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The New Earth and the Eternal Kingdom

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Introduction

Expectations of divine rewards for those who do good on earth exist in almost all cultures and all peoples of the human race. The Bible presents an unequivocal teaching on this question. There will be a new earth, new in terms of both time and form, different from the present one. Upon that new earth will be established a new and eternal kingdom ruled by the King of kings. The subjects of that kingdom will be those rescued from sin by God's plan of salvation.

The establishment of this kingdom will fulfill the everlasting covenant of God with human beings. This eternal kingdom is an actual place; it is both the reward and final home of the redeemed. It is the ultimate objective of the gospel and salvation history. In it the divine promises to the world and the purpose of Christ's coming to this world will be accomplished.

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I. Heaven in the Bible

The word “heaven(s)” in English versions of the Bible is commonly translated from the Hebrew *šāmayim* and the Greek *ouranos*. The meaning of both words is “that which is high or above.”

The word “heaven(s)” in Scripture is used to refer to one of three major realms: (1) the atmospheric heavens immediately above us; (2) the astronomic or stellar heavens; and (3) the dwelling place of God. The atmospheric heavens refer to the space that immediately surrounds the earth, technically known as the troposphere, in which the birds fly (Gen. 1:20 ; Jer. 4:25). In this realm the rain and snow fall (Gen. 7:11 ; Deut. 11:11 ; Isa. 55:10) and the winds and clouds move (Ps. 78:26 ; 147:8). The astronomic or stellar heavens are the space where the sun, moon, and stars have their orbits (Gen. 1:14 , 16 , 17 ; 22:17 ; Isa. 13:10 ; Matt. 24:29).

At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon prayed to God: “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above or on earth beneath But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:23–27 ; cf. 2 Chron. 2:6 ; 6:18). Nevertheless, the Scriptures clearly and repeatedly affirm that God dwells in heaven. He looks down from His holy habitation, from heaven, and blesses His people (Deut. 26:15 ; Ps. 53:2 ; Isa. 63:15). When His people pray toward the Temple, He hears in heaven, His dwelling place, and forgives them (1 Kings 8:30 , 39 , 43 , 49). During the time of Hezekiah, “the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven” (2 Chron. 30:27). The psalmist states, “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Ps. 11:4); “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” (103:19). Jesus constantly referred to the “Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16 , 45 ; Mark 11:25). All these references indicate that “heaven” is the abode or habitation of God, which the apostle Paul designated as “the third heaven” or “Paradise” (2 Cor. 12:2 , 3).

Not only does the word “heaven” stand for the place where God dwells, where His throne is, heaven is His throne (Isa. 66:1), the symbol of His authority. Thus “heaven” is used as a metonymy for God. Especially in postexilic Judaism this term came to be used as a circumlocution for the divine name “Yahweh” or as a synonym for “God,” reflecting the Jews’ reluctance to pronounce God’s name. In the NT this phenomenon is found with some frequency. In the parable of the prodigal, the returning son said to his father: “I have sinned against heaven” (Luke 15:18 , 21), meaning that he had sinned against God. Jesus used “heaven” as a synonym for God when He said, “He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it” (Matt. 23:22). Here God is represented by His dwelling place.

In modern parlance, “heaven” is used in the same ways as in the Bible. In addition, however, “heaven” is often understood as the place where the redeemed will receive their reward immediately after death. While this use of the word “heaven” for the abode of the

blessed is not biblical, the concept of a real place where the redeemed will live with God—often called a new earth—is indeed scriptural and will be explored in the following sections of this article.

II. The Dwelling Place of the Redeemed

The OT and NT speak repeatedly of the reward of the righteous. Thus Paul wrote to the Romans that God would give eternal life “to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality” (Rom. 2:7). However, before the Bible teachings on the topic are examined, the time when the righteous will live in this glorious place needs to be ascertained.

The Bible clearly teaches that at death human beings sleep an unconscious sleep (see Death I. C. 4). This state continues until the resurrection (see Resurrection I. A). The dead are no more until brought to life by the resurrection trumpet. Thus the rewards of all, righteous and wicked, are received only at their respective resurrections (see Second Coming I. G. 2 ; Millennium I. C. 1, 3). To imagine that the dead immediately receive their reward goes against the biblical teaching of the reward of the righteous, to be received at the Second Coming.

According to the Bible, the redeemed will spend the millennium in heaven (see Millennium I. C. 2). After that they, together with the heavenly city, will return to this earth, where they will live eternally. This earth made new is the topic of the rest of this article.

A. The Dwelling Place of the Redeemed in the OT

Among the promises given to Israel, several deal extensively with a renewed earth under the rulership of the promised Messiah. These promises describe a happy people in a beautiful land, where all things are peaceful and good. They describe what might have been if Israel had fulfilled its covenant obligations (see Deut. 28:1 , 2 , 13 , 14). In reality, because of its apostasy and rebellion over the centuries, culminating in the rejection of Jesus as Messiah, Israel lost its right to the fulfillment of these conditional prophecies of glorious well-being. The Christian church has come to occupy the place of Israel, as a spiritual nation. The warnings and prophecies given to Israel are now applicable to the Christian church. (See Apocalyptic II. B. 1 ; Remnant/Three Angels I ; 4BC 25–38.) Thus while the primary application of OT prophecies regarding a renewed earth was to a renewed land of Israel, the secondary application, made in the light of NT writings, is to the earth made new expected by Christian believers.

Because of the conditional nature of these prophecies, not all details can be applied to the earth made new described in Revelation 21 and 22 ; however, there is little doubt that the OT view of the “new earth” is very similar to that given in the NT and can be safely applied to the eternal home of the redeemed. Several aspects of the OT teaching on the “new earth” must be considered.

1.A New Kingdom

Isaiah announces God's determination: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind" (Isa. 65:17 ; cf. 42:9 ; 43:19 ; 66:22). In the original intention, Canaan was to be miraculously renewed. The "former things," the sad memories of captivity and domination, were to be forgotten. According to F. Delitzsch, "Jahve creates a new heaven and a new earth which so charm men by their glory, so thoroughly satisfy all desires, that no one recalls the former ones or wishes them back again" (2:464).

Not only would the heavens and earth be made new; the spirit in the dwellers of the new earth would be new. God would give them a new heart and a new spirit (Eze. 11:19 ; 18:31 ; 36:26) in place of their old and stony heart. On this new heart would be written the law of God's new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34).

2.A Messianic Kingdom

The King of the new earth would be the Messiah, the descendant of David (Isa. 11:1 ; cf. Jer. 33:17). He would sit on the Davidic throne and be empowered with the Spirit of Yahweh (Isa. 11:1–3). His kingdom, that is, His government and judgment, would be characterized by "righteousness" and "faithfulness" (verse 5).

The Messianic King is totally different from all earthly and temporal kings and rulers. The essential meanings of righteousness (*šedeq*) may be summarized as (1) loyalty or faithfulness to the community and (2) rightness, as in what is correct and according to law, here God's own law. When Yahweh judges the world "with righteousness" (Ps. 9:4 , 8 ; Isa. 11:4 , 5), He directs and sustains the world in the divine order, which is morally correct and right in nature. Righteousness includes the covenant relation that characterizes God's dealings with His people as always being for their good and corresponding to what He has promised. Righteousness and faithfulness are the foundation principles upon which God's reign in the renewed earth will be based.

Zechariah 12–14 describes the Messiah's triumphant intervention in human history. The day of the Lord, the last battle of all nations against Jerusalem, is described in 14:1–8 , while verses 9–21 delineate the establishment of the Messianic kingdom: "And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one" (verse 9). Here is proclaimed the absolute lordship and universal kingdom of the Messianic King.

3.Jerusalem the Capital

The capital of the "new earth" is Jerusalem. According to Zechariah 14 , topographical changes, including the splitting of the Mount of Olives (verse 4), make possible the enlargement, fortification, and glorification of Jerusalem (verse 10). The city will be inhabited, the curse will be lifted, and "Jerusalem shall dwell in security" (verse 11).

The “mountain of the house of the Lord” would be established as “the highest of the mountains” (Isa. 2:2). The “Lord of hosts” would reign on Mount Zion (Isa. 24:23); He would rejoice in the city’s inhabitants (Isa. 65:19). Because of the Lord’s presence in the city, the “mountain” would be holy and the city, faithful (Zech. 8:3). In this holy city, where God “roars” from the temple and dwells, no strangers or unclean persons would enter (Isa. 52:1 ; Joel 3:16 , 17), but all nations would come to Jerusalem, bringing with them their wealth (Isa. 60:11) and the desire to seek the presence of the Lord (Jer. 3:17).

4.A Worshipping Kingdom

The New Jerusalem would be the religious center of the kingdom. To Mount Zion would come “the nations” and “peoples” to learn of the Lord’s ways, to walk in His paths (Isa. 2:2 , 3 ; Micah 4:1). The remnant of Israel would return to worship at the Lord’s holy mountain (Isa. 27:13). Those who loved the Lord and kept His Sabbaths would come to the “house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa. 56:6–8). Foreigners would be welcome (Isa. 66:20).

In these descriptions, worship of the Lord centers on three different festivals. Isaiah 66:23 affirms that the redeemed will come “from new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath.” The construction of this verse may be interpreted in two ways. The redeemed will come on every new moon festival and on every Sabbath or they may come constantly, from one feast to another. Thus the redeemed would be worshipping daily at the throne of God. The first interpretation puts more emphasis on the particular days of worship, while the second stresses the perpetuity of worship. While the first interpretation is probably more in harmony with the meaning of the original language, the spiritual richness of the second interpretation need not be excluded.

Under the Mosaic law the new moon festival (Num. 10:10 ; 28:11–14) celebrated the beginning of the new month. The Sabbath was kept as a memorial of Creation (Gen. 2:2 , 3 ; Ex. 20:8–11) and of Israel’s liberation from Egypt (Deut. 5:12–15). Since there would be new heavens and earth in the new creation, mention of these two special days seems appropriate. Most significant is the idea that “all flesh,” meaning everyone, would come to worship God as Creator, Saviour, and Redeemer, both regularly and unceasingly.

According to Zechariah 14:16 , the redeemed would come to Jerusalem to celebrate the yearly feast of Tabernacles. This joyful harvest festival (Deut. 16:13–15) reminded the Jews of God’s protection during their wilderness wandering (Lev. 23:43). It also pointed forward to the gathering of the saved and their celebration of salvation in the new earth. The feast spoke of the final joyful reunion and restoration of Israel.

5.A Holy Kingdom

In that future realm, the King in the midst of it would be holy (Isa. 12:6). Likewise, the city and the land would be holy (Zech. 2:12); the mountain would be holy (Isa. 27:13). The inhabitants of Jerusalem would be holy, cleansed from all filth (4:3 , 4 ;

33:24); “the unclean shall not pass over” the way to that land (Isa. 35:8). “They shall be called The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord” (Isa. 62:12).

Holiness permeates the kingdom. The bells of the horses bear the inscription “Holy to the Lord.” The pots in the house of the Lord are holy and the cooking pots are sacred (Zech. 14:20 , 21). In former times Aaron’s turban had been adorned with a gold plate engraved with the words “Holy to the Lord” (Ex. 28:36). Now the designation once reserved for the high priest can be applied to everyone and everything; public life, religious life, and private life are included.

6.A Joyful Kingdom

Not only would God’s people “be glad and rejoice for ever” in God’s creation; Yahweh Himself would “rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad” with His people. There would be no more “sound of weeping” or “cry of distress” (Isa. 65:17–19). The blind would see, the lame jump, the deaf hear, the dumb sing (Isa. 35:5 , 6). The city’s inhabitants would no longer be called “forsaken” or “desolate” (Isa. 62:5). Gloom and depression would be banished from the glorious New Jerusalem. This was in stark contrast with the situation in Jerusalem when Isaiah pronounced this prophecy. At that time the Assyrian armies had besieged the city and required a heavy tribute of Hezekiah (Isa. 36 ; 37). In addition Isaiah had prophesied that Babylonian armies would invade Jerusalem and carry off its treasures and people (Isa. 39:6 , 7). Yet God was planning a glorious future for the city, which would be “a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord” (see Isa. 52:9 ; 62:1–7). One reason for this joy would be the vindication and salvation of God’s people (Isa. 62:1 , 2). But the greatest source of joy would be the presence of the Lord among His people.

Through Isaiah God promised that the “offspring of the blessed of the Lord” (Isa. 65:23) would have a special relation with their Maker: “Before they call I will answer” (verse 24). The barrier of sin that had hindered communication with God (Isa. 59:2) would be removed. There would exist an intimate relationship and perfect communication between God and His people. No request would go unnoticed; no delay in response would exist. God would provide everything necessary for the people’s well-being and happiness. The Lord would place His sanctuary in the midst of Israel for evermore (Eze. 37:28). As a symbol of the richness of this heavenly kingdom, Isaiah describes a banquet of good things (Isa. 25:6).

7.A Peaceable Kingdom

In this joyful kingdom, every kind of enmity and hostility will disappear. Harmony and peace will exist, not merely among humans, but also among animals (Isa. 11:6–9 ; 65:25). The wolf, formerly the lamb’s major enemy, will be its guest. The formerly rapacious leopard will lie down with the kid in peaceful rest. The lion, king of beasts, in the past cruel and fierce, now shares his meal of straw with the calf and fatling he would have torn to pieces. The bear is at peace with the cow; their young lie down together with no sign of animosity. Undoubtedly the world has been restored to its unfallen situation,

when all animals ate green plants (Gen. 1:30). More remarkable yet, a little child leads them without fear and in perfect safety (Isa. 11:6).

Isaiah 11:8 notes a further contrast. “The suckling child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den.” The fundamental enmity between the serpent and human beings—“the first of all enmities, whereby man’s relationship with all the animal world was really thrown out of joint” (Young 389)—will be wiped out. “The most helpless of human beings, the child that has just been weaned, will be unharmed by mankind’s deadliest enemy” (*ibid.*) . The serpent, representative of Satan, will become harmless. At the same time, God will destroy the ultimate enemy: death. “He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces” (Isa. 25:8).

A summary of the peacefulness of that beautiful land is given in Isaiah 11:9 (cf. 65:25): “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” There is no harm, no fear. There is no war or even preparation for war (Isa. 2:4 ; Hosea 2:18 ; Micah 4:3). There is only a peaceful fellowship of love among all creatures and all nations under the Messiah’s government. The cause of this peace is “the knowledge of the Lord.” Both theoretical and experiential, this knowledge of God will be so extensive as to fill the earth. The true knowledge of the Lord who is the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), the one who makes and brings peace (John 14:27 ; 16:33 ; Rom. 5:1 ; Col. 1:20), the God of peace (1 Cor. 14:33) is the prerequisite for enjoying genuine peace and safety in the earth made new.

8.A Fruitful Kingdom

The Messianic kingdom was not to be a place of idleness. Its inhabitants would build houses and inhabit them (Isa. 65:21 , 22). Not only would the redeemed build houses—undoubtedly including designing, constructing, furnishing, arranging, and even adorning them—they would also enjoy the satisfaction of living in the houses they had planned and built. There would be no creditors or victors to push them out of their rightful heritage.

The inhabitants of the land would plant and harvest; they would enjoy the work of their hands (Isa. 62:9 ; 65:22). The crops to be planted were the traditional ones of Canaan: vines and fig trees (Isa. 65:21 ; Micah 4:4) and grain (Isa. 62:8 , 9). The increased fertility of the land would go beyond the planted fields. Deserts would become productive (Isa. 43:19–21) and full of trees (Isa. 41:18 , 19); the wilderness would “rejoice and blossom” (Isa. 35:1 , 6 , 7); the mountains would “drip sweet wine” and the hills would “flow with milk” (Joel 3:18 ; Amos 9:13).

The joyful work given to Adam and Eve in the garden, “to till it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15), would be restored. The inhabitants of the earth restored would “sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (Micah 4:4). Work there would be a comfort and source of delight.

9.A Permanent Kingdom

In Isaiah 65:23 God declares the permanence of His new creation and the people who will live there. As the new heavens and earth will remain forever, so will those who dwell there. Those who live in this Promised Land will have long life: Old men and women sit in the streets with the children playing around them (Zech. 8:4 , 5). Infant mortality—a common problem in the ancient world—disappears; one who dies at 100 years is still a child (Isa. 65:20).

When applied to the purified and holy earth made new, the death element in Isaiah 65:20 and 66:24 does not fit, for death is banned from the abode of the redeemed (Rev. 21:4). Both verses refer to what might have been but never was.

B. The Dwelling Place of the Redeemed in the NT

1. In the Gospels

To a great extent, Jesus' teaching regarding the reward of the redeemed was a natural continuation of the OT teaching just explored. However, great emphasis is laid on “the kingdom,” called either “kingdom of heaven” (32 times in Matthew, but none in Luke) or “kingdom of God” (32 times in Luke, four times in Matthew) by the Gospel writers. That the terms are equivalent is shown in their parallel use (Matt. 13:11 and Luke 8:10 ; Matt. 10:7 and Luke 9:2). While the kingdom at times appears to be a spiritual realm (see the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13), undoubtedly it is also a physical place where God's people live. For example, one enters the kingdom (Matt. 5:20 ; 18:3 ; 19:23 ; Mark 9:47 ; Luke 18:25). The “kingdom of God” is a real place where Jesus will again eat and drink with His disciples (Mark 14:25 ; Luke 22:16 , 18).

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus speaks of “heaven” not only as the dwelling place of God (Matt. 6:9) or the place from whence He had come (John 6:51), but as the place where the righteous will be rewarded: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:12 ; Luke 6:23). In speaking of this reward, Jesus uses the figure of the heavenly banquet, at which the saved Gentiles will sit “at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11 ; cf. Luke 13:28 ; 14:15). The “messianic banquet” is an OT symbol (Isa. 25:6) that appears in the intertestamental literature (3 Enoch 48:10), and represents the fullness of satisfaction the redeemed—including the Gentiles—would enjoy. Jesus also promised that the “meek” would “inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

“Eternal life,” the opposite of eternal damnation, was prominent in Christ's teaching (Matt. 25:46). Those who had sacrificed family for His cause would receive “in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:30 ; Luke 18:30). It appears in that favorite of verses, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Although one may rightly contend that “eternal life” begins in the here and now, Jesus' use of the term points to “the age to come,” to a time when the saved will participate in the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

In John 14:2, 3 Jesus equates heaven, the dwelling place of God, with the place where His disciples will be welcomed. Here He Himself will prepare them dwelling places so that they may live with Him.

2.In the Epistles

In the Pauline Epistles, no precise description is made of the place where the redeemed will live. There is, however, no doubt regarding their reward: “To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). In fact, the “sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18). Furthermore, the glorious reward is eternal. (Rom. 6:23 ; 2 Cor. 4:18 ; 2 Tim. 2:10). This eternal glory is the “hope laid up for you in heaven” (Col. 1:5), the “promised eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

While in 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul is describing the greatness of God’s plan of salvation, there is little doubt that the paean of praise would apply to Paul’s understanding of the eternal glory awaiting God’s children: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.” Paul himself was confident of being in this place, saved for God’s “heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18).

Peter echoes Paul’s certainty regarding the “inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven” for the believers (1 Peter 1:4). His readers were to set their “hope fully upon the grace” that would be coming to them “at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (verse 13). In his Second Epistle the apostle climaxes his fiery description of the last day with the promise of “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells,” obviously where the righteous will live (2 Peter 3:11–13).

3.In Revelation

The prophetic book of John contains a great deal of information regarding the new earth. From it we learn also about the millennium and the characteristics of those who inherit the new earth.

a.The millennium. A detailed study of the millennium appears in a separate article. Here it is enough to point out that during this 1,000-year period the redeemed of the earth, both the righteous dead and those who were alive at the Second Coming, will be with the Lord in heaven (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). At His second advent Christ sends “out his angels with a loud trumpet call” to “gather his elect from the four winds” (Matt. 24:31). He then takes the redeemed to the “Father’s house,” which He has prepared for His own (John 14:2, 3). In the heavenly kingdom those who shared in the first resurrection are “priests of God and of Christ” and “reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4, 6).

b.Qualifications for entry into the new earth. In Revelation we find information on the characteristics of those who qualify to live on the earth made new and of those who have excluded themselves from it.

The inhabitants are overcomers, victors, conquerors. “To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). The overcomer is not hurt by the second death (verse 11) and receives a new name (verse 17). The conquerors are dressed in white and walk with Christ (Rev. 3:5); in fact they share the throne with Christ (verse 21). Those who have been victors over the beast and its image stand beside the sea of glass, singing the song of Moses (Rev. 15:2 , 3). After describing the atmosphere of the new earth, John quotes Christ’s identification of its inhabitants: “He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7).

All those who live in the new earth are written in the “Lamb’s book of life” (verse 27). This book appears once in Paul (Phil. 4:3) and six times in Revelation. It is one of the books on which judgment is based (Rev. 20:12). In it are written the names of those who have given allegiance to Christ, who have no part with the beast (Rev. 13:8 ; 17:8). The conqueror’s name is not blotted out of this book (Rev. 3:5). Closely related to the idea of being inscribed in the book of life is the concept expressed in Revelation 22:14 : “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.” In Revelation 7:14 more information on the washing of robes is given: “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Elsewhere in the NT , believers are “justified” (Rom. 5:9), redeemed (Eph. 1:7), “brought near” (Eph. 2:13), and reconciled (Col. 1:20) by Christ’s blood shed on Calvary. Hebrews indicates that God’s people are purified (Heb. 9:14) and forgiven (verse 22) through the blood of Jesus. Being clothed in Christ’s righteousness is the paramount qualification for entrance into the heavenly kingdom (cf. Jesus’ parable of the wedding garment in Matthew 22:1–14).

The KJV and other versions, reflecting some ancient manuscripts, translate Revelation 22:14 differently: “Blessed are they that do his commandments.” While the manuscript evidence favors the translation “wash their robes,” and the modification of “washing robes” to “doing commandments” in the process of copying Greek manuscripts is easily understandable, one must accept that the two ideas are not mutually exclusive. Keeping the commandments is a sign of knowing, following (1 John 2:3–6), and loving the Master (John 14:15).

Those who specifically exclude themselves from the new earth and condemn themselves to the lake of fire are the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and the liars (Rev. 21:8). To these, Revelation 22:15 adds “dogs” (vile, shameless persons) and “every one who loves and practices falsehood.” The basis for exclusion is given in Revelation 21:27 : “But nothing unclean shall enter it.”

The picture given in Revelation of who may and who may not enter the kingdom agrees with what is found elsewhere in the Bible. David describes the one who can dwell on God’s “holy hill”: “He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor” (Ps. 15:2 , 3). Isaiah likewise identifies the

one who can dwell “on the heights”: “He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly; he who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil” (Isa. 33:15). In one of his conditional prophecies of the glory that might have been Israel’s, and which await their fulfillment in the earth made new, Isaiah affirmed that the “unclean” would be absent (Isa. 35:8). While expressed in a somewhat different way, the qualifications given by Jesus for entry into the kingdom of heaven are closely related to those in Revelation. One’s righteousness should exceed “that of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matt. 5:20); words alone do not gain a person’s access into the kingdom (Matt. 7:21); and a childlike spirit is requisite for entry (Matt. 18:3).

c.A description of the new earth. The last two chapters of Revelation contain a great deal of information on the new earth. Additional information can be gleaned from other sections of the book (Rev. 3:5 , 12 , 21 ; 14:3 ; 15:2–4).

According to the revelator, the new earth comes into being after the millennium, after the purification by fire of the earth we know today (Rev. 21:1). At that time the “holy city, New Jerusalem,” comes “down out of heaven from God.” It is safe to assume that this is the capital of God’s kingdom, God’s dwelling place. After its descent to earth, God makes His dwelling on the new earth, among the redeemed (verses 2 , 3 , 9).

The “New Jerusalem” (Rev. 3:12 ; 21:2), also called “the city of my God” (Rev. 3:12) and “the holy city” (Rev. 21:2 , 10), is the “Mount Zion ... the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” in Hebrews 12:22 . The city is beautiful, “as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). It is radiant, “like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (verse 11). At this point we recognize the limitations of our human understanding; we cannot comprehend that which we have not seen. Yet in faith we accept that this city is lovely beyond compare.

The city is square and very large. The measurement of the city is given as 12,000 *stadia* . Whether that is one side or the perimeter is not clear. At 185 meters (202 yards) per *stadium*, the length of each side would be 2,220 kilometers, or approximately 1,380 miles. Even if the measure were that of the perimeter, as was often given in antiquity, a contour of 1,380 miles would make for a very large city. To further complicate the picture, “its length and breadth and height are equal” (Rev. 21:16). Many attempts have been made to explain these dimensions. Some have suggested that one must recognize them as “angel’s” measures (verse 17), but this would not solve the puzzle. Others have posited that “equal” (*isos*) should be translated “proportionate.” Yet others suggest that John meant that the perimeter of the base of the wall was equal to the perimeter of the crown of the wall. Ultimately, human understanding fails. As I. T. Beckwith states, “the Apocalypticist, regardless of architectural reality, is struggling to express by symbols the vastness, the perfect symmetry, and the splendor of the new Jerusalem” (760).

The wall of the city is built of jasper, measures 144 cubits, and has 12 gates—three on each side (Rev. 21:13 , 17 , 18). The Greek *iaspis* appears to refer to a translucent green stone, as described by first-century naturalist Pliny; however, here a transparent stone

may be intended (as suggested by the translation “diamond” in *The Jerusalem Bible*). In any case, as in Revelation 4:3 , “jasper” is used to describe shining brilliance. At 0.45 meters (18 inches) a cubit, the 144 cubits would be equivalent to some 65 meters (213 feet). “This measure may represent the height or the thickness of the walls. Each of the 12 gates “is a single pearl (Rev. 21:21) and remains open all the time, since there is no night (verse 25). Some have suggested that as pearls are “formed only by suffering, salvation is made possible only by the anguish and death Christ suffered for us. Again the measurements and descriptions defy human comprehension.

The city is made of gold and its foundations are gemstones. The gold is described as pure and “transparent as glass” (verse 21), a most unusual combination to modern understanding, but which certainly suggests brilliance and light. The 12 stones of the foundations are listed in the RSV as jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst (verses 19 , 20). Of the names of these gemstones in Greek, seven correspond to LXX names of stones on the priest’s breastplate (Ex. 28:17–20 ; 39:10–13). In the RSV translation of the same lists, nine are the same in Exodus and Revelation. What the symbolic relation between the two sets of gemstones may be is not clear. John’s description attempts to portray the glory and beauty of the city he saw in vision.

“Through the middle of the street of the city” flows the “river of the water of life,” issuing from the “throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1). The tree of life, with a trunk on each side of the river, produces each month one of 12 kinds of fruit; its leaves are “for the healing of the nations” (verse 2). The water of life quenches the physical and spiritual thirst of the redeemed (Rev. 21:6). The fruits of the tree “contain the vital element the human race has gone without since Adam and Eve had to leave Eden—the antidote for aging, burnout, and simple fatigue” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* 377; cf. Gen. 3:22).

John saw “no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22). This is in contrast with Revelation 15:5 , where a temple is clearly in view. With the sin problem solved, there is no longer any need for ceremonies to bring humanity and Deity into agreement. The need for a temple is past; the throne of God and the Lamb is open to all (Rev. 22:3).

Throughout the description, light is an important feature. The city itself is brilliant gold and gems, with the “glory of God” (Rev. 21:11). The water of the river of life is “bright as crystal” (Rev. 22:1). “There shall be no night there” (Rev. 21:25 ; 22:5). There is no need for sun or moon, for Christ and the Father provide all the illumination needed (Rev. 21:23).

d. Activities in the new earth. While Isaiah stresses the agricultural and even commercial pursuits of the renewed earth (Isa. 60:4–7), John writes about the worship and fellowship activities. Neither excludes the other.

According to Revelation, the principal activity of the redeemed is the worship of the Lamb. Free from “anything accursed” (Rev. 22:3), outside of the grasp of death (Rev. 21:4), in the close company of God, who dwells with them (verse 3), the redeemed prostrate themselves in joyous worship of the One who has made heaven possible. This agrees with the worship predicted in Isaiah 66:22 , 23 .

The Greek verb translated “worship” in Revelation 22:3 is *latreuō*, generally used in reference to service or worship in the house of God (cf. Matt. 4:10 ; Luke 2:37 ; Phil. 3:3 ; 2 Tim. 1:3 ; Heb. 8:5 ; 9:14 ; 13:10). It is also used in Revelation 7:15 to describe the worship and service of those who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (verse 14).

Singing makes up an important part of heavenly worship. The 144,000 “sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders”; this is a song of experience that only they can learn (Rev. 14:3). Those who conquer sing the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb; in it they praise God for His justice and holiness (Rev. 15:2–4).

Both during the millennium in heaven and later on the earth made new, the righteous share God’s rule. They reign “with Christ” (Rev. 20:4) “for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). They do not assert their own authority but share in Christ’s royal rule.

The new earth will be a place of ultimate fellowship, among the redeemed and of these with heavenly beings. God will dwell among His people; “they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:3 , 4). In close and sweet communion, ransomed sinners will learn to know God, with none of the past separation. In this relation, they will learn of God’s ways (Micah 4:1 , 2), of His power displayed in Creation and re-creation. Then they will be able to join the elders in singing: “Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11). In addition, they will praise Christ’s worthiness, “for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shalt reign on earth” (Rev. 5:9 , 10).

III. The Significance of the Doctrine

The doctrine of the new earth and the eternal kingdom is of great importance, not simply because it involves the last things, but because it is related to the final stage of salvation history and the goal of redemption. It concerns God’s purpose in Creation, His covenant

and promises, and Christ’s message and ministry. It also impacts our Christian life in this world.

A. Fulfillment of God’s Purpose in Creation

When God created human beings in the beginning, His plan for them was to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over” everything in the world (Gen. 1:28). His purpose in Creation was that human beings made in His image would lead a blissful eternal life and exercise kind dominion over the whole world and all its creatures (verses 26 , 27). However, this original purpose was thwarted by the fall of Adam and Eve. But God’s will in Creation could not be entirely frustrated and nullified. He announced the plan of redemption in order to redeem fallen humanity from death, which resulted from their sin (Gen. 3:15 ; Rom. 6:23 ; Eph. 2:1). Thus the course of the history of redemption is the story of the restoration of His creation from its present mortal state to God’s originally intended state.

Therefore, the eternal kingdom that will be established on the new earth is the final fulfillment of the divine purpose of Creation. God has waited long for the establishment of His kingdom, in which His children will freely and fully enjoy all the blessings provided by His infinite wisdom. As Paul states, “creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Not only has the whole creation been awaiting this development, but the human race as a whole groans inwardly as its members wait for the “adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies” (verses 22 , 23).

God will make the heavens and the earth new (Isa. 65:17), but this does not necessarily involve another creation *ex nihilo*. The terms employed in 2 Peter 3:7–13 imply renewal and restoration that will produce a purified universe out of the old. In Matthew 19:28 the term *palingenesia* signals the renewal of the world, not a totally new creation; the word is translated “new world” (RSV), “New Age” (TEV), or “regeneration” (KJV). Through this re-creation God the Creator ultimately will fulfill His original purpose for creating “the first heaven and the first earth” (Rev. 21:1). Peter calls the time when this will take place “the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21 , KJV; “restore,” NIV).

B. Accomplishment of God’s Covenant and Promises

The doctrine of the eternal kingdom also represents the accomplishment of the covenant and promises that God has made with His people throughout OT history. With all of its prophecies and promises, the whole Bible is focused upon a great eschatological event, i.e., the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom.

Many prophecies of the OT point to the end of time, when the Messiah will come to reign on the new earth. Many prophecies in the NT concern the second coming of Jesus Christ and the signs that precede it. These prophecies are grounded upon the fact that God is faithful and never fails to keep His promises. God is a God of recompense who will reveal to us the glorious reward that cannot be compared with the sufferings of this present time (Rom. 8:18).

Jesus counseled His followers, “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you,” and He

concluded His counsel with a guarantee: “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:13 , 14). Paul encourages us to be steadfast and immovable in our faith, because in the Lord our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58) and the present life is not the only one if we hope in Christ (verse 19). The “crown of righteousness” is laid up as a reward for “all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8), and the “crown of life” will be given to every person who is “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). All these promises will be fully accomplished when the eternal kingdom is established.

C. Consummation of Christ’s Message and Ministry

Another important aspect of the eternal kingdom is that it consummates the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. At the climax of his prologue to the ministry of Jesus, Mark sets forth this significant passage: “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel’ ” (Mark 1:14 , 15). As G.R. Beasley-Murray notes, this passage is intended “to supply a summary of the gospel preached by Jesus, of which the teaching of Jesus in the body of the gospel can be viewed as exposition” (71), or as John Bright has stated: “Mark thus makes it plain that the burden of Jesus’ preaching was to announce the Kingdom of God; that was the central thing with which he was concerned. A reading of the teachings of Jesus as they are found in the Gospels only serves to bear this statement out. Everywhere the Kingdom of God is on his lips, and it is always a matter of desperate importance” (17).

The Synoptic Gospels make this clear in passages of a summary nature that indicate that the evangelists saw Jesus’ primary purpose in terms of preaching the kingdom (Matt. 4:12–17 , 23 ; 9:35 ; Mark 1:14 , 15 ; Luke 4:43 ; 8:1 ; 9:2). Many sayings and parables of Jesus concern the coming of the kingdom of God. Some of them relate to the nature of the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:3–9 , 31–33 , 45–50). Some teach how one can enter the kingdom of God: One’s righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20) and must do the will of the Father who is in heaven (Matt. 7:21). Others illustrate the importance of the kingdom of God: It would be better to mutilate oneself and enter maimed than not enter at all (Matt. 18:8 , 9), and it is worthwhile to sacrifice any human relationship and earthly property for the kingdom of God (19:29).

Some sayings and parables of Jesus concern the kingdom of God in the present, while others concern the kingdom of God in the future. The former may be called “the kingdom of grace” and the latter “the kingdom of glory.” From either point of view, “the kingdom of God” was the burden of Christ’s teachings. Therefore, when the glorious kingdom of God finally does come to this earth to be established forever, it will be a grand consummation of Christ’s message and ministry.

D. Spiritual Impact on the Christian Life

The doctrine of the new earth and the eternal kingdom is of great significance, not merely as an integral part of biblical teachings, but as an important factor that upholds the Christian’s faith and offers practical benefits for the believer’s spiritual life. It provides

the believer with strength and courage to endure and overcome the temptations of this world. Moses chose rather “to share ill-treatment” with God’s people than “to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Heb. 11:25); he considered “abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt,” because “he looked to the reward” (verse 26). Jesus Himself “endured the cross, despising the shame,” because He could see “the joy that was set before him” (Heb. 12:2). Paul renewed his courage by contemplating the future glory: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18). “So we do not lose heart For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:16 , 17).e

Belief in the doctrine of the eternal kingdom and its reward brings joy and hope to Christians. Paul says, “If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:14). “We rejoice in our hope of sharing• the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). The believers may joyfully accept “the plundering” of their property, since they know that they have “a better possession and an abiding one” (Heb. 10:34). Peter encourages us, “Rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13). Jesus also says, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:12).

Belief in the hereafter provides a more positive and constructive thrust for life in this world. The Christian who plans and prepares to live eternally will lead a sincere and honest life on earth. Those who will enter the eternal kingdom are those who have established the kingdom of God in their hearts by accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and King. When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was going to come, He answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, . . . the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20 , 21). The phrase “in the midst of you” (*entos hymōn*) may also be rendered as “within you” as in KJV, NIV, and TEV. Only those who have already experienced the “kingdom of grace” in the present life can inherit and enjoy the “kingdom of glory” in the afterlife.

Finally, the biblical truth about Paradise restored helps us understand God’s true character and His original purpose and ideal in creating humanity. Sin has so marred and damaged this earth that the present world grossly misrepresents God’s character and His original plan for this planet. The picture of the new heaven and new earth portrayed in Scripture reveals God’s character more clearly. In other words, “in what God has planned for the redeemed—a world untouched by Satan’s influence, a world in which God’s purpose rules alone—we have a truer representation of His character” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* 382).

As Christians glimpse a clearer picture of the new heaven and the new earth, they are attracted to desire that better world. The more clearly one understands the nature of the eternal kingdom and God’s will for the redeemed, the greater the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

IV. Historical Overview

In all cultures and ages, the concept of the rewards of righteous and wicked is closely related to the understanding of the state of the dead. Here we deal only with what has often been called the “abode of the redeemed,” the place where God’s people are recompensed after the final resurrection. Although frequently more emphasis is placed on the reward of the wicked than that of the righteous, the eternal kingdom promised to the righteous has been through the ages an integral part of the Christian hope.

A. Ancient World

Ancient Mesopotamians thought that after death, human beings were doomed to exist as shades in the nether regions. Little could be done in life to assure any kind of blissful existence in the hereafter.

For the ancient Egyptians, death was a continuation of life as known on earth, with a fulfillment of the best one might expect. A person who succeeded in passing the judgment hall of Osiris entered paradise: the Fields of Aalu. There the pleasures of food, wine, and leisure were enjoyed. To ensure a happy passage, a long list of good deeds done and bad ones avoided—the Book of the Dead—routinely was placed in the tomb with the body.

The Greeks considered that at the end of life the soul was rewarded or punished. The judges pronounced sentence at the parting of the ways, one of which led to the abode of the blessed. No clear picture of the activities in such a place is available.

B. Judaism

Jewish pseudepigraphical writings of the intertestamental period follow the OT theme of a “new earth” (2 Baruch 32:6; 57:2). In 4 Ezra 8:52 we read, “It is for you that Paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed, goodness is established and wisdom perfected beforehand.”

The second-century B.C. book of Jubilees notes, “The day of the new creation when the heaven and earth and all of their creatures shall be renewed according to the powers of heaven and according to the whole nature of earth, until the sanctuary of the Lord is created in Jerusalem upon Mount Zion” (1:29). Similar ideas appear in 1 Enoch: “On that day, I shall cause my Elect One to dwell among them, I shall transform heaven and make it a blessing of light forever. I shall (also) transform the earth and make it a blessing, and cause my Elect One to dwell in her. Then those who have committed sin and crime shall not set foot in her” (45:4, 5). According to 2 Enoch, the place prepared for the righteous, “who afflict their souls, and who avert their eyes from injustice, and who carry out righteous judgment” (9:1) “has an appearance of pleasantness that has never been seen” (8:1). Every kind of ripe fruit, food, gardens, and fragrance (8:3) are there; and “the tree of life is in that place” (8:3; cf. Testament of Levi 18:11).

According to rabbinic Judaism, the righteous went to paradise, the Garden of Eden. The Messianic reign was to be political and physical Utopia; after it would be the world to come, when the righteous sit in glory and enjoy the splendor of the divine presence in a world of pure spiritual bliss (Babylonian Talmud *Berakoth* 17a, 34b). References to this world are tied to Isaiah 64:3, with the recognition that none but God can have a conception of the matter.

The “new earth” is commonly called ‘*ólām ha-bā*’, the “world to come.” This phrase is first used in 1 Enoch 71:15, dated in the second or first century B.C. The ‘*ólām ha-bā*’ follows the age of the Messiah and begins with the last judgment. According to the Babylonian Talmud, a third-century-B.C. rabbi described the ‘*ólām ha-bā*’ as follows: “In the future world there is no eating nor drinking nor propagation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence” (*Berakoth* 17a).

Jews today accept the ancient teaching in varied degrees. The more secularized have little belief in the age to come. The orthodox still hold to the doctrine.

C. Islam

At the final judgment, those who have achieved sanctification, who know God and are close to Him, will reach *al-Jannah*, “the garden,” luxuriant with tall shadowing trees. The delights prepared for the blessed are hardly imaginable. In that heavenly garden the righteous recline on couches, dressed in garments of silk, enjoying the best of food and drink (Qur’an 76:5–22). “Rivers of water unpolluted, and rivers of milk whereof the flavour changeth not, and rivers of wine delicious to the drinkers, and rivers of clear-run honey; therein for them is every kind of fruit with pardon from their Lord” (Qur’an 47:15).

D. Eastern Religions

For Buddhists, as for Hindus, a person’s fate after death is decided by one’s karma. At death, souls pass over a bridge into the abode of the gods; the good pass easily into the celestial realm, the most important feature of which is light and splendor. Because this blissful state is impermanent, it is not worthy of one’s desire. In popular thinking, however, those who do good look forward to going to a delightful place of abundance and happiness.

In Hinduism the dead pass by two fires, which burn the wicked but let the good pass by to bliss. *Rig-Veda* devotees implore deities to grant them immortality in the third heaven, the undecaying world. The blessed there enjoy eternal life, as a result of their past sacrifices and gifts made to the priests. In place of the frail human body they receive a blemishless and vigorous body.

E. Early Christianity

Early Christian teaching on the reward of the saved deviates little from the biblical position. The *Didache*, from the late first or early second century, instructs Christians to pray: “Remember, Lord, your Church, to save it from all evil and to make it perfect by your love. Make it holy, and gather it together from the four winds into your Kingdom which you have made ready for it. Let Grace come and let this world pass away” (10:5, 6).

Although purporting to have been written by Solomon, the *Odes of Solomon* represents a Christian hymnbook, from the first or second century A.D. They speak of the reward of the faithful: “Blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in your land, and who have a place in your Paradise” (11:18). Further: “Indeed, there is much room in your Paradise. And there is nothing in it which is barren, but everything is filled with fruit” (verse 23).

In early Christian thinking, heaven was conceived as a place where the faithful enjoyed a life full of joy. Scenes from the catacombs in Rome depict the heavenly life as a banquet or a garden landscape. Funerary inscriptions place the dead as “refreshed and joyful among the stars,” expressing not only a belief in a reward for the righteous but in a conscious state prior to the resurrection. In the second-century Gospel of Thomas, a brief description of Paradise appears: “For you have five trees in Paradise, which do not move in summer or in winter, and their leaves do not fall. He who knows them shall not taste death” (19).

For Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390) the believer not only found release from the troubles of this life, but came to enjoy a full knowledge of God and nearness to the divine presence. In the poems of Ephraim the Syrian (fourth century), paradise had three divisions. Its one river flowed from under the throne in the garden, dividing itself into four streams.

In the East, complete salvation had to wait until the day of resurrection. In the West, Augustine taught that resurrection from the dead would enhance the joys of salvation already available to the departed soul, but was not indispensable to enjoyment of the presence of God. Some excerpts from the last chapter of *The City of God* show Augustine’s beliefs regarding heaven. “Who can measure the happiness of heaven, where no evil can touch us, no good will be out of reach; where life is to be one long laud extolling God, who will be all in all.” “The promised reward of virtue will be the best and the greatest of all possible prizes—the very Giver of virtue Himself.” There “sin will have no power to tempt.” Heaven will be “that ultimate Sabbath,” foreshadowed on earth by the weekly Sabbath. This final Sabbath was to be the seventh age, following the sixth, in which Augustine placed himself. It would be a “kingdom without end, the real goal of our present life” (*City of God* 22. 30).

F. Roman Catholicism

Medieval monks contemplated the bliss of heaven and wrote poems about it. Bernard of Cluny (twelfth century) composed one of the most familiar: “Jerusalem the Golden,”

still sung today. Others who wrote hymns about heaven were Peter Abélard (1079–1142) and Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471).

Benedict XII's fourteenth-century papal constitution *Benedictus Deus* affirms the existence of the beatific vision and its essence as an intuitive vision of God. Its direct concern was to ensure that for those who need no further purification, the beatific vision follows immediately upon death and endures continuously forever. This was affirmed in reaction to the teaching of John XXII, who had held that the joys of heaven would be experienced only after the resurrection of the body.

In modern Roman Catholic thinking on heaven there is emphasis on heaven as a state, although it is also a place, given that glorified bodies require a place in which to dwell. "This community of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed is called 'heaven.' Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1024). "Heaven is not primarily a place but a personal relationship" (*The New Dictionary of Theology* 456). Ultimately the renewal of the world, together with the restoration of the body, constitutes the final completion of God's salvific plan.

The "Letter on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology" issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1979) is very reserved concerning details of doctrine on heaven. While affirming belief in the resurrection of the body, the survival of the "human self" after death, and "in the happiness of the just who will one day be with Christ," it warns against arbitrary imaginative representations since "neither Scripture nor theology provides sufficient light for a proper picture of life after death."

G. Protestantism

The Reformers appear to have taken heaven for granted. But from the little they wrote we learn of their firm belief in the reward of the redeemed. For example, Martin Luther describes the "celestial, spiritual body" of those who will be resurrected at the last day: "The entire body will be as pure and bright as the sun and as light as air, and, finally, so healthy, so blissful, and filled with such heavenly, eternal joy in God that it will never hunger, thirst, grow weary or decline" (*Luther's Works* 28:196). Likewise John Calvin affirmed the certainty of the resurrection and the eternal happiness of the redeemed. In his *Catechism* he wrote, "That blessedness will be the Kingdom of God, crammed with all brightness, joy, power, happiness—things far removed now from human sense, and which we now see only darkly, until that day comes on which the Lord will show His glory for us to see" (20. 9).

Protestant hymnody has proclaimed the certainty of the reward of the righteous. Isaac Watts (1674–1748) penned many hymns about heaven; of these, one of the best known reads as follows: "There is a land of pure delight,/Where saints immortal reign;/Infinite day excludes the night/And pleasures banish pain." Nineteenth-century Protestant hymnody presents many songs extolling the beauties of heaven. Fanny Crosby wrote many of these, including "When My Life Work is Ended."

While Protestants generally believe in heaven as a place where the redeemed will spend eternity with God and the angelic hosts, there appears to have been no attempt to systematize a doctrine of heaven. The inroads of rationalism and secularization have resulted in an erosion of the clarity of the millennial hope. While expressing belief in the “symbols” of Christ’s kingdom, Reinhold Niebuhr wrote: “It is unwise for Christians to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell” (2:294).

H. Adventist Understanding

With the expectation of the Second Advent as a foundation of their doctrinal system, Adventists constantly have affirmed their conviction of the reality of a new heaven and new earth following Christ’s second coming. The redeemed will spend the millennium in heaven (see II. B. 3) before descending to this earth with the New Jerusalem. At that time the planet will be renewed by fire and re-created. The saints will then spend eternity with the Lord on this earth made new.

Ellen White’s visions of the heavenly home and the renewed earth have contributed much to the realism with which the future of the blessed is viewed. In *Early Writings* she describes the glories of the heavenly city as she had seen them in vision in the 1840s (EW 39, 40).

Adventist art forms also extol the wonders of the earth made new. The artistic renderings of painters Harry Anderson and Russell Harlan have captured the imagination of generations of Adventist readers, young and old. Adventist songwriters since William Miller (“I’m Going Home”) have expressed in music the glorious hope for a future of bliss. These include, to name a few, James White (“What Heavenly Music”), Annie R. Smith (“Long Upon the Mountains”), Frank Belden (“Joy By and By”), and Henry de Fluiter (“Over Yonder”).

The last of the 27 fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, adopted in 1980, presents a synthesis of the Adventist understanding of the new earth (*SDA Yearbook* 1981:8).

“On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:13 ; Isa. 35 ; 65:17–25 ; Matt. 5:5 ; Rev. 21:1–7 ; 22:1–5 ; 11:15 .)”

V. Ellen G. White Comments

A. Heavenly Abode—Real Place

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. And yet, ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him’ (1 Cor. 2:9). Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God” (GC 674, 675).

B. Privileges of the Redeemed

“Heaven is a good place. I long to be there and behold my lovely Jesus, who gave His life for me, and be changed into His glorious image. Oh, for language to express the glory of the bright world to come! I thirst for the living streams that make glad the city of our God.

“The Lord has given me a view of other worlds. Wings were given me, and an angel attended me from the city to a place that was bright and glorious. The grass of the place was living green, and the birds there warbled a sweet song. The inhabitants of the place were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely. They bore the express image of Jesus, and their countenances beamed with holy joy, expressive of the freedom and happiness of the place. I asked one of them why they were so much more lovely than those on the earth. The reply was, ‘We have lived in strict obedience to the commandments of God, and have not fallen by disobedience, like those on the earth.’ ... I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again. Then the angel said, ‘You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God’ ” (EW 39, 40).

C. No Night and No Weariness

“In the City of God ‘there shall be no night.’ None will need or desire repose. There will be no weariness in doing the will of God and offering praise to His name. We shall ever feel the freshness of the morning and shall ever be far from its close. ‘And they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light’ (Rev. 22:5). The light of the sun will be superseded by a radiance which is not painfully dazzling, yet which immeasurably surpasses the brightness of our noontide. The glory of God and the Lamb floods the Holy City with unfading light. The redeemed walk in the sunless glory of perpetual day” (GC 676).

D. Heaven as a School

“Heaven is a school; its field of study, the universe; its teacher, the Infinite One. A branch of this school was established in Eden; and, the plan of redemption accomplished, education will again be taken up in the Eden school.

“ ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him’ (1 Cor. 2:9). Only through His word can a knowledge of these things be gained; and even this affords but a partial revelation.

“The prophet of Patmos thus describes the location of the school of the hereafter:

“ ‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away And I John saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ (Rev. 21:1 , 2).

“ ‘The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof’ (Rev. 21:23).

“Between the school established in Eden at the beginning and the school of the hereafter there lies the whole compass of this world’s history—the history of human transgression and suffering, of divine sacrifice, and of victory over death and sin. Not all the conditions of that first school of Eden will be found in the school of the future life. No tree of knowledge of good and evil will afford opportunity for temptation. No tempter is there, no possibility of wrong. Every character has withstood the testing of evil, and none are longer susceptible to its power” (Ed 301, 302).

E. Treasures of the Universe Opened

“All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God’s children. With unutterable delight we shall enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. We shall share the treasures gained through ages upon ages spent in contemplation of God’s handiwork. And the years of eternity, as they roll, will continue to bring more glorious revelations. ‘Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think’ (Eph. 3:20) will be, forever and forever, the impartation of the gifts of God.

“ ‘His servants shall serve Him’ (Rev. 22:3). The life on earth is the beginning of the life in heaven; education on earth is an initiation into the principles of heaven; the lifework here is a training for the lifework there. What we now are, in character and holy service, is the sure foreshadowing of what we shall be” (Ed 307).

F. Higher Education in the Future Life

“Christ, the heavenly Teacher, will lead His people to the tree of life that grows on either side of the river of life, and He will explain to them the truths they could not in this life understand. In that future life His people will gain the higher education in its completeness. Those who enter the city of God will have the golden crowns placed upon their heads. That will be a joyful scene that none of us can afford to miss. We shall cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus, and again and again we will give Him the glory and praise His holy name. Angels will unite in the songs of triumph. Touching their golden harps,

they will fill all heaven with rich music and songs to the Lamb” (MS 31, 1909 in 7BC 988).

G. Harmonious Social Life and Endless Increasing of Knowledge

“There the redeemed shall know, even as also they are known. The loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul shall there find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the sacred ties that bind together ‘the whole family in heaven and earth’ (Eph. 3:15)—these help to constitute the happiness of the redeemed.

“There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.

“All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God’s redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God’s handiwork. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator’s name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.

“And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.

“ ‘And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever’ (Rev. 5:13).

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love” (GC 677, 678).

H. The Life in Garden and Field

“There, when the veil that darkens our vision shall be removed, and our eyes shall behold that world of beauty of which we now catch glimpses through the microscope; when we look on the glories of the heavens, now scanned afar through the telescope; when, the blight of sin removed, the whole earth shall appear in ‘the beauty of the Lord our God,’ what a field will be open to our study! There the student of science may read the records of creation and discern no reminders of the law of evil. He may listen to the music of nature’s voices and detect no note of wailing or undertone of sorrow. In all created things he may trace one handwriting—in the vast universe behold ‘God’s name writ large,’ and not in earth or sea or sky one sign of ill remaining.

“There the Eden life will be lived, the life in garden and field. ‘They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands’ (Isa. 65:21 , 22).

“There shall be nothing to ‘hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord’ (Isa. 65:25). There man will be restored to his lost kingship, and the lower order of beings will again recognize his sway; the fierce will become gentle, and the timid trustful.

“There will be open to the student, history of infinite scope and of wealth inexpressible. Here, from the vantage ground of God’s Word, the student is afforded a view of the vast field of history and may gain some knowledge of the principles that govern the course of human events. But his vision is still clouded, and his knowledge incomplete. Not until he stands in the light of eternity will he see all things clearly.

“Then will be opened before him the course of the great conflict that had its birth before time began, and that ends only when time shall cease. The history of the inception of sin; of fatal falsehood in its crooked working; of truth that, swerving not from its own straight lines, has met and conquered error—all will be made manifest. The veil that interposes between the visible and the invisible world will be drawn aside, and wonderful things will be revealed” (Ed 303, 304).

I. No Marriage and No Birth

“There are men today who express their belief that there will be marriages and births in the new earth, but those who believe the Scriptures cannot accept such doctrines. The doctrine that children will be born in the new earth is not a part of the ‘sure word of

prophecy.’ The words of Christ are too plain to be misunderstood. They should forever settle the question of marriages and births in the new earth. Neither those who shall be raised from the dead, nor those who shall be translated without seeing death, will marry or be given in marriage. They will be as the angels of God, members of the royal family” (MM 99, 100).

J. Travel in the Future Life

“Many seem to have the idea that this world and the heavenly mansions constitute the universe of God. Not so. The redeemed throng will range from world to world, and much of their time will be employed in searching out the mysteries of redemption. And throughout the whole stretch of eternity, this subject will be continually opening to their minds. The privileges of those who overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony are beyond comprehension” (RH Mar . 9, 1886).

K. The Reward of Earnest Effort

“ ‘If any man’s work abide, ... he shall receive a reward’ (1 Cor. 3:14). Glorious will be the reward bestowed when the faithful workers gather about the throne of God and of the Lamb. When John in his mortal state beheld the glory of God, he fell as one dead; he was not able to endure the sight. But when the children of God shall have put on immortality, they will ‘see him as he is’ (1 John 3:2). They will stand before the throne, accepted in the Beloved. All their sins have been blotted out, all their transgressions borne away. Now they can look upon the undimmed glory of the throne of God. They have been partakers with Christ in His sufferings, they have been workers together with Him in the plan of redemption, and they are partakers with Him in the joy of seeing souls saved in the kingdom of God, there to praise God through all eternity.

“My brother, my sister, I urge you to prepare for the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven. Day by day cast the love of the world out of your hearts. Understand by experience what it means to have fellowship with Christ. Prepare for the judgment, that when Christ shall come, to be admired in all them that believe, you may be among those who will meet Him in peace. In that day the redeemed will shine forth in the glory of the Father and the Son. The angels, touching their golden harps, will welcome the King and His trophies of victory—those who have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb” (9T 285).

L.A Happy, United Family

“All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving—the robe of Christ’s righteousness. All nature, in its surpassing loveliness, will offer to God a constant tribute of praise and adoration. The world will be bathed in the light of heaven. The years will move on in gladness. The light of “the moon will be as the light of the sun, and “the light of the sun will be sevenfold greater than it is now. Over

the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite “in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death’ ” (RH Nov. 26, 1903).

M. The Bright Home of the Saints

“Heaven was the subject of my contemplation—heaven, the much-longed-for heaven. I seemed to be there, where all was peace, where no stormy conflicts of earth could ever come. Heaven, a kingdom of righteousness where all the holy and pure and blessed are congregated—ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands—living and walking in happy, pure intimacy, praising God and the Lamb who sitteth on the throne! Their voices were in perfect harmony. They never do each other wrong. Princes of heaven, the potentates of this mighty realm, are rivals only in good, seeking the happiness and joy of each other. The greatest there is least in self-esteem, and the least is greatest in his gratitude and wealth of love.

“There are no dark errors to cloud the intellect. Truth and knowledge, clear, strong, and perfect, have chased every doubt away, and no gloom of doubt casts its baleful shadow upon its happy inhabitants. No voices of contention mar the sweet and perfect peace of heaven. Its inhabitants know no sorrow, no grief, no tears. All is in perfect harmony, in perfect order and perfect bliss

“Heaven, sweet heaven, the saints’ eternal home, the abode for the toilers, where the weary who have borne the heavy burdens through life find rest, peace, and joy! They sowed in tears, they reap with joy and triumph. Heaven is a home where sympathy is alive in every heart, expressed in every look. Love reigns there. There are no jarring elements, no discord or contentions or war of words” (letter 30, 1882; 9MR 104, 105).

N. City of God for Commandment Keepers

“None who have had the light of truth will enter the city of God as commandment-breakers. His law lies at the foundation of His government in earth and in heaven. If they have knowingly trampled upon and despised His law on the earth, they will not be taken to heaven to do the same work there; there is no change of character when Christ comes. The character building is to go on during the hours of probation. Day by day their actions are registered in the books of heaven, and they will, in the great day of God, be rewarded as their works have been. It will then be seen who receives the blessing. ‘Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city’ ” (RH Aug. 25, 1885).

O. The Eternal Abode of the Obedient

“The great plan of redemption results in fully bringing back the world into God’s favor. All that was lost by sin is restored. Not only man but the earth is redeemed, to be the eternal abode of the obedient. For six thousand years Satan has struggled to maintain possession of the earth. Now God’s original purpose in its creation is accomplished. ‘The

saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever' (Dan. 7:18)" (PP 342).

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The Great Controversy

Frank B. Holbrook

Introduction

Scattered across the pages of both the OT and NT lie many references and allusions to an unrelenting war between God and Satan, between good and evil on both cosmic and personal levels. Comparing these passages, we inlay their individual insights to form a mosaic window of truth through which we can perceive the total message “of Scripture with greater clarity than otherwise.

The moral controversy, which has troubled the universe of God’s creation, is closely linked to the plan of salvation. The latter provides not only deliverance for humanity from the enslavement of sin, but also a theodicy for the Godhead against Satan’s accusations.

In the following study the biblical data have been arranged in chronological sequence in order to demonstrate more effectively the nature of the war, how it unfolded, its course through the centuries, the final struggle, which ends in Satan’s defeat and God’s triumph and vindication. The article concludes with a summary of some of the more important theological truths exhibited by this foundational teaching of Scripture.

- I. The Controversy Foreseen
 - A. The Divine Secret
 1. Grace Initiated the Plan
 2. Atoning Death of Christ
 3. Accepting the Provisions of Salvation