

Eschatology: Heaven

What is the Nature of the Present Heaven?

The Present Heaven is of a Temporary Nature.

When a Christian dies he or she enters into a transitional period between our past lives on Earth and our future resurrection to life on the New Earth. Usually when we refer to "Heaven," we mean the place that Christians go when they die. This is what I am calling the present or intermediate Heaven. This present or intermediate state is temporary.

Philippians 1:21-23

Although, the present Heaven where we go when we die, where we will dwell prior to our bodily resurrection is "better by far" than living on Earth under the Curse, away from the direct presence of God. Still, the intermediate or present Heaven is not our final destination. God's children are destined for life as resurrected beings on a resurrected Earth.

Will we live in Heaven forever?

The answer depends on what you mean by Heaven. Will we live with the Lord forever? Absolutely. Will we always be with him in exactly the same place that Heaven is now? No. In the present Heaven, we will be in Christ's presence, and we will be joyful, but we will be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and permanent relocation to the New Earth.

The Biblical teaching tells us that there will be new heavens and a new earth, an entirely renewed creation, and we will live with God there... There will also be a new kind of unification of heaven and earth... There will be a joining of heaven and earth in this new creation.

Does Heaven really Change?

Only God is eternal and self-existent. All else is created. Heaven is not synonymous with God, nor is it part of his essential being. Therefore, God must have created Heaven. It is not a place where he must dwell, but it is a place where he chooses to dwell. Because Heaven is a place where angels live, where finite beings come and go, it appears to be a finite environment, a specific location.

The present Heaven is a temporary lodging, a waiting place until the return of Christ and our bodily resurrection. The Eternal Heaven, the New Earth, is our true home, the place where we will live forever with our Lord and each other. The great redemptive promises of God will find their ultimate fulfillment on the New Earth, not in the present Heaven.

Revelation 21:1

Similarly, what we now refer to as Hell will also be relocated. After the Great White Throne Judgment, Hell will be cast into the eternal lake of fire.

Revelation 20:14-15

More on this in two weeks...

Distinguishing the Present and Future Heavens

The questions, What is heaven like? and, What will Heaven be like? have two different answers. The present, intermediate Heaven is in the angelic realm, distinctly separate from Earth. By contrast, the future Heaven will be in the human realm, on Earth.

Revelation 21:1-3

Heaven, God's dwelling place, will one day be on the New Earth.

So heaven and earth, now separated, will then be merged: the new earth will also be heaven, since God will dwell there with his people. Glorified believers, in other words, will continue to be in heaven while they are inhabiting the new earth.

Genesis 3:8

Jesus says this about anyone who would be his disciple:

John 14:23

This is a picture of God's ultimate plan, not to take us up to live in a realm made for him, but to come down and live with us in the realm made for us.

Remember Revelation 21:2 does not say that the New Jerusalem will be suspended over the Earth. When John watches the city "coming down" from Heaven, there's no reason to believe it will stop before it reaches the New Earth. Scripture indicates they will be joined. Their present incompatibility is due to a

temporary aberration, the Earth is under sin and the Curse. Once this aberration is corrected, Heaven and Earth will be fully compatible again.

Ephesians 1:10

This World is not Our Home ... or is it?

Our Longing for Eden

We are homesick for Eden. We long for what the first man and woman once enjoyed, a perfect and beautiful Earth with free untainted relationships with God, each other, animals, and our environment. Every attempt at human progress has been an attempt to overcome what was lost in the Fall.

We long for a return to Paradise, a perfect world, without the corruption of sin, where God walks with us and talks with us in the cool of the day. Because we are human beings, we desire something tangible and physical, something that will not fade away. And that is exactly what God promises us, a home that will not be destroyed, a kingdom that will not fade, a city with unshakeable foundations, and an incorruptible inheritance.

Adam was formed from the dust of the earth, forever establishing our connection to the earth.

Genesis 2:7

Just as we are made from the earth, so too we are made for the earth.

Clues to the Nature of the Eternal Heaven

Since the eternal Heaven will be a New Earth, this suggests that the current Earth must be bursting with clues about what Heaven will be like.

We are told that Heaven is ***a city***.

Hebrews 11:10

Hebrews 13:14

We understand cities. Cities have buildings, culture, art, music, athletics, goods and services, events of all kinds. And, of course, cities have people engaged in activities, gatherings, conversations, and work.

Heaven is also described as ***a country***.

Hebrews 11:16

We know about countries. They have territories, rulers, national interests, pride in their identity, and citizens who are both diverse and unified.

We are told we will have ***resurrected bodies***.

1 Corinthians 15:40-44

We know what a body is; we have had one all of our lives. So we can imagine a new body.

In Heaven, we will ***rest***.

Revelation 14:13

We know what it means to rest. And to want rest.

Hebrews 4:10-11

We are told we will ***serve*** Christ on the New Earth, ***working*** for his glory.

Revelation 22:3

We know what it means to work. And to want to work.

Scripture speaks of a New Jerusalem made of precious stones. Some of the jewels listed are among the hardest substances known.

Revelation 21:19-21

They indicate the material solidity of the New Earth.

Abraham "was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham's descendants "were longing for a better country, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16). And as Christ's followers, "we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14); "we are looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth he has promised" (2 Peter 3:13).

Is the Eternal Heaven an Actual Place?

Jesus did not say that Heaven was "primarily a state" or a "spiritual condition." He spoke of a house with many rooms in which he would prepare a place for us.

John 14:2

In Revelation 21-22, the New Earth and New Jerusalem are portrayed as actual places, with detailed physical descriptions.

John 14:3

He uses ordinary, earthly, spatial terms to describe Heaven. The word *where* refers to a place, a location. Likewise, the phrase *come back and take you* indicates movement and a physical destination. If we reduce Heaven to something less than or other than a place, we strip Christ's words of their meaning.

Are we just a-passing through?

We may pass from the earth through death, but eventually we will be back to live on the restored Earth. Earth has been damaged by our sin.

Genesis 3:17

Therefore, the earth as it is now (under the Curse) is not our home. The world as it was, and as it will be, is our home. We have never known a world without sin, suffering, and death. When we see a roaring waterfall, beautiful flowers, a wild animal in its native habitat, or the joy in the eyes of our pets when they see us, we sense that this world is, or at least was meant to be, our home.

The idea of the New Earth as a physical place is the invention of a transcendent God, who made physical human beings to live on a physical Earth, and who chose to become a man himself on that same Earth. He did this that he might redeem mankind and Earth. Why? In order to glorify himself and enjoy forever the company of men and women in a world made for us.

The three phases of Earth's history.

The following list shows the three phases of Earth's history: humanity's past on the original Earth; our present experience on the fallen Earth; and our promised future on the New Earth.

Three Eras of Mankind and Earth

Past	Present	Future
Original Earth	Fallen Earth	New Earth
Genesis 1-2	Genesis 3-Revelation 20	Revelation 21-22
Original Earth	Fallen Earth	New Earth
No Curse	Sin and the Curse	No more Curse
No Shame	Shame	No Shame
Sin Unknown	Sin Corrupts	Sin forever removed
No Death removed	Death permeates all	Death forever
Mankind created	Mankind dies	Mankind resurrected
God walks with humans	Humans cut off from God	God dwells with
humans		
Creation perfect	Creation tainted by sin	Creation restored
Ground fertile	Ground cursed	Ground fertile
Satisfaction in labor	Toil in labor	Joy in labor
Paradise	Paradise lost	Paradise regained
Able to sin	Enslaved to sin	Unable to sin
Rules and expands Paradise	Banished from Paradise	Free access to Paradise

These parallels are too remarkable to be anything but deliberate. These mirror images demonstrate the perfect symmetry of God's plan.

Why is Earth's Redemption Essential to God's Plan?

Just as he promises to make men and women new, he promises to renew the earth itself.

Isaiah 65:17

Isaiah 66:22

2 Peter 3:13

Revelation 21:1

God's redemptive plan climaxes not at the return of Christ, nor in the millennial kingdom, but on the New Earth. Only then will there be no more death, crying, or pain.

Revelation 21:4

If God's plan was merely to take mankind to the present Heaven, or to a Heaven that was the dwelling place of spirit beings, there would be no need for new heavens and a New Earth. Upon creating the heavens and the earth, he called them, "very good." Never once has he renounced his claim on what he made. He isn't going to abandon his creation. He is going to restore it. God will bring Heaven and Earth together into the same dimension, with no wall of separation, no armed angels to guard Heaven's perfection from sinful mankind.

Genesis 3:24

Ephesians 1:10

Christ died not merely to make the best of a bad situation. He died so that mankind, Earth, and the universe itself would be renewed to forever proclaim his glory.

God's Earthly Renewal Plan

Reconcile, Redeem, Restore, Recover, Return, Renew, Regenerate, Resurrect. Each of these biblical words begins with the re- prefix, suggesting a return to an original condition that was ruined or lost. For example:

Redemption means to buy back what was formerly owned.

Reconciliation means the restoration or reestablishment of a prior friendship or unity.

Renewal means to make new again, restoring to an original state.

Resurrection means becoming physically alive again, after death.

1 John 3:8

God placed mankind on Earth to fill it, rule it, and develop it to God's glory. But that plan has never been fulfilled. Should we therefore conclude that God's plan was ill-conceived, thwarted or abandoned? No. God determined from the beginning that he will redeem mankind and restore the Earth. Why? So his original plan will be fulfilled.

The New Earth is the Old Earth Restored.

Peter preached that Christ "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

Acts 3:21

We are told that a time is coming when God will restore everything. This is an inclusive promise. It encompasses far more than God merely restoring disembodied people to fellowship in a spirit realm. It is God restoring mankind to what we once were, what he designed us to be, fully embodied, righteous beings. And restoring the entire physical universe to what it once was.

The prophets were never concerned about some far-off realm of disembodied spirits. They were concerned about the land, the inheritance, the city of Jerusalem, and the earth they walked on.

Luke 2:38

Notice Luke's exact wording. What were God's people looking forward to? Redemption. Their own redemption? Of course. But it was much more than that. It was the redemption of not only themselves, but also their families and community and even their city, Jerusalem. And the redemption of Jerusalem would also be the redemption of Israel. As the entire world was promised blessing through Abraham, the redemption of Jerusalem and Israel speaks of the redemption of the earth itself.

Revelation 21:1 says the old Earth will pass away. But when people pass away, they do not cease to exist. As we will be raised to be a new people, so the earth will be raised to be a New Earth.

Matthew 19:27-28

Notice Christ's word choice. He did not say "after the destruction of all things" or "after the abandonment of all things" but "at the renewal of all things." The word *paligenesia*, translated "renewal" in Matthew 19:28, comes from two words which together mean "new genesis" or "coming back from death to life." When Jesus said "all things" would be renewed, the disciples would have understood him to mean "all things."

Redemption = Return

Redemption buys back God's original design. If, due to the Fall, God would have given up on his original purpose for mankind to fill the earth and rule it (Genesis 1:28), he surely would not have repeated the

same command to Noah after the Flood (Genesis 9:1). Still, until sin and the Curse are permanently removed, people would be incapable of exercising proper stewardship of the earth.