

## **“Heaven”**

### **V. “Seeing the Earth Restored”**

In the last sessions we discussed the importance of understanding that God’s original plan was not an “oops” and that because of man’s sin, He resorted to Plan B by sending Jesus to redeem us. In fact, we learned that redemption through Jesus Christ was part of God’s original plan (Genesis 3:15).

We also looked at the significance of Jesus’ resurrection...His **PHYSICAL resurrection!** If Jesus is our model for life, then He is our model for our resurrection!

**THIS WEEK, we focus on “Seeing the Earth Restored” by answering 3 main questions:**

- 1. Where and when will our deliverance come?**
- 2. Will the old Earth be destroyed...or renewed?**
- 3. Will the New Earth be familiar...like home?**

When we look at the fate of the earth, we can be reminded of how God takes something destroyed by sin and renews and rebirths it, redeeming it for an eternity. Just like us, God will redeem and restore the earth. We were marred by sin (Romans 3:23) but God gave us new life through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23, John 3:16, II Corinthians 5:17). This earth is marred by sin, but God will redeem it through Jesus Christ.

**Romans 8:28** promises us that God can take ALL things, even our sin, and bring about good. That promise extends to the earth. The old earth gives way to the New Earth. Just as man is redeemed, so will the earth, thus all creation will be renewed.

#### **Where and when will our deliverance come?**

In **Hebrews 11**, there is reference to the “Old Testament” people of faith looking forward to a New Earth, a new existence that was more than just floating around as disembodied spirits.

**11:13-14** “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth (Gk: *ge* – country, land, ground, region, terrain). People who say such things are looking for a country (Gk: *patris* – native town, farther land, heavenly home) of their own.

**11:16** “Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

About these same people, Isaiah said in **Isaiah 26:19**, “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy...The earth will give birth to her dead.” *Just as Adam was made from the dust of the earth, so we will be remade from the dust of the earth to which we returned at death.*

\*So when will this take place? To gain a better understanding, you must first understand **Revelation 20:3-7**. Let’s read it.

### **The Millennium**

Revelation 20 refers six times to the Millennium:

The devil is bound for a thousand years (v.2)

For a thousand years, the nations are no longer deceived (v.3)

The saints come to life and reign with Jesus (v.4)

The rest of the dead don’t come to life until after the thousand years (v.5)

The saints will be priest and kings for a thousand years (v.6)

Satan will be loosened at the end of the thousand years, and he will prompt a final human rebellion against God (vv.7-8)

Three main views of the Millennium:

**Postmillennial** – Christ’s Kingdom is spreading throughout the world, and after a period of time (not necessarily a thousand years) of God’s justice spreading throughout the world, Jesus will return to an already utopian world.

**Premillennial** – a literal thousand year reign of Jesus after He returns and defeats His enemies at the battle of Armageddon. During the thousand year reign, God’s promises of the Messiah’s earthly reign will be fulfilled. The Millennium will end with a final rebellion, and the old earth will give way (be transformed) to the New Earth.

**Amillennial** – not holding to a literal thousand years, events in **Revelation 20:3-7** are happening right now as Christ’s church reigns with Him over the earth, in victorious triumph empowered by His death and resurrection. The saints rule with Christ from the intermediate Heaven, where they dwell with Christ.

Regardless of your belief about the Millennium, one thing is common with all three: **there will be a New Earth.**

\*As far as *where* the “deliverance” for God’s people will come, the Old Testament prophecies are dominated by the theme of God’s plan for an earthly kingdom of righteousness – promises of the New World:

**Isaiah 9:7** The Messiah “will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom forever.”

**Isaiah 11:1-10** describes Jesus’ mission to Earth.

v.4 – He will rule against the wicked and destroy them

v.6 – there will peace in the animal kingdom (no predators)

v.9 – no harm or destruction in Jerusalem

v.10 – The Messiah “will stand as a banner for the peoples,” and “the nations will rally to Him.”

v.10 – His place of rest will be glorious (This anticipates Revelation 21-22)

**Isaiah 62:11** – “See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.” THIS STATEMENT REAPPEARS in **Revelation 22:12** in the words of Jesus Christ: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

**Isaiah 65:17-19, 21, 25** describes life in the New Heaven and the New Earth

-New Heaven and New Earth

-Former things (Heb: first things, in time, place or in rank) not remembered

-New Jerusalem

-Rejoicing people

-No weeping or crying

-God will rejoice with His people and in His people

-There will be houses and people dwelling in houses

-Vineyards will be planted and worked

-There will be peace in the animal kingdom

**Isaiah 66:22-23** says that there will be worship in the New Heaven and New Earth

\*TWO IMPORTANT POINTS worth noting about Isaiah.

1. His prophecies concerning Jesus’ birth were fulfilled literally, therefore, Isaiah’s prophecies about the New Heaven and the New Earth should be taken as being fulfilled literally.

2. Jewish scholars understood Isaiah’s writings as literal and not figurative. This carried over the Jewish people. This helps explain why Jesus was expected to bring about an earthly kingdom in His day. While restoring God’s earthly kingdom was Jesus’ ultimate mission, He had to first teach and preach God’s heavenly kingdom.

**Will the old Earth be destroyed...or renewed?** Will the New Heaven and the New Earth be made from scratch?

\*Theologian and author Anthony Hoekema writes, “In his redemptive activity, God does not destroy the works of his hands, but cleanses them from sin and perfects them, so that they may finally reach the goal for which he created them. Applied to the problem at hand, this principle means that the new earth to which we look forward will not be totally different from the present one, but will be a renewal and glorification of the earth on which we now live.”

What does “utterly destroyed” mean?

Some Scripture indicates that the earth and the universe will be “utterly destroyed.”

**-Psalm 102:25-26** says that the earth and the heavens will “perish...they will wear out like garment...and they will be discarded.”

**-Luke 21:33** Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

**-2 Peter 3:10** says that “The heavens will disappear...the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

**-Revelation 21:1** says that the first heaven and the first earth had “passed away.”

In contrast, some Scripture passages speak of the earth remaining forever:

**-Ecclesiastes 1:4** says the “earth remains forever (Heb: o-lawm, o-lawm).”

**-Psalm 78:69** says that God established the earth forever (Heb: o-lawm, o-lawm)

The Hebrew word *o-lawm*, *o-lawm* in Ecclesiastes and in Psalms is translated “forever.” However, in Deuteronomy 15:17 it is translated “for life” and does not mean “forever.”

\*It is clear from Scripture that the earth *as it is now* will not remain forever – but let’s take a closer look and see what this means.

**I Corinthians 3:12-15** teaches that God’s judgment will destroy man’s work (Gk: *er’gon* – toil, an act or deed) that is not quality and will refine what is quality. **Revelation 14:13** reminds us that our deeds will follow us into Heaven.

**Do you see your “works” completely “spiritual” works, or do you think the Bible could be talking about products of your labor? In other words, do you think**

**mankind's creativity, culture, art, music, desires, languages, knowledge, etc. will carry over to the New Heaven?**

Albert Wolters writes, "Those purified works on the earth must surely include the products of human culture. There is no reason to doubt that they will be transfigured and transformed by their liberation from the curse, but they will be in essential continuity with our experience now – just as our resurrected bodies, though glorified, will still be bodies."

\*The confusion comes with the misinterpretation of "destroy." In contrast to what many think, Scripture does not interpret destroy to mean absolute or final destruction, **rather a temporary destruction that is reversed through resurrection and restoration!**

We might say, "A caterpillar passes away, and the butterfly emerges." The old gives way to the new. **II Corinthians 5:17** says that believers in Jesus Christ are new (Gk: *kainos* – new in quality or fresh, superior to the old) creatures and that the "old" is "passed away" or "destroyed." **The same Greek word in II Corinthians 5:17 which is translated "passed away" is used in Luke 21:33, Revelation 21:1 and II Peter 3:10 that we looked at earlier.**

**Redemption means Restoration!!!** Consider Peter's words in **Acts 3:21**, "He (Jesus) must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

Remember, the same Peter that declared those words in **Acts 3:21** is the same Peter who declared in **II Peter 3:10** that the earth would be laid bare. Apparently, there was no conflict with himself on his thoughts about the earth being renewed, resurrected and restored. Had he not been clear in his understanding of the earth's destiny, he would've contradicted himself in these two passages.

When speaking of the NEW Heaven and the NEW Earth in **Revelation 21:1**, the Greek word translated "new" is *kainos* and does not mean "new as opposed to old" but rather new in quality and superior in character. Remember, this same Greek word is used in **II Corinthians 5:17** to describe believers in Jesus Christ. The Christian is still the same person he was before. Different? Yes. But also the same. Thus, the New (*kainos*) Heaven and the New (*kainos*) Earth.

***"The earth's death will be no more final than our own. The destruction of the old Earth in God's purifying judgment will immediately be followed by its resurrection to new life. Earth's fiery "end" will open straight into a glorious new beginning."***

**-Randy Alcorn in Heaven**

So, with all this in mind...

**Will the New Earth be familiar...like home?**

Before we answer that, think about this:

- Have you ever been in a place so gorgeous you didn't want to leave?
- Have you ever heard of someone discussing "dying and going to heaven" and you felt a twinge of guilt because you had the thought, "I don't want to leave this beautiful place."?

In our exploration of our citizenship in heaven, we must be careful not to minimize our connection to the earth and our destiny to live on it and rule it. **Remember, that is God's plan!!** We were created from the earth, for the earth, to live on and enjoy the earth, to rule the earth, and to walk with God on the earth.

If we reduce eternity to a spiritual, non-earthly existence in which Earth is a distant memory if a memory at all, then we think of God as a failure!

Understanding the physical nature of the New Earth:

- frees us to love the world that God has made, without guilt
- reminds us that God himself gave us the earth, gave us a love for the earth, and will delight in giving us the New Earth
- causes us to anticipate eternity and look forward to Heaven
- increases our love for God
- increases our desire to share with others about salvation through Jesus Christ

\*Will heaven be familiar? YES!!! The Bible says heaven is our **HOME!**

What images come to your mind when you think of *home*?

- Family
- Friends
- Eating
- Decorations
- Warmth and security
- Laughter
- Reading
- Resting and relaxing
- Carrying out personal interests (sports, music, art, etc)

The New Earth is an *Earth*. By calling the New Earth *Earth*, God emphatically tells us it will be earthly, thus familiar. Earth in Greek is *ge*, from which we get the word *geology*, and it refers to the soil, the land, including rocks, trees, rivers, grass,

mountains, deserts, flowers, etc. Ge is concrete in nature, not abstract, and also refers to animals and human beings.

**Revelation 21:1** says the “first earth” will pass away. While we have dealt with “pass away” let’s now look at “first.” The Greek word from which we translate “first” is *protos* from which we get our English word “prototype.” Thus, *protos* suggests a vital connection between the old earth and new earth. The old earth is a prototype, or serves as a pattern, for the new earth. There’s continuity, therefore we should expect new trees, new flowers, new grass, new rocks, new rivers, new mountains, new oceans, new animals, etc. NOTE: *new* not *non*!

If we understand that the New Earth will be familiar in physical terms, why not assume that OUR ACTIVITIES will be familiar as well?

**Discuss: What are some things you enjoy that you imagine you would love to do in Heaven, on the New Earth, for eternity?**

The homesickness for Heaven we experience is the most misdiagnosed problem we have! We try to fulfill our cravings, our satisfactions with sex, drugs, alcohol, new job, money, possessions, popularity, prestige, etc. **But what we really want is the person we were made for, Jesus, and the place we were made for, the New Earth.**

\*With the understanding that the Bible teaches a New Heaven which will be centered on the New Earth, we can more easily understand why we love this earth, our present earth, so much, despite its sin and corruption. The joys we experience on earth, and our love for the earth are not heaven – but they are glimpses of Heaven!!