

What Will Heaven Be Like?

Revelation 5:9-10

King of Kings! (Gospel of Matthew Series)

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“Since where God dwells, there heaven is, we conclude that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be merged.

Believers will therefore continue to be in heaven as they continue to live on the New Earth.”

Anthony Hoekema



pen your Bible to **Revelation 5**. We are continuing our series on “Heaven.” This morning we are looking at a message entitled: “What Will Heaven Be Like?”

The Earth is the Lord’s

Abraham Kuyper famously said, “There is not one inch in the entire area of our human life about which Christ, who is Sovereign of all, does not cry out, “Mine!” “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” Man lost dominion on the earth, and the earth became a place of brokenness and iniquity. But the Lord is going to renew the earth one day.

If God were to end history and reign forever in a distant Heaven, Earth would be remembered as a graveyard of sin and failure. Instead, Earth will be redeemed and resurrected. In the end it will be a far greater world, even for having gone through the birth pains of suffering and sin—“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—” (**1 Cor. 2:9**). God owns the earth and He will take it back when heaven descends to earth at Jesus’ coming.

Hoekema: Earth and Heaven One

Listen to the words of Anthony Hoekema, “Since where God dwells, there heaven is, we conclude that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be merged. Believers will therefore continue to be in heaven as they continue to live on the New Earth.” Heaven and Earth will become one!

But what will we be like on the New Earth in eternity?

I. The People of the New Heaven and Earth.

The Abrahamic Covenant

When we think of the population of inhabitants in the New Heaven and Earth, we need to go all the way back to the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1-3, “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.””

Remember that God destroyed the human race with a worldwide flood, and started again with **Noah**. But not long after, the people of the earth again became proud, and tried to build a tower to heaven, believing that “nothing that they propose to do would be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6).

So God scattered them by confusing their languages and then started over again with **Abraham**. And through Abraham God promised to bless “all the families of the earth.” Remember,

A Promise to a Barren Woman

God promised that Abraham’s seed would bless all nations when Sarah was **childless** and **barren**! But you know the story, and God gave Sarah life in her womb. Eventually, that meant Jesus would come through Abraham’s family. And through Jesus all nations would be blessed!

What God meant for a curse at Babel will be a blessing in eternity. It seems very clear from Revelation 5:9-10 that we will retain our ethnic identities in the New Heaven and Earth.

What About Ethnic Identities?

Consider in Revelation 5:9-10 the song the elders sing to the Lamb:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll

and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God

from every tribe and language and people and nation,

10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,

and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10).

Every People, Family, and Nation

Will we have ethnic identities in the New Earth? According to this passage, absolutely. Is the risen Jesus Jewish? Certainly. Will we know he’s Jewish? Of course. Our resurrected DNA will be unflawed, but it will preserve our God-designed uniquenesses, racial and otherwise.

Tribe refers to a person’s clan and family lineage. People refers to race. Nation refers to those who share a national identity and culture.

We read in Revelation 21:24,26, “the kings of the earth will bring their glory into [the New Jerusalem]... 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.”

Dutch theologian **Herman Bavinck** said of the New Earth, “All those nations—each in accordance with its own distinct national character—bring into the new Jerusalem all they have received from God in the way of glory and honor.”¹

Like the God’s church on earth now, the New Jerusalem will be a melting pot of ethnic diversity. And like Christ’s church, the groups in the New Jerusalem will be united by their common worship of King Jesus. We will delight in each other’s differences, never resent or be frightened by them.

¹ Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*,

One New Humanity

Unfortunately, in this world under the Curse, there's often hostility between races and nations. They're divided by sin, intolerant of differences in appearance, language, and culture. Speaking of the racial divide between Jews and Gentiles, Paul says, "For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new [humanity] in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Paul goes further in **Galatians 3:26-27** and says that not only are racial divisions healed in Christ, but also gender divisions and societal divisions. Listen to Paul in **Gal. 3:26**, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

There will be no racial, societal or gender prejudice in Heaven. There will be no illusions of racial or national superiority, no disputes over borders.

A Corporate Aspect to God's Image

Some scholars argue that the image of God has a corporate dimension. Richard Mouw said we begin to see the glorious beauty of God as we see the uniqueness of all nations in the New Earth: "There is no one human individual or group who can fully bear or manifest all that is [reflected] in the image of God, so that there is a sense in which that image is collectively possessed [and displayed]. The image of God is, as it were, parceled out among the [all the redeemed] peoples of the [New] Earth. By looking at different individuals and groups we get glimpses of different aspects of the full image of God."²

If this is true, and I believe it may be, then racism is not only an injustice toward people but also a rejection of God's very nature. On the New Earth we'll never celebrate sin, but we'll celebrate diversity in the biblical sense. We'll never try to keep people out. We'll welcome them in, exercising hospitality to every traveler. Peace on Earth will be rooted in our common ruler, Christ the King,

Christ will bring Peace on Earth not by the abolition of our differences but by a unifying loyalty to the King, a loyalty that transcends differences—and is enriched by them. The kings and leaders of nations who have put their trust in Christ will be united with the King of Righteousness.

As Isaiah says in **Isaiah 2:4**, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Living Hope - Multicultural

It is for this reason that we want to see Living Hope Bible Church further expand as a multicultural church that looks like heaven! We need to realize that not just your family or ethnicity or culture will be in heaven. Men and women from every tribe, tongue, people and nation will dwell there.

What can you do to expand God's multicultural mission at Living Hope?

1. You can learn another language.
2. You can keep yourself informed on the mission of God around the world. We just returned from Brazil, and it is amazing where there are about 44 million Protestants.

² Richard Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 47.

The Gospel is expanding by leaps and bounds. In Mexico, new churches are being established on a daily basis.

3. You can pray for more multicultural ministries will be established at LHBC. Currently we have outreaches in both Korean and Spanish. May God expand our horizons!

II. The **Culture** of the New Heaven and Earth.

Fantastic Culture

Can you imagine the fantastic culture on the New Heaven and Earth? The eternal Heaven, on the New Earth, will be a physical environment with physical people who work, eat, converse, and hold positions of authority. We will travel across the New Earth. We will worship together. Leaders of nations will bring the splendor of different cultures into the New Earth where Jesus Christ reigns on His throne.

Just imagine the most beautiful of art, the most brilliant music, and the most reasoned literature, crafts of every kind, technology, clothing, jewelry, education, and even various kinds of foods from every culture—all these things will have a part of society and culture in the New Earth.

In eternity, we will continue to function as God's image-bearers. As the new humanity in Christ we will continue to reflect our Lord and God by serving him with our body and mind and our imaginations. Creativity will not diminish but increase!

The greatest art remembered on this earth will have an amateur feel in the New Earth. Cities will be built and governments will be established under King Jesus.

Our Language in the New Heaven and Earth?

What language will we speak in the New Earth? Will there be one central language in Heaven, a language we'll all speak and understand? (Todos sabemos que Español es el idioma celestial! —*We all know Spanish is the heavenly language!*”) Scripture says of those with different languages, “They cried out in a loud voice” (Revelation 7:10). This singular “voice” implies a shared language.

God says of many different nations, “You have made them to be a kingdom” (Revelation 5:10). One kingdom, one world, one government. This may imply one shared central language.

The Tower of Babel Reversed

God could allow us to understand all languages even if we can't speak them. But Scripture seems to suggest more. The Babel account offers clues as to the importance of shared language in an ideal society. “Now the whole earth had one language and the same words... 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”... 6 And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” (Genesis 11:1, 4, 6).

God then confused their language and dispersed them, so their great city went unfinished. Notice that all people originally shared one language, which empowered them to cooperate together in great achievements. But because they were united in self-glorification rather than God-glorification, they used their united language for rebellion and self-destruction. Because the

people weren't united around their God-designed purpose to rule the earth for his glory, God removed their shared language.

In reversing the Curse, **God will reverse Babel**. Instead of people building a city for **their** own glory, God will build a city for them, uniting them for **His** glory. In Genesis 11 the people attempted to connect Earth to Heaven with their city, making Heaven one with Earth. In Revelation 21 God brings Heaven down to Earth, making Earth one with Heaven.

We May Also Keep Our Languages

Nonetheless, it seems likely that in addition to our common language, we will maintain our current languages. Although the confusion of languages at Babel was originally a curse, the gatherings in Heaven of people of every nation, tribe, and language show that God will unite forever the people divided at Babel—not by eliminating their differences, but by eliminating sin, suspicion, and hostility.

Our Diversity Will Serve Everyone's Good

Tribes, peoples, and nations will all make their own particular contribution to the enrichment of life in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 21:24-26). Daniel prophesied that the Messiah would be "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (Daniel 7:14). Just as the church's diversity of gifts serves the good of others (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), so our diversity will serve everyone's good in the new universe.

III. The Landscape of the New Heaven and Earth.

Earthly Beauty will be Even Deeper

Next week we will see how the new creation is in direct fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant and all the land promises of the Old Testament. I can't wait to see the new creation. What will it be like?

The earthly beauty we now see won't be lost. We won't trade Earth's beauty for Heaven's but retain Earth's beauty and gain even deeper beauty. As we will live forever with the people of this world—redeemed—we will enjoy forever the beauties of this world—redeemed.

C.S. Lewis rightly said, "In the truest sense, Christian pilgrims have the best of both worlds. We have joy whenever this world reminds us of the next, and we take solace whenever it does not."

The Continuity of the Earth

In becoming new, will the old Earth retain much of what it once was? Yes! Theologians call this the idea of "continuity."

The New Earth in Scripture is pictured to be very much like the old Earth, yet completely redeemed. One theologian put it this way: "The world into which we shall enter in at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is... not *another* world [entirely]; it is this world [renewed], this heaven,

this earth; both, however, passed away and renewed. It is these forests, these fields, these cities, these streets, these people, that will be the scene of redemption.”³

Shadowlands

You see our current world is just the broken “shadowlands” of what we once had in Eden.

The Beasts Are Now Gentle

We get a picture of the New Earth in Isaiah 11 where the beasts lose their beastliness. The wolf and the lion lie down in peace together. Look at **Isaiah 11:6-9**,

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
9 They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

Children and Animals

People often ask me whether animals will be in Heaven. Their second question, is whether they’ll ever see their pets again. To some people, these are merely sentimental questions. To others, they are very important. Children especially want to know the answers. What do we tell them when they ask?

First of all, mankind and animals will enjoy the New Earth in perfect harmony and submission to God, and man will once again have dominion over the earth. It seems that perhaps we may even be raising the infant children that died so young here on earth.

And now mankind will have such dominion over the earth that even a child that is barely weaned from his mother will be able to demonstrate that dominion by playing in the dens of snakes and not being harmed!

Cities in the New Earth

And of course there will be cities in the New Earth. We’ve already spoken of the New Jerusalem, but there will be local governments and cities as well. We read in **Revelation 2:26**, “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.” And in **Luke 19:17**, Jesus says to some on the Last Day, “Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.”

And so it seems that there will be cities, populations, and architecture throughout the New Earth. Perhaps you are a city dweller, or perhaps you are from the country. Both will be featured in the New Earth.

³ Edward Thurneysen, quoted in J. A. Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 218–19.

Conclusion

What a joy that this week we had two couples get engaged in our congregation. When that groom is shaking up here at the front he will see the most beautiful earthly vision of a woman he'll ever see coming down that aisle. The only sight that supersedes that sight is the sight of Jesus. On that day, when heaven descends from to earth, we will have a perfect Bridegroom and He will have a radiant, spotless Bride!