salvation brings rest – life free from tension and strife, dissatisfaction or frustration, pain and anguish (see Revelation 21.4), disappointment and regret. Rest is abundant life, life in all its fulness, life as God always intended mankind to enjoy. True rest is to enjoy perfect harmony, complete wellbeing, true fulfilment, deep satisfaction, pure joy, abiding peace.

And, at heart, rest is to do with relationships. We experience true rest when we are in harmonious fellowship with God and with each other:

► Sin shattered our relationship with God. But in the world to come, we'll "*see his face*" (Revelation 22.4) – "*his face*" here refers both to God and to Jesus Christ, the Lamb. We will enjoy God's presence fully, without shadow or interruption.

► Sin spoils our relationships with other people. In the world to come, there'll be no social barriers, no personality clashes, no intellectual limitations that cause errors and misconceptions, no misunderstandings, nothing to mar our relationships there. There'll be no marriage there (Luke 20.35-36) – even this deepest and most fulfilling human

bond will be eclipsed by the intimacy of our relationship with God and with His people there.

"This is what I was made for!"

We, God's people, will be all that God meant us to be. To borrow C.S. Lewis's words, we shall say, "*Here at last is the thing I was made for.*"

What do we humans really long for? Our answers to that question tell us a lot about our eternal home. We long to love and be loved. We long for a special place and role in society. We're eager to explore, to discover new worlds; we thirst for knowledge and understanding. We long for ways to engage our talents and creativity, our intellect and imagination. Well, our life in glory won't disappoint!

Life in the age to come will be no golden retirement! There'll be new things to learn, new realms to explore. There'll be purposeful work to do - to work is part of what it means to be human. But our work will no longer be painful toil. It will be pleasurable and satisfying. To be part of the New Jerusalem is to be a citizen, and to be a citizen involves responsibility. God will call each one of us to a special role that no-one else can fulfil, a role that will bring pleasure to Him, joy and fulfilment to us and blessing to creation. As there are diversities of gifts here, so there will be there. We shall serve God as His priests, kings and prophets:

► We will be God's priests

In Old Testament times priests served God in His Tabernacle and in the Temple that replaced it. But John

sees no Temple building in the New Jerusalem - *"its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb"* (Revelation 21.22). The whole city is the Temple, the dwelling-place of God. God's presence fills the entire city, where God's people live. We shall all be in His temple. And we shall serve Him there as His priests.

We'll behold God's face (Revelation 22.4); we'll live in the glory of His immediate presence, and serve and worship Him in His presence for ever (Revelation 22.3). The Greek word for *"worship"* here is *latreuō* and suggests priestly ministration. Revelation 7.15 uses the same Greek word *latreuō* (in this case translated *"serve"*) when it tells us that God's faithful people *"serve him day and night in his temple"*. Greg Beale comments: *"here [in Revelation 22.3] also they are performing priestly service in the temple of the end-time city."*

► We will be God's kings

We shall be kings. We shall reign for ever and ever (Revelation 22.5). God created mankind to rule over His creation on His behalf (Genesis 1.26,28, Psalm 8.6). Mankind was to subdue the Earth, and use its resources to make it productive and beautiful, and develop a rich and golden civilisation there.

Since the Fall, mankind's God-given powers to govern Earth have been greatly weakened. Our race's moral depravity - coupled with our impaired mental and physical powers - makes us unable to subdue and rule the Earth as God intended. Mankind wages a frustrating and wearisome battle against nature (see Genesis 3.17-19). The natural world lacks its God-given leadership. And, like any system without proper management, disorder and breakdown result. Earth faces disaster as the human race mismanages and ravages it. Furthermore, God removed His blessing on the land (compare Leviticus 26.18-20, Deuteronomy 11.16-17).

And the natural world suffers alongside us. As we mentioned in Session 2, it's hotly debated whether animal death occurred before the Fall. But we can be sure that disease and pain and injury, unnatural death and 'natural' disasters were not part of God's plan for the natural world. Nature suffers because of our race's sin.

As Paul tells us, *"the creation was subjected to frustration"* (Romans 8.20 NIV). Nature can't flourish and become the



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A scene in Plitvice Lakes National Park in Croatia – a pristine paradise that reminds us of the Garden of Eden. Humanity has never forgotten paradise and longs to return there. One day we shall.

global paradise God intended.

But despite the Fall, God has never revoked mankind's mandate. Erich Sauer said: *"... cultural achievements are an essential attribute of the nobility of man as he possessed it in Paradise. Inventions and discoveries, the sciences and the arts, ... are throughout the will of God. They are the taking possession of the earth by the royal human race (Genesis 1.28), the performance of a commission, ... a God-appointed ruler's service for the blessing of this earthly realm."*

God has, where necessary, limited fallen mankind's power in order to slow down our cultural progress for good reason - most notably at Babel (Genesis 11.1-9). But mankind's cultural mandate is still in force even now while we look for Jesus's coming! Science and technology, the arts and learning, exploration and discovery – for wholesome purposes and within God's will for our lives – is still our God-given mandate on this fallen Earth.



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The creation *"was subjected to frustration"* (Romans 8.20 NIV). One day, it *"will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God"* (Romans 8.21).

But at Jesus's second coming, creation will be *"set free from its bondage to decay"* (Romans 8.21) and transformed into the paradise God had always intended. God will unleash His boundless blessing on all creation.

And God's new humanity – now sinless and with new and perfect bodies and minds - will take up its vocation on the new Earth. Mankind, with Christ as our Head, will then rule the Earth wisely and well just as God had always planned. We'll fulfil our kingly calling in new and wonderful ways, far beyond anything we can now imagine.

► We will be God's prophets

Our present knowledge of God is like seeing an image reflected in a mirror – indirectly (see 1 Corinthians 13.12). Gordon Fee comments: *"In our own culture the comparable metaphor would be the difference between a photograph and seeing someone in person. As good as a picture is, it is simply not the real thing."* In the age to come we'll see and know Him *"face to face"* (1 Corinthians 13.12). We shall know Him in the same kind of way that He knows us – without mediation or veil, directly, intimately, perfectly. As God's prophets, we'll be His friends and confidants in a deeper way than we can experience in this present life.

The end of our Journey



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Sunrise over an amethyst sea. We look with eager anticipation for the dawn of a new world that *"has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb"* (Revelation 21.23).

Our Big Journey ends. God has conquered Satan and every evil power. All the tangled consequences of sin have been dealt with. Evil has been exposed. Satan has been proved a liar. God has been vindicated and glorified; He has demonstrated to all creation that He is holy, that He is love. God's people are in God's new paradise - forgiven, saved, recreated in His image, living in communion with Him, and

fulfilling the destiny God had always planned for them. A Man - Christ Jesus, the promised King of David's line - rules the Earth. He shares that rule with all humanity. And God the Father rules supreme over all creation (see 1 Corinthians 15.28).

To God be glory for ever and ever!

But actually, our Big Journey hasn't really come to an end. The new Heaven and Earth don't signal the end of history - just the end of history as we know it. History simply enters a new phase, and the Big Journey continues in glory.

As C.S. Lewis said at the conclusion of his Narnia series: "But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."



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