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**What the Bible Says About the Future: ISBN 1-59872-275-1**

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## *What Eternity Will Be Like*

Eternity encompasses all existence beyond the dissolution of the present heavens and earth, which will occur after the close of the millennium. Eternity is the second phase of God's visible kingdom. Unlike the first phase – the millennium – which will last for only a thousand years, the eternal phase of the kingdom will endure forever (see Figure 9.1, p. 233). Eternity represents a new start for the redeemed of the human family – an existence without pain, sorrow, or death, in perfect uninterrupted fellowship with God forever.

### ***Biblical Background***

The Old Testament conception of eternity is sketchy. While the Old Testament saints did know of the resurrection (cf. Job 19:23-25 and Dan. 12:2), they seem to have had no concept of either Heaven (as the eternal abode of the saints) or Hell (as a place of torment). Six Hebrew words are translated “heaven” or “heavens” in the AV – *galgal* [1 time], *arabah* [1 time], *aripîm* [1 time], *shahaq* [2 times], *shamayim* [419 times], and *shemayin* [32 times] – with the exceptions of *arabah* and *aripîm*, which should be translated “deserts” and “clouds” respectively, all the rest seem to be references to the physical heavens of the universe – either the sky or the heavens beyond, in which the stars are set. Likewise, there is one Hebrew word that is translated “Hell” in the AV – *sheol* [31 times]. However, “sheol” is viewed simply as the place of the dead, both the righteous and the unrighteous. Most recent versions simply transliterate the word “sheol” into English rather than translating it as “Hell,” since the places of the righteous and unrighteous dead are not clearly distinguished in the Old Testament. Interestingly, there is a reference to the new heavens and earth in Isaiah (65:17), though it is not there differentiated from the millennium.

It was not until the teaching of Christ that the concepts of Heaven and Hell came into sharp focus (on Heaven *cf.* Matt. 5:16,20,34; 6:9,20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:32-33; 19:21; 22:30; 23:9; Jn. 3:13,31; 6:33,38,41,42,50,58; 14:1-3; on Hell *cf.* Matt. 5:22,29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Lk. 16:23). Not only was Christ the first person in the New Testament to expound the doctrine of Heaven, He is the source of virtually everything revealed about Hell. Hell [Gr., *gehenna*] is equated with the Lake of Fire and should be distinguished from “Hades,” which is the interim abode of the dead – though since the cross, only the unrighteous dead are in Hades (*cf.* Rev. 20:13). [The Old Testament believers’ sins were not removed until Christ’s sacrifice actually took place (Heb. 9:15-17); prior to that time they were merely “covered” (the Hebrew word *kaphar*, translated “atonement” is ultimately the word from which our English word “cover” is derived). Jesus’ teaching in Luke 19:19-31 and His conversation with the repentant thief while on the cross (Lk. 23:43) both indicate that the Old Testament saints, as of the time He spoke, had not yet been received into Heaven, but were in a place He termed “Paradise,” or “Abraham’s bosom” That Paul refers to Heaven as “paradise” in 2 Corinthians 12:4 is not an argument that the two are the same, since there is no reason why there could not have been two locations for paradise – one before the cross and another afterward. Apparently Jesus, at His death, descended into Hades (the same as the Hebrew “*Sheol*,” a part of which contained the souls of all the saints who had died prior to the cross) and afterward, when He ascended to the Father, He emptied Sheol of the souls of the saints, transferring them to Heaven (Eph. 4:8). This view of Paradise was once commonly taught, but has been abandoned by some dispensationalists due to the influence of covenantal assumptions regarding the nature of salvation in the Old Testament; nevertheless, it still seems to be the best interpretation of the biblical data (*see*, Appendix E: *Regeneration and Indwelling in the Old Testament*, p. 337).]

The New Testament letters add little new insight concerning either Heaven or Hell, even though Heaven is frequently mentioned. It is not until we come to the book of Revelation that we find additional significant information concerning Heaven and Hell. Throughout the book of Revelation, John describes various scenes in Heaven (4:1-6:17; 7:9-8:6; 10:1-11; 15:1-8; 19:1-10). He also gives a rather detailed description of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem,

which will descend to the new earth after the millennium (Rev. 21:1-22:5). While the New Jerusalem isn't called "Heaven," the description given leaves little doubt as to its identification, since it is the eternal abode of the saints. John also revealed that Hades—the interim abode of the unrighteous dead—will be replaced by an eternal place of damnation referred to as, "the Lake of Fire" (Rev. 20:14-15). As indicated previously, the Lake of Fire is apparently the place Jesus had in mind when He used the term *gehenna* ("Hell"). Another significant contribution of Revelation is the distinction made between the millennium and eternity. This distinction is not made anywhere else in Scripture. Also, it is the book of Revelation that gives the most detailed account of the final judgment of the unrighteous (Rev. 20:11-15).

### ***Events From the Close of the Millennium to the Dissolution of the Present Heavens and Earth***

The millennium will close with the defeat of those who follow Satan in the final rebellion (Rev. 20:7-9). As a result of this rebellion, a huge number of people will perish when fire descends from heaven; and Satan, presumably along with his host of fallen angels, will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10). It is at this point that God will dissolve the present world. All these events, indeed all events in human history to this point, occur during the present temporal phase of earth's history (prior to the earth's re-creation). However, events that follow the dissolving of the present world occur in what is ordinarily referred to as "eternity." We must be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking there is no time in eternity. Only God is eternal, all of His creation is, and will forever be, temporal. Those who know God will live forever, not because they will become eternal, but because the only Eternal One will forever impart His life to them.

### ***The Dissolution of the Present Heavens and Earth***

The first mention of the new heavens and earth occurs in Isaiah 65:1. However, as was mentioned previously, nothing is there revealed concerning this new creation, neither events, nor characteristics. (The characteristics that are mentioned in Isaiah 65:2-25

refer not to eternity, but to the millennium; note the mention of death in verse 20, which could not be a characteristic of eternity, *cf.* Rev. 21:4.) As was observed earlier, the Old Testament prophets did not foresee the distinction between the millennium and eternity; thus, these two truths were intertwined in Isaiah's prophecy. It is John's explanation in Revelation that allows us to differentiate these two phases of the future visible kingdom of God.

In Revelation we learn that Satan's damnation in the Lake of Fire is the final event prior to the dissolution of the present heavens and earth. Obviously, at the dissolving of the present physical universe, any unredeemed people will perish physically. While it cannot be known for certain, it is possible the fire that falls from heaven upon the rebellious at the end of the millennium is itself the dissolving process set in motion. In any case, no unsaved person will survive this event, as can be inferred from the fact that the unrighteous will be called up from the dead at the final judgment — this is the second resurrection and includes only the unredeemed (*cf.* Rev. 20:12-15). Peter, in relating this truth to the day of the Lord, which starts sometime in the tribulation and extends into eternity, gives us a glimpse into the cataclysmic end of the present universe when he says:

[2 Pt. 3:7-13] By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. . . . But the day of the LORD will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. . . . That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The present heavens and earth will be dissolved and replaced by the new creation (a new universe) suited for eternity. However, before unveiling the new heavens and earth, one final matter must be attended to — the final judgment of the unrighteous.

## *The Final Judgment of the Unrighteous*

Revelation contains the only extended account of this judgment. John says:

[20:12-18] And 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. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

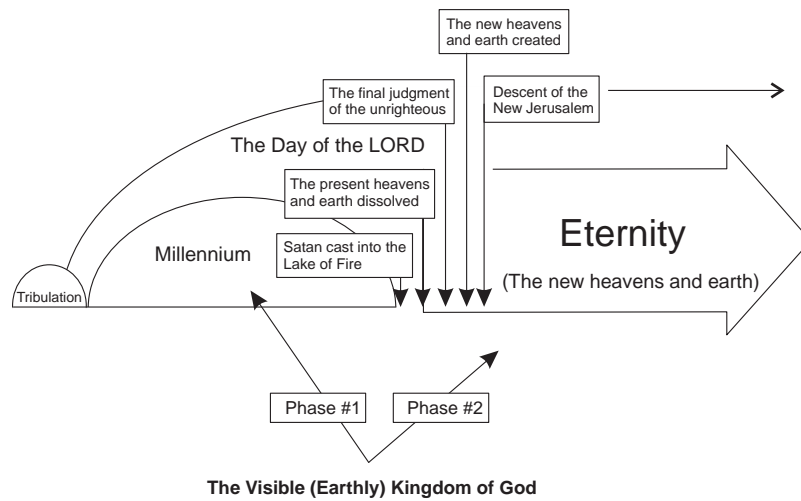
Several observations can be made from this account. 1) The objects of judgment are the resurrected dead (v. 12), that is, the unrighteous dead (the righteous dead will have been resurrected at the beginning of the millennium). At this resurrection the unrighteous will be given a body suited for eternity in the Lake of Fire. 2) Every unredeemed person will be present at this judgment (vv. 13-14). 3) The prior status of those to be judged is immaterial. They will all be judged alike (v. 12). 4) The two items to be established at this judgment are that the individual is a sinner deserving of eternal punishment, which will be established by an examination of his deeds (*cf.* vv. 12-13), and that he or she has not been redeemed so as to be forgiven (vv. 12-13). This final step in the proceeding — the determination that the sinner is unredeemed and unforgiven — will be accomplished by consulting the Book of Life, which contains the names of all the redeemed. For those present the search will be a formality, for they are all unsaved, as is evident by their presence at this particular judgment; yet this proceeding will demonstrate the justice of God's sentence upon them. 5) This final judgment will not be a summary proceeding, rather each individual will be examined according to his or her own moral choices. 6) The outcome of this judgment will be that all the unredeemed will be cast into the Lake of Fire — which is the second death (v. 14). The term "second death" is not intended to convey the notion that the unrighteous will cease to have conscious existence at some point, as has been suggested by

some (a doctrine referred to as “annihilationism”). As terrible as it is, Scripture is explicit that the lost will spend eternity in conscious awareness of their circumstance (Matt. 25:41-46).

We are given no indication as to how long it will take to complete this judgment; however, once the judgment is complete all the unrighteous, including Satan and his angels—having been judged earlier (*cf.* Rev. 20:10)—will be in the Lake of Fire where they will remain forever in conscious torment, completely beyond all hope. God’s creation will have been purged of all evil and His eternal holiness, righteousness, and justice will have been vindicated to the fullest extent, for all eternity.

### *The New Heavens and Earth*

The new heavens and earth are mentioned by Isaiah (65:1), Peter (2 Pt. 3:13), and John (Rev. 21:1); however, only John reveals detailed information concerning the new creation, and much of that information must be extrapolated from his description of the New Jerusalem. The following information is gleaned from John’s description in Revelation 21-22. 1) The new earth will have no sea (oceans), *cf.* 21:1, and will consequently have greater land area (assuming the new earth is the same size as the original). 2) It will be a world without pain, suffering or sadness (21:4). 3) The new heavens and earth represent a completely new material world, not simply a renovation of the present earth (21:5, *cf.* 20:11, 21:1). 4) There will be nothing unclean or sinful in the new creation (21:8,7). 5) The heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, will be the centerpiece of the new earth (21:2-22:5). 6) The new creation will abound in substances of intrinsic beauty (21:18-21). 7) Apparently, the new earth will no longer be dependent upon the light of the sun and moon (21:23; 22:5). 8) God’s dwelling will forever be with man upon the new earth (21:3,22-23). 9) There is indication that the new earth will be populated by nations of redeemed people (21:24-26). 10) In the vicinity of the New Jerusalem, and possibly the entire earth, there will no longer be any night, only eternal day (21:25; 22:5). 11) The curse, having been ameliorated during the millennium, will be entirely absent from the new creation (22:3, *cf.* Rom. 8:18-21). 12) The chief concern of the saints on the new



**Figure 9.1 Eternity**

Eternity represents the second phase of the visible aspect of the kingdom of God, and begins with the dissolution of the present universe. After the final judgment of the unrighteous, God will create new heavens and a new earth. The heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, will descend to the earth and God will dwell with His redeemed forever.

earth will be to worship and serve Christ, and reign with Him forever, though the particulars of what is involved in this reign are not specified (22:3-5).

### *The New Jerusalem*

The bulk of John's description of the new heavens and earth is occupied with the description of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-22:5). As mentioned above, statements and inferences taken from the description of the New Jerusalem are the chief source of information about the new heavens and earth, and consequently of eternity itself.

John's description of the New Jerusalem, in Revelation 21:1-22:5, yields the following information. 1) The New Jerusalem apparently will not descend until the new earth is prepared (21:1). 2) The New Jerusalem is both the home of the saints and the location of God's throne (Rev. 21:3,22-23; 22:1-5). The city will rest upon the earth signifying that Heaven, as the place from which God rules all creation, will itself be relocated to the new earth. The significance of this might not be readily apparent to contemporary Christians who have grown accustomed to thinking of God in ubiquitous terms; however, God's manifest presence, previously visible only in Heaven, will at this time dwell on the earth in the Holy City. 3) The beauty and design of the heavenly city staggers the imagination. John gives this description:

[Rev. 21:9-23] One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shown with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure

the city, its gates and its wall. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia [1400 miles, or about 2200 kilometers] in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick [200 feet, or 65 meters], by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city wall were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. [Explanations in brackets were added.]

4) Both Israel and the church are symbolically represented, yet distinctly, in the construction and decoration of the city. Israel is represented by the twelve gates, each of which has the name of one of the tribes written upon it (v. 12), and the church is represented in that the twelve foundation stones of the city each have written upon it the name of one of the twelve apostles (v. 14). 5) John thought it significant that the city contains no temple structure (v. 22). We should not be surprised at this; after all, a temple is a place where sinful people meet with a holy God. However, such will not be the case in eternity, there will be no sin and no barrier between God and man. The New Jerusalem will have no more need of a temple than did the Garden of Eden. In Eden, God and man walked together as friends. In the Heavenly City, we will walk together with Christ in an even more intimate relationship, such that the closest earthly analogy is marriage (v. 9, *cf.* Eph. 5:22-32).

## *Life in Eternity*

Those who enter the eternal kingdom will be in need of healing, having witnessed the eternal damnation of the unrighteous, which in most every case will involve the eternal loss of loved ones—sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends, and neighbors. There will most assuredly be grief at this great personal loss, but the legacy of sin and death will not be allowed to burden the hearts of the redeemed in eternity; God will wipe away every tear. Death will be defeated and will become only a distant memory. There will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain, all these will fade into the dim past as God opens before His redeemed a glorious future (Rev. 21:4). He will create all things new. His healing will leave no area of life untouched. The redeemed of the human family will be free to begin again, this time with no possibility of failure (Rev. 21:5). Sin and death will be forever vanquished. On the heels of so great a message, the New Testament draws to a close with these words:

[Rev. 21:6-22:17] . . .It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. . . .And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.