

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE ETERNAL STATE

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History is heading toward a new heaven and new earth, which is often referred to as the eternal state. This is not a mystical realm but a real, tangible place where the people of God will dwell in the presence of the Triune God forever. Scholars debate whether the new earth is a renovation of the present planet or an entirely new entity. Whichever option chosen, the student of Scripture will be wise to remember that the eternal state has both continuities and discontinuities with our present planet. He should also draw upon the hope of knowing that the troubles of our world today will give way to the glorious world to come.

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As the Bible clearly reveals, the time will come when every facet of God's reign will merge into one eternal kingdom, on a new earth, in which the Triune God will be gloriously present. His enemies will be everlastingly vanquished, and His people will serve Him perfectly and reign with Him victoriously forever. Christians refer to that future reality as the *eternal state* and the *new earth*, or to use the common vernacular, as *heaven*.¹

The eternal heaven (i.e. the new earth) is the future home of all who have savingly trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ for salvation. It is the blessed

¹ Throughout this article, the terms *eternal state* and *heaven* will be used interchangeably. The Bible uses the term *heaven* to refer to the abode of God (Ps 80:14; Heb 8:1). Thus, although the term *heaven* is not used in Scripture to refer to the eternal state, it is nonetheless an appropriate designation—since the Triune God will reside with redeemed humankind on the new earth. In that sense, it is important to differentiate between the intermediate heaven (where the souls of believers go immediately after death—cf. 2 Cor 5:8) and the eternal (or consummated) heaven—a reference to the new heavens and earth which are gloriously revealed in passages like Revelation 21–22. As Anthony Hoekema explains, “Since God will make the new earth his dwelling place, and since where God dwells there heaven is, we shall then continue to be in heaven while we are on the new earth. For heaven and earth will then no longer be separated as they are now, but will be one.” Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 274.

hope that has ignited the hearts of believers throughout every generation of church history. As C. S. Lewis observed, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. . . . It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”²

In writing about heaven, the Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, asked his readers, “Why are not our hearts continually there? Why dwell we not there in constant contemplation? . . . Bend thy soul to study eternity; busy it about the life to come; habituate thyself to such contemplations, and let not these thoughts be seldom or cursory, but settle upon them; bathe thy soul in heavenly delights.”³ The American evangelist, D. L. Moody, similarly emphasized the importance of maintaining an eternal perspective:

Surely it is not wrong for us to think and talk about Heaven. I like to locate it, and find out all I can about it. I expect to live there through all eternity. If I were going to dwell in any place in this country, if I were going to make it my home, I would inquire about its climate, about the neighbors I would have, about everything, in fact, that I could learn concerning it. If soon you were going to emigrate, that is the way you would feel. Well, we are all going to emigrate in a very little while. We are going to spend eternity in another world, a grand and glorious world where God reigns. Is it not natural that we should look and listen and try to find out who is already there, and what is the route to take?⁴

Focusing on the glories of one’s eternal future is a vital part of the life of faith (cf. Heb 11:16). But in an age of science fiction novels and near-death experiences,⁵ it is imperative that believers think rightly about heaven. True hope must be grounded in biblical reality, not in fairy tales or overactive imaginations.

Ask the average American what he thinks about “heaven,” and he will probably describe a state of existence in which the joys of this life (e.g. vivid color, good food, loud music, physical activity, and meaningful friendships) are largely absent. Popular stereotypes depict a place where everything is white, sanitized, and

² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 134.

³ Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 235–36.

⁴ D. L. Moody, *The D. L. Moody Year Book*, ed. Emma Moody Fitt (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 9–10.

⁵ Recent books like the best-selling *Heaven Is for Real* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010) and the lesser-known *My Trip to Heaven* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011) have become increasingly popular in the evangelical world. Ironically, such books never agree on the details of what heaven is like. For example, Colton Burpo (who was featured in *Heaven Is for Real*) claims that the Holy Spirit is “bluish and transparent . . . and almost ghost-like,” and that He does not have wings (“Questions about Heaven,” Heaven Is For Real, Inc., <http://hifministries.org/index.php?id=17>, accessed August 15, 2012). By contrast, David Taylor, author of *My Trip to Heaven*, states that the Holy Spirit is bright white, has a body, and “also had huge, beautiful, white wings as part of His form” (67). Such blatant contradictions expose the fact that these alleged trips to heaven have more to do with the author’s imagination than any actual celestial visit.

generally quiet—like a cosmic hospital or giant library in the sky. Heaven’s ethereal inhabitants float about like disembodied spirits, donning halos and endlessly strumming miniature harps atop clouds of cotton.⁶ Such a picture is understandably unappealing; it is also grossly inaccurate. Yet, far too often, evangelical Christians allow their understanding of heaven to be tainted by the culture around them, rather than looking to the Word of God.

The Scriptures reveal that the eternal heaven is anything but bland, boring, or quiet. The new earth is a place of brilliant color (Rev 21:19–21; cf. 4:3), delicious food (22:2; cf. 19:7–9), vibrant music (cf. 5:8–13), exuberant physical activity (21:24–26), and intimate fellowship with God Himself (22:3–4).⁷ The best this life has to offer cannot compare to the wonders and joys of the life to come. In light of that reality, the renown Reformer Martin Luther exclaimed, “I would not give one moment of heaven for the wealth and pleasure of all the world, although they were to last thousands upon thousands of years.”⁸

The most detailed description of the eternal heaven in the Bible is found in Rev 21:1–22:5.⁹ As R. C. Sproul explains, “The most vivid and dramatic portrayal of heaven that we can find in Scripture is at the end of the Revelation of John. . . . The future of creation is found in the manifestation of a new heaven and a new earth.”¹⁰ The final two chapters of Revelation not only make up the last two chapters of inspired Scripture, they also present the climax of salvation history. Since the creation of the world, all of human history has been directed toward this final cosmic consummation—when God will reign with His redeemed on the new earth for all of eternity.

As throughout all of Scripture, the theme of God’s kingdom permeates the apostle John’s description of the new heavens and earth. Whereas Satan, sin, and death have attempted to challenge divine authority since the Fall, in the eternal state all such enemies have been destroyed. God’s sovereign reign will continue, uncontested, for all of eternity. In the words of one commentator:

⁶ Such contemporary misconceptions stem from the dualism of Greek philosophy. As George E. Ladd explains, “In typical dualistic Greek thought, the universe was divided into two realms: the earthly or transitory, and the eternal spiritual world. Salvation consisted of the flight of the soul from the sphere of the transitory and ephemeral to the realm of eternal reality. However, biblical thought always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence” (*A Commentary on Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 275).

⁷ As Jonathan Edwards exclaimed, “The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows, but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the ocean” (Jonathan Edwards, “The Christian Pilgrim.” Cited in Randy Alcorn, *Eternal Perspectives* [Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012], 315).

⁸ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1959), 2:624.

⁹ In the words of Grant R. Osborne, “The only extended description of ‘heaven’ in the Bible is Rev. 21:1–22:5” (*Revelation*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 742).

¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 151–52.

The consummated kingdom of God will be just that—the *kingdom of God*. Everything in the universe will be brought into conformity with God's good and beneficent will. He will be king. He will be sovereign. He will exercise rule. He will have the dominion. He will be Lord. John expresses this truth by picturing God on the "throne" and saying that "his servants will serve him."¹¹

A simple survey of Revelation 21–22 reveals several general characteristics of this divine kingdom. First, it will be a *geo-physical kingdom*—located on a new earth within a new universe (21:1). It has geographical features: the absence of a sea (21:1), the presence of a city (21:2), a high mountain (21:10), a river with banks (22:1–2), and a tree that produces fruit (22:1–2). It occupies physical space (21:16–17) and encompasses the physical activity of its inhabitants (21:24). The apostle John describes it as a land of bright color and exquisite beauty, like dazzling jewels (21:19–21). There is even a reference made to the marking of time (in terms of *months* and *seasons*) in eternity future (22:2).

It will also be a *socio-political kingdom*—complete with a capital city, the New Jerusalem (21:2). The city itself has gates, high walls, foundations, engraved names, and streets (cf. Isa 62:3–5). Its inhabitants communicate through speech and writing (21:3, 5). There is government hierarchy (21:24), an ongoing economic system (21:24), and some form of national distinctiveness (21:24, 26).¹² But most importantly, the King's throne is present on the new earth (22:1, 5). Though His people will reign with Him (22:5), they are also His bond slaves—with His name written on their foreheads designating that they belong to Him (22:4; cf. Isa 62:2).

Third, it will be a *spiritually-perfect kingdom*. Sin and its effects will be gone (21:4), thus, there will no longer be any separation between God and man (21:2–3). There will no longer be any spiritual thirst (21:6–7). Instead, the essence of life will revolve around face-to-face communion with God (22:4–5). No sinful influences or unregenerate people will be allowed inside its territories (21:8, 27), but only those who have been redeemed, and therefore love to worship and serve their Lord and Master (22:3).

Finally, it will be a *divinely-glorious kingdom*. The New Jerusalem will be the crown jewel of the new earth, radiating the glory of God (21:11). The Triune God—Father (21:22), Son (22:1, 5), and Holy Spirit (21:10)—will be present in the midst of His people. The Shekinah glory will permeate the entire world (22:5), such that there will be no need for the sun or the moon (21:23; cf. Isa 66:20–22), or even a lamp (v. 23). The redeemed will bask in radiance of His presence, as they worship Him in perfect purity (22:3–4). They will continually enjoy the essence of eternal

¹¹ Christopher A. Davis, *Revelation*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000), 371.

¹² The presence of "nations" in 21:24 has resulted in a wide variety of interpretations by commentators. For a survey of ten proposed views, see Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 476–78. Thomas' own conclusion is "that 'the nations' are composed of saved people who survive the millennial kingdom without dying and without joining Satan's rebellion and who undergo some sort of transformation that suits them for life in the eternal state" (p. 478). Yet, Thomas is quick to add that any view is somewhat speculative, since "this is an issue on which the text of Revelation is silent."

life—fellowship with God (cf. John 17:3)—as they drink the water of life (Rev 21:6) from the river of life (22:1) which flows from His heavenly throne.

With that as a backdrop, the final section of John’s apocalyptic vision (20:11–22:5) can now be considered in more detail. The apostle relates the grand consummation of salvation history by focusing on four major themes: the punishment of the King’s enemies (20:11–15), the perfection of the King’s territory (21:1–8), the physical properties of the King’s capital city (21:9–21), and the personal presence of the King Himself (21:22–22:5). Outlined another way, these four themes center around the great white throne (20:11–15), the new heavens and earth (21:1–8), the New Jerusalem (21:9–21), and within the New Jerusalem, the throne room of God (21:22–22:5).

The Punishment of the King’s Enemies (20:11–15)

In Revelation 20, the apostle John transitions from the millennial kingdom (20:1–10) to the eternal state by describing the final condemnation of God’s enemies. The setting is a royal one, with the Sovereign of the universe seated on His majestic throne of judgment—ready to issue an imperial sentence of guilt on all of His adversaries.¹³

At this final judgment, the first enemy to be condemned is Satan (cf. v. 10).¹⁴ With permanent finality, the true King and Judge will send the usurping god of this world (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4) into the lake of fire—never to oppose the purposes or people of God again. The prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2), whose defeat was accomplished at the cross, will be cast into everlasting punishment. In the lake of fire, he will join the beast and the false prophet who were already imprisoned there before the commencement of the millennial kingdom (Rev 19:20).

It is important to note that Satan will not be the king of hell; but rather its primary captive and most-tormented prisoner. According to Rev 14:9–11, the Lamb Himself is sovereign over the lake of fire. Holy angels administer the righteous wrath of God forever and ever.

Following Satan’s condemnation, the masses of unredeemed humanity throughout history will be raised from the dead (Dan 12:2; John 5:28–92) and

¹³ In the words of Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort: “[In ancient Israel] the throne chair itself was symbolic of the power which God, the King of the Universe, had vested in the office He created. The ‘throne’ (kisse’) was and continues to be a sign of authority, majesty and exalted rule by God’s chosen rulers in Israel (Pss. 9:7; 45:6; 94:20; Prov. 16:12). God delegates His authority from His heavenly throne (Pss. 11:4; 45:6; 47:8; 132:12). In Isaiah, the Lord is the picture of Majesty, seated upon His throne high over the universe (Isa. 6). Heaven itself is the Lord’s throne and even it does not contain Him. . . . Daniel’s vision of the great white throne is reiterated in Revelation 20:11. After God’s judgment from this eternal throne, the Lord God and His Lamb, Jesus Christ, will rule forever” (*Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000], 189).

¹⁴ Though 20:10 is rightly grouped with 20:1–9 (in terms of literary structure), it nonetheless serves as the bridge event between the millennial reign of Christ and God’s judgment at the great white throne. Even non-premillennialists acknowledge that the final judgment of 20:11–15 “either begins with or is simultaneous with the definitive judgment in v 10” (G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 1032).

summoned to appear before the great white throne (Rev 20:11–15).¹⁵ As with the devil, the eternal destiny of all the unredeemed is the lake of fire—where God's justice and righteous indignation will be everlastingly displayed in the punishment of the wicked.

Lastly, death itself will be destroyed (Rev 20:14). This is the final act of Christ's millennial reign. As the apostle Paul explained in 1 Cor 15:25–26, "He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death." Christ's kingly dominion during the millennial age will culminate in the destruction of death itself. According to 1 Cor 15:28, after all of His enemies are defeated and His mediatorial role is fulfilled, Christ will then subject His kingdom to the Father "so that God may be all in all." Though the millennial kingdom will have come to an end, the Son of God will continue to rule with His Father in Trinitarian glory for all of eternity (cf. Rev 22:3–5).

The Perfection of the King's Territory (21:1–8)

With the enemies of the King permanently vanquished, the apostle John transitions to speak of the glorious perfection that will characterize His eternal kingdom. For believers, an everlasting future awaits, not in the lake of fire but in the *new heaven and new earth* (Rev 21:1). When this sin-stained universe has passed away (cf. 20:11), God will create a new one that is both permanent and perfect.¹⁶

From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained

Whereas the original creation was corrupted by sin (Gen 3:1–24), the new creation will recapture and exceed the glory of the old (cf. Rom 8:19–22). It will never be contaminated or cursed. As Mark Dever explains:

In Revelation, creation is re-finished, refurbished, and re-presented in a new heaven and a new earth, all of which tends toward the great end of the Bible and world history—the glory of God himself. . . . The holiness of God's people will finally be complete, and we will dwell together with him. Really, Revelation presents the Garden of Eden restored, only better.¹⁷

¹⁵ Premillennialists understand the resurrection of the redeemed to have taken place before the great white throne judgment, at the outset of the millennial kingdom (cf. Rev 20:4).

¹⁶ The redeemed, in their resurrection bodies, will experience a life on the new earth that is not only spiritual but also physical. Hoekema explains: "One gets the impression from certain hymns that glorified believers will spend eternity in some ethereal heaven somewhere off in space, far away from earth. . . . On the contrary, the Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God's praise in glorified, resurrected bodies. On that new earth, therefore, we hope to spend eternity, enjoying its beauties, exploring its resources, and using its treasures to the glory of God" (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 274).

¹⁷ Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 39.

A comparison of the new created order in Revelation 21–22 with the old creation in Genesis 1–3 provides a number of intriguing similarities and differences. In Gen 1:1, God created the heavens and earth; in Rev 21:1, God creates the new heavens and new earth. In Gen 1:3, God created light; on the new earth, God's glory is the light. In Gen 1:5, God created day and night; on the new earth, there is no more night. In Gen 1:10, God created the sea, and in Genesis 6–8, He used the sea to judge the world; on the new earth, there is no more sea. In Gen 1:14–18, God created the sun and moon to give light to the earth; on the new earth, there is no longer any need for the sun and the moon.

In Gen 1:28, God placed man as ruler over the earth. In Genesis 3, man abdicated that rule and Satan usurped that authority; on the new earth, redeemed mankind will reign together with God, and Satan will be forever defeated. In Gen 2:7, God created man's body out of the dust of the earth; on the new earth, redeemed men will exist in perfect, resurrection bodies (cf. 1 Cor 15:42–58). In Gen 2:10, a river watered the Garden of Eden; on the new earth, a river nourishes the entire world. In Gen 2:17, God warned that the penalty for sin would be death; on the new earth both sin and death are absent. In Gen 2:21–24, God created a bride for the man, Adam. In the eternal state, believers remain unmarried (Matt 22:30). However, on the new earth, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven as a bride. And believers, corporately, are described as the bride of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Gen 3:4, the devil tempted Eve to sin; on the new earth, Satan and his hosts will be absent. In Gen 3:8–10, we see that God walked in full fellowship with Adam and Eve; believers will again walk in full fellowship with God on the new earth. At the Fall (Gen 3), God's perfect law was violated; on the new earth, His people will serve and worship Him perfectly. In Gen 3:15, God promised that the coming Messiah would trample the head of the serpent; on the new earth, the eternal benefits of that final victory over sin and Satan are fully realized. In Genesis 3:16, God explained that pain and suffering are one of the consequences of sin; on the new earth, pain and suffering are removed. In Gen 3:17, God cursed the ground; on the new earth, the curse on the earth is gone. In Gen 3:21, God killed an animal substitute in order to make coverings for Adam and Eve; on the new earth, all of the redeemed are there because they have been covered by the sacrifice of Christ (cf. Isa 61:10; Rev 7:9, 13–14). In Gen 3:22, God guarded the Tree of Life to prevent men from eating it; on the new earth, mankind freely partakes of its fruit and lives forever.

A Comparison of the New Earth to This Present World

In addition to the parallels that can be drawn between the new earth and God's original creative work (in Genesis 1–3), it is also instructive to note comparisons and contrasts between this present world (after the Fall) and the perfect world that will exist in the eternal state.

One of the most striking features of Rev 21:1–22:5 is its prominent use of negatives. In describing the new earth, the apostle John spends a considerable

amount of time emphasizing the realities of this world that will *not* be part of the next. John MacArthur, in his commentary on Revelation, explains it like this: “Heaven will be so dramatically different from the present world that to describe it requires the use of negatives To describe what is totally beyond human understanding [necessarily] requires pointing out how it differs from present human experience.”¹⁸

Consider the following two lists:

Items That Will Be Present on the New Earth

1. The New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, 9 ff) which is called “the Bride of Christ” because it consists of all whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life (21:27)
2. The redeemed who inhabit the New Jerusalem. They are also called overcomers (in 21:7); heirs of God (in 21:7); peoples or nations (21:24); and His bondservants (22:3)
3. The Triune God (21:3) – the Father (21:22; 22:3), the Lamb (21:22; 22:3), and the Spirit (21:10; 22:17)
4. The water of life (21:6)
5. A high mountain (21:10)
6. The glory of God (21:11)
7. City walls made of jewels that radiate the light of His glory like a multi-faceted diadem projecting a spectrum of brilliant light and color (21:12, 18)
8. Pearly city gates (21:12, 21)
9. City foundation stones, also made of precious jewels (21:14, 19–20)
10. Streets of translucent gold (21:21)
11. Brilliant light that emanates from God Himself (21:23)
12. Perpetual daytime (21:25)
13. Continual worship and praise (21:26)
14. The river of life (22:1) that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb (22:1)
15. The tree of life (22:2) and fruit and leaves on the tree of life
16. Unending service to God (22:3) and face-to-face fellowship with Christ (22:4)
17. The name of God written on the foreheads of His servants (22:4)

Items That Will Be Absent from the New Earth

1. No sea (21:1)
2. No longer any separation between God and man (21:2–3)
3. No tears, mourning, or crying (21:4)
4. No pain (21:4)
5. No death (21:4)

¹⁸ John MacArthur, *Revelation 12–22*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 269.

6. Nothing that will not be made new (21:5)
7. No spiritual thirst (21:6)
8. No unforgiven sinner—whom John lists as the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, immoral persons, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars (21:8); no one who practices abomination and lying (21:27)
9. No temple (21:22) because God is the temple
10. No need for the sun or moon (21:23; 22:5) because God is the light
11. No need for a lamp (21:23; 22:5)
12. No night (21:25; 22:5)
13. No closing of the gates (21:25)
14. Nothing unclean (21:27)
15. No one whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life (21:27)
16. No curse (22:3)
17. No end to the eternal reign of Christ and His redeemed (22:5)

As these two lists demonstrate, John spends roughly the same amount of time delineating aspects of this world that will *not* be on the new earth as he does denoting the things that will. By including such striking contrasts, the apostle emphasizes the qualitative superiority of the new earth over this present world.

A detailed analysis of every item on these lists is beyond the scope of this article. But one item in particular bears further investigation. Why does the apostle John begin his description of the new earth (in 21:1) by telling his readers that there is no sea?

Commentators have offered a variety of opinions in response to this question. Part of the answer is probably found in the fact that the ocean is one of the most distinctive features of our planet. When one looks at pictures of the earth from space, the opal-blue sea is what immediately sets it apart from all other worlds. Perhaps John mentions that detail first because it represents such a dramatic geographical difference.

But, there is more to it than that. It may be that John wishes to emphasize how different the essence of life will be on the new earth. Whereas life here depends on physical water and the hydrological cycle, life on the new earth will be, as one commentator states, “based on a completely different life principle than the present universe. . . . Without a sea, there can be no hydrological cycle, so that every feature of life and climate will be dramatically different.”¹⁹

There is also a spiritual point that the apostle John is making here. At times in Scripture, and even in the book of Revelation, the sea represents a principle of disorder, violence, unrest, and even wickedness. This principle is seen in passages like Isa 57:20; Ps 107:25–28; Ezek 28:8; Rev 12:18; 13:1; and 17:1–6. John is emphasizing that there will be nothing hostile or rebellious on the new earth.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., 263.

²⁰ Robert Thomas, commenting on the absence of the sea, explains that: “Most justifiably see this void as representing an archetypal connotation in the sea (cf. 13:1; 20:13), a principle of disorder, violence, or unrest that marks the old creation (cf. Isa. 57:20; Ps. 107:25 – 28; Ezek. 28:8). . . . It is not

Finally, one other factor ought to be considered. In Revelation 21–22, the apostle John repeatedly highlights the reality that all judgment against the earth has been undone. The Fall has been canceled out, the curse eliminated, sin abolished, and death destroyed. Though God created the sea on the third day of the creation week (Gen 1:10), the ocean as it exists today (covering seventy-five percent of earth's surface) is largely the result of God's judgment in the flood (Genesis 6–8). Genesis 7:11 describes the dramatic ways in which the world was altered during that great deluge, as waters burst forth from the depths of the earth and crashed down from the firmament of the heavens. The sea is not only a spiritual symbol of disorder and unrest; it is also a vivid reminder of God's wrath being poured out on this world during the flood. Its absence in the new earth not only represents the elimination of all wickedness, but also the undoing of divine judgment.²¹

Is the New Earth an Entirely New Planet?

One final issue regarding the general character of the new earth deserves consideration. In Rev 21:1, an exegetical issue arises as to whether the new earth is a completely new creation (being made out of nothing), or whether it is a restoration of this present world.²² R. C. Sproul summarizes the issue nicely:

We are told that the first earth and the first heaven pass away. What does this mean? Interpreters are divided on this question. Some view the passing away of the original creation as an act of divine judgment on a fallen world. The old order is destroyed, annihilated by God's fury. Then the old is replaced by a new act of creation. Out of nothing God brings forth the new order. A second view of the matter . . . is that the new order involves not a new creation of out nothing, but rather renovation of the old order. Its newness is marked by the work of God's redemption.²³

Those who hold the *renovation* view look to passages like Matt 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom 8:19–22; 2 Pet 3:10–13; and Rev 21:5 which suggest a future renewal of this corrupted universe. Lexically, they emphasize that the word for “new” in Rev 21:1 is *kainos* which often indicates the idea of being *renewed* rather than starting

that the sea is evil in itself, but that its aspect is one of hostility to mankind” (Thomas, *Revelation* 8-22, 440).

²¹ For an extended discussion on the absence of the sea in the new earth, see G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, 1050–51. As part of his argument, Beale draws a connection between the removal of the sea in the new earth and the threatening presence of the sea in both the Flood and at the Exodus.

²² Grant R. Osborne explains some of the history of this controversy. He writes, “There was considerable speculation regarding this new order in Jewish thinking. Two ideas predominated, one holding that there would be total destruction of the present world and virtually a creation *de novo* of a new heaven and earth (1 Enoch 72.1; 83:3–4; 91.16; 2 Bar. 44.12; Sib. Or. 3.75–90) and the other teaching a renovated or transfigured earth (Jub. 1.29; 4.26; 23.18; 1 Enoch 45.4–5; 2 Bar. 32.2–6; 57.1–3; T. Levi 18.5–10)” (Osborne, *Revelation*, 730).

²³ R. C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering*, 152.

over from nothing.²⁴ From a philosophical standpoint, they contend that if this earth is annihilated, it would suggest that God's original purpose for this earth was ultimately frustrated by sin. Finally, they draw a parallel between the resurrection bodies of the redeemed and the resurrection or renovation of the new earth. In the words of Simon J. Kistemaker:

God will not annihilate heaven and earth and then create them anew out of nothing. Instead he will transform them in a process that is the same as calling forth the lowly bodies of the saints to make them like the glorious body of the Lord (Phil. 3:21). Just as Jesus' body was transformed at his resurrection, so at the coming of the Lord the bodies of his people will be not annihilated but completely changed and glorified.²⁵

By contrast, those who argue for *replacement* (i.e. the *annihilation* of this earth) look to texts like Pss 97:5; 102:25–26; Isa 13:13; 34:4; 51:6; Matt 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; 1 Cor 7:31; Heb 1:10–12; Heb 12:27; 2 Pet 3:10–12; 1 John 2:17 and Rev 20:11; 21:1. Lexically, they emphasize that the word *apēlthan* (*passing away*) expresses the concept of annihilation and total destruction. Commenting on the biblical evidence for both sides, Robert Thomas writes:

Evidence from other Scriptures on this issue is a standoff and therefore indecisive. The language of [Revelation] 20:11 which depicts an entire dissolving of the old, a vanishing into nothingness followed by a new creation in 21:1 without any sea is the decisive contextual feature that determines this to be a reference to an entirely new creation."²⁶

In response to philosophical arguments for the renovation view, advocates of the replacement view contend that God's plans in history are not frustrated because His triumph over sin is demonstrated in the final stage of the present earth's existence—the millennial kingdom. They further argue that our resurrection bodies do not consist of the same molecules that made up our earthly bodies. Rather, the earthly tent disintegrates and is replaced with a new permanent residence (cf. 2 Cor 5:1).²⁷

A fuller discussion of the debate goes beyond the scope of this present article. Whichever view an interpreter takes, it is important to stress that there are elements of both *continuity* and *discontinuity* between this present world and the world to come. Those who argue for the *renovation* view must be especially careful not to

²⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 555 explains that “This adjective conveys the meaning of something that is new but has its origin in the old.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 554–55.

²⁶ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 440.

²⁷ As G. K. Beale (who sees merit in both positions though ultimately takes the renewal view) acknowledges, “Renewal does not mean that there will be no literal destruction of the old cosmos, just as the renewed resurrection body does not exclude a similar destruction of the old” (Beale, *Revelation*, 1040).

overemphasize elements of continuity. In particular, they ought to avoid the temptation to move the fulfillment of millennial prophecies into the eternal state—as if specific promises in this present world can go unfulfilled until the creation of the new earth.²⁸

As the chart below demonstrates, the Bible reveals elements of discontinuity that clearly differentiate the present age, the millennial kingdom, and the eternal state from one another.

CHART: Continuity & Discontinuity			
Feature	Church Age	Millennial Kingdom	Eternal Kingdom
<p>Christ physically reigning on the earth from Jerusalem (over both Israel and the Gentile nations)</p> <p>Mediatorial rule of Christ</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No</p> <p>John Walvoord: “Though Christ reigns in the hearts of His followers now, in the millennial kingdom this will be universal, political, and visible.”²⁹</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>2 Sam 7:16; Pss 72:8; 89:20-37; Isa 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 16:5; 24:23; 32:1; 40:1-11; 42:3-4; 52:7-15; 55:4; Jer 31:12; 33:19-21; Ezek 34:25-29; Dan 2:44; 7:27; Joel 2:21-27; Amos 9:13-14; Mic 4:1-8; 5:2-5; Zech 9:9; 14:16-17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>On the new earth, in the New Jerusalem</p> <p>Rev 22:1, 5</p> <p><u>BUT</u> it is no longer the mediatorial kingdom of the millennium (1 Cor 15:24).</p>
<p>Human governments are submissive to Christ</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes, though imperfectly</p> <p>Pss 2:6-9; 72:8-11; Isa 11:4; Dan 2:35; 7:14; Mic 4:1-2; Zech 9:10; Rev 19:16</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>Rev 21:24</p>

²⁸ This is the error of many amillennialists, who assume that Old Testament millennial prophecies will be fulfilled in either the present age (for the church) or in the eternal state. As a proponent of that view, Anthony Hoekema writes: “Earlier we looked at a number of Old Testament prophecies which speak of a glorious future for the earth. . . . Prophecies of this nature should be understood as descriptions—in figurative language, to be sure—of the new earth which God will bring into existence after Christ comes again—a new earth which will last, not just for a thousand years, but forever” (Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 275-76).

²⁹ John Walvoord, “The Second Coming of Christ and the Millennial Kingdom,” online at: <http://bible.org/seriespage/second-coming-christ-and-millennial-kingdom>. Accessed August 16, 2012.

Righteousness and justice characterize the age	No But some people are righteous through faith	Yes But there are still unbelievers. Isa 2:4; 11:3-5, 9; 12:3-4; Jer 31:33-34; Ps 72:7	Yes But there are no more sinners. Rev 21:8, 27
There will be a temple and memorial sacrifices will be performed in it	No A temple will be rebuilt during the tribulation period	Yes Ezek 40:1-46	No Rev 21:22
The curse on the ground is lifted	No	Yes Isa 30:23; 32:14-15; 35:1-2, 7.	Yes Rev. 22:3
It will be a time of unprecedented prosperity for humanity	No	Yes Jer 31:12; Ezek 34:25-29; Joel 2:21-27; Amos 9:13-14	Yes
Sickness and death will be eliminated	No	No – but greatly reduced Isa 29:18; 33:24; 35:5-6; 65:20	Yes Rev 21:4; cf. Isa 25:8
There is childbirth and population growth	Yes	Yes Isa 65: 20, 23; Jer 30:19-20; Ezek 37:25; Zech 8:5	No Matt 22:30; Luke 20:34-36
The animal world is tamed	No	Yes—such that children can play with cobras Isa 11:6-8; cf. 65:25	Yes Implied

Jerusalem is the capital city of the world	No	Yes Zech 14:10	Yes But it is the New Jerusalem – not a man-made city.
Jerusalem will be greatly enlarged	No	Yes But different in origin and size from the New Jerusalem Jer 30:18b; 31:38–40; 37:13; Zech 14:10	Yes Rev 21:16 A completely new city; it comes from heaven and is massive
The presence of the sea	Yes	Yes Ps 72:8; Isa 11:11; 60:5; Ezek 47:10–20; 48:28; Zech 9:10; 14:8	No Rev 21:1
Sin and judgment are eliminated	No	No Ps 2:9; Zech 14:16–19; Ezek 44:25, 27; Rev 19:5; 20:7–10	Yes

John Walvoord: “Any close examination of the many particulars that abound in prophecy of this [messianic] kingdom on earth will make it clear that these prophecies are not being fulfilled in any sense now and that they require a second coming of Christ, a personal return of Christ on earth, and the establishment of His kingdom on earth for a thousand years before the eternal state begins. The millennial kingdom will not be fulfilled in the new earth (Rev 21–22), as in the Millennium there will be sin and death and divine judgment as well as other factors not found in heaven. The Millennium will be fulfilled in the present earth, even though some changes will be made in the earthly situation.”³⁰

³⁰ Ibid.

The Physical Properties of the King's Capital City (21:9–21)

Prominent attention is given in John's account of the new earth to the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the eternal heaven. Nearly half of Revelation 21 is devoted to describing the physical properties of the city. This magnificent metropolis of staggering proportions will be the heart of the new earth, for it is here that God Himself dwells.

Christians rarely think of heaven as a city, and yet that is precisely how God describes it (Heb 11:16; cf. John 14:2). Cities have buildings, streets, houses, and citizens. They are places of political power, economic industry, higher learning, refined culture, and impressive architecture. These characteristics are true of the heavenly city as well, though the New Jerusalem will far outshine any earthly city in both its magnificence and its might.

The fact that every major society on earth organizes itself into cities is indicative of the way God designed human beings. He created them to function in community with other people. It is not surprising, then, to learn that life on the new earth will center on a great municipality. As one writer explains, "The concept of a city includes relationships, activity, responsibility, unity, socialization, communion, and cooperation. Unlike the evil cities of the present earth, the perfectly holy people in the new Jerusalem will live and work together in perfect harmony."³¹

In stark contrast to the harlot city of Babylon (destroyed in Rev 18), the holy city of the New Jerusalem is free from God's judgment (21:9). It is the home of the redeemed and the bride of the Lamb (21:2). It is also a realm characterized by the glory and presence of God (v. 11). Throughout the Old Testament, God's glory is often manifest as blazing light (cf. Exod 13:21; 19:18; 24:17; 34:29–30, 35; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10–11; Ps 104:2; Isa 4:5; Ezek 10:4; Hab 3:3–4; Luke 2:9). Like a giant prism illuminating God's glory everywhere, the New Jerusalem will light up the entire new universe.

Unlike the dirty, smoggy cities of this world, the New Jerusalem glistens like a massive jewel as it descends from heaven. The Greek word translated "jasper" in verse 11 does not necessarily refer to the actual gem *jasper*, which possesses a reddish or brownish hue. Rather, it is a general term that can refer to any kind of precious gemstone. The further description, "clear as crystal," suggests that John is describing a diamond. Thus, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven onto the new earth like a jewel-studded crown from heaven. The image of a heavenly crown is appropriate because, as Rev 22:2–5 describes, it is the very throne room of God himself.

According to Rev 21:15–17, the measurements of the New Jerusalem are immense: approximately 1,500 miles long on each side.³² By way of illustration, if one corner of the city were placed on Los Angeles, a second corner would sit on

³¹ John MacArthur, *Revelation 12–22*, 264.

³² David Aune explains that, because the *stadion* varied in length (from 607 to 630 feet), the New Jerusalem measures between 1,416 and 1,566 miles in each direction. David Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1161.

Mexico City, a third corner on St. Louis, Missouri, and the final corner on Edmonton, Alberta. If the center of the New Jerusalem rested where the current Jerusalem stands, it would stretch across three continents from Greece to Iran to Saudi Arabia to Libya. The current city of Los Angeles has an area of 468 square miles. The state of California comprises roughly 164,000 square miles. But the New Jerusalem will encompass over 2 million square miles. That is the equivalent of 14 states of California put together; or 4,807 cities of Los Angeles combined.

But the New Jerusalem is not just a big square. It is a cube. The highest mountains on earth are about 5 miles tall; but the New Jerusalem will rise into the air 1,500 miles—with walls over 200 feet thick. The massive city houses a total volume of more than 3 billion cubic miles. In light of the city's immensity, some commentators have speculated that the resurrection bodies of the redeemed may not be subject to gravity.³³ If so, the residents of the New Jerusalem would be able to traverse through space not only horizontally, but also vertically, making every part of this glorious cube inhabitable and accessible to the citizens of the New Jerusalem.

But there is more going on than just information about its enormous dimensions. The specific arrangement of the three gates on each side of the city, in verses 13–14, points back to the way the twelve tribes of Israel camped around the tabernacle (cf. Num 2:1–31), and also the arrangement of the gates of the millennial Jerusalem (cf. Ezek 48:30–35). Furthermore, the cube-shaped dimensions of the New Jerusalem reflect the design of the Holy of Holies. As Mark Dever explains,

Any Christian who knows the Old Testament knows that John's vision harks back to the Most Holy Place. This special place within Israel's temple was itself a perfect cube and the most manifest location of God's presence on earth. Now, in this cube-shaped heavenly city, God's full, unmediated presence is given to all his people. The whole world becomes the temple.³⁴

The Personal Presence of the King Himself (21:22–22:5)

In 21:22, the apostle John transitions from an external description of the New Jerusalem to an internal one. Having established the physical dimensions of the capital city, with significant parallels to the Most Holy Place, he begins to describe the worship and activity that characterizes those who are inside. Most importantly, he focuses his attention on the fact that the Triune God will be personally present there. As a result, there will be no need for a temple (v. 22) because God and the Lamb are the temple.³⁵ The redeemed will live forever with the Lord in intimate worship and fellowship; they will not need a curtain to separate them from His holy presence, because they have been made perfect just as He is perfect (cf. 1 John 3:2).

³³ Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1983), 451.

³⁴ Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, 39.

³⁵ As Grant R. Osborne observes, "Revelation places considerable emphasis on the heavenly temple (7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5–6, 8; 16:1, 17). Now the heavenly temple descends from heaven to earth in the form of a city and becomes the eternal home of the saints." Osborne, *Revelation*, 732.

Above all else, it is God's personal presence that defines the new earth as *heaven* (Rev 21:3). It is not heaven because it is beautiful and glorious; or because the saints of all the ages are there; or because angels lift up their voices in magnificent hymns of praise. On the contrary, it is only heaven because the Triune God will make it His dwelling place. In the words of D. L. Moody, "It is not the jasper walls and the pearly gates that are going to make heaven attractive. It is the being with God."³⁶

In heaven, the redeemed shall be reunited with their Redeemer. Spending eternity with Him in perfect fellowship, worship, and service is what makes eternity so glorious. His presence is heaven's essence. Charles Spurgeon poignantly expressed this reality with these words:

Oh, to think of heaven without Christ! It is the same thing as thinking of hell. Heaven without Christ! It is day without the sun, existing without life, feasting without food, seeing without light. It involves a contradiction in terms. Heaven without Christ! Absurd. It is the sea without water, the earth without its fields, the heavens without their stars. There cannot be a heaven without Christ. He is the sum total of bliss, the fountain from which heaven flows, the element of which heaven is composed. Christ is heaven and heaven is Christ.³⁷

In 22:1–5, the apostle John brings his description of the New Jerusalem to its climax. In these verses, in particular, the focus centers on the glorious presence of God and of the Lamb.

In John's other writings, the concepts of life, light, and love are all intrinsically linked to God. In places like John 1:4 and 5:26, the apostle explains that *God is Life*, in the sense of being the Giver and Source of all life. In 1 John 1:5, he writes that *God is Light*, speaking of His glorious holiness and perfection. And in 1 John 4:8, John records that *God is Love*, meaning that He is characterized by the infinite love which He demonstrated through the cross of Christ. Appropriately, those three realities define the New Jerusalem as it is described in Rev 22:1–5.

First, the New Jerusalem is characterized by *the life of God* (vv. 1–2). The river of life, containing the water of life, flows out from His throne (v. 1). Its banks are populated with the tree of life (v. 2), the fruit of which gives everlasting life to all who eat.³⁸ The source of this life is God Himself. In the New Jerusalem, every thirst is quenched by the water of life, and every hunger pain is satisfied by the tree of life. Though John is describing physical features, these elements also symbolize spiritual life. Jesus prayed in John 17:3, "This is eternal life, that they may know

³⁶ Dwight L. Moody, *Great Pulpit Masters* (New York: Revell, 1949), 1:210–11.

³⁷ Charles Spurgeon, "Forever with the Lord," Sermon 1136. Cited from Randy Alcorn, *Eternal Perspectives* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 305.

³⁸ As Robert Thomas notes, commenting on Rev 22:2, "Though eating the fruit of the Tree of Life is unmentioned here, the implication is that this is what brings immortality, the same as was true for Adam and Eve originally (Gen. 3:22). Conditions of future bliss will mean a return to the original glories and privileges of God's presence with man, before sin raised a barrier that prevented that direct contact" (Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 484).

You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” For all of eternity, the redeemed will never experience any shortage or lack of any kind, because they will be with the fountain of living water, in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

Second, the New Jerusalem is also characterized by *the love of God* (vv. 3–4). His judgment has been removed and His presence restored (v. 3). The separation between God and man that characterizes this sin-stained world no longer remains. For eternity, believers will enjoy intimate fellowship with the King of kings. Yet, their love will not only be manifest in deep communion and heartfelt worship, but also in a desire to serve—being able to do so without any reluctance or deficiency. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” In heaven, those who love Him will keep His commandments perfectly.

Third, the New Jerusalem will be engulfed in *the light of God* (v. 5). In the final verse of his heavenly vision, John reiterates once more that the glory of heaven will shine with unsurpassed radiance and brilliance. The shadows of night have disappeared, and so has the need for a lamp. Even sunlight is no longer required. The radiance of God’s glory illumines everything and everyone. It is here—as they bathe in the wonder of His majesty—that the redeemed will “reign forever and ever” as the bond slaves of their heavenly Sovereign, worshipping Him in perfection for all of eternity.

What makes the New Jerusalem so marvelous? It is not its heavenly origin or its incredible dimensions. It is not the sparkling jewels or translucent gold. It is not the absence of night or the presence of angels. All of those things are amazing, but they are simply by-products of the fact that God Himself is at the center of it all. His life sustains it. His love makes it possible for us to enjoy, and His light illumines it with an indescribable radiance. The new Jerusalem is the centerpiece of the new earth because the Triune God dwells there; He is the centerpiece of all eternity.

Living as Citizens of the Kingdom

The Word of God is far from silent on the nature of God’s kingdom in the eternal state. But why has God seen fit to reveal these truths to His people? There are at least three reasons why the future reality of heaven ought to influence believers in the present. These might be summarized as: hope, holiness, and the honor of God.

Hope. The reality of heaven provides hope for the future, even in the face of trials or death. Thus, Paul could tell the Thessalonians that believers do not grieve “as the rest of the world who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). As Charles Spurgeon observed:

The very happiest persons I have ever met with have been departing believers. The only people for whom I have felt any envy have been dying members of this very church, whose hands I have grasped in their passing away. Almost without exception I have seen in them holy delight and triumph. And in the

exceptions to this exceeding joy I have seen deep peace, exhibited in a calm and deliberate readiness to enter into the presence of their God.³⁹

Writing about his trials, the apostle Paul similarly explained to the Corinthians, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:17). Because believers know what the future ultimately holds, they can face the temporal troubles of this life with confidence and courage.

Holiness. In addition to producing hope, the reality of heaven promotes holiness in the lives of the redeemed. In the words of one commentator, “The New Jerusalem is the reality that finalizes the hopes of God’s people and rewards them for all they have endured. It also is intended to spur the readers to greater faithfulness in the present, knowing what is at stake.”⁴⁰ Recognizing that they will soon be in the presence of their heavenly King, those who belong to Christ desire to please Him and reflect His perfect character in every way possible. As the apostle John wrote in his first epistle, “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2b–3).

Believers understand that they will be rewarded by Christ for their faithfulness in this life (2 Tim 4:8). The reality of a heavenly future puts the priorities and pursuits of this life in proper perspective (cf. Matt 6:19–21). Such an eternal mindset motivated the nineteenth-century missionary Adoniram Judson, who said:

A few days and our work will be done. And when it is once done, it is done to all eternity. A life once spent is irrevocable. ... Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone.⁴¹

Those words echo the heartbeat of the apostle Paul, whose entire ministry was motivated by eternal concerns. As he told the Corinthians, “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:9–10).

The Honor of God. Finally, biblical eschatology provides a vivid reminder of the fact that the purpose behind all of salvation history is the glory of God. Ultimately the manifestation of that glory will culminate in the blazing light of the new heavens and earth. It will radiate throughout the New Jerusalem and engulf

³⁹ Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon at His Best* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988), 51.

⁴⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 727.

⁴¹ Adoniram Judson, as cited in Edward Judson, *The Life of Adoniram Judson* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1883), 14–15.

every one of heaven's inhabitants. For all of eternity, believers will bask in the wonder of God's grace and glorify Him for His infinite mercy and kindness.

The unmerited favor of God will thrill the hearts of the redeemed throughout all of eternity, and they will praise and exalt Him as a result. The awe of redemptive love will fuel their worship. As Richard Baxter so aptly expressed,

*As we paid nothing for God's eternal love and nothing for the Son of His love, and nothing for His Spirit and our grace and faith, and nothing for our eternal rest . . . what an astonishing thought it will be to think of the unmeasurable difference between our deservings and our receivings. O, how free was all this love, and how free is this enjoyed glory. . . . So then let **DESERVED** be written on the floor of hell but on the door of heaven and life, **THE FREE GIFT**.⁴²*

With inexhaustible joy, believers from every age of human history will join together in unending adoration and thanksgiving to God for the unmerited kindness of His grace (cf. Rev 5:9–14).

Clearly, the reality of heaven ought to motivate believers in their homeward journey, as they navigate through this world as sojourners and citizens of another realm (Phil 3:20). To do that effectively, they must set their eyes on Him and the glorious future He has promised (Col 3:1–2; Heb 12:1–2). Focusing on God's kingdom in eternity is not a hindrance to the life of faith; it is the essence of it (Heb 11:16). As one evangelical author rightly concludes:

Understanding Heaven doesn't just tell us *what* to do, but *why*. What God tells us about our future lives enables us to interpret our past and serve him in our present. . . . We need to stop acting as if Heaven were a myth, an impossible dream, a relentlessly dull meeting, or an unimportant distraction from real life. We need to see Heaven for what it is: the realm we're made for. If we do, we'll embrace it with contagious joy, excitement, and anticipation.⁴³

⁴² Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 36–37.

⁴³ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 443.

The concept of the kingship of God appears in all Abrahamic religions, where in some cases the terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are also used. The notion of God's kingship goes back to the Hebrew Bible, which refers to "his kingdom" but does not include the term "Kingdom of God". The "Kingdom of God" and its equivalent form "Kingdom of Heaven" in the Gospel of Matthew is one of the key elements of the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. The Gospel of Mark indicates that the gospel is