

# **Eschatology: How Then Shall We Live?**

## **Review**

1. Optimism – we are optimistic about what God is doing in the present age. Jesus is building his church.
2. Long-term – we are also realistic about what God is doing in the present age. We are far from finished.

## **From a Garden to a City**

The Bible begins in a garden (Genesis 1-2) and ends in a city (Revelation 21-22). This is no accident; it is God's plan. God never intended his creation to remain in a "natural" state.

## **Creation**

God intended to transform the garden into a city. The goal of creation is civilization. We see hints of this from the beginning.

*Genesis 1:26*

This is often called "the Dominion Mandate." God ordained that mankind play the key role in transforming the earth from a garden to a city. He created man to take dominion, or to rule over all the earth. This could not be accomplished by Adam and Eve alone.

*Genesis 1:28*

God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. He wanted them to fill the earth. God wanted the earth covered with his representatives. He commanded them to subdue the earth and gave them dominion, or rule, over all of it.

## **The Fall**

Obviously, Adam and Eve failed to rule perfectly, but God did not change his plan. God had planned for this all along. He set out to redeem creation by transforming mankind and the earth. We see the "Dominion Mandate" repeated after the flood.

*Genesis 9:1*

God still wants the earth to be filled with his representatives, with godly people. He wants them to rule over the earth, to subdue and transform it.

## **The Re-Creation**

This mandate does not change in the New Testament era. Jesus gave this charge just prior to his ascension.

*Matthew 28:18-20*

Jesus commanded the apostles to "make disciples of all the nations," which is often interpreted as "make at least one individual Christian from every nation." Actually, the apostles are to "disciple all the nations." They are to bring entire nations under the rule of Jesus Christ. Again, we see that God wants the earth covered with godly people. What we call "the Great Commission" is simply an update of "the Dominion Mandate."

## **Progress from Genesis to Revelation**

History moves from a garden to a city. History is supposed to be progressive. Technological advancement is good, when submitted to God's law.

We see many striking similarities between the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2) and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22). In both we find a river which is located near the tree of life. God is present in the midst of the garden and the city. Mankind enjoys unrestricted fellowship with the Creator. Yet,

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we also see differences. The two lamps (sun and moon) are gone with God taking their place. There are walls, gates, and streets.

How do the artifacts of the New Jerusalem get there? Who builds the walls, the gates, the streets? Did God miraculously create them? No, these artifacts are the product of civilization, of culture, of man. God designed them, but man built them. They are not created; they are manufactured from creation by man.

Who designed the tabernacle? God. Who built the tabernacle? Man. Who designed the temple? God. Who built the temple? Man. Who designed the New Jerusalem (the new heavens and the new earth)? God. Who builds the New Jerusalem? Man.

The garden of Eden was devoid of architecture and other cultural artifacts. It was simply the creation of God.

*Genesis 2:10-12*

Why does Scripture mention gold, Bdelium, and onyx that are outside the garden? Is this just a superfluous detail to add character to the narrative? No! These metals and stones are mentioned because man is supposed to go and collect these materials and build with them. He is to take them to the garden.

The New Jerusalem still has the creation of God, but it is teeming with cultural achievement. God said that the creation was good. However, God never intended the creation to stay "natural." God told man to tend the garden and to keep it. He was to work in the garden. He was to make changes in the garden, to transform the garden, to cultivate it into a culture.

Mankind was given the privilege of improving upon the original creation. Creation was good, but man was created to make it better. The development of creation was made possible by God. Indeed, it is mandated by God. We do not destroy the creation, but we are using it for the purpose for which God created it.

Now, the garden is not left behind. In fact, the New Jerusalem is a garden-city. It still bears the marks of the creator, but it has been transformed by man.

Isn't Jesus building a place for us?

*John 14:2-3*

Jesus is preparing a place for us. Does this mean that Jesus the Carpenter is physically building something for us? No, this means that Jesus is preparing a renewed world for us. Jesus is ruling over the world, using the church to renew the world so that it will be fit for him to live on forever.

*Hebrews 11:10*

God is the builder and maker. He is the designer. We are the workers.

### **Culture and the Bible**

Immediately after his creation, Adam began to build culture. He named the animals, which involved careful observation and analysis – the basis of all science. Adam composed a brief poem extolling the virtues of his perfect companion. Here we see the beginning of the arts.

Man was also assigned the task of growing crops, which involves plowing, planting, watering, and harvesting. These actions alter the "virgin landscape" forever. Yet, these acts are good.

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Animals establish a culture of their own. Birds build nests. Beavers build dams. Spiders build webs. Yet, each of these are not experimental or new. Part of the image of God in us is that we are creative. We build new structures and create new designs. Animals are reactive while humans are proactive.

The goal is a garden-city, where the beauty of man-made works and the glory of creation are wedded in a mutually-enhancing whole. Culture is the product of human acts of concretization undertaken in the developmental transformation of the earth according to the commandment of God.

Culture is not an activity to keep mankind occupied until something else happens. It has a particular God-ordained end in view: the development of the earth into a global network of gardens and cities in harmony with creation – a glorious garden-city. Culture is religion externalized or made public. Culture reveals the religion of those who make it.

The cultural perspective of the OT is one of cultural transparency. The nation of Israel as a closed society established by God to reach the nations. They did not self-consciously develop Hebrew culture, but that is what happened.

The cultural perspective of the NT is one of cultural antithesis. The apostles urged believers to avoid the world (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15) and warned that the things of the world could be a dangerous distraction (Matthew 13:22; Luke 18:22).

Unfortunately, some have taken this to mean that believers should withdraw from cultural endeavors as much as possible. We see this in ascetic traditions, such as monasticism or even American evangelicalism. However, the danger of the “world” in the Bible is not the danger of the physical earth. The “world” refers to the whole sinful social order that is a systematic rebellion against God.

The apostles urged Christians not to be conformed to the common beliefs and values of pagan society, but rather, to have the totality of their thoughts shaped by the doctrines of Scriptures alone (Romans 12:2). The Bible consistently teaches that the physical things of this world are good and to be enjoyed within the bounds of God’s law.

NT writers were not opposing the OT cultural model. They were not advocating withdrawal from culture. There is a change in OT to NT because OT was a closed society, whereas the NT urges us to go out into society to transform it.

### **Conclusion**

As we conclude our series on eschatology, we can see at least three major goals that we hope have been accomplished.

1. Unlock the Bible
2. Love God and marvel at his intricate yet cohesive plan
3. Embrace every task that God has for you to do