

“Heaven”

VIII. “What Will the Resurrected Earth Be Like?”

Recap important points:

-There are two stages of heaven: Intermediate and Eternal Heaven (New Heaven and New Earth)

-When mankind fell, creation fell. Both are under the curse of death.

Therefore, both were redeemed through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

-Jesus’ physical resurrection is the model for our physical resurrection.

-This present Earth will not be annihilated, rather restored, resurrected, redeemed, transformed from this *prototype* to the final New Earth.

-We will rule with Jesus, under His authority, on the New Earth.

-God’s original plan had no “oops” in it. Redemption was part of His original plan, and God’s original plan will be realized (Revelation 21:1).

-When we (the Church, the Bride of Christ) are presented to him, we will be wearing our acts of service, ministry and righteousness, as our Fine Linen (Revelation 19:8).

-We will rule with Christ on the New Earth. God’s Kingdom continues to expand, and we will be given dominion over it.

In part 8 we will focus on answering “What will the resurrected Earth be like?” by addressing 5 main questions:

- 1. Will the New Earth be an Edenic paradise?**
- 2. What is the New Jerusalem?**
- 3. What will the Great City be like?**
- 4. Will there be space and time?**
- 5. Will the New Earth have sun, moon, oceans and weather?**

By now, all that you previously thought of heaven has certainly been challenged in this study. For the remainder of the study, we will be tackling some questions that many have asked over the years. **This would be a good time to go back and review the previous weeks as the remainder of the study will expand on previously presented ideas and subject matter.**

Will the New Earth be an Edenic paradise?

Understanding from previous weeks that our present world gives us a foretaste of greater things to come on the New Earth (**Hebrews 8:5** reminds us that things on earth are a shadow of what is in heaven), and understanding that God created Eden for mankind (**Genesis 2:8-9**), and that Jesus promised us that He is preparing a place for

us (**John 14:2-3**), the question is asked, “Will the New Earth be a *return* to Eden?” In other words, “Will we go backwards and start over?”

As we’ve seen in this study, Scripture indicates that we will not “go backwards” and “start over,” rather the New Earth includes a carryover of culture and nations. The Fall of mankind divided history, but it did not end it. There will be no regression of culture on the New Earth. **Genesis 4:20-22** mentions technological advances and skills being developed. There’s no reason to believe we will not continue to advance for eternity. Albert Wolters says, “By analogy, salvation in Jesus Christ, conceived in the broad creational sense, means a restoration of culture and society in their present stage of development. That restoration will not necessarily oppose literacy or urbanization or industrialization or the internal combustion engine, although these historical developments have led to their own distortions or evils. Instead, the coming of the kingdom of God demands that these developments be reformed, that they be answerable to their creational structure, and that they be subjected to the ordinances of the Creator.”

Life on the New Earth will not be a going backwards, but a restoration of all things.

It’s hard for many to imagine this concept of human and cultural advancement because of the fact that God’s original creation and dwelling place for man was Eden, and Eden was a garden. So if Eden is restored, won’t we just return to a garden and live like Adam and Eve did before the Fall?

No!

Eden was not just a garden. It was an entire land of natural wonders. **Genesis 2:11-12** says that the Pishon River, originating in Eden, flowed, “through the entire land of Havilah...” The Bible goes on to say that the land had gold, aromatic resin and onyx. **Ezekiel 2:13** reminds us that the precious onyx stone was located not only near Eden, but *in* Eden. Later in Israel’s history, God would instruct the high priest to wear two onyx stones with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written on them. God called these “memorial stones” (**Exodus 28:9-12**). According to Genesis and Ezekiel, these stones memorialized Eden. God wanted His people to be reminded of Eden, and to keep it in their hearts. As the priest went about his duties in the temple, representing God’s redemption, wearing the onyx stones, God wanted His people to be reminded that He would redeem and restore them to Eden. In **Revelation 21:19-20** we’re told that onyx stones will be on the foundations of the walls of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. Alcorn writes, “The onyx of Eden and on the high priest’s shoulders – representing two places where God dwelled with His people – will be displayed in the Holy City, where God will forever live with His people. Hence, the onyx on the high

priest and in the Temple simultaneously points us to our past in Eden *and* our future on the New Earth.”

Just as Eden is our backwards-looking reference point, the New Earth is our forward-looking reference point. We should expect the New Earth to be like Eden, *only better!*

Better?!?! Better than Eden? But wasn't Eden paradise?

We must remember, we've never seen men or women, animals or nature the way they were intended to be. We've only seen marred remnants of what once was. Imagine if the “wrong side” of Heaven can be so beautiful, how much more beautiful the “right side” of Heaven will be! The Earth's beauty we now see won't be lost, but renewed, resurrected, redeemed, and transformed into the New Earth, gaining an even deeper beauty. God's plan for our life is complete, and perfect. The idea of reverting backwards, or losing anything we love on this earth in Heaven, is not Biblical. In **Jeremiah 29:11** God promises that His plan is to better us forever! Our sin, and the Curse of death on this earth, does not stop God from fulfilling what He promised us in Scripture.

On the New Earth, no good thing will be destroyed. The good things of God's creation and mankind's creative expression will be carried over to the New Earth for eternity. Again, and it can't be overstated: one must keep in mind that we will continue to progress for an eternity, without the hindrance of sin and evil.

What is the New Jerusalem?

It is a city.

It is the *capital city* of the New Earth.

As we've seen in the past week's lessons, Scripture describes Heaven as both a country (**Luke 19:12; Hebrews 11:14-16**) and a city (**Hebrews 12:22; 13:14; Revelation 21:2**). Fifteen times in Revelation 21 and 22 the place God and his people will live together is called a city. We've established things one might find in a city: trees, buildings, sidewalks, roads, rivers, people, culture, art, music, food, animals, walls, etc. Scripture uses concrete and architectural terms to describe the Holy City. We should not read Scripture as merely figurative, but understand it to describe the Holy city as a literal geographical location with concrete features.

The city at the center of the future Heaven, the capital city, is called the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 21:15-16 gives us the dimensions of the Holy City: 12,000 stadia, or 1400 miles in length, width, and height. While these measurements may have symbolic importance (the cube shape reminding us of the Trinity of God, like the Most Holy Place in the Temple [**1 Kings 6:20**], saying that God will live in this city and his presence *in full form*, will be the greatest feature), this doesn't mean they can't be literal. **Revelation 21:17** emphasizes these dimensions are given in “man's measurements.”

Revelation 21:12-13 says that the Holy City as “a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west.”

Gates represent access. In the New Earth, citizens of heaven will have access to God, and to the Holy City, all the time. The city’s open gates are a great equalizer. There’s no elitism in Heaven. While on this earth, a city’s walls and gates are used for protection against enemies. However, in Heaven, there are no enemies!

The gates on each side of the City, because of the vastness of the City, may each venture out to a new country, perhaps each with radically different terrain. There will be a going and coming of people from every nation, tribe, language and culture. This all suggests *adventure!!!*

But someone would ask, “Aren’t the images described in Revelation symbolic of something greater?” YES! But that doesn’t negate the fact that the descriptions can’t be literal. Think of a wedding ring. It symbolizes a marriage commitment, but it’s still a real ring!

What will the Great City be like?

We’ve established that, like other cities on this present earth, the Holy City will have features we are familiar with. However, the New Jerusalem will be a place of perfection. Therefore, as we look at present-day cities and stand in awe of buildings, parks, museums, culture, art, music, etc., we need to keep in mind that these things are only a shadow of even greater things to embrace.

Just as we previously discussed the fact that human culture and advancement will not stop in heaven, it will only increase and become greater, we must also consider the fact that *our interests* and *our God-given desire to explore* will continue!

What prompted Magellan and Columbus and all the other explorers to go off seeking “the new world”? *We were made to seek out new worlds!* It’s only the demands of our present life that limit our exploration here on earth. But in Heaven, our exploration will be encouraged by God, others, and all that is within us. So for our sake of this study, let’s agree that once there, we will want to explore the capital city!

It will be extravagant!

Presumably from Scripture, there will be other cities in Heaven. But there’s only one capital city. The Bible says it will be filled with visual magnificence. **Revelation 21:11** says, “It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” We’re told that “the wall was made of

jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone,” (**Revelation 21:18-19**).

*Let’s look at two very important features, mentioned in Scripture, that we will find in the Holy City.

It has the River of Life!

In **Revelation 21:1-2**, John describes a natural wonder that runs through the Holy City: “the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.”

Is this a real river? Is John describing actual water? YES!

Does this river symbolize anything? YES!

The river runs down the center of the city. The city is the *center* of activity. Water is essential for human, *physical* life. (Disembodied spirits don’t need or desire water. This is another reference to the fact that we’ll be physical beings.) The river flows from *God’s* throne. Rivers are beautiful and people are naturally attracted to water. This river reflects God’s thirst-quenching (the Bible’s original audience lived in a bone-dry climate and knew fully how precious water was), need-satisfying nature. We won’t have to travel “out of the city” to see beauty.

It has a Tree of Life!

In addition to the river of life, John mentions another amazing feature: “On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (**Revelation 22:2**). The tree of life is mentioned three times in Genesis 2 (being in Eden). It’s mentioned four times in Revelation. We can presume the tree of life in Revelation is the same one in Genesis. **Revelation 2:7** says that the tree of life is presently in the intermediate heaven. The New Jerusalem is also in the intermediate heaven. **Revelation 21:2** says the New Jerusalem, along with the tree of life, will be brought down and placed on the New Earth. Follow this: the tree of life was relocated from Eden to the present heaven, and it will be relocated again to the New Earth. This also points to the fact that we discussed last in talking about God’s Kingdom being present *right now*, just not here on this present earth. Remember, Jesus said in **John 18:36**, in talking to Pilate, “But now (presently) my kingdom is from another place.”

In **Revelation 2:7** Jesus said, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise (Gk: *paradeisos* – a walled garden or park, Eden. This is the same word Jesus used in talking to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in *paradise*. This is a direct reference to the intermediate heaven [see your notes from week 2 and 3]). This tree bears fruit that must be eaten for eternal sustenance (just like it was in Eden). This helps fulfill God’s original plan! We will eat

from the same tree from which Adam and Eve ate. Notice, there's no mention of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The redeemed have already known sin and its devastation, and will desire it no more!!!

The description of the tree of life in Revelation 22 mirrors precisely what is prophesied in **Ezekiel 47:12**, "Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."

Given this, now read **Psalm 1:1-3**. The person who delights in God and does not indulge in the sinful nature, "is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yield its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Even in the Psalms, we have a foreshadow of how Heaven will be!

Also worth noting: we will *eat* from the tree. Disembodied spirits don't eat. Only physical beings eat. Also, we will need to eat regularly (the tree yields fruit every month). This suggests that we will expand energy, need rest, and refueling. Again, we will not be disembodied spirits floating around with no purpose. We will be physical beings, engaged in activity, expanding energy, eating and fellowshiping, and enjoying the beauties of God's creation...FOREVER and PROGRESSING!!

*Some would ask, "Are we all going to eat off the same tree? Do we have to come to the Holy City to eat?"

Commentator William Hendriksen suggests, "The term 'tree of life' is collective, just like 'avenue' or 'river.' The idea is not that there is just one single tree. No, there is an entire park: whole rows of trees alongside the river; hence, between the river and the avenue. And this is true with respect to all avenues of the city. Hence, the city is just full of parks, cf. **Revelation 2:7**. Observe, therefore, this wonderful truth: the city is full of rivers of life. It is also full of parks containing trees of life. These trees, moreover, are full of fruit."

Will there be space and time?

We've all heard that in Heaven, "time won't matter anymore." Many tend to think of Heaven as a mode of existence where space and time are meaningless. But is that *true*?

*First and foremost, we must remember that we are finite beings. ONLY GOD is infinite. The notion that "time and space won't matter in heaven" is really stating that we will become infinite (no boundaries), omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (everywhere at the same time), and omnipotent (all-powerful) beings. This is the same prideful thought that got Satan cast out of Heaven!

In Heaven, we are resurrected physical beings, thus occupying *space*. In Heaven, we serve God; we do not become God. From what we have learned over the last several weeks, we will travel, work, eat, fellowship, and explore in Heaven. Therefore, we occupy *time*. We must also remember that Jesus is the model for our resurrected bodies. Just as he walked, talked, ate, fellowshiped, engaged in activity, felt, expressed emotions, moved about, etc., so will we! These are all examples of occupying time and space.

It's Christoplatonism (see notes from part 1) that tries to persuade us that something is wrong with time and space. But there is not. God created time and space, and His creation is "good."

Some look to scripture to back up their argument that there is no time in heaven. A misunderstanding of the KJV of **Revelation 10:6**, "there should be time no longer," has led to this. But other translations render a better understanding of the truth. The NIV states, "There will be no more delay!" which doesn't mean that time itself will cease but that there is no time left before God's judgment is executed.

Other Scripture references to time:

- Luke 15:7** Inhabitants in heaven rejoicing when a sinner repents
- Revelation 6:10-11** Martyrs in heaven wondering when God will deal with injustices on earth
- Ephesians 2:7** Paul speaks of "coming ages (not just *future*, but *plural*)"
- Revelation 7:15** God's people serve Him day and night
- Revelation 22:2** The tree of life yields fruit every month
- Genesis 8:22** God says that summer and winter, day and night, will never cease
- Revelation 8:1** says there was silence in heaven for half an hour
- Revelation 5:9-12** describes music in heaven. Music requires time: meter, tempo, rests, are all essential parts of music.

Will the New Earth have Sun, Moon, Oceans, and Weather?

Those who think the New Earth will have no sun and moon generally refer to three passages: (1) **Revelation 21:23**, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (2) **Revelation 22:5**, "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light." (3) **Isaiah 60:19-21**, "The sun will no more be your light of day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light...Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; for the Lord will be your everlasting light..."

Notice that none of these verses say there will be no more sun or moon. They say the New Jerusalem will not *need* their light, for the sun and moon will be outshone by the

glory of God. **God himself will be the light source for the New Jerusalem, restoring the original pattern that existed in Genesis 1, before the creation of the sun or moon.** Remember, light preceded light-holders (**Genesis 1:3**). Notice the sun and moon weren't created until **Genesis 1:16, day 4**. However, **on day 1, Genesis 1:3**, "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." So it will be again. This is another example of how the last chapters of the Bible re-establish something from the first chapters of the Bible.

So, will there be no more sunsets?!?

Do you enjoy sunsets? Yes, we do! Are we "losing" or "gaining" in heaven? We are gaining! Our sun is one of countless billions of stars. We could possibly see many more sunrises and sunsets on many more worlds.

To the original readers, night was often associated with darkness, crime, the underworld, hidden things, danger, prostitution, drunkenness and idol worship. Yet darkness isn't evil – God created it. We understand that night can also be associated with good things – time with family after a hard day's work, rest, dinner with loved ones, a time for reading Scripture and praying.

I don't believe Scripture teaches a void of unearthly things (sun, moon, night) as much as it is emphasizing God's glory and beholding a renewed creation, a pre-Fall creation we can read about in Genesis 1.

Will there be oceans?

Just as there is misunderstanding of Scripture as it pertains to the sun and moon, there is equal confusion about oceans in Heaven. **Revelation 21:1** says that there will be "no longer any sea." Many are disappointed at this because of all the fun things associated with the beach! Again, in heaven are we "losing" or "gaining"? We are gaining! So the core meaning is there will be no more cold, treacherous waters that separate nations, destroy ships, and bring down our loved ones. The original audience of Scripture associated the "sea" with "death" and the "unknown." In Heaven, there will be neither death or fear of the unknown.

Oceans are salt water. The salt seas purge, cleanse, and preserve the earth. They absorb and cleanse the pollution and filth poured into them. On the New Earth, such cleansing will no longer be necessary.

Even if there were to be no more oceans, or seas, we are told there will be bodies of water: rivers, tributaries, and lakes.

I believe there will be oceans in heaven, and like everything else in creation, it will be resurrected and made perfect and for a purpose. The illumination of salt water oceans would illuminate countless sea creatures, and I believe God's animal kingdom will be in Heaven (as we will study in future weeks).

What will heaven's weather be like?

We have a tendency to think that weather can be "bad" or "good." But if we believe that God is the creator of weather, and He called His creation "good" then weather must be "good." We have seasons on earth, and God created those seasons for a purpose. We will have seasons on the New Earth. Perhaps then we will see and understand more fully God's original intent for the seasons He created.

Rain is a blessing. Often in the Bible, and even in our culture, we use "rain" as a synonym for "blessings." We even sing an old hymn that says, "there shall be *showers* of blessing..." So will it rain on the New Earth? Why not? If it is not "bad" and it has a purpose, sure it can rain on the New Earth.

What about extreme heat or cold? What about earthquakes and hurricanes? Again, as with all creation, if it is "good" and has purpose, then YES. If not, then NO.

Central to this week's teaching is the fact that we *gain everything and lose nothing* when we get to Heaven. Our existence there will be far greater than our existence here on this present earth. We will not lose what we enjoy here, we will only enjoy it on a greater level. We will enjoy our relationship with God on a greater level. We will enjoy and rule over his creation on a greater level. We will see more clearly, as we explore and learn, God's original plan being fulfilled!