Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON FOUR

The End of the Age
Discussion Forum

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Discussion Forum

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Dr. Gary M. Burge
Dr. Constantine Campbell
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Question 1:
What is the general resurrection of the dead?

Dr. Constantine Campbell
The general resurrection from the dead is the Jewish belief that begins to develop in the Old Testament, that at the end of time, on judgment day, *all* people will be raised physically from the dead for judgment. And so, we see that in Daniel 12:1-2, and the expectation includes that, at that judgment point, some will go on to everlasting life, a kind of good destination, and others will come under eternal judgment. We see that idea picked up in the New Testament as well by Jesus. In John 5, he says the exact same thing: all will be raised from the dead, some to everlasting life and some to eternal condemnation. And that means that the general resurrection from the dead is tied to judgment and vindication/righteousness kind of ideas.

Dr. Guy Waters
The general resurrection of the dead refers to the fact that when Jesus comes back at the end of the age, then all people are going to be raised bodily. Jesus' people will be raised in glory, their bodies conformable to his. The Scripture does not say much about the character of the resurrection body of the wicked, but that they will be raised in their bodies is taught in the Scripture. And that is important, not only as a matter of fidelity to biblical teaching, but that we're going to appear before God and to experience eternity in soul and body as the human beings that God made us to be. And it tells us now that our bodies matter to God, and what we do without bodies matters to God. And the body is not a shell that we're going to cast off forever at death, but that we're going to live eternally, soul and body, and if in the presence of Jesus Christ, that's a great hope that our soul and body will be joined together, conformable to his glorious humanity.

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Dr. Riad Kassis (translation)
The general resurrection of the dead is an important belief in our Christian faith. We call it the general resurrection because *every* person will be resurrected from the dead and their souls will reunite with their bodies, regardless of whether they are believers or sinners. This resurrection of the bodies of the dead is a general resurrection because *everyone* will be resurrected one day, and they will give account and be judged in front of God for what they did in this life. According to Matthew 25, the ones that believe in Jesus and lived a true Christian life will be resurrected and live in the new heavens and the new earth, and whoever refused Jesus' love and lived far from him will face eternal torment.

Question 2:
Why is it important that our future resurrection will be a physical resurrection?

Dr. Benjamin Gladd
It's important for our physical bodies to be resurrected, not just as spirits, but as a physical entity, for two reasons. I mean, there are plenty, but here are two. The first is because we're made in the image of Christ. Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 15, that he fashions us after his own image. What's his image? It's a completely new… It is a body that is fit for the new heavens and new earth. And if Christ's body is like that, then our body, too, must be like that. Must be. And secondly, in order for us to be in the new heavens and new earth, we have to have a new body. We can't be in the new heavens and new earth with our old body or with just our soul. It's not designed, the new heavens and new earth are not designed to just house souls. They are designed to house people, and God dwelling with physical people.

Dr. Guy Waters
It is important that the future resurrection be a physical resurrection of our bodies. One reason, of course, is that our Lord Jesus Christ himself was raised in his humanity and did that for us, so that, were our bodies not to be raised, then we would not experience all that he has won for us as our Savior. And the Bible teaches that Jesus came to save us, and not *part* of us, not to extract our souls from our bodies, but to save us as whole persons, soul and body. And one of the great things about the work that Jesus has done for us is that we are freed from death. Death is conquered, and we have the hope in Christ that death will not have the final say on any part of us because Jesus has conquered death in his resurrection.

Dr. Richard Phillips
The human being is a physical body with a soul. And we will not be complete without that… One thing I like to say as a pastor — in fact, I said this just the other day with a dear friend of mine who died and his family — "You will see this body again." Satan will not win one inch of this person. Christ has redeemed the whole. And the soul will go to heaven, the body will go into the grave, but when the final trumpet sounds, the

Lord will return, and the body will be raised in glory. What was sown in weakness will be raised in power. And my father, who I cannot see anymore, I cannot hear his voice, but he died in Christ, and I will look into those eyes again, I will hear that voice, that manner of speech in a glorified way that will bless me… We are bodily creatures. I would not be saved if my body was lost or if my body was ravaged by disease eternally or corrupted by sin. No, no, no. We will be glorified in body and in soul.

Question 3:
How did the Christian doctrine of the resurrection confront the Greek and pagan beliefs of the first century?

Dr. Constantine Campbell
It's a Greek and pagan idea to assume that the flesh is somehow evil and that at death we escape the flesh and just our spirit lives on. But that is not the biblical idea. The biblical understanding of humanity, the Bible's anthropology is fully orbed so that the body actually matters and is inherently good, though corrupted through sin and the Fall. So, the body will be resurrected to an immortal body, a perfect body and not capable of sin, but it's very important that it is a real physical body in line with Jesus' own physical resurrection from the dead.

Dr. Daniel Treier
As N. T. Wright has shown, the ancient world was fully aware that people don't normally rise from the dead, and yet the early Christians claimed this for Jesus, and eventually for us, anyway. Caroline Walker Bynum and other historians have shown that the early Christians were profoundly committed to the resurrection of the *body* and that this was very counter-cultural in contrast to almost every reigning philosophical alternative. It was scandalous for Christians to be saying that our bodies were going to be raised from the dead and that there was going to be some kind of continuity of bodily identity between our earthly bodies lying dead and the bodies that God will give us in the resurrection. There were all sorts of explorations about how God would do this, depending on what had happened to our earthly bodies, and what age we would be, or what condition our bodies would be in when they would be raised. Christians didn't agree on all these questions, but they agreed that exploring them was important because they were so committed to the resurrection of the body and not to any of the reigning alternatives, such as, for instance, reincarnation or other substitutes that might look like resurrection but really aren't resurrection. But what difference does it all make? Well, as Oliver O'Donovan and others have shown, the resurrection is a profound point of focus for Christian ethics and gospel witness. God doesn't simply redeem us out of this created order, but God reaffirms in the resurrection of Christ his commitment to the world he has made, including its material aspects, including its embodied and social character. Our bodies might be, in the ancient world, one of the most scandalous components of ourselves, but God commits, in the resurrection of Christ, to redeeming all that he has made including

our bodies. And that has profound implications for what we imagine our future to be; we're going to live on a new heavens and a new earth in which people and place come together, in which righteousness dwells. And Paul seems to envision that until then, when we die, we feel naked without our bodies. Yes, we're present with the Lord, but 2 Corinthians 5 seems to suggest there's a longing for the fullness of how God made us to be, and that fullness lies in our embodiment. So when, by the Spirit, God raised Jesus from the dead, God was making a promise that he would make all things new including the bodies that he gave us.

Question 4:
How did Paul view the future resurrection of the dead?

Dr. Gary M. Burge
When Paul thinks about the resurrection of the dead, he's got two ideas in mind. First, there is no doubt that in Paul's mind he believes that when we die we will be in the presence of Christ. In fact, in 2 Timothy, when he contemplates his own martyrdom, he thinks about that very thing. He will be in Christ's presence immediately. On the other hand, he understands that at the consummation of history, at the end of time, there is going to be a physical sort of corporeal resurrection of our bodies. And so, as we try to put together this end-time sort of resurrection of the body and this present sort of death bringing us directly to Christ, theologians have had to understand how these two work together. And so, what many of us think is that what will happen is that we will have a kind intermediate state in which we go to be with Christ and we await the, sort of, the completion of our resurrection at the end of time. But in everything that Paul teaches about the resurrection, one thing has to be true: when we imagine the resurrection, we have to imagine Christ's resurrection. That is clear in Romans 6. If we are going to be identified with him in a death like his, we will also be connected to him in a resurrection like his. So, as Christ was raised from the dead to eternal glory, so likewise we are going to be raised from the dead, and we will enjoy the kind of life that Jesus enjoys today.

Dr. Jimmy Agan
Paul had a view of the future resurrection of the dead that was completely consistent with his Jewish upbringing, but radically out of step with the secular world around him. You see, Paul believed in a resurrection of the dead that really was physical, that actual bodies would be raised from the dead and that our bodies, as physical as they are now, will be raised again and renewed. Paul didn't think of resurrection as a merely spiritual idea, that somehow our spirits would live on. For Paul, resurrection meant, no, our spirit rejoined to a body as God intended from the very beginning in Genesis 1. So, Paul's view of the resurrection was physical. It's also historical. Paul expects this resurrection from the dead to be a time and space event, really because he believes that about the resurrection of Jesus: if Jesus was raised in our time and space, then we will be raised in time and space… Paul believed that the resurrection, the future resurrection of believers, was also a source of great strength for the present,

and so Paul could look forward to our future resurrection as a way of comforting people who are grieving the loss of loved ones. First Thessalonians 4 is a great example of this, where Paul says those who are sorrowing because their loved ones have passed away, they need to understand that Jesus is going to come and raise us from the dead. That's not just future blessing, but it gives us strength to face grief and sorrow in the present.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs
For Paul, the promise that believers in Christ will be raised to everlasting life is absolutely central to the Christian message, and not least because it's connected to the resurrection of Jesus himself. In Corinth, as you know, 1 Corinthians 15 — that's the great resurrection chapter — the problem presented by the Corinthians there is not that they seem to be denying that Jesus was raised from the dead, nobody's denying that, but they're denying in some sense that they would be raised from the dead. But for Paul, that's the same thing. It's just a question of timing… So, the fact that they were denying, in some sense, that they would be raised from the dead, Paul says this means that you're denying that Jesus was raised too, because he is the firstfruits of the one harvest, and if you deny there is going to be a harvest, you're denying that there are firstfruits… All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. On the day of resurrection, the glory will be restored; we will fully be what God has intended us to be all along. It's an exciting day. I'm looking forward to it.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress
Well, the apostle Paul talks about the future resurrection from the dead in 1 Corinthians 15, and he uses as his starting point the resurrection of Christ. It's Christ's resurrection which is the model for understanding the resurrection of each Christian believer. So, Christ is raised from the dead never to die again. He is filled with the Spirit, he has a resurrection life, and he is also our representative, so that when the time comes for the resurrection of our bodies, they will be like his. They will be heavenly bodies as opposed to the earthly body of Adam.

Question 5:
What is the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of believers?

Dr. Lynn Cohick
Paul connects the resurrection of the body — Jesus' resurrection — with the defeat of sin. So, first and foremost, Jesus' resurrection, not simply his death on the cross, but his *resurrection* from the grave, shows us that death is defeated. And because death is defeated, thus sin is defeated. Now, Paul will talk about how Jesus' death and resurrection, in that he'll use this term called "firstfruits," which is an unfamiliar term to most of us today, but back in Paul's day it was related to the sacrifices and the tithes that the Jews would bring to the temple. You gave the firstfruits of the land to thank God, and those firstfruits were symbolic of your whole harvest. So, when Paul

is saying that Jesus is the firstfruits, what he's saying is, God is promising that our bodies, believers' bodies, will also be raised. And so, that "firstfruits" language is a wonderful promise to us. The believer's raised body, Paul says, will be a glorified body. It will be imperishable and immortal. It's important for us to remember that Jesus lives now eternally in a raised body, so that when believers die and we enter into our final home, we will have a glorified body. We don't know what exactly it will look like, but we won't be spirits floating around in the air. We'll live in the new heavens and the new earth, immortal because our life is hidden in Christ.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.
You know, the resurrection is a concept that undergirds the whole New Testament. You might even say it's the central core of the New Testament itself. We have isolated passages in the New Testament that speak very directly to resurrection. Perhaps the classic passage is 1 Corinthians 15. The Corinthians are under-informed about the resurrection, and so Paul goes to great length as to the nature of the resurrection. One of its key arguments is that our resurrection is going to be qualitatively similar or analogous to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is the firstfruits, Paul says. Well, what does that mean? Well, Jesus was already crucified, dead and buried and raised. He was raised bodily. Bodily physically, yes, but in a way that's not quite physical the way we think about this. Now, I'm not altogether sure how this really works. Jesus is physical enough so that when he says, "touch my hands," you touch him without your hand going through, and at the same time he can eat and, you know, actually eats. But then again, he suddenly appears in rooms where the doors have been locked. So, how does that work? Is he really physical? I think the Bible's answer is, yes, he's completely physical, but he's able to move in different spheres and in different dimensions, if you will, that we don't have access to… Well, if Jesus is raised that way, the promise is, we will be raised exactly that way.

Dr. Amy L. Peeler
One of my favorite texts in the New Testament is 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul is talking about the resurrection. Now, an interesting thing seems to have happened in this community. They believed that Jesus rose from the dead, but they don't think that means anything for them. Well, they're already experiencing the resurrection. They have spiritual gifts, they can do whatever they want, and so Paul seems to indicate that some of them have stopped believing that their bodies are going to be resurrected, and he has some strong words for them. He says, if that's the case, if we don't believe in the resurrection, then we, of all people, are most to be pitied. And he makes this very tight connection that Jesus' resurrection from the dead *guarantees* that the future resurrection for all people is coming, a bodily resurrection. Jesus is the beginning of a process that will be brought to fruition at the end of time. And this aligns well with Jewish ideas that, in the end, all people would be resurrected to bring an account to God. What's interesting about Christianity is Jesus is the first person to have experienced this, and his experience of resurrection is a promise that that day is coming for everyone else.

Dr. Matt Carter
Jesus was not the first person to come back from the grave, yet they call him the firstfruits of the resurrection. And the answer to the question of "why?" is very different. You see, when Lazarus died and was resurrected by Christ, he eventually got sick, he got old, and he died again. But Jesus, when he rose from the grave, he was the firstfruits of this new bodily resurrection. He's the first person in history who rose from the grave in a new body, never to die again. That's why they call him the firstfruits of the resurrection. And though Jesus was the first to rise from the grave into a new resurrected body, never to die again, him being the firstfruits means he won't be the last. It means that when we're resurrected, we're not just resurrected spiritually, we're not just having a spirit that goes somewhere, but we're actually going, at the coming of Christ, to receive new bodies. We're going to be with him forever in a physical way, enjoying the new heaven and a new earth, and Jesus' resurrection was a foreshadowing of that.

Question 6:
Since we know our suffering will end when we die and our souls go to heaven, why should we look forward to the general resurrection?

Dr. Mark Gignilliat
Christians have confessed for a very long time that — in various confessional statements — that we believe in the "resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." We say that at the end of the Apostles' Creed. We say it at the end of the Nicene Creed. This is at the core of Christian confession. We believe in the resurrection of the dead. And that's a bodily resurrection. For multiple reasons… We can look at Paul in 1 Corinthians, for example and see that Paul emphasizes the importance of the bodily resurrection… And I think, for a long time in a certain pietistic strand of Christian belief, leaving our bodies and being disembodied spirits seems to be the ultimate goal of what Christian existence is about. And that's simply not the way the Bible emphasizes the resurrection and what the final day will be. It emphasizes that our bodies and our souls need to be combined one with the other; it's not right to be bodiless souls. So, our confession about the resurrection of the dead is a confession that sees bodies and souls together, and that's the ultimate goal. And our souls in the intermediate period are waiting for our bodies to be joined to them again, and *that* is the final moment of the resurrection of the dead.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd
In the new heavens and new earth, we will be fully restored images. That is, we will probably play sports; we will eat, we will work; we will organize; we will worship; we will have amazing relationships; we will enjoy all of these things. Everything that we enjoy now in part that is righteous and just, we will enjoy to the fullest, to the max, there. Why? Because our bodies and our spirits will finally be completely restored… A person is not able to enjoy those things fully in heaven right now as a soul. You've got to have a body to eat, you've got to have a body to do all the… To

really be in the image of God, you've got to have a body. And so, really, the question is, what does being in the image of God look like in the new heavens and new earth? That's the question.

Question 7:
How similar will our resurrected bodies be to our current bodies?

Dr. Constantine Campbell
It's clear in the New Testament that there is a continuity and discontinuity between our current bodies and our future resurrected bodies. The key information for this is Jesus' own bodily resurrection. It's clear that this was Jesus himself. He was no longer in the tomb. His body was not somewhere else and the apostles were meeting a spirit. He was embodied in his body with the wounds from his crucifixion. He was able to be touched, he was able to eat food, etc., and he was recognizable. Although what's interesting is, apparently not immediately recognizable as we see in, say, Luke 24 where many people encounter the resurrected Jesus and don't immediately realize it's him. We're not told why that's the case, but it does suggest that maybe there's something about his resurrected body that is not immediately recognizable. Also, there's discontinuity in the fact that apparently Jesus can move from one place to another and go through walls, kind of transporting immediately and those sorts of things… We see Paul flesh this out, so to speak, a little bit in 1 Corinthians 15 where he talks about the fact that our bodies will be raised immortal, and they will be glorious, and that we will no longer sin or even have the capacity to sin. All of those things are new elements that will be different about our resurrected bodies compared to our current bodies… Our resurrection body will be our real body, but transformed through the resurrection.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat
When we speak of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, we're really in a realm that's clouded with mystery. There's so much about that future moment that we don't know, and so I think reservation and pause is probably wise when we begin to give definitive answers about what the future coming day will be like. But with that said, there does seem to be, when we look at the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, there does seem to be a continuity, a strong continuity between the resurrected body of Jesus and his pre-death body. And we see that significantly in the fact that he wants his disciples — Thomas, for example, and then on the road to Emmaus as well when he shows up in the upper room after that — he wants them to see his hands, and he wants them to see his side and his feet, the places where those wounds that happened in his earthly life, how they're still marked on his glorified body that seems to appear in rooms out of nowhere. So, again, we're in a realm that's shrouded with mystery, but there does seem to be some continuity, some recognizable continuity between our bodies in our pre-resurrected state and in a resurrected state.

Question 8:
How can we say we will have resurrected bodies if they have already decayed in the ground?

Dr. Vern S. Poythress
Many people wonder how we can have resurrection bodies because if we die in this life, then our bodies decay into the ground. Well, the Bible has an answer that focuses on the power of God rather than giving us a technical explanation. God knows what he's going to do. First Corinthians 15, there is an explanation of this, and it says that the bodies that we will have will be transfigured bodies. They won't be exactly the same, but it's kind of the difference between the seed and the plant that comes from the seed. You can illustrate this with the resurrected body of Jesus because it was identifiable as Jesus, but there was also the change — he was glorified. He was no longer subject to death. Now, that's a mystery to us because all our experience is related to this life, but it's not a mystery to God because he's the Creator, so he is going to take care of it. You don't need to worry about it.

Dr. Paul Gardner
At the end of the day, the resurrection of Jesus is the firstfruits of our resurrection, and Jesus is raised bodily from the dead. Now, it's true his skeleton was there and his body was there in the grave, because that's the way they did it in those days, but whatever, it was the most extraordinary miracle. For a completely dead skeleton with no spirit present or whatever, for that to rise from the dead requires the extraordinary miracle of the resurrection. And a God who can raise the dead can surely draw together the molecules or the bits of a person from anywhere and everywhere… Can God bring that together as a body again? Yes, he can because he's God. God can make and do with matter and with his creation whatever he wants to do. And this is the miracle of the Christian faith. It is that we believe there will be a bodily resurrection for all people… He will raise them from the dead like he will raise us from the dead. So, I don't think we need to worry about decaying bodies or whether we're cremated or whether we're buried at sea or whether tragically, as happens these days, body parts are thrown in different directions because of a bomb. We do not need ultimately to worry, however hurtful and painful these things are, because God is all-powerful. God is the miracle worker, and the resurrection is the greatest miracle.

Question 9:
How can people that have never heard the gospel still be condemned in the last judgment?

Dr. Guy Waters
The Bible teaches that even people who have never heard the gospel preached will be condemned at the last judgment. Paul tells us in Romans 1 that God makes himself known through the creation, his wisdom and his power and his goodness. And he also teaches that every human being, by virtue of being made in the image of God and

living in God's world, knows God through the things that are made. Sadly, the response of sin to that knowledge is ingratitude and rebellion. And so, when all people stand before God on the day of judgment, they will not stand before one whom they don't know, but they'll stand before one who has made himself known through the creation and whom they have chosen to rebel against.

Rev. Vermon Pierre
People wonder how someone can be condemned if they've never heard of the gospel at the last judgment. And, you know, it's a question that you want to sympathize with and understand. Really, it's a question that people are wondering, "It seems as if God is unfair." And I think we have to begin with understanding if we're going to take the Bible seriously. The Bible speaks of God being more fair or more just than any of us can imagine. I think of Deuteronomy 32:

> **The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he (Deuteronomy 32:4, ESV).**

So that's the baseline, that God is just and perfect in all that he does. And then when we think of why people are condemned, it's actually not because they haven't heard the gospel, it's because they reject God. Romans 1 tells us that "God's invisible attributes, his divine power, his divine nature, they've been seen since the creation of the world, and yet we reject it. And so — and this is a really important phrase here — "so they are without excuse." That means human beings, we are without excuse. When you stand before the Lord God, there will be nothing that could be said, there's no argument that can be said, no evidence that can be brought in that would say, "Well, I have an excuse for why I rejected you." The Bible says it's on that basis that people are condemned and judged. So, there's no one in hell really with an alibi and the ability to say, "Yes, this is unfair and I had a good excuse." The Bible says we are without excuse. But of course, that does mean we should continue to share the gospel with people all the more, so that people would have that opportunity, by God's grace, to believe in him.

Question 10:
Given that all Christ's enemies will be condemned in the final judgment, what attitude should we have toward unbelievers?

Dr. Paul Gardner
As we think of those who will be condemned at the final judgment, the question does come up for all of us, so, how are we to regard those who are sinful, those who are in rebellion against God? How are we to regard them now? If this is who they are, if they are the ones who are persecuting and putting to death the followers of Christ in some countries, as they are today, what should be our attitude? What should be our attitude even to the boss who won't give a promotion to somebody because they're a Christian? And difficult as that question is in practice in our hearts, from Scripture,

it's actually a relatively easy question to answer, because what we have in front of us is the picture of Christ. We are to be as Christ was. Christ comes to a whole world that is in rebellion against God, and Christ comes with compassion, with love, with mercy, with arms that reach out to draw people to himself. He comes urging people to turn to him and to follow him, and that should be our message too, and that should be our attitude. You see, it's very easy for us to become vengeful, especially if we are hurt for our faith, if somebody is judging us, or not dealing with us properly, or lying about us for our faith, it's very easy to be vengeful. How do I have a right attitude to that person? And to us, Jesus says, well, love your enemies. Jesus says, well, turn the other cheek. We are called to witness to something far greater than just our emotional reactions. But you know, we have to learn that. This takes time. This is not something that's instinctive within us. I'm a fallen human being. I have sinful reactions to those I see around who are blatantly disregarding God and sinning in most atrocious ways sometimes, but it is those very people that God says, "Love them; reach out to them; show my love; speak of my mercy to these people, because it may be in my plan to draw them to myself as well." The greatest example of this in the New Testament is surely the apostle Paul himself. There he is, going to Damascus actually to persecute Christians, to put them to death, to imprison them, and Christ comes to him and speaks to him directly. And Paul comes to faith. And then Paul goes out with the same compassion to people all over the world. That's what we're called to do. It's a hard job sometimes, because emotionally we often have real difficulty with doing that.

Rev. Rico Tice
How should we feel about the final state of the wicked? You know, the problem in England is people don't ask themselves that question. So, they don't really sit there and think, "What will it be like for people to be in eternal torment?" They dismiss what the Bible says in vast numbers in terms of eternal torment, so they don't really sit and think about it. Now, once I am beginning to think about that, the response is tears. So, in Romans 9, Paul weeps for the state of his people. He says, "I'd rather be cut off knowing that they will be." Jeremiah 20, he weeps and says, "I've got to speak." Once we've pondered the fact that sin leads — because it's so serious if it's not paid for by Jesus — it leads to a place where I pay myself, well then the response is that we weep. And then we long to warn … because they'll have to pay for their sin themselves. So, to weep; ultimately the answer to this is to weep. How should I feel? It should lead me to weep and then to warn.

Question 11:
How did the Old Testament portray the new heavens and the new earth?

Dr. Vern S. Poythress
Well, there are at least two passages in Isaiah that use the expression "new heaven and new earth." One of them is Isaiah 65:17, and then there's a description that

follows it. The interesting thing is that the description is very like the first heavens and first earth, except that it's transformed. It's better. It's blessed. It's blessed with God's presence and with the suppression of sin. And so, that's the background, actually, for the discussion of the new heaven and new earth in the New Testament. We believe that God will bring a transfiguration of this present heavens and earth when Christ returns.

Rev. William W. Carr, Jr.
The language of the new heavens and the new earth occurs twice in the book of Isaiah, once in chapter 65 when God announces "I am creating new heavens and new earth" and then again in chapter 66 when he elaborates a little bit more about what it will be like in that new heavens and new earth. I think that we use "new heavens and new earth" as perhaps a kind of umbrella term that we gather elements from different parts of the Scripture and sort of bring them together in that kind of conceptual term… That reminds us of our ongoing stewardship under God for the present world, but it also reminds us, and we hold to the promise, that there will indeed be a time when war is no more, illness no more, when as Isaiah says in chapter 25, every tear will be wiped away because God will have swallowed up death forever.

Question 12:
Will the current heavens and earth be destroyed in order to make way for the new heavens and earth?

Dr. Scott Manor
Well, it's an interesting question to ask, whether or not the new heavens and the new earth will require the destruction of what exists now. And one thing I would say about this is that there's a difference of opinion, depending on, sort of, which theological camp you might come from. From my point of view… There's a saying that I learned in seminary and it goes like this: "God doesn't make junk, and he doesn't junk what he makes." And to unpack that a little bit, when God made the heavens and the earth, he declares them good. And of course we know that sin enters into the world and it changes that, it infects it. But that doesn't mean that all of a sudden it's bad, discardable in some sense, and so when we think about what God's redemptive purposes are for, and the scope of his redemptive purposes, we need to realize that that's not just for you or for me, but that it's for the entirety of his creation. It's for all of his creation. And so, in that sense, when you think about even the way God preaches the kingdom of God, when Christ is preaching that in his gospels, a lot of times you see him healing someone of some sort of illness, making something right that was not quite the way it should be — the blind seeing, the lame walking. And all of those, to me, are indicators of the way he's not only just restoring us in our relationship with Christ, but also restoring his creation. It's a full scope of his redemptive purposes. And so, the answer really in my mind is that the new heavens and the new earth don't eradicate what exists now. It's more of a question of a full restoration of what does exist now at a time when it will be completely free from sin.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.
There are biblical texts that seem to suggest that there's going to be a great cosmic catastrophe at the end of times, but I think we have to think about what is being told to us in a text like Romans 8:19-22 where it talks about the creation groaning for its redemption, and texts like that seem to tells us that there's some kind of continuity between what there is now in the cosmos and what there will be… God is *renewing* the heavens and the earth. And certainly there's apocalyptic language that talks about some kind of transformation, but I think that's more like a refiner's fire. Another reason I say that it's important to think about this is, think about the beginning of the Bible and the end of the Bible. You begin with a garden; you end with a city. There's a lot of similar imagery there. Now, is that similar imagery there because God is starting with a new one, or is that similar imagery there because this is the bringing to fruition of what God has created? And I think it's the bringing to fruition of what God has created.

Dr. Michael D. Williams
Second Peter 3, at first glance, Peter is using a very vivid string of terms to speak about the day of the Lord, the comings of the new heavens and new earth, and it's been very typical for Christians to go to a text like this, especially from the King James reading of, say, verse 10: "This world will burn up. It will be consumed in fire. It will be destroyed." Sound biblical exegesis, however, in the last number of years has pointed out, and I think convincingly, that the language that Paul, excuse me, that *Peter* actually uses here is not destruction language, but is purgation language. The best manuscripts, instead of using — for "consumed with fire" — instead of using a term that comes from a verb meaning "to consume," actually comes from a verb meaning "to establish" or "to find," and it does create the idea of purgation… Further, I would just add to that, when we come to a text, we come to it with the rest of Scripture. There are other texts and things in Scripture that should inform how we come to a text like that… You know, you've got to think here in terms of what Paul says in Romans 8, that the world itself cries out for the liberation of the sons of God. Why? Because our redemption will be the redemption of the world. John Calvin had no problem whatsoever thinking about Romans 8:20 and saying that all of creation cries out for resurrection. We could… Other things we could bring in here and would shed light on this — the resurrection of Jesus. Everything that went into the tomb came out. It was a *bodily* resurrection. It wasn't a spiritual resurrection, if you will. Our resurrection is going to be like unto his… God is going to restore rather than annihilate his world.

Dr. Danny Akin
You know, there's a lot of question about the relationship of the current world to the new heaven, the new earth, the New Jerusalem. Some people believe that this present order will be completely destroyed, and then God will reconstitute *defacto, ex nihilo,* a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem. I don't think that's exactly what the Bible teaches. I think the Bible teaches that this creation — Romans 8 — is groaning and looking forward to the redemption, the ultimate salvation of the sons and

daughters of God, and when we are glorified, this creation that exists right now likewise will be glorified. So, there is genuine continuity between the present order and the future order. But the future order — I like to say it this way when I teach theology — the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem is going to be Eden regained and more. We'll get everything back we lost when Adam and Eve failed, but it will be even more, even far beyond what we could ever hope or imagine. So, there's continuity, but what we're going to receive is going to be so much more glorious because all the ravages and effects of sin and the curse will be removed, banished forever. As it says in [Revelation] 21:4, "no more crying, no more pain, no more sorrow and no more death." He's making all things new. It's going to be a great, great order for all of eternity.

Question 13:
What will the new heavens and new earth be like?

Dr. Paul Gardner
I love the expression "the new heavens and the new earth" in Scriptures. We find it back in the Old Testament prophets, and then we find it again, of course, in the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter in the New Testament. And they are talking about the re-creation of all things, or the new creation of all things once Christ has returned in glory. I don't think the Bible tells us an awful lot about what the new earth will be like, or even the new heavens. There seems to be, just by the expression, there seems to be a greater "to-ing" and "fro-ing," if you like, between what we consider the spiritual realm of the heaven, the place where the Lord is and the earth where we live, and we know that the new earth will be ruled by Christ who will be there with us, and will see him face to face. So, there seems to be a much greater sort of coherence, if you like, between heaven and earth when all things are made new. But I guess the closest we get to some sort of a description is in Romans 8. At the moment, we are given this picture that all creation — and that's the physical creation, not just human beings — is groaning like the pains of a mother in childbirth, we're told, waiting for the sons of God — that's God's people — to come into this inheritance of the new earth. And at least the implication of that seems to be that when the new earth does come, creation, as we know, it will function properly and will be looked after properly by us. So, I like to think of the new earth as a place where, finally, we shall work for the Lord in an environment which is working well and not under the Fall, the curse of the Fall, the judgment of God that happened when Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, but where everything is integrated well. So, that earth, which we're supposed to look after well, we will look after well. Those end-of-day feelings that we have of, "Have I accomplished anything?" if we do come back and go to sleep in the new earth, I think I will go to sleep feeling I have accomplished what I was set out to accomplish because I have been perfected, and I'm living in this perfect earth. And the Lord I know, who is seated in the heavens, who is seated in glory, I see with me. I see him face to face day by day.

Rev. Rico Tice
What will the new heavens and the new earth be like? Well, two things. First of all, this is guaranteed because Christ rose from the dead. So, the fact he got through death himself means that he can get me through, and it opens up the wonder of this new world that we're going to. So, this isn't just "pie in the sky." That past certainty gives me this future hope. What will it be like? Well, Revelation 21:

> **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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. '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" (Revelation 21:1-4).**

Interesting, isn't it, that verse that, "he'll wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, no mourning, no crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." So, what I learn from that is there'll be no more handkerchiefs — "no more crying," no more hearses — "no more death," no more hospitals — "no more pain." And so, I look ahead to a world where there'll be no curse. So, the curse that came into the world because of Adam and Eve's sin against God has been removed by the curse-bearer, Jesus Christ. And I can know that this will be a real physical place, because it's a new heaven and a new earth. Now, the word "new" here is *kainos*, which means "renewed." It'll be like this earth and yet utterly renewed. So it will be physical — we'll have physical bodies — but it won't be a world that is under curse and that is falling apart. And it comes down from heaven like a bride beautifully prepared for her husband. So, a bride is prepared for her wedding place, for her wedding day. It's a prepared place that has been put together for me. But I suppose, yeah, that the big thing here is mourning or crying or pain; all are gone because God has wiped those away in a world where sin has been dealt with by the death of Jesus.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs
People try to imagine what the new heavens and the new earth will be like. The Scripture gives us pictures, of course, images. By saying that, I don't mean to imply that they're not true. They are true. Maybe the best way to think about that is that it will be like the present creation, but unlike. I think that it's important to say both things. This world is God's; he made it. He owns it. It's deeply corrupted by sin and death. But God has apparently no intention of handing over this creation to sin and death ultimately. And yet, it does have to be purged. I think this is why the Bible often uses the image of fire when talking about the judgment day. So, we should think of that fire as a cleansing fire. It will be a very terrible and "*awe*-full" day, "*awe*-some" in that sense. But the new creation that will emerge out of that act of power and mercy on God's part will be recognizable, I think, as a renewed creation, because

God loves all that he has made. And so, the images and pictures we have are of banquets and of gardens and of rivers — Revelation 21–22, of course, the parables of Jesus. It will be creation, and our bodies as part of it will be holy. I think sometimes we think, maybe too often, of physical health with our resurrection bodies and so forth, and that's true, it's right to think that way, but sickness and decay and death are the result of sin, that's the primary cause. And so, raised from the dead and the creation renewed, it will be holy and whole in the Old Testament sense of *shalom* and, although I don't have a Bible verse for this, I think we can imagine God looking at his renewed creation and saying again, "It's very good."

Rev. Vermon Pierre
What will the new heavens and the new earth be like? We don't have every detail about it, but the Bible tells us a whole lot, in Revelation 21–22 particularly. It speaks of heaven coming down and becoming part of earth, and one of the things I'd like to emphasize there, it's not as if the earth goes away. It's a new heavenly world, if we can put it that way. And this new heavenly world is a place where God is always present. It's a place where the Bible says there's no more tears, there's no more pain, there's no more suffering, and most especially, there's no more sin. In many ways it's humanity in the way that it should have been, the way that it never has been since Adam sinned and humanity has continued to sin and reject God. All that is wiped away and human beings are able to honor God and follow God and worship God in the ways that they should. It's going to be a place characterized by love and by beauty and by joy in the most perfect and pure form, because we will be in the presence of love and joy and beauty, in the presence of God forever. So, new heavens and new earth will be an incredibly special place. It's a place for us to look forward to, to motivate us to live in the earth now, knowing that this earth and heavens… There's more, there's better to come.

Question 14:
What benefits will we receive from being in God's immediate presence in the new heavens and new earth?

Dr. Grant R. Osborne
We can't even begin to spell out all the benefits of what happens when we're in God's immediate presence in the new heavens and new earth. Basically it's found in Revelation 21:3-5, and what it really is, is that, remember, Moses could not look upon the face of God and live. We will not just look upon the face of God, we will walk hand in hand with God, and it says there clearly, "He will be our God, we will be his people." We will have this absolute physical proximity and awareness and fellowship and love, and we will look upon the face of the God who created the heavens and the earth. We will look on eternity. We will have all… The joy will be, I think it's a joy that can't even be described in human language. There's just no language to attest. And really, Revelation 21 is merely a human attempt to get at the glory and the joy and the incredible nature, the majesty that will be ours when we are with God in the

new heavens and new earth. It's beyond compare. But it primarily will be, we will be in his absolute presence. We will be eternal beings. All of the pain, all of the suffering, all the mourning, all the hurt will be gone forever. And the joy is something that I think that nothing can approximate the joy that we'll have at that time.

Dr. Greg Perry
We get a vision of what the new heavens and the new earth will be like in Zechariah 8. The prophet is talking about the most important characteristic of this new city is that God, once again, will dwell with his people and that that's going to make all the difference in every sphere of life. And so, the prophet begins to talk about how the old women and the old men will once again sit in the streets. And there's such a sense of public safety. The kids, the boys and the girls are running and playing in the streets, and there's a reconciliation between the generations; the old and the young, they want to be together. And the prophet talks about how in the former times you didn't have any wages, and your beasts didn't have any food, but in this time when God returns, you will have what you need. There'll be economic renewal as well. And your work is going to be productive, you're going to produce surpluses, and you're going to have, to be able to share with one another. And then he talks about how there will be also ecological renewal, that once again the grains will grow and the earth will have rain and will have dew that you need, and the vineyards will produce wine. And so, what we see in terms of the new heavens and the new earth is that every area of image bearing will flourish once again as God comes to dwell with his people and he completely renews our role as his image bearers in the world.

Dr. Danny Akin
You know, the new heavens and the new earth are going to be wonderful in so many ways… I'm often asked, "Will we be able to interact with our God in heaven?" After all, the Bible does say that no man can see God and live. And that's true in our fallen state. In our sinful state, we cannot see him in all his glory. We would be consumed. But the good news is in heaven we're not fallen. In heaven, we're glorified. In fact, it says in 1 John 3 that when the Lord Jesus comes again we will be like him, where we will see him as he is. And Revelation 21–22 also affirms that we will be in perfect communion with our God. So, we're going to be able to interact with all of God's good creations including his good creatures like angels. But even better than that, we will be able to interact directly with our Creator as well, who will not only be our Creator, but he's also our eternal Father.

Dr. Richard Phillips
There's not one square inch of the entire cosmos that Satan has overrun and marred and vandalized by sin that will stay that way. In the end of the ages, everything that God made and designed will fulfill the end for which he designed it. And we are destined to live in a glorified cosmos in glorified bodies with the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus returns, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, and so Christ will have victory over all that God has made, and our enemy will have nothing but the dust that God has made him to eat.

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