

Eschatology - The Doctrine of Last Things
Chapter 57 - The New Heavens and the New Earth

1. Introduction to the eschatological doctrine of the New Heavens and the New Earth
 - 1.1. We must remember that eschatology is not just the study of the “last days” but is the study of the end - the goal and purpose of all things. This is not a plan B - it is God’s eternal intent.
 - 1.1.1. Matthew 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, **the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**”
 - 1.1.2. Revelation 13:8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — **all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.**
 - 1.1.3. Ephesians 1:3–6 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ,** in accordance with his pleasure and will — ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.
 - 1.1.4. Titus 1:1–3 ¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of **God’s elect** and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness - ² a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of **eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,** ³ and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,
 - 1.1.5. 2 Timothy 1:8–10 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of **his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,** ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought **life and immortality to light through the gospel.**
 - 1.2. The new heavens and the new earth is a fitting end to our study, wrapping up all that has gone before and bringing it to its desired goal.
 - 1.3. Consequently, the study of the new heavens and the new earth is not merely academic or unrelated to our daily lives. In fact, as we study the new heavens and the new earth, it calls us to holy living and service of God now, knowing that there is a great future and reward awaiting us.
 - 1.3.1. 1 John 3:2–3 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. **³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.**

- 1.3.2. 2 Peter 3:11–13 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? **You ought to live holy and godly lives¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.** That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.
 - 1.3.3. Matthew 6:19–21 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.²⁰ **But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,** where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
 - 1.4. In this final session we will try to bring to a close all of our study on God, creation, humanity, the fall, redemption, and consummation.
2. The end of the story - we live forever in a new heavens and a new earth
- 2.1. We do not just go to a new heaven - it is a new heavens and a new earth
 - 2.1.1. Isaiah 65:17 “Behold, I will create **new heavens and a new earth.** The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”
 - 2.1.2. Isaiah 66:22 “As **the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure** before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure.”
 - 2.1.3. 2 Peter 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to **a new heaven and a new earth,** the home of righteousness.
 - 2.1.4. Revelation 21:1 Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth,** for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.
 - 2.2. The new heavens and the new earth are a real place - not just a state of mind
 - 2.2.1. This is required by the doctrine of the resurrection. We do not just exist as spirits for eternity - our bodies will be raised. Thus we will not just inhabit the new heavens and the new earth mentally, but physically in our resurrected bodies.
 - 2.2.2. The Scriptures regarding eternity indicate real physical presence:
 - 2.2.2.1. John 14:2–3 In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.
 - 2.2.2.2. Hebrews 11:8–10 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.¹⁰ **For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

2.2.2.3. Isaiah 25:6–9 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine — the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. ⁹ In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

2.2.3. In fact, as we will see in the sections below, eternity appears to be very real and “earthy” - it is not some disembodied or ethereal existence. If it were, it would not be the fulfillment of all we have studied, but would rather be a total disruption of the story of God and man that unfolds from Genesis 1:1 and continues throughout Scripture.

2.2.3.1. C.S. Lewis implies that the new heavens and the new earth are actually more real, more substantial and physical than the present fallen world. We live in the “shadowlands” - while our eternal home is the real world. In the Great Divorce the newly arrived people have to adjust to the substantial nature of heaven - they are too “thin” from their existence here in the shadowlands.

3. The relationship between the present creation and the new heavens and the new earth
 - 3.1. Some Christians believe that the present creation will be totally destroyed and will be replaced with a new heaven and earth that are totally discontinuous from the present creation.
 - 3.2. However, this seems to be wrong for several reasons:
 - 3.2.1. This would be out of line with the rest of Scripture, which indicates great continuity throughout God’s plan and work. God does not simply utterly discard things - he redeems and restores things.
 - 3.2.2. The word ‘new’ is best understood as not referring to something that is utterly disconnected from what went before, but rather something that has been made new. For example, Christians are new creations in Christ, but this does not mean that the old person ceases to exist and a new unrelated person comes into being. On the contrary, the old person is utterly renewed by coming into Christ. (Note: the word for ‘new’ in passages like 2 Corinthians 5:17 is the same word for ‘new’ in the new heavens and earth in passages like Revelation 21:1).
 - 3.2.3. The clear teaching of the resurrection body - which has great continuity with our present body - leads us to believe that the new heavens and earth will also have great continuity with the present heavens and earth.
 - 3.2.4. A number of Scriptures seem to require that the present creation is renewed rather than destroyed.

- 3.2.4.1. Romans 8:18–23 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ **The creation waits in eager expectation** for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹**that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.** ²² We know that **the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth** right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but **we ourselves**, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, **groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**
- 3.2.4.1.1. Notice the creation is looking forward to the end of days. But why would it do that if they only meant its destruction? The whole line of reasoning would make no sense.
- 3.2.4.1.2. Notice the clear link between our redemption and the future of creation. Both groan, and both will be liberated. Since our liberation is not destruction but rather resurrection renewal, we should expect the same for creation.
- 3.2.4.2. James 1:18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.
- 3.2.4.2.1. Believers are a firstfruits of all God created. If we are not being destroyed and re-created, then neither will the rest of creation - or else the firstfruits analogy fails.
- 3.2.4.3. Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, **at the renewal of all things**, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
- 3.2.4.3.1. Notice Jesus speaks of the end as the renewal of all things - not the destruction and new creation of all things.
- 3.2.4.3.2. The word for renewal (*παλιγγενεσία*) is literally “regeneration” of all things. The only other time this word is used in the NT is in Titus 3:5, where it refers to our regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Thus, this is another link between the future of believers and that of the rest of creation.
- 3.2.4.4. Colossians 1:19–20 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

- 3.2.4.4.1. Notice that Jesus' work included not only human, but "all things." In v16, we read that Christ created "all things" and it seems clear that the "all things" in view in Christ's reconciling work is the same "all things" in view in His creative work.
 - 3.2.4.4.2. This means that Christ's redemptive work affects all of creation. Thus, it is not credible that he would create and reconcile creation only to destroy it in the end.
- 3.3. But what about verses that seem to indicate the present creation is destroyed?
 - 3.3.1. Others argue that a number of verses teach that everything in the present creation will be destroyed.
 - 3.3.2. However, on closer examination what they really teach is that the present creation will undergo the purifying fire of God's judgement - not total annihilation.
 - 3.3.2.1. Revelation 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. **Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.**
 - 3.3.2.1.1. This does not say the creation is destroyed. It simply says they fled, and no place was found for them.
 - 3.3.2.1.2. In the figurative language of Revelation this indicates the holiness of God - all of creation can not stand before His wrath and judgment. This does not indicate destruction but rather judgment and purification.
 - 3.3.2.2. Psalms 102:25–28 In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ²⁶ **They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded.** ²⁷ But you remain the same, and your years will never end. ²⁸ The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you.
 - 3.3.2.2.1. This verse is contrasting God's unchanging eternity with the perishable, changing nature of creation. As permanent as creation seems to be, it is not like God - only He is eternal.
 - 3.3.2.2.2. Here, poetic language is used to stress this vast difference. Poetic language should not be pressed - it is using metaphor. Creation is literally not clothing, and god does not literally wear creation - it only points to something similar. Creation is not eternal; like clothing it wears out. But God is not like this - He is eternal and does not change or wear out.

3.3.2.2.3. From a fuller view as taught in the verses above, we know that the change in creation will be a rebirth - not an annihilation. In light of this, the word discard is probably a poetic use of hyperbole.

3.3.2.3. 2 Peter 3:7–13 By the same word **the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment** and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. **The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.** ¹¹ **Since everything will be destroyed in this way,** what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. **That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.** ¹³ **But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.**

3.3.2.3.1. This verse is usually seen as the strongest argument that the present creation will be destroyed, since it uses words like “disappear”, “destroyed”, “laid bare”, “destruction”, and “melt”.

3.3.2.3.2. However, several things seem to indicate that this is not a literal destruction, but rather a radical change because of a cleansing fire of judgment.

3.3.2.3.2.1. The section opens by stating that what is in store is fire and judgement, which in the Scripture indicates purification.

3.3.2.3.2.2. This passage speaks of judgment and the day of the Lord. This is a major OT motif that deals with God’s judgment, and it predominately indicated something that was not totally annihilated but rather cleansed and purified through judgment.

3.3.2.3.2.3. In fact, in day of the Lord passages in the OT figurative language was used to state that stars would fall from the sky, the earth would be destroyed, etc. - but these things were not literally true. (See Isaiah 13:1, 9-10, 13; Isaiah 34:4-5 for examples). Thus, it seems likely that the language here is used figuratively as well.

3.3.2.3.2.4. The word for “burned up” (KJV) or “laid bare” (NIV) or “exposed” (ESV) is εὐρίσκω which has the basic meaning of “found” or “exposed”. Thus, the idea is not that the universe will literally be destroyed by burning up, but rather that it will be “found out” and “exposed” - in judgement this present world will be seen as it really is - and then changed!

3.3.2.3.2.5. The word for “destroyed” in vv10,11,12 is λύω, which has the basic meaning of “untie” or “loosen”. It normally does not mean something as drastic as annihilation, but rather something being undone, loosened or freed. That would seem to be the best meaning here.

3.3.2.3.2.6. The analogy in verses 5-7 is with Noah’s flood which is said to have “destroyed” the world (a different but related word). But note that the flood did not annihilate the world of Noah’s time, but rather it purified it. Thus it seem sthat this is what the judgment fire of God will do at the end - it will purify and change, but not annihilate.

3.4. Thus, it seems that there will be both continuity and discontinuity between the present creation and the new heavens and earth. This present creation must be changed - and it will be on the day of judgment. Yet, it will not be annihilated. It will continue into eternity, just as we will.

4. Life in the new heavens and the new earth

4.1. The Bible does not give a lot of detailed information about life in the new heavens and the new earth. However, we do know some things about what it is and is not like.

- 4.1.1. As noted above, it is not an ethereal place of disembodied spirits. On the contrary, it is a very bodily, “earthy” place and existence.
- 4.1.2. From the Scripture, we do know that the following will characterize the new heavens and earth and our place in it:
 - 4.1.2.1. It will be a place of great joy and delight, with no sorrow
 - 4.1.2.1.1. Psalms 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; **you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.**
 - 4.1.2.1.2. Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.
 - 4.1.2.2. It will be a place and time of great feasting and joy
 - 4.1.2.2.1. Revelation 19:9 Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to **the wedding supper of the Lamb!**’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”
 - 4.1.2.2.2. Isaiah 25:6–8 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare **a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine — the best of meats and the finest of wines.**
⁷On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.
 - 4.1.2.2.3. Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.
- 4.1.2.3. It will be a place and time of perfect righteousness
 - 4.1.2.3.1. 2 Peter 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to **a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.**
 - 4.1.2.3.2. Revelation 21:27 **Nothing impure will ever enter it**, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.
- 4.1.2.4. It will be a place and time of great, deep, lasting, fulfilling relationships
 - 4.1.2.4.1. Genesis 15:15 You, however, **will go to your fathers** in peace and be buried at a good old age.

- 4.1.2.4.2. Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places **at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** in the kingdom of heaven.
- 4.1.2.4.3. This would seem to be the fulfillment of a proper doctrine of humanity from Genesis 2:18 - it is not good for us to be alone - we were created for relationships with other humans.
- 4.1.2.4.4. No inhabitants of that blessed world will ever be grieved with the thought that they are slighted by those that they love, or that their love is not fully and fondly returned... There shall be no such thing as flattery or insincerity in heaven, but there perfect sincerity shall reign through all in all. Everyone will be just what he seems to be, and will have all the love that he seems to have. Jonathan Edwards
- 4.1.2.5. It will be a place of continued diversity in our personalities, gifts, and service to God
 - 4.1.2.5.1. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood **you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.**"¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Revelation 5:9-10
 - 4.1.2.5.2. After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, **from every nation, tribe, people and language**, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Revelation 7:9-10
 - 4.1.2.5.3. The **nations will walk by its light**, and the **kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.**²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.²⁶ **The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.** Revelation 21:24-26
 - 4.1.2.5.4. Notice that the nations are in view in redemption, and the nations seem to continue as distinct entities in eternity.

- 4.1.2.5.5. In fact, in light of the continuity between the present creation and the new heavens and earth, it seems that human culture and accomplishments, cleaned of sin, will in some way survive into eternity.
- 4.1.2.5.6. Every legitimate and excellent fruit of human culture will be carried into and contribute to the splendor of life in the new creation. Rather than the new creation being a radically new beginning, in which the excellent and noble fruits of humankind's fulfillment of the cultural mandate are wholly discarded – the new creation will benefit from, and be immensely enriched by its receiving of these fruits. Cornelius Venema
- 4.1.2.5.7. The one who is Lord of the whole of life was never going to bring us at the end into an eternal existence of mental constriction, or of emotional and creative impoverishment. Creativity will surely be valued, for such an anticipation must be in keeping with the nature of Him who set the morning stars a-singing when He created them at the beginning, and whose joyful cry echoes across the battlements of the new creation. "See I am making everything new!"... What creative possibilities await us in the unfolding of the eternal ages no present imagination can begin to unravel.
Bruce Milne
- 4.1.2.6. We shall see God - the fulfillment of all for which we were made.
 - 4.1.2.6.1. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet **in my flesh I will see God**; Job 19:26
 - 4.1.2.6.2. Blessed are the pure in heart, for **they will see God**.
Matthew 5:8
 - 4.1.2.6.3. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; **then we shall see face to face**. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 1
Corinthians 13:12
 - 4.1.2.6.4. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for **we shall see him as he is**. 1 John 3:2
 - 4.1.2.6.5. **They will see his face**, and his name will be on their foreheads. Revelation 22:4
- 4.2. In short, what we do know is the new heavens and the new earth will be the fulfillment of all for which we long, all for which we were created, all which God intended in creation!