

GLENDALE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

WHAT THE BIBLE ACTUALLY SAYS  
ABOUT

# HEAVEN

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# What the Bible Actually Says about Heaven

Sunday, March 6, 2016

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## I. Introduction: The Importance of Thinking about Heaven

- It is hard for us to look forward to our final destiny if we are fuzzy on what that destiny entails. (cf. Florence Chadwick: “All I could see was the fog...I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it.”)<sup>1</sup>
- Heaven is not our default destiny. Unless we turn to Christ to resolve our sin problem, the default destination for every human being is hell. (cf. Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:13-14 that the majority of humans will not make it to heaven: “*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*”)
- We have acquired a lot of wrong ideas about heaven over the years—both from our culture, but also from well-meaning Christians.
  - Do we become angels when we die?
  - Do we engage in continual singing and worship—and nothing else—for eternity?

## II. The Difficulties Involved in Thinking about Heaven

- Our thinking is often **influenced by the teaching of the Greek philosopher Plato**, who believed that *material things* (like the human body and the earth) *are evil*, and that only *immaterial things* (like the soul and the afterlife) *are good*. This **predisposes us to “spiritualize”** teaching about heaven in Scripture.
- There are **not a lot of Bible passages** that teach about the “intermediate state” or the “final state” of humanity (involving bodily resurrection and arrival of the new heavens and new earth). We do have accurate revelation from God in the Bible, but it is not comprehensive. Accordingly, there is a **lot of room for speculation**.
- There are significant differences of opinion among scholars and theologians about **how to interpret Bible passages** that are in the literary genres of **prophecy** and **apocalyptic**.
  - Every kind (or genre) of literature in Scripture (e.g. historical narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, letters, etc.) is written according to certain “rules” that were defined by the cultural conventions at the time they were written.
  - Prophecy in the Old Testament and in the New Testament often uses **elements of poetry**, which may involve extensive use of **figures of speech and exaggeration**. For instance:
    - Isaiah 55:12 “*For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands*”
    - Do mountains and hills literally break forth into singing and do trees literally have hands that they can clap (are we living in Narnia?!), or is this a highly figurative way to describe the great joy and peace mentioned here?

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<sup>1</sup> Relayed in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004).

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- Isaiah 65:25 *“The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.*”
- Is this a literal depiction of a drastic change that God will bring about between predators and prey in the animal world, or is this a figurative description of the kind of peace that will permeate the earth (for humans) after the changes that God brings about?
- Apocalyptic literature<sup>2</sup> makes **extensive use of symbols and images** which are frequently intended to refer to something other than what is literally stated. For instance:
  - Revelation 21:16 describes the New Jerusalem: *“The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.*
  - Is this a literal description of the size of the new city (= approx. 1,400 miles on each side of a cube or pyramid shape)? Or, could it be that the multiples of the number 12 were intended to be symbolic and the cube shape was intended to be a reference to the holy of holies in the temple of Solomon (which was also a perfect cube, 20 cubits in each direction)—especially considering that the New Jerusalem does not contain a temple, but is a sort of “temple” as it is the dwelling place of God with humanity (cf. Revelation 21:3)?
- Much of the descriptions of “heaven” in Scripture is **through the use of images**—particularly of a city, a garden, and a kingdom—rather than through the use of concepts. Because cities, gardens, and kingdoms are familiar to us, they afford us analogies through which we may understand “heaven.”
- Our **judgments about the nature of pre-Fall Creation and life in the Garden of Eden** will significantly impact our thinking about life in resurrected bodies in the new heavens and new earth. For instance:
  - Do we believe that the second law of thermodynamics, entropy, is a result of God’s curse upon the ground (cf. Genesis 3:17 *“...cursed is the ground because of you...”*). If so, the most remote galaxy, the most distant quasar, was somehow shaken by humanity’s sin.
  - Do we believe that there was animal death before the Fall?<sup>3</sup>
  - On the other hand, our judgments about such issues as entropy, plant death, animal death, and the earth’s age should not deter us from the central agreement that “the whole

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<sup>2</sup> Apocalyptic (from the Greek word *apokalypsis* (ἀποκάλυψις) means a ‘revelation’) and claims to reveal things which are normally hidden. Some OT prophecy is written in an Apocalyptic genre (e.g. parts of Daniel, Zechariah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel) and the book of Revelation is the main NT example. However, there are a number of Jewish Apocalyptic books written between 200 BC and AD 100 which were not considered inspired Scripture.

<sup>3</sup> Alcorn, *Heaven*, does not, but Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 79, believes that it is “quite likely that there must have been death in the animal and vegetable worlds before man fell into sin. We have fossil records of many kinds of plants and animals which have been extinct for thousands of years. Many of these species may have died out long before man appeared on the earth. Further, death plays an important part in the mode of existence of many plants and animals as we know them today. There are carnivorous animals who subsist by eating other animals. There are plants and trees which are killed by animals or insects.”

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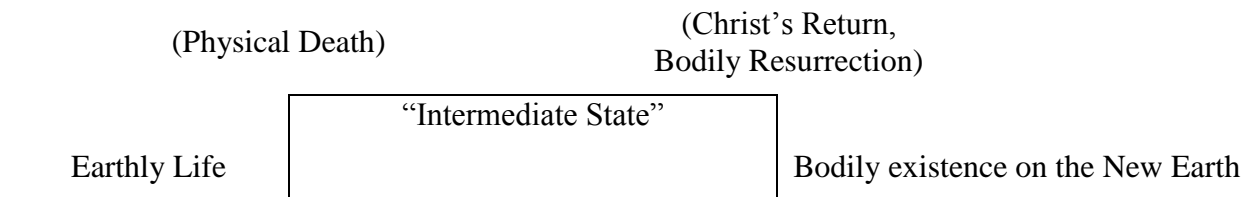
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creation” has come under humanity’s curse, and that God will deliver the whole creation by our resurrection.

## III. Definitions: What Do We Mean by “Heaven”?

- The Hebrew term *shamayim* (שָׁמַיִם) and the Greek term *ouranos* (οὐρανός) are the main terms used for “heaven,” and they are used in four main ways in the Bible:
  - The Earth’s **atmosphere** (the realm in which birds fly and clouds are found)
  - The **universe** (the realm in which the sun, moon, and stars are found). The expression “heaven and earth” (or “the heavens and the earth”) is often used to designate the entire universe.
  - A **synonym for God** (e.g. Luke 20:4 “...was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”)
  - The **“place” where God dwells** (cf. Isaiah 66:1 “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne,’” Matthew 6:9 “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven...’”). Angels are often associated with heaven (e.g. they are called “heavenly beings” in Psalm 29:1, or the “heavenly host” in Luke 2:13).<sup>4</sup>
- It is this last one, “heaven” as the “place” where God dwells, which has become the destination that most of us unconsciously associate with the “place where righteous human beings go when they die.” As such, it is often conceived as an “escape” from this world into an eternal spiritual existence with God where He dwells
- However, the emphasis in the New Testament is on a **bodily resurrection on a new heavens and new earth** and it depicts God’s sovereign rule—His “kingdom”—as coming “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10)
- Thus, the basic Christian understanding of a believer’s personal future<sup>5</sup> involves 1) death, 2) a **new bodily existence on the new earth**, and 3) an **“intermediate state” between the two**. It can be expressed graphically as:



<sup>4</sup> Questions about how God “dwells” in heaven and is, at the same time, omnipresent (present everywhere) are resolved when we consider that God need not be present in the same degree and manner everywhere. This sense of “heaven” is where His presence is portrayed as being more concentrated than in other places.

<sup>5</sup> In order to keep this discussion focused on “heaven,” I have intentionally excluded the 1,000-year reign of Christ, called the Millennium, described in Revelation 20:1-6 from this timeline. There are three major views concerning Christ’s return in connection with the Millennium. The Premillennial position differs from the other two in that it believes that Jesus, upon His return, will initiate the bodily resurrection of the righteous and establish a 1,000 year physical reign on earth before bringing in the new heavens and new earth. In one type of Premillennialism (Dispensational Premillennialism), His coming is thought to be preceded by a rapture of the church before (or during) a 7-year-long Tribulation.

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## IV. “Intermediate State”

- The Bible does not use the term “intermediate state” to refer to the temporary condition of human beings between their death and resurrection, preferring to use such varied terminology as “Abraham’s side,” “Third Heaven/Paradise,” “with the Lord/with Christ,” and “under the altar.” The term “intermediate state” is helpful in describing the function of this “state” between a believer’s death and bodily resurrection.<sup>6</sup>
- The main biblical passages about the “intermediate state” include:
  - Ecclesiastes 12:7 “*the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*”
  - Luke 16:19-31, esp. v.22 (the parable of Lazarus and the rich man) “*The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side*”
  - Luke 23:43 (Jesus to the thief on the cross), “*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise*”
  - Acts 7:59 (stoning of Stephen) “*And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’*”
  - 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, “*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*”
  - 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 “*Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the **third heaven**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into **paradise**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.*”<sup>7</sup>
  - Philippians 1:19-26, esp. v.21-23 “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be **with Christ**, for that is far better.*”
  - Revelation 6:9-11 “*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw **under the altar** the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge*

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<sup>6</sup> There also seems to be an “intermediate state” for non-Christians, which we will look out in next month’s seminar.

<sup>7</sup> It is uncertain whether the “third heaven” is a synonym for “paradise” or whether Paul’s vision involved a two-stage process. A three-heaven scheme was the most well established view in Jewish writings, and the “third heaven” would therefore be recognized as the highest.

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*and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”*

- There are a couple of **conclusions** we can draw from this biblical evidence:
  - These passages either indicate or assume that the soul (or spirit)<sup>8</sup> is **separated from the body** at death. Because there will be a future resurrection of the body, where the soul will be reunited with a new body (see point V. below), this period of separation should be viewed as a **temporary situation**, and not the final destiny of an individual.
  - Most of these passages indicate that the soul takes up residence with God, where He is at, at the moment of death—there is not a delay or waiting period for it to get there.<sup>9</sup>
  - Several of these passages indicate that a person’s soul **retains its personal identity** and **remains conscious** during this temporary situation.
    - In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, both the rich man and father Abraham retain knowledge of their identity, and their past lives. Even if it is just a parable which takes poetic license, Jesus intended for us to picture people in the afterlife as real humans with thoughts and capacities, and with the same identity, memories, and awareness from their lives and relationships on Earth.
    - In Revelation 6:9-11, the souls of the martyrs remembered that they were martyred because of the witness they borne, and were aware that God had not yet judged those who had persecuted them.
  - The mention that the soul/spirit is absent from the body suggests that the Christian may not be bound by the time sequence as we know it in the “intermediate state.” In other words, though thousands of years may have passed on earth since their entrance into the “intermediate state,” **they may have little to no perception of how much time has passed** until the future resurrection.
  - If someone were to experience “heaven”—either through a vision, or a Near Death Experience—at any time prior to the future resurrection of the body, they would only get a glimpse of this temporary “intermediate state” (cf. Paul’s experience in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4).
- **Some Incorrect Notions about the Intermediate State**
  - **Purgatory**: while the souls of the righteous ascend to heaven and the souls of the unrighteous descend to hell, **the souls of those who are in a state of grace buy are not yet spiritually “perfect”** (e.g. they did not have a chance to experience absolution from any venial sins they had committed) **go to purgatory**. The purpose of purgatory is to give them an opportunity to **personally atone for their sins**, after which they will ascend to heaven.
    - **Proponent**: Roman Catholicism

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<sup>8</sup> “Soul” and “spirit” seem to be used interchangeably in Scripture (e.g. death is described as giving up the “soul” [Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21; Acts 15:26] and as giving up the “spirit” [Psalms 31:5; Luke 23:46].

<sup>9</sup> The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16:19-31 is an exception; it does not explicitly mention the souls of Lazarus or Abraham in the presence of God. It is possible this is because Abraham and Lazarus at that time were OT saints and were awaiting Christ’s death on the cross to atone for sins.

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- **Problems:** it is derived from the Apocrypha (a collection of Jewish religious literature from the time period between the testaments which was never thought to be inspired by Jews or non-Roman Catholics<sup>10</sup>); since humans must atone for their own sins, this seems to teach that Jesus' death was not sufficient to pay for sins and, therefore, teaches a salvation by works.
- **Soul Sleep:** the belief that the soul, during the period between death and resurrection, is unconscious (it can be said to be "sleeping"). One's next conscious moment after death is their awakening at the resurrection.
  - **Proponents:** Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses
  - **Problems:** use of "sleep" in the NT is related to the sleep of the **body**; the verses listed above that indicate consciousness in the "intermediate state" argue against soul sleep.

## V. Resurrected Bodies, and a New Heaven and New Earth

- Throughout the Bible, "**resurrection**" refers to the **reuniting of a soul (or spirit) with a body**. Resurrected human beings do not become angels, they are raised to life to live in God's new heaven and new earth.
- The idea of a bodily resurrection stems from within Judaism:
  - Job 19:25-27 *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet **in my flesh I shall see God**, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another"*
  - Daniel 12:2 *"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth **shall awake**, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt"*
  - John 11:24-26 Martha said to Jesus (upon the death of her brother, Lazarus), *"I know that [Lazarus] will **rise again in the resurrection on the last day**." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."*
- The main biblical passages about the future resurrection in Christianity include:
  - John 5:28-29 *"for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, **those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment**."*
  - Romans 8:23-24 *"we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, **the redemption of our bodies**. For in this hope we were saved."*

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<sup>10</sup> The chief passage is 2 Maccabees 12:42-45: *[Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Jewish forces] also took a collection, man by man, to the amount of 2,000 drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, **taking into account the resurrection**. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. **Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.***

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- 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 “ Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him that God may be all in all. 29 Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? 30 Why are we in danger every hour? 31 I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! 32 What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” 33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” 34 Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. 35 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” 36 You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 39 For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40 There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. 42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44 **It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.** If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. 50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell



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*you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 **For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.** 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."*

- There are a couple of **conclusions** we can draw from this biblical evidence:
  - The explicit mention of bodies in connection with the resurrection indicates that the **future resurrection will involve a new type of bodily existence.**
  - The **explicit comparison with Jesus Christ**, as the "firstfruits" of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20) offers assurance about the fact of the resurrection and gives us some insight as to the nature of the new bodies we will receive.
  - The expression "a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44) has led many to think that the resurrection body will be a nonphysical one. However, the statement actually describes the **state in which the Holy Spirit rules the body.**
  - We'll be raised "imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:52). This suggests that our resurrected bodies will **not wear out or grow old or ever be subject to any kind of sickness or disease.**
- Not only our bodies, but God intends to renew all of Creation
  - Isaiah 65:17 "*For behold, **I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind***"
  - Isaiah 66:22 "*For **as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain***"
  - Romans 8:19-21 "*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that **the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.***"
  - 2 Peter 3:13 "*But according to his promise we are waiting for **new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells***"
  - Revelation 21:1-5 "*Then **I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'** And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'*"

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- There are a couple of **conclusions** we can draw from this biblical evidence:
  - God made heaven and earth, and **He declared the original, pre-Fall earth to be “very good”** (Genesis 1:31). God’s intention to create a new heaven and new earth is an affirmation about the inherent good in His original creation.
  - God’s intention to “set creation free from its bondage to corruption” (Romans 8:21) also suggests that He will not completely “scrap” the old creation, but rather **liberate what has come to be enslaved to the curse**. This suggests that “In this renewed creation, there will be no more thorns or thistles, no more floods or droughts, no more deserts or uninhabitable jungles, no more earthquakes or tornadoes, no more poisonous snakes or bees that sting or mushrooms that kill. There will be a productive earth, an earth that will blossom and produce food abundantly for our enjoyment.”<sup>11</sup>
  - God’s people will live on this new earth in glorified, resurrected bodies, and God Himself will **make the new earth His dwelling place**. Thus, with His coming to the new earth, the distinction between “heaven” and “earth” will be obliterated—“heaven” is the dwelling place of God, and so we will be in “heaven” while we are on the new earth. This also explains why there is no temple in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:22).

## VI. Practical Issues

- The **relationship between our present bodies and our future resurrected bodies** will be marked by continuity and discontinuity. We have experience living in bodies, and we can logically expect that our bodily experience after the future resurrection will be similar to our present bodily experience in some ways. Unfortunately, when we try to get specific about similarities and differences, we also get more speculative.
  - As discussed above, our **personal identity** seems to survive into the “intermediate state.” In several biblical examples, **memories are also retained**: the souls of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9-11 remember at least some of what happened on earth; Samuel remembered what Saul had done before Samuel’s death and some things after his death in 1 Samuel 28:16-19; Job could say “In my flesh I will see God...I, and not another” (Job 19:26-27); Jesus called people in the “intermediate state” by name (e.g. Lazarus in Luke 16:25, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Matthew 8:11); when Moses and Elijah appeared out of the “intermediate state” to stand with Christ at his transfiguration, the disciples with Christ recognized them as the distinct individuals they were, the same men they were on Earth—even though they had never met them. Paul encourages the Thessalonians that they will **be reunited with believing family and friends** in the resurrection: “*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope...through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep... we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them ... and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words*” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). There’s no reason to think our identity or memories would be lost when we are resurrected.

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<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 836.

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- As embodied creatures existing in space and time, will we **be subject to the same laws of physics** on the new earth? If we wish to travel from one place to another, will we have to walk or employ some means of transportation to do so? Jesus demonstrated the ability to appear amongst the disciples even when the doors were locked (John 20:26), but it is possible that this is related to abilities Jesus has through His divinity.
- What happens to our earthly bodies—whether **cremated or if every molecule is reabsorbed by nature**—is not a significant issue when we consider that every seven years or so, every atom and molecule in our bodies is “changed out” with new material. Each of us are—physically—totally different from the person we were ten years ago, yet we retain the same DNA and are still “ourselves.”
- Will we need to **eat and drink** on the new earth? There are statements which suggest that we will eat and drink at “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9), and Jesus will once again drink wine with his disciples in the heavenly kingdom (Luke 22:18). Yet, if these are simply symbolic descriptions of fellowship, they need not imply that we will need nourishment. And Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 6:13 “*Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food—and God will destroy both one and the other*” may suggest that eating and food is limited to this life. And, if we do eat and drink, does that mean that we will need to eliminate bodily waste? Again, uncertain.
- Will we need **sleep** on the new earth? Our bodily experience now requires sleep, and it is likely that God’s design for the rhythm of life for Adam and Eve in pre-Fall creation likewise included sleep. However, will sleep be necessary for resurrected bodies? It’s uncertain.
- What about **marriage and sexual intimacy** on the new earth? Jesus indicated that there will be no marrying or giving in marriage in the resurrection (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35). Jesus’ teaching here does not necessarily imply that there will be no sex differences in the life to come. What we do learn, however, is that the institution of marriage will no longer be in existence, since there will be no need to bring new children into the world. Since sexual intimacy is connected with marriage and childbearing, it is possible that there will be no need for sexual intimacy in heaven.
- Will we **grow in knowledge and skill** on the new earth? Some scholars assume that achieving perfection in character will make any kind of growth process impossible.<sup>12</sup> However, since God is infinite and we are finite creatures, we may expect that we can go on learning more about God for all eternity.<sup>13</sup>
- Will the new earth mean an **abandonment of culture and technology**? If we are surrounded by resurrected people with resurrected brains and eternity to learn and grow, why would we not expect to see greater works of craftsmanship and technological advance on the new earth? Additionally, God’s empowerment of Bezalel, son of Uri, and Oholiab, son of Ahisamach to create the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exodus 31:1-6) suggests that there’s nothing wrong with this kind of cultural creation. Alcorn asks, “Even under the Curse, we’ve been able to explore the moon, and we have the technology to land on Mars. What will we be able to accomplish for God’s glory when

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<sup>12</sup> E.g. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998), 1240.

<sup>13</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1162.

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- we have resurrected minds, unlimited resources, complete scientific cooperation, and no more death?”<sup>14</sup>
- Life on the new earth seems to allow the composition of music and **singing** before the Lord: the 144,000 “who had been redeemed from the earth” sing a “new song” before God’s throne (Revelation 14:2-3). People in “the intermediate state” sing a “song of Moses,” likely the song of Exodus 15, rejoicing in the redemption of Passover (Revelation 15:2-3). This suggests we’ll sing both old and new songs, songs written on earth and songs written on the new earth.
  - Also, there is a picture of **worship** in the “intermediate state” in Revelation 19, with the twenty-four elders and four living creatures proclaiming God’s majesty—we would assume that God’s presence with us would prompt us at times to express similar sentiments. And it’s likely that we’ll be able to do so with even greater spontaneity and genuineness because Christ bore every one of our sins. He paid the ultimate price so that we would be forever free from sin—and the fear of sin. All barriers between us and him will be forever gone.
  - Life on the new earth seems to involve us **ruling and serving**. God revealed about Jesus that “*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore*” (Isaiah 9:7), which suggests that Christ’s government of the new heaven and earth will be ever-expanding. Scripture indicates that we will have real responsibilities to “judge the world” and to “judge angels” (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) and to “reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12; cf. Revelation 22:5).
  - The **relationship between our present earth and the new earth** will also be marked by continuity and discontinuity. Here, too, there is a tendency to get speculative.
    - Will any of the **material goods from the old earth**—cars, houses, tools, literature, computers, etc.—survive to the new earth? Aside from the assurance that the Bible will survive (Psalm 119:89 “*Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens*”), Scripture is silent about the survival of goods from the old earth.
    - What about **animals** on the new earth? Alcorn notes that Scripture says a great deal about animals, portraying them as Earth’s second most important inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> Animals were entrusted into our care, and our relationships with animals are a significant part of our lives. God saved animals from the Flood. These considerations suggest that God may have a future plan for animals as well. Scripture is silent as to whether any specific animals might be “restored” to the new earth or whether animal death will continue (this often depends on whether one believes animal death was the result of the Fall).
    - We are called to make **preparations for heaven**: Matthew 6:19-21 “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”

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<sup>14</sup> Alcorn, *Heaven*.

<sup>15</sup> Alcorn, *Heaven*.

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## VII. Bibliography

- Alcorn, Randy. *Heaven*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. This is the book to read if you are interested in thinking more about the “intermediate state” and life on the new earth. Alcorn discusses a dizzying array of questions and does a fantastic job of helping one think “outside the box.”
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