

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Guide

LESSON
FOUR

THE END OF THE AGE



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

Three stages of the eschaton (or “the age to come”):

- Inauguration – the time of Jesus’ life and earthly ministry, including the foundational work of his first century apostles and prophets, when *this age* began to overlap with *the age to come*
- Continuation – the time from just after the inauguration until Jesus returns when we suffer the hardships of *this age* but enjoy the beginning blessings of *the age to come*
- Consummation – the time of Jesus’ return when God will completely end *this age* and permanently replace it with *the age to come*

General eschatology – the study of God’s universal acts of judgment and salvation in the last days

II. General Resurrection (3:56)

General resurrection:

- Called “general” because it includes all human beings that have ever lived.
- Called “resurrection” because the souls of the dead will be reunited with their reconstituted bodies.

The general resurrection can be considered either one of the final events of the intermediate state or one of the first events of the final state.

The general resurrection:

- ends all temporary punishments of unregenerate souls
- ends all temporary blessings of regenerate souls
- prepares all souls for their final punishments and blessings

A. Early Controversies (6:19)

Two schools of thought in Jesus' day about the resurrection of the dead:

- Pharisees – believed that there would be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked
- Sadducees – denied that there would be a physical resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6-8)

The controversy between the Pharisees and Sadducees is rooted in their understanding of Scripture:

- Pharisees – accepted the whole Old Testament as Scripture where the general resurrection is clearly taught (Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2)
- Sadducees – accepted only the five books written by Moses (“the Pentateuch”)

Jesus, Paul, and the early church took the side of the Pharisees and strongly refuted the Sadducees.

Jesus' argument against the Sadducees (Mark 12:18-27):

- God was still in a covenant relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still had to be alive as spirits.
- If they were alive as spirits, then they would eventually be resurrected to inherit their covenant blessings (Matthew 8:11).
- If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were to be resurrected, then the general resurrection was true as well.

Some in the first-century church also denied a universal, bodily resurrection:

- Hymenaeus and Philetus believed that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:18).

Paul said they rejected the truth and destroyed faith.

- Paul's opponents in Corinth found resurrection repulsive (1 Corinthians 15:12-34).

Paul argued:

- If they rejected all resurrections, they must reject Jesus' resurrection and deny the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).
- If they accepted Jesus' resurrection, they had no reason to deny anyone else's resurrection.
- Jesus is the "firstfruits" of the resurrection of the regenerate, so our future resurrections are absolutely certain.

In defending the resurrection of the regenerate, Paul removed any objection to the general resurrection.

B. Divine Authority (13:11)

Divine authority – God’s legal and moral right to carry out his will

1. Hell (13:47)

God rules over hell and has complete control over Satan, the demons, and the unregenerate souls he imprisons there (2 Peter 2:4, 9).

God has the authority and power to summon the unregenerate from hell, and to make them appear before his judgment throne.

2. Heaven (16:27)

Heaven is God’s throne room, where his authority and glory are manifested more openly than anywhere else (Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:34, 23:22; Hebrews 8:1).

The descriptions of God ruling from his throne in heaven appear to be literal (1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Acts 7:55, 56).

Heaven, where God's will is done perfectly, is the model for the new heavens and new earth that God will create at the end of the eschaton (Matthew 6:10).

C. Effect on Creation (19:05)

1. Natural World (19:20)

God uses eschatological events to alter how the natural world works in order to prepare it for his presence.

“God, in His ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure”
(Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 5, section 3).

God's curse on mankind included a curse on the earth itself (Genesis 3:17-18).

Paul taught that the earth will be rescued through the resurrection of redeemed humanity (Romans 8:19-23).

Just as creation was corrupted through God's curse on humanity, it will be purged of corruption through humanity's redemption.

2. Hell (23:19)

The souls of the unregenerate will be removed from hell and returned to their bodies on earth so they can face God's judgment.

The demons may be released either to fight in the rebellion or be summoned to judgment with the unregenerate.

3. Heaven (24:53)

Regenerate souls will return to earth in order to appear before God's judgment throne.

Heaven will be wonderful but God never intended us to live there forever:

- We don't have bodies in heaven, so we aren't complete human beings there.
- Jesus' throne will be on earth, not in heaven, and it's much better to remain in his presence.
- The new heavens and new earth will be even more wonderful.

Heaven will be emptied of angels, and Jesus will bring all the angels with him to collect the regenerate (Matthew 24:31, 25:31).

The general resurrection will place every human and every angel on the earth for the final judgment, leaving heaven and hell empty.

D. Effect on Human Beings (27:34)

The general resurrection will include all human beings that have ever lived:

- whether regenerate or unregenerate (John 5:28-29)
- regardless of whether their bodies have been preserved through burial (Rev 20:13; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; John 11:24)

In our resurrected state, we'll still be the same people we are now — body and soul.

The resurrected bodies of the regenerate will be much more glorious, immortal and powerful than our current bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 49; 1 John 3:2).

The regenerate who are still alive when Jesus returns will be changed in an instant so that their bodies become like those of the resurrected regenerate (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Scripture isn't entirely clear about the unregenerate still alive when Jesus returns:

- They may all be slain in the last battle of Satan's rebellion.
- If they are still living, their bodies will most likely be changed in an instant to be like those of the resurrected unregenerate.

In the general resurrection, every person will exist as an everlasting soul in an everlasting body, prepared to face the final judgment.

III. Final Judgment (35:08)

Final judgment – the eschatological event when God will formally:

- declare the guilt of his enemies for their transgressions and pronounce their everlasting punishment
- declare the innocence of those who are in Christ and pronounce their everlasting gifts and rewards

A. Judge (35:51)

Jesus will be the judge at the final judgment (Matt 25:31-46; John 5:26-30; Acts 10:42, 17:30, 31; 2 Tim 4:1).

The Father has given the right to render final judgment on humanity and angels to the Son (Acts 10:42, 17:31; John 5:26-27).

The elect or righteous angels will assist Christ in his role as judge:

- Matthew 13:41, 42 – In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus compared the angels to gardeners during a harvest.
- Matthew 24:31 – The angels have a corresponding role in gathering the elect, or regenerate, for the day of judgment.
- 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3 – The regenerate will assist the Lord in judging both the unregenerate and the fallen angels.
- Revelation 20:4 – Some of Christ's people will play a more prominent role in the judgment.
- Psalm 149:5-9 – The regenerate will help Jesus carry out the sentences of those he condemns.

B. Parties (40:32)

1. Fallen Angels (40:42)

Demons used to be angels, but they rebelled against God and are now chained in dungeons awaiting Christ's judgment (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

2. Unregenerate (41:27)

At the final judgment, the Lord will separate the unregenerate from the regenerate and will condemn the unregenerate (Rom 2:5-8; Rev 11:18, 20:11-15; Matt 25).

3. Regenerate (42:43)

Jesus will also render judgment on the regenerate (Rom 2:7; Rev 11:18; Matt 25).

C. Evidence (44:08)

God will consider every piece of evidence in order to ensure that perfect justice is upheld (Eccl 12:14; Matt 12:36; 1 Cor 4:5; Psa 62:12; Prov 24:12, Matt 16:27; Rom 2:5-11).

We'll be judged according to our own situations:

- Those who have sinned with more knowledge of God's requirements will be judged more harshly (Luke 10:13-14).
- Those of us who are bound to God in covenant are more greatly obligated to obey him (Psalm 50:4-6).
- Teachers within the church will be judged more strictly (James 3:1).
- Those that have never heard the gospel will still be judged and condemned, although their guilt will be less (Acts 20:26, 27).

D. Decisions (49:04)

Scripture teaches us to look to the final judgment to right all the many great injustices in our world.

Christ will render curses for those that have done evil and blessings for those that have done good.

1. Curses (50:07)

All God's enemies, angelic and human, will receive just punishment for:

- their opposition to Christ
- their mistreatment of his people
- the sins they've committed in rebellion against his character and law

The wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction (2 Thes 1:6-9; Dan 12:2, Matt 25:46; John 5:29; Rom 2:7-12; Jude 7).

- Satan will suffer forever in a lake of burning sulfur, also known as the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15)
- Satan's followers, the unregenerate, and all of Jesus' enemies will receive this same everlasting, conscious punishment.
- The greater their sins, the greater their suffering will be (Matthew 11:23, 24; Hebrews 10:29).

2. Blessings (52:37)

Because of God's mercy in Christ, the regenerate will share in the eternal covenant blessings that Jesus earned.

Believers will be rewarded for the good works that God foreordained and that the Holy Spirit accomplished in them (Matthew 6:20; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33, 34).

In John's vision of the final judgment (Revelation 20):

- Many books contained the deeds committed by humanity.
- Everyone judged solely on the basis of those books was condemned.
- A special book called "the book of life" contained the names of all the regenerate.
- Everyone listed in the book of life received God's gracious gifts and eternal rewards.

IV. New Heavens and New Earth (55:42)

The new heavens and new earth will be the last stage of redemptive history, the final event of the consummation of the eschaton.

A. Purity (56:25)

After the final judgment, God will purify creation so that his plans can be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth.

The effects of sin permeate creation itself, preventing it from becoming the world God plans for it to be (Genesis 3:17-19).

All of creation falls short of the glorious final state God had planned for it until the final consummation of history (Romans 8:20-21).

The final judgment will be followed by a fiery cleansing that will remove all the remaining influences and effects of sin (2 Peter 3:7-12).

God will send fire to destroy the “elements” (*stoicheia*), possibly meaning:

- physical components of creation (earth, water, air)
- basic principles
- demonic powers

This process of purification by fire would leave the earth uninhabitable, or “laid bare,” but also free from sin.

B. Newness (1:02:17)

In its context in Isaiah, the Hebrew word for “new” (*chadash*) in the phrase “new heavens and new earth” means “renewed” (Isaiah 65:17, 66:22).

The Greek word for “new” (*kainos*) also points to the fact that the earth will be renewed rather than replaced (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).

Similar to the resurrected bodies of the regenerate, the same heavens and earth that are now corrupted by sin will be remade in the future.

When God renews the earth, he’ll sweep away the sinful work of humanity and establish the worldwide garden he’s always intended.

C. Geography (1:07:45)**1. Unified kingdom (1:07:56)**

God’s goal for the natural world has always been for it to become an extension of his preternatural, heavenly kingdom (Matthew 6:9-10).

In the past, God allowed heaven to intersect with earth only in special places (e.g., the Most Holy Place).

The Most Holy Places in the tabernacle and temple were replicas of God's heavenly throne room where heaven and earth intersected (Leviticus 16:2; Isaiah 6:1).

In the new heavens and new earth, God will establish his heavenly throne on earth and will manifest his presence everywhere (Revelation 21:1-5, 22; 22:1-3).

2. New Jerusalem (1:12:56)

The New Jerusalem will be the capital city and centerpiece of the new creation (Revelation 21, 22). It will:

- shine with God's glory.
- descend from heaven and be a unified kingdom where God dwells with his people.
- be a perfect cube that is large enough for all redeemed humanity, confirming God's abiding presence.

The dimensions and descriptions of the New Jerusalem frequently mention the number twelve:

- In the Old Testament, twelve is associated with the twelve tribes of Israel, representing God's people in that age.
- In the New Testament, twelve is associated with the twelve apostles, representing God's people in the current age.

This reference suggests that in the New Jerusalem, God's people will be present in all their diversity (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.
- He'll extend his heavenly kingdom so that it fills the entire world.
- We'll never again face death, sickness, mourning, crying or pain.
- We'll live in God's presence forever, in perfect peace and fellowship.

V. Conclusion (1:17:44)

11. Explain some of the geography of the new heavens and new earth. How will the natural and supernatural realms become a unified kingdom? What does Scripture tell us about the New Jerusalem?

Application Questions

1. Why is it important to affirm the physical resurrection of the body?
2. Scripture teaches that God has complete authority over both heaven and hell. How does this challenge the popular notion that hell is controlled by Satan?
3. What are some common misperceptions about hell? Respond to at least three of these misperceptions using biblical references to support your answers.
4. What do the Bible's descriptions of God's heavenly throne room tell us about God's character?
5. Read Romans 8:19-23. What do you think Paul meant when he said that creation is "groaning" and that believers "groan inwardly"? What kinds of things cause us to groan as we "wait eagerly for ... the redemption of our bodies"?
6. Many Christians look forward to going to heaven, but Scripture tells us that God has something even better for us in the new heavens and new earth. How might this change the way you talk about the future God has planned for humanity?
7. Why has God chosen to restore our bodies to our souls in the general resurrection rather than leaving us as disembodied spirits?
8. Is the knowledge that Jesus will be your judge a comforting thought to you or a fearful one? Why?
9. James 3:1 says that teachers within the church will be judged even more strictly than other believers. How does this challenge you in your own ministries of preaching and teaching?
10. The apostle Paul taught that those who have never heard the gospel will still be judged and condemned at the final judgment. How does this urge you to be more faithful in your personal witness and in the corporate witness of your church?
11. The final judgment is intended to punish the wicked and reward the righteous. How do you feel about preaching the forgiveness of sins through Christ to murderers and other criminals? Is there anyone who doesn't deserve to hear the gospel? Explain your answer.
12. What do you look forward to most in the new heavens and new earth?
13. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

Apostles' Creed – A statement of the Christian faith formulated and written to unify the basic tenets of essential Christian theology (ca. 2nd to 6th centuries A.D.)

Book of Life – A special book mentioned in John's vision of the final judgment that contains the names of all those who will live in God's glorious presence for eternity

chadash – Hebrew word (transliteration) meaning either "new" or "renewed"

consummation – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

continuation – Second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

cultural mandate – The command in Genesis 1:28 instructing humanity to develop and rule the creation to display God's glory

divine authority – God's legal and moral right to carry out his will

elect – Term used for those chosen by God for covenant blessings

eschatology – The study or doctrine of the last days

eschaton – The last stage of world history; the last or latter days

final judgment – The eschatological event when God will formally declare the guilt of his enemies and pronounce their everlasting punishment, and formally declare the innocence of those who are in Christ and pronounce their everlasting rewards

firstfruits – The first yield of a harvest or endeavor; often presented to God as an offering of gratitude

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

general resurrection – The resurrection of all people in order to face God's final judgment when Christ returns in glory

inauguration – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

intermediate state – The state between our lives on earth now and the lives we will have in the resurrection

kainos – Greek word (transliteration) meaning "new" or "new in quality"

Most Holy Place – A cube-shaped inner room of the tabernacle and temple in Jerusalem, separated by a large veil, that offered access to God's holy presence; also called "the Holy of Holies"

new heavens and new earth – The last stage of redemptive history when creation will be completed and perfected; God's eternal kingdom where his people will dwell with him forever in perfect peace and fellowship

New Jerusalem – The capital city and centerpiece of the new creation where God will establish his heavenly throne and manifest his glory to his people

Nicene Creed – Creed written by a council held in Nicaea in A.D. 325; an expansion of the Apostles' Creed that affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity and refuted Arianism

Pharisees – Jewish religious sect from the first century known for their strict observance of the Law; believed in the future resurrection, but also believed that God would not intervene until Israel became obedient to the Law

preternatural – The realm of existence that is beyond or beside nature; includes invisible spirits such as angels and demons

Sadducees – Jewish sect at the time of Christ that only adhered to the five books written by Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy) and did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection of the dead

tabernacle – Movable tent in which the Ark of the Covenant was kept and in which God showed his special presence to Israel

temple – Building in Jerusalem where the Israelites worshiped God and where God promised to be present with his people in a special way; destroyed in 586 B.C., later rebuilt, and destroyed again in A.D. 70

the age to come – Phrase used by rabbis and leaders in Israel to describe the future age of righteousness, love, joy and peace that would follow the exile; time when all of God's purposes for history would be fulfilled

this age – Phrase used by rabbis and leaders in Israel to describe the present age of sin, suffering and death

Westminster Confession of Faith – An ecumenical doctrinal summary composed by the Westminster Assembly of Divines and published in 1647