

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
FOUR

THE END OF THE AGE



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Contents

I. Introduction.....	1
II. General Resurrection.....	2
A. Early Controversies	3
B. Divine Authority	5
1. Hell	5
2. Heaven	6
C. Effect on Creation	7
1. Natural world	7
2. Hell	8
3. Heaven	9
D. Effect on Human Beings	9
III. Final Judgment.....	12
A. Judge	12
B. Parties	13
1. Fallen angels	13
2. Unregenerate	14
3. Regenerate	14
C. Evidence	15
D. Decisions	16
1. Curses	17
2. Blessings	17
IV. New Heavens and New Earth.....	18
A. Purity	19
B. Newness	20
C. Geography	22
1. Unified kingdom	22
2. New Jerusalem	23
V. Conclusion	25

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Four

The End of the Age

INTRODUCTION

When God created the world, his goal was to turn the entire planet into his earthly kingdom. He began by setting up the Garden of Eden as his sanctuary. And he appointed humanity to increase in number, and to spread the borders of the garden to the ends of the earth. But, of course, humanity sinned, and plunged both the human race and creation itself into corruption and death. As a result, the earth still hasn't been prepared for God, and he still hasn't brought his kingdom to earth in all its fullness. But God hasn't given up on his plan. And at the end of the age, he'll fulfill it — perfectly. He'll restore his faithful people to life, purge his enemies from his world, establish the new heavens and the new earth as his permanent kingdom, and reign forever from his throne in the New Jerusalem.

This is the fourth lesson in our series *Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology*, and we've entitled it "The End of the Age." In this lesson, we'll continue our study of the last events of history that will finally end *this age* and fully consummate *the age to come*.

As we saw in our first lesson in this series, the Old Testament expected God's kingdom to unfold in three phases: the initial creation of the universe and its creatures; a long period of redemption necessitated by humanity's fall into sin; and finally, the everlasting eschaton, also called "the age to come." The eschaton is the ultimate state of the universe after redemption is complete, when God's heavenly kingdom fills the earth.

We also saw that the New Testament changed these expectations by dividing the eschaton into three stages. The age to come began with the *inauguration*, which spanned Jesus' life and earthly ministry, including the foundational work done by his first century apostles and prophets. During the inauguration, this age began to overlap with the age to come. This age is characterized by sin, suffering and death, while the age to come is characterized by God's blessings for his faithful people.

The second stage of the eschaton is the *continuation*, which began immediately after the inauguration and will continue until Jesus returns. During the continuation, we suffer the hardships of this age at the same time that we enjoy the beginning blessings of the age to come.

And the third stage is the *consummation*, which will begin when Jesus returns. In the consummation, God will completely end this age, and permanently replace it with the age to come. So, in this lesson, when we talk about "the end of the age," we have in mind the end of this age, and the full consummation of the age to come. Like our last lesson, this lesson will focus on matters of general eschatology. As you'll recall, general eschatology is:

The study of God's universal acts of judgment and salvation in the last days

And, in contrast with individual eschatology, general eschatology emphasizes the *events* of the eschaton rather than how individuals *experience* those events.

Our treatment of “The End of the Age” will address three sequential events. First, we’ll cover the general resurrection of the dead. Second, we’ll look at the final judgment. And third, we’ll describe life in the new heavens and new earth. Let’s look first at the general resurrection.

GENERAL RESURRECTION

The general resurrection is called “general” because it includes every person *ever*, whether regenerate or unregenerate — all the billions of human beings that have ever lived. And it’s called “resurrection” because the souls of the dead will be reunited with their reconstituted bodies.

All of the bodies of all who have died will be resurrected, not just believers, but everyone will be resurrected for a specific purpose, and that is to stand before God’s appointed judgment and God’s appointed judge, which is his Son, Jesus Christ. And in the judgment, it will be revealed who is in the Book of Life and who is judged by the books of their life. Those who are judged by the books of their life will hear the verdict, “Depart from me.” Those who are in the Book of Life will hear the glorious truth, “Enter in, Beloved,” not because we were better, but because we had given our lives to Christ, who with his blood wrote us in the Book of Life, having paid for our sins of omission and commission, all of them, all of our sins, all the sins of all of his people.

— Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

We can consider the general resurrection of the dead to be either one of the final events of the intermediate state, or one of the first events of the final state. It’s part of the *intermediate* state in the sense that, in the general resurrection, the unregenerate and the regenerate still haven’t reached their final conditions. But it’s part of the *final* state in the sense that our souls are no longer separated from our bodies. Regardless of how we classify it, though, the general resurrection ends all temporary punishments of unregenerate souls and all temporary blessings of regenerate souls, and prepares them for their final punishments and blessings.

We’ll explore the general resurrection in four parts. First, we’ll address some early controversies surrounding this doctrine. Second, we’ll point out God’s divine authority to implement this eschatological event. Third, we’ll talk about its effect on

creation. And fourth, we'll discuss its effect on human beings. Let's look first at the early controversies over the doctrine of the general resurrection.

EARLY CONTROVERSIES

In Jesus' day, there were at least two schools of thought concerning the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees believed that there would be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. But the Sadducees denied that there would be a physical resurrection of the dead. In fact, when Paul was arrested and taken before the Jewish court, called the Sanhedrin, he appealed to this controversy in order to defend himself. Listen to Luke's report of this event in Acts 23:6-8:

Paul ... called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all) (Acts 23:6-8).

The controversy between the Pharisees and Sadducees is rooted in each group's understanding of Scripture. The Pharisees accepted the entire Old Testament as inspired Scripture. But the Sadducees accepted only the five books written by Moses — Genesis through Deuteronomy, which we often call the Pentateuch. The general resurrection is clearly taught in passages like Isaiah 26:19, and Daniel 12:2. So, the Pharisees affirmed it. But the Sadducees denied it because they didn't see the doctrine taught in the books of Moses.

With regard to this controversy, Jesus, Paul, and the rest of the early church clearly took the side of the Pharisees. And to refute the Sadducees even more strongly, Jesus proved that they had misread Moses himself. In Mark 12:18-27, a group of Sadducees challenged him over the doctrine of the resurrection. In Mark 12:26-27, Jesus responded this way:

Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken! (Mark 12:26-27).

We can summarize Jesus' argument this way: God was still in a covenant relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And for that to be true, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still had to be alive as spirits. And if they were alive as spirits, then they would eventually be resurrected — presumably to inherit their covenant blessings, as Jesus indicated in Matthew 8:11. And if believers like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were to be resurrected, then the general resurrection was true as well.

Sadly, some in the first-century church also denied a universal, bodily resurrection. For instance, in 2 Timothy 2:18, Paul accused Hymenaeus and Philetus of believing that the resurrection had already taken place. Perhaps they thought the resurrection was merely spiritual. Or maybe they thought it was fulfilled in the resurrections that took place when Jesus was crucified, as recorded in Matthew 27:52, 53. But either way, Paul said that they rejected the truth and destroyed faith.

Paul also encountered resistance to physical resurrection in Corinth, as indicated by his defense of the idea in 1 Corinthians 15:12-34. Apparently, his opponents in Corinth found resurrection repulsive. So, Paul pointed out that if they rejected all resurrections, they also had to reject Jesus' resurrection. And if they rejected Jesus' resurrection, then they also had to deny the forgiveness of sins. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15:17:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).

On the other hand, if they accepted Jesus' resurrection, then they had no reason to deny anyone else's resurrection. Paul went on to identify Jesus as the firstfruits of the resurrection of all the regenerate, meaning that because Jesus has been resurrected, *our* future resurrections are absolutely certain. And in defending the resurrection of the regenerate, Paul also removed any objection to the general resurrection.

Christ's resurrection is the basis of the resurrection of all believers. As Berkhof said, Jesus' resurrection proves that he is the Lord of the resurrection, and his resurrection brings the resurrection of all believers. It is of utmost importance that Jesus is the Lord of the living. As Colossians 1:18 says, Jesus Christ was the first to be resurrected, and the firstfruits of the resurrection. Since he is the first to rise again of those who have fallen asleep, that means, in the future, those who follow him will also be raised along with him. The picture of a ripe harvest is used to represent the importance of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Just as when we see the trees begin to bear fruit in the harvest season, and we know that more fruit is to come, Jesus Christ's initial resurrection shows that there will be a group of people rising with him.

— Prof. Hezhuang Tian, translation

Having addressed the early controversies surrounding the general resurrection, let's turn to God's divine authority to raise the dead.

DIVINE AUTHORITY

We can define God's divine authority in a variety of ways. But for our purposes in this lesson, we'll describe it as:

God's legal and moral right to carry out his will.

When we say that God has the authority to do something, we mean that it's perfectly within his rights to do it, and that he commits no wrong if he does it.

Our discussion of God's divine authority in the general resurrection will divide into two parts: his authority over hell, and his authority over heaven. Let's look first at his authority over hell.

Hell

It's important to recognize that God has *complete* authority over hell. When unregenerate souls suffer in hell during the intermediate state, they suffer because God is punishing them. And when they're drawn out of hell in order to face judgment, it's because God has summoned them into his court.

Now, Christians have sometimes imagined that Satan is the ruler of hell. For instance, in John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, the character of Satan claimed it was "better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n." But the reality is that God rules over hell, and that he has complete control over Satan, the demons, and the unregenerate souls he imprisons there. As Peter wrote in 2 Peter 2:4, 9:

If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment ... then the Lord knows how ... to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment (2 Peter 2:4, 9).

There is some sense in which the Evil One has authority over his demons, and he can send them to do things and send them to do evil, but ultimately, the Evil One, all of his demons, all of the unregenerate who are in hell, they *all* are under the authority of Yahweh. They are under the authority of the God, the uncreated God who is the God of the universe. And so, there's a sense in which Satan has some power, but all the power that he has ends at the leash that Yahweh has on him, and at any time Yahweh can jerk that leash and bring him back and put an end to that power and do with him whatever he will.

— Dr. Samuel Lamerson

As the ruler and jailor over hell, God has the authority and power to summon the unregenerate from their prison, and to make them appear before his judgment throne. And in the general resurrection, that's exactly what he'll do.

With this understanding of God's divine authority over hell in mind, let's turn to his authority over heaven.

Heaven

While some Christians have been confused about God's authority over hell, none should be confused about his authority over heaven. Heaven is God's throne room — the place where his authority and glory are manifested more openly than anywhere else. As God put it simply in Isaiah 66:1:

Heaven is my throne (Isaiah 66:1).

Out of all creation, heaven is where God manifests his authority most directly. We find this same point in Matthew 5:34 and 23:22, and in Hebrews 8:1.

Many descriptions of God are figurative representations of spiritual realities. But the description of God ruling from his throne in heaven appears to be more literal. One reason to think God has an actual throne in heaven is that several prophets received visions of God seated there. For instance, the Old Testament prophet Micaiah saw him in 1 Kings 22:19 and 2 Chronicles 18:18. And Stephen, the first Christian martyr, had a similar vision in Acts 7:55, 56. In these cases, their visions don't appear to have been symbolic dreams or metaphoric representations, but rather apocalyptic unveilings of heavenly realities. In other words, they saw the real workings of the heavenly court, where God sits on his throne and reigns without challenge.

As Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer, heaven is the place where God's will is done perfectly. And that's why it's the model for the new heavens and new earth that God will create at the end of the eschaton. In Matthew 6:10, Jesus taught his disciples to pray that:

[God's] will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus was looking forward to the day when our world would be made perfect — the day when all of his enemies would be removed, and all of his people would live in sinlessness and peace. And he described that future world by comparing it to the present state of heaven.

Now that we've explored the general resurrection in terms of the early controversies and God's divine authority to bring it about, let's talk about its effect on creation.

EFFECT ON CREATION

The general resurrection's effect on creation will be felt in at least three different realms. First, it will significantly impact the natural world.

Natural world

As you'll recall, the events of the eschaton, and especially of its consummation, are designed to change the world into God's earthly kingdom. But the existing world is corrupted by sin and decay. So, God uses eschatological events to alter how the natural world works in order to prepare it for his presence. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 5, section 3, speaks of God's ability to alter creation in radical ways when it says:

God, in His ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure.

When the Confession speaks of "means," it has in mind things like cause and effect, human volition, and the physical laws of the universe. But God also works "without, above, and against" means. In other words, he can perform miracles whenever he wants to.

When humanity fell into sin, part of God's curse on us included a curse on the earth itself. It became a place of danger and death, and the ground itself resisted humanity's attempts to cultivate it. As God said to Adam in Genesis 3:17-18:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you (Genesis 3:17-18).

But in Romans 8, Paul looked forward to God's miraculous resurrection of the regenerate as the solution to this problem. He taught that in the resurrection, the earth itself would be rescued through the resurrection of redeemed humanity. Listen to what he wrote in Romans 8:19-23:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed... [T]he creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 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 (Romans 8:19-23).

In this passage, Paul taught that the redemption of our bodies, that is, our resurrection, will complete our adoption as sons. That's when the sons of God will be revealed, and the creation itself will be liberated.

Put simply, just as the creation was corrupted through God's curse on humanity in Genesis 3, the creation will be purged of its corruption through God's powerful redemption of humanity. And this redemption will be completed when the regenerate are raised as part of the general resurrection.

According to the laws and theories of physics, chemistry and biology, the general resurrection would be impossible. But God is able to do *anything* he wants to do, so the physical laws of the natural world will give way to his commands. Billions of people will return to life — even those that have been dead for thousands of years. It will be an astounding display of God's power. And it will irrefutably prove that his authority is more fundamental to the function of the universe than even our most important scientific beliefs are.

The general resurrection's effect on creation will also impact hell, where the unregenerate and the fallen angels had previously been imprisoned.

Hell

When the unregenerate are resurrected, their souls will be removed from hell and returned to their bodies on earth so that they can face God's judgment. But it won't be just the unregenerate that will have been emptied from hell. Satan and the other demons will also have been removed by this point in the eschaton.

Some theologians understand Revelation 20 to teach that Satan, and perhaps the demons, will be released from their imprisonment in hell in order to participate in a final rebellion against God. As John reported in Revelation 20:7-8:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle (Revelation 20:7-8).

Other theologians point to passages like 2 Peter 2:4, which we read earlier, that says the fallen angels are being held in gloomy dungeons until the judgment. But in either case, it seems that hell itself will be empty: the demons will be released before the resurrection to fight in the rebellion; or they'll be summoned to judgment alongside the resurrected unregenerate.

A third impact of the general resurrection's effect on creation is that heaven will no longer be the residence of regenerate souls.

Heaven

Like the resurrected unregenerate, the resurrected regenerate will be returned to earth in order to appear before God's judgment throne. Heaven is a wonderful place, so it's easy to wonder why we would ever want to leave it. But God never intended us to live there forever. For one thing, we don't have bodies in heaven. So, there's an important sense in which we aren't complete human beings there. Besides that, after the resurrection, Jesus' throne will be on earth, not in heaven. And it's much better for us to remain in his presence. And of course, as wonderful as heaven is, God has something even better in mind for us in the new heavens and new earth.

Well, it's true that after death those that belong to God enjoy what some might call a state of bliss in God's presence, what we call the "intermediate state." The fact of the matter is this: God wants his creation to come to fruition. That includes humans coming to fruition, the ones that belong to him, in the end, the ones that are saved... So even though it is a great thing for people to be experiencing God's presence, the fact is, is that the fulfillment, the fruition of creation, is us being in bodies, and these bodies are God's idea. If we think that the best thing is for us to be outside of our body in God's presence, I think we're missing the point about God actually having a salvation that attends to his entire creation, and it does include salvation of our bodies, the transformation of our bodies. And in the end, of course, Christ is raised in a body. If he's raised in a body and that's the firstfruits, then what comes after that? The resurrection of our bodies.

— Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

In addition to being emptied of regenerate souls during the resurrection, heaven will also be emptied of angels. Matthew 25:31 says that when Jesus returns, he'll bring *all* the angels with him. And Matthew 24:31 says that their task will be to collect the resurrected regenerate from the furthest corners of heaven and earth, and to gather them to Christ.

In short, the general resurrection will place every human and every angel on the earth, assembling them for the final judgment. And as a result, both heaven and hell will be left completely empty.

Having described the general resurrection with regard to early controversies, divine authority and the effect on creation, let's take a look at the resurrection's effect on human beings.

EFFECT ON HUMAN BEINGS

The general resurrection will include all human beings that have ever lived, whether regenerate or unregenerate. As Jesus said in John 5:28-29:

A time is coming when all who are in their graves will ... come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).

As we mentioned in an earlier lesson, when the Bible talks about people rising from their graves in the resurrection, it doesn't mean that only people whose bodies have been preserved through burial will be raised. Rather, all who have died will be included. For example, in Revelation 20:13, John said that the sea would give up the dead that had been lost in it, and that all the souls in death and Hades would be raised again. The same idea is reflected in places like Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2, and John 11:24.

Regardless of *where* our bodies are — and even if they no longer exist — we will all be raised in the general resurrection. But what will our resurrected bodies be like? How similar will they be to the bodies we have now?

A lot of people would like to know what our resurrected bodies will look like after the general resurrection. The best way to answer this question is to study Jesus' resurrected body after he rose from the dead. His body had similar elements to his old body — Jesus ate, drank, and talked. Yet in other ways his body was different from the old body — Jesus walked through locked doors and disappeared. And the Bible refers to our resurrected bodies as being “glorious bodies,” just like Jesus' own.

— Dr. Riad Kassis, translation

Our resurrected bodies won't be entirely new. Instead, they'll be reconstituted versions of the bodies we have now. In death, our bodies are eventually completely destroyed by cremation, decomposition or other means. But God is able to do anything. In the case of those whose bodies still exist in some form, Scripture indicates that those bodies will be raised and restored. In the case of bodies that have been completely lost or destroyed, Scripture isn't explicit. But it's reasonable to believe that God can create new bodies that retain the identities of the originals.

And this point about identity is critical. It means that in our resurrected state, we'll still be the same people we are now — body and soul. God will redeem the regenerate as whole persons, and he'll condemn the unregenerate as whole persons. But even though we maintain our own identity with the same physical bodies, there will still be qualitative differences between our current bodies and our resurrected bodies. Concerning the regenerate, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says:

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

The resurrected bodies of the regenerate will be much more glorious, immortal and powerful than our current natural bodies. In fact, Scripture teaches that our

resurrected bodies will be like the body Jesus received when he rose from the dead. As Paul argued in 1 Corinthians 15:49:

Just as we have borne the likeness of [Adam], so shall we bear the likeness of [Jesus] (1 Corinthians 15:49).

And in 1 John 3:2, we read:

What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.

Scripture doesn't describe the resurrected bodies of the unregenerate. Certainly they won't be glorious like the bodies of the regenerate. But they'll have to be different in some way in order to last throughout the final state. Sadly, though, the resurrection will be a source of horror for the unregenerate. They'll be filled with terror and shame. Their new bodies will make them vulnerable to additional torments. And their final prison will be worse than the hell they've already endured.

Our discussion of the glorious resurrection of the regenerate and the terrifying resurrection of the unregenerate raises an obvious question: What happens to people who are still alive when Jesus returns? How can they be resurrected if they haven't even died? With regard to the regenerate, we'll be changed in an instant, so that our bodies become like those of the resurrected regenerate. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Paul gave this explanation:

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Here, Paul used "sleep" as a euphemism for die. So, those that don't die will be just like those that have been resurrected.

Scripture isn't entirely clear about the unregenerate, though. It may be that they will all be slain in the last battle of Satan's rebellion, before the general resurrection. This might be implied by passages like Revelation 20:7-10, where Satan's hordes are as numerous as the sand on the seashore. If that's true, then there won't be any unregenerate left alive when the resurrection happens. But it could also be that some of the unregenerate survive this battle. If so, it would make sense that they, too, would be changed in an instant, just like the regenerate. The difference would be that their resurrected bodies would be like those of the other resurrected unregenerate, prepared to endure everlasting punishment.

In any case, the result of the general resurrection will be the complete reconstitution of the human race — every person will exist as an everlasting soul in an everlasting body. We'll be whole persons, and together we'll constitute the whole human race. And in this way, humanity will be prepared to face our final judgment.

So far in our lesson on "The End of the Age," we've addressed the general resurrection of the dead. Now let's focus on the final judgment.

FINAL JUDGMENT

The final judgment is the eschatological event when God will formally declare the guilt of all his enemies for all their transgressions, and pronounce their everlasting punishment. And he will formally declare the innocence of all those who are in Christ, and pronounce their everlasting gifts and rewards. It will be a highly public event attended by the entire resurrected human race and the whole company of angels, both fallen and elect.

Our discussion of the final judgment will divide into four parts. First, we'll identify the judge of the proceedings. Second, we'll consider the parties that will be judged. Third, we'll mention the evidence the judge will evaluate. And fourth, we'll discuss the decisions he'll render. Let's turn first to the judge himself.

JUDGE

The New Testament teaches in many places that Jesus will be the judge at the final judgment. For example, we see this in Matthew 25:31-46, John 5:26-30, Acts 10:42 and 17:30, 31, and several other places. As just one brief example, 2 Timothy 4:1 says:

Christ Jesus ... will judge the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1).

This same belief has been echoed in Christian creeds since the early centuries of the church. For example, the Apostles' Creed, standardized around A.D. 700, says:

Jesus Christ ... will come to judge the living and the dead.

And the Nicene Creed, first formulated in A.D. 325 and revised in A.D. 381, says:

Jesus Christ ... shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead.

The right to render final judgment on all humanity, and on the angels, innately belongs to God the Father. But the Father has given this right to the Son. Peter talked about Jesus' appointment by the Father in Acts 10:42. Paul mentioned it in Acts 17:31. And Jesus himself claimed that he had received this honor because of his role as Messiah. Listen to Jesus' words in John 5:26-27:

The Father ... has given [the Son] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:26-27).

In this passage, "Son of Man" is a messianic title; it identifies Jesus as the Christ, the heir to the Davidic covenant and throne.

The Father has appointed the Son to be the arbiter of judgment, the one who metes out punishment. One of the reasons — not completely

the dominant — but one of the reasons why God has appointed the Son to do so is because it's in fulfillment of Daniel 7. In Daniel 7, there the Son of Man is the one who "takes care of business" with the four beasts, and he emerges victorious, and he goes into the presence of the Ancient of Days, and there his role, really, the main reason why the Son of Man is mentioned in Daniel 7 is because he is the one that judges these rebellious kingdoms... In other words, the Son of Man executes the will of the Ancient of Days.

— Dr. Benjamin Gladd

The New Testament also teaches that the elect or righteous angels will assist Christ in his role as judge. For instance, in the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13:41, 42, Jesus compared the angels to gardeners during a harvest. In particular, he identified the weeds as those who do evil, or the unregenerate, and said that his angels would gather them and throw them into a fiery furnace. This may mean that the angels will escort the resurrected prisoners from hell to the last judgment, and then will help carry out their final sentences. And in Matthew 24:31, Jesus indicated that the angels have a corresponding role in gathering the elect, or the regenerate, for the day of judgment.

Moreover, 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3 suggests that the regenerate will assist the Lord in judging both the unregenerate and the fallen angels. And Revelation 20:4 indicates that some of Christ's people will play an even more prominent role in that judgment. Beyond this, Psalm 149:5-9 predicts that the regenerate will actually help Jesus carry out the sentences of those he condemns.

Having identified the judge that will govern the final judgment, let's focus on the parties he'll judge.

PARTIES

Scripture mentions three separate parties or groups that will face the final judgment. The first we'll mention is the fallen angels, also known as demons.

Fallen angels

Both 2 Peter 2:4, and Jude 6, report that the demons used to be angels that held authority from God. But they rebelled against him, and abandoned their heavenly homes and their authority. As a result, they're now chained in gloomy dungeons awaiting Christ's judgment.

The elect angels — that is, those who haven't fallen — won't be included in the judgment, because they've never sinned against God. So, there's no reason for them to be accused.

The second of the parties facing judgment will be the unregenerate.

Unregenerate

Several passages of Scripture teach that when the resurrected human race appears before Christ's judgment throne, the Lord will separate the unregenerate from the regenerate. Paul talked about this separation of the wicked from the righteous in Romans 2:5-8. And John received visions of it in Revelation 11:18 and 20:11-15. And Jesus himself talked about it in his Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25. And in each of these passages we are told that, at the final judgment, Christ will condemn the unregenerate. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 25:31-46:

The Son of Man ... will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another ... Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me" ... Then they will go away to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46).

The third of the parties judged by Christ will be the regenerate.

Regenerate

After Jesus separates the unregenerate from the regenerate, he'll also render judgment on the regenerate. We see this in many places, including Romans 2:7, Revelation 11:18, and again in Matthew 25, where Jesus compared the unregenerate to goats and the regenerate to sheep. Listen to what Jesus said about the regenerate in Matthew 25:33-34:

He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 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" (Matthew 25:33-34).

Now, we should point out that some Christians mistakenly believe that the regenerate won't be judged at all. This is because John 5:24 can be translated as saying that believers don't come into judgment. But many translations, and most interpreters, rightly take this verse to mean that believers won't be *condemned* in the final judgment. In fact, as we'll see later in this lesson, if the regenerate were to miss the judgment, they wouldn't receive their everlasting rewards.

Now that we've explored the final judgment in terms of its judge and the parties that will stand before him, let's turn to the evidence he'll consider.

EVIDENCE

God will consider every imaginable piece of evidence in order to ensure that perfect justice is upheld. He'll evaluate everything we've done, thought, and said. He'll look into our secret motives. He'll consider the covenants that govern our relationship with him, and the revelation we received in life. He'll listen to witnesses, and weigh extenuating circumstances. Nothing will be left out, and nothing will be inadmissible. And all of this will be done in pursuit of perfect justice, so that every reward and every punishment will perfectly fit everyone who is judged. Ecclesiastes 12:14 summarizes the broad scope of the evidence this way:

God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Matthew 12:36 adds that:

Men will have to give account ... for every careless word they have spoken (Matthew 12:36).

And 1 Corinthians 4:5 says:

He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Similar ideas are found in Psalm 62:12, Proverbs 24:12, Matthew 16:27, and Romans 2:5-11.

As we've mentioned, however, not everyone will be held to the same level of accountability. Rather, we'll each be judged according to our own situations. For instance, those who have sinned more blatantly, and with more knowledge of God's requirements, will be judged more harshly. Listen to how Jesus rebuked those who rejected him in Luke 10:13-14:

Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you (Luke 10:13-14).

Psalm 50:4-6 indicates that Christ will also hold us accountable to our covenant obligations in the judgment. The implication is that those of us who are bound to God in covenant are more greatly obligated to obey him. And James 3:1 says that teachers within the church will be judged even more strictly.

However, we need to be very clear that even those that have never heard the gospel will still be judged and condemned. Their guilt will be less than that of those who

explicitly reject Christ and knowingly rebel against God and his law. But their fates will still be similar.

That's why in Acts 20:26, 27, Paul argued that he was "innocent of the blood of all men" because he had proclaimed "the whole will of God." His point was that if people didn't hear the gospel, they would die in their sins and perish forever. And, if he hadn't done his work as an evangelist, he would bear a measure of guilt for having withheld the words of life from them.

People who have never heard the gospel can, and in many cases will be condemned at the last judgment because they do know something about God and about his righteous requirements of them. Romans 1. The apostle Paul there makes it very explicit that God has revealed things to every human being about himself through creation, so that even those who haven't been blessed with the knowledge of the story of Jesus are without excuse, because they do know things that are true about God and what God expects of them, and as Romans also teaches us, have violated God's law. So, they will be judged based upon the knowledge that they've received, the light of God's character and will that they have received by nature. Some of us have received more through the Scriptures and through the gospel message of Jesus. We're responsible for that. But all men are responsible for the knowledge that they've received about God from creation, and for that they will be held accountable. Jesus makes it very clear in the Gospels that we're going to be responsible for the light that we've received and how we respond to it.

— Rev. Dan Hendley

Having spoken of the final judgment in terms of its judge, parties, and evidence, we're ready to discuss the decisions Jesus will render.

DECISIONS

There are many great injustices in our world. Liars and bullies frequently suffer no consequences for their words and actions. Criminals often remain free. Those that harm or steal from others don't make reparations. People are oppressed. Dedicated Christians are persecuted terribly for their faith. Laws are exploited to harm the very sorts of people they were intended to help. The list could go on and on. But Scripture teaches us to look to the final judgment to right all these wrongs — to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous. The final judgment is the event where God balances the equations, where good really does produce blessing, and where evil results, not in profit, but in curse.

In general, we can say that there are two types of decisions Christ will render: curses for those that have done evil, and blessings for those that have done good. We'll briefly describe each of these decisions, beginning with his curses on the wicked.

Curses

Scripture usually describes the punishment of fallen angels and the punishment of the unregenerate in different places. But their fate is ultimately the same. Put simply, all God's enemies, whether angelic or human, will receive just punishment for their opposition to Christ, for their mistreatment of his people, and for all the sins they've committed in rebellion against God's character and law. As Paul told his readers in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ... He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

When Paul said that the wicked would be punished with everlasting destruction, he didn't mean that they would be annihilated or cease to exist. Rather, he had in mind a crushing punishment that would destroy the lives of the wicked, and that would leave them in a state of devastation forever. We see this same idea in Daniel 12:2, Matthew 25:46, John 5:29, Romans 2:7-12, and Jude 7.

The punishment of the wicked is briefly described in Revelation 20:10-15. There, we're told that Satan will suffer forever in a lake of burning sulfur, also known as the lake of fire. And his followers — including the beast and the false prophet mentioned in Revelation 13–20 — will receive the same punishment. And so will all the unregenerate. Jesus will condemn his enemies to this same everlasting, conscious punishment. In addition, passages like Matthew 11:23, 24, and Hebrews 10:29, teach that the greater their sins, the greater their suffering will be.

Having seen that Christ's decisions will include curses for the wicked, let's look at his blessings on the righteous.

Blessings

Because of God's mercy in Christ, the regenerate will share in the eternal covenant blessings that Jesus earned. By his perfect life, obedient death, and powerful resurrection, those who are *in Christ* will receive things like forgiveness of sins, and eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. And these gracious gifts will be accompanied by rewards for the good works that God foreordained and that the Holy Spirit has accomplished in the lives of the regenerate. This is why, in passages like Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21, and Luke 12:33, 34, Jesus placed so much emphasis on laying up treasures in heaven.

These two types of blessings — gifts and rewards — are illustrated in John’s vision of the final judgment in Revelation 20. This is the same vision in which the demons and the unregenerate are cast into the lake of fire. In Revelation 20:12, 15, John provided this report:

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books... If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:12, 15).

In John’s vision, many books contained the deeds committed by humanity — both good and bad. Sadly, everyone who was judged solely on the basis of those books was condemned, because no one is righteous enough to earn his way into God’s blessings. But there was also a special book called “the book of life.” It contained the names of all the regenerate. That book was a legal record stating that Jesus had paid the price of death for their sins. So, everyone listed in the book of life received God’s gracious gifts like forgiveness and eternal life, along with eternal rewards for the good works that God’s Spirit had produced in their lives.

In the last judgment, anyone who is judged solely on the basis of his or her works will be condemned to the lake of fire. But if we believe in Jesus’ gospel, and repent of our sins, we’ll be completely forgiven. In fact, if that’s true of us, our names are *already* written in the book of life. There’s no way we can be condemned — because we belong to Jesus, and he died to purchase us as his personal covenant inheritance. So, instead of being condemned, we’ll enjoy his blessings forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

Now that we’ve examined the Bible’s teaching on the general resurrection and the final judgment, let’s turn our attention to our last major topic: the new heavens and new earth.

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

The new heavens and new earth will be the last stage of redemptive history — the final event of the consummation of the eschaton. The effects of humanity’s fall into sin will be completely removed. Creation will be completed and perfected as God’s heavenly kingdom expands to encompass the earth. And God’s people will dwell with him and enjoy him forever in its beauty, peace, health and prosperity.

We’ll describe the new heavens and new earth in three steps, focusing first on their purity, second on their newness, and third on their geography. Let’s begin with their purity.

PURITY

In an earlier lesson, we saw that God's plan has always been to fill the earth with his images, and for his images to serve and honor him by ruling over creation on his behalf. We also saw that our rule is governed, in part, by the cultural mandate, which requires us to cultivate the whole planet until everything resembles the Garden of Eden. So far, though, our sin and its consequences have kept us from reaching that goal. But after the final judgment, God will purify creation so that his plans can be fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth.

As we've seen, at the last judgment all the demons and unregenerate will be cast into the lake of fire. Their condemnation will ensure that they don't inhabit or corrupt the new heavens and new earth. But this will only be the first part of creation's purification, because the heavens and earth need to be cleansed, too. The effects of sin permeate creation itself, preventing it from becoming the world God plans for it to be. And the reason lies in God's curse on Adam. In Genesis 3:17-19, God issues this curse:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you ... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food (Genesis 3:17-19).

Moreover, God's curse didn't just impact agriculture. It certainly resulted in problems such as natural disasters and attacks by wild animals. But Paul suggested that the problems went even further. In other words, *all* of creation fell short of the glorious final state God had planned for it — at least until God brings about the final consummation of history. Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 8:20-21:

The creation was subjected to frustration ... by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:20-21).

Peter compared the future purification of the world to the flood that happened in Noah's day. At that time, God removed most of sinful humanity from the planet. But he left his curse on the earth itself, and the demons were still free to cause trouble. But according to Peter, the final judgment will be followed by a fiery cleansing that will remove all the remaining influences and effects of sin. As Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:7-12:

The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men... 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... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat (2 Peter 3:7-12).

According to Peter’s description, God will send fire to destroy the “elements.” Many modern readers associate this term with the physical components of the world, like earth, water, and air. But the Greek word translated “elements” — *stoicheia* — might actually refer to basic principles, or even demonic powers that will be punished forever in the lake of fire. This is how the word is used everywhere else in the New Testament, including in Galatians 4:3, 9, Colossians 2:8, and Hebrews 5:12.

In essence, Peter described a process of purification by fire that would leave the earth uninhabitable, or in his words “laid bare,” but free from sin. We might even say that it will look much like it did in the beginning of Genesis 1, before God formed the universe during the creation week.

Peter talks about the Noachic deluge. What we really have here is, this world will be destroyed as Noah’s world was destroyed. So, we really have the picture of three worlds here: Noah’s world before the flood, the world that came after the flood, and the world that will come after the return of the Lord. And these three worlds are distinguished by two catastrophic events: the flood and the destruction by fire. But God’s only created his world once, and it’s still here, so the Noachic flood did not destroy the world, it purged it; it cleansed it. And the language of purgation is actually fairly common in Scripture. It’s there in Malachi to speak about the world to come. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians to speak in this way. And I think, on balance then, just within the text itself, on the analogy of the Noachic flood, God is not going to destroy his world and replace it with some other world, he is going to cleanse it. Now, a radical cleansing that will be. He’s not simply going to come and pick up the trash, but it will not be a complete destruction.

— Dr. Michael D. Williams

Now that we’ve described the purity of the new heavens and new earth, let’s address their newness.

NEWNESS

The phrase “new heavens and new earth” first appears in Isaiah 65:17. And the phrase “the new heavens and the new earth” occurs in Isaiah 66:22. In both these verses, the Hebrew word for “new” is *chadash*, which can mean either “brand new” or simply “renewed.” In its context in Isaiah, though, it means, “renewed.” Listen to Isaiah 65:17-19:

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind... I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over

Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more (Isaiah 65:17-19).

Notice that the new heavens and new earth would include a newly created Jerusalem. But that Jerusalem would be the same one that already existed, in which people were weeping and crying at the time of Isaiah's ministry. Moreover, God was also going to create his people to make them a joy, meaning that he would radically change their lives, not that he would create a brand new people.

And just as the Hebrew word *chadash* can mean either "brand new" or "renewed," the same thing is true of the Greek word *kainos*. Both 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 use *kainos* when describing the new heaven and new earth. Moreover, the description of the new creation in Revelation 22 also points to the fact that the earth has been renewed rather than replaced. In Revelation 22:3, John said,

No longer will there be any curse (Revelation 22:3).

The phrase "no longer" implies that there once was a curse, but that it will have been removed. In other words, our cursed world will be repaired, not replaced by one that has never been cursed.

A helpful way to think about the newness of the new heavens and new earth is to compare it to the resurrection of the regenerate. Our new bodies will be qualitatively different from our old ones. But they'll also have a great continuity with them. The same bodies that lie in the grave will be raised. And in a similar way, the same heavens and earth that are now corrupted by sin will be remade in the future. But they'll be qualitatively different. Wild animals won't be hostile to each other or to human beings. Disease will be unknown. There will never be another natural disaster. And as Revelation 21:1 indicates, even the saltwater oceans will be replaced by life-giving fresh water.

Another way to think about the newness of the heavens and the earth is to remember God's plan for creation. In Genesis 1:27, 28, which we earlier identified as the cultural mandate, God tasked humanity with cultivating the entire earth. The goal was to expand the borders of the Garden of Eden until it filled the whole world. Since then, humanity has largely succeeded in spreading human culture throughout the earth. But because of our sinfulness, the culture we've built doesn't resemble the paradise of Eden. So, when God renews the earth, he'll first sweep away the sinful work of humanity. And in its place, he'll establish the worldwide garden he's always intended.

When Christians think about creation they have often made some really tragic mistakes. We think about our life here in this world in creation and we think that our salvation is really about us leaving this world. When we think of this world and we think of all of its problems, we think that at the end of time what God really is going to do is dispose of this creation and give us another life in heaven. And so, Christians historically have detached themselves from creation... We need to think more biblically about this. God *loves* his creation, he's devoted to his creation; this creation is something he imagined at the very beginning of time and, therefore, his project in the world is

the reconstitution of creation; it's the restoration of creation. So, when the promise at the end of time is that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, it isn't as if this earth will be thrown away. This earth will be *renewed*. So, as a person who is a Christ follower, I want to be participating in God's devotion to his creation, and I want to anticipate that time when this world is going to be filled with the beauty and glory and wonder that God had intended for it at the very beginning of time.

— Dr. Gary M. Burge

Having looked at the new heavens and new earth from the perspective of their purity and newness, let's briefly survey their geography.

GEOGRAPHY

At least two aspects of the geography of the new heavens and new earth are worth noting. First, they will be a single unified kingdom.

Unified kingdom

Before God created the material universe, which theologians often call the "natural realm," he created and ruled over the *preternatural* realm of heaven. The preternatural realm is the spiritual world of angels and demons. It exists alongside the natural world, and creatures can pass between both realms as God permits them. For example, our souls enter the preternatural realm when we die, and angels and demons influence the natural world in various ways. But as we've mentioned throughout these lessons, God's goal for the natural world has always been for it to become an extension of his preternatural, heavenly kingdom. Listen to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-10:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God to bring his heavenly kingdom to earth, and make the earth as fully obedient to him as heaven already is. Simply put, we're to ask God to extend his preternatural kingdom of heaven to encompass the natural kingdom of earth. In the past, God allowed heaven to intersect with earth only in special places, such as the Most Holy Place in Moses' tabernacle, and later in the temple. As we read in Hebrews 8:5:

[The high priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about

to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:5).

The Most Holy Places in the tabernacle and temple were replicas of God’s heavenly throne room because that’s where heaven and earth intersected. The Most Holy Places existed simultaneously in heaven and on earth. And according to Leviticus 16:2, they offered access to God’s immediate presence. This is why it was only safe to enter them as God commanded. It also explains Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6:1, where he saw the Lord seated on his heavenly throne, while the train of the Lord’s robe flowed down and filled the earthly temple.

But in the new heavens and new earth, God will establish his heavenly throne on earth. This is clear from Revelation 21:1-5 and 22:1-3. And significantly, Revelation 21:22 says that there won’t be a temple, or a Most Holy Place, because God will manifest his presence with his people everywhere. We won’t need to find a special place where heaven and earth intersect. And access won’t be limited only to the high priest once a year. Instead, all God’s people will have access to his presence all the time.

What benefits will we receive from being in God’s immediate presence in the new heavens and the new earth? We’re told in Revelation 22, we shall see God. That is an amazing statement since we’re told elsewhere — the Old Testament — that no man shall see God at any time. And then we’re told that Jesus made God visible. John 1, he became the incarnate God, he tabernacled among us. To be in the presence of God is what the ancients called the “beatific vision,” which means “the happy-making sight.” To see God is to be joyful — they’re synonymous — to see God as redeemed people covered with the righteousness of Christ. To see God *not* covered with the righteousness of Christ is dreadful because of being overwhelmed with his holiness. But we will have such a relationship with him, a oneness with him. He is Abba, Father, Papa. We will be able to be in his presence, to see his face, and to enjoy his presence. It will be the happy-making sight. We will be happier than we’ve ever been, happier than we’ve ever dreamed of being, to be directly in the presence of God.

— Dr. Randy Alcorn

The second aspect of the geography of the new heavens and new earth that we’ll mention is the New Jerusalem.

New Jerusalem

Revelation 21, 22 describes the New Jerusalem as the capital city and centerpiece of the new creation. It will shine with God’s glory, and be adorned with every precious

jewel. And the fact that it will descend from heaven confirms what we've said about the new heavens and new earth being a unified kingdom where God dwells with his people.

God did this in the past in the Garden of Eden. He did it in the days of Moses when he led his people through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. He did it in the days of Solomon when his temple was built. And he has always indwelt his faithful people through his Holy Spirit. But the new heavens and new earth will eclipse all of these, because God will manifest his glory among all of us, and we'll live in his glorious presence forever.

Interestingly, the New Jerusalem will be a perfect cube: 12,000 stadia wide, long, and tall. This is roughly equivalent to 1,400 miles wide, long and tall! Now, John's visions in Revelation are highly symbolic, so we can't be confident that his descriptions will be fulfilled strictly literally. Even so, these symbols indicate that the New Jerusalem will be overwhelmingly large, and sufficient to receive all redeemed humanity into God's presence.

Moreover, the cubic shape of the New Jerusalem also confirms God's abiding presence. In the Old Testament, the Most Holy Places in the tabernacle and the temple were also cubes. So, just as God manifested his glorious holy presence in the Most Holy Places, he'll also manifest his glory to his people in the New Jerusalem. In fact, Revelation 21:23 says that God's glory will be so bright that the New Jerusalem won't even need the sun to shine on it.

We should also point out that the dimensions and descriptions of the New Jerusalem frequently mention the number twelve. In the Old Testament, this number is associated with the twelve tribes of Israel, representing God's people in that age. And in the New Testament, the number twelve is associated with the twelve apostles, representing God's people in the current age. This suggests that in the New Jerusalem, God's people will be present in all their diversity, and perhaps even in all their distinctive cultures. As we read in Revelation 21:24-27:

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it... The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 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 (Revelation 21:24-27).

In the new heavens and new earth, God's creation will be fully renovated and renewed. He'll eradicate sin and all its effects from the world. And he'll extend his heavenly kingdom so that it fills the entire world. As a result, we'll never again face the threat of death, or sickness, or mourning, or crying or pain. But the glory of the new heavens and the new earth won't simply be one of a perfect world. Its *greatest* blessing will be that we'll live in God's presence forever, in perfect peace and fellowship.

The scriptural teaching on the new heavens and the new earth sometimes are a shock to Christians today because often it's thought that we die and go to heaven, which is thought to be some sort of disembodied existence floating on a cloud; whereas actually, the Bible is quite clear that there will be a creation of a new earth as well as a

new heaven, and that we will know a human bodily existence in a new creation. There will be no more sin; there will be no more crying; there will be no more death in this new creation. But when Jesus taught us to pray “Your kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven,” it’s an expectation that we should be working towards the new heaven and the new earth now, but we can, when Jesus comes back, be guaranteed that that work will be complete.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on “The End of the Age,” we’ve examined three major topics of eschatology. We’ve looked at the resurrection of the dead with respect to early doctrinal controversies, God’s authority, and the resurrection’s impact on creation and human beings. We’ve studied the final judgment by looking at Jesus as the judge, the parties he’ll judge, the evidence he’ll review, and the decisions he’ll make. And we’ve considered the new heavens and new earth in terms of their purity, newness and geography.

In this series, we’ve explored several aspects of the doctrine of eschatology. We’ve seen that God is King and Lord over all creation. We’ve looked at the implications of that fact for our lives as regenerate and unregenerate human beings. And we’ve learned that he’s unswervingly guiding history toward its ultimate goal: the consummation of Christ’s messianic kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. There will, of course, be casualties, since Christ will preserve perfect justice in the final judgment. But the outcome will bring glory to God, and immeasurable blessings to us, as we live in his presence forever.