

# The Return of the King

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** The Christian's ultimate hope is God's presence in a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells.

Revelation is a book about the true, lasting hope we have in Christ Jesus. While there are some chilling scenes and images in the book, they are not the focus. We cannot discount God's coming judgment on the world, but ultimately Revelation is not about that. Revelation is about the return of Jesus. Jesus is victorious in the end, and so are we. Jesus will return to make all things new. He will wipe away every tear from every eye, and He will put death to death once and for all. And we will be with Him forever.



What do you long for most when you think of eternity?

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Finally, we turn our attention to the return of Jesus and when all things will be restored. We will see in this session that what sin and rebellion smashed in Eden, Jesus will put back together again better than new. Jesus will make all things new and separate all unbelievers from believers. Those who refused to trust in Christ will be judged, but those who have trusted in Him will live with God under His loving rule forever, according to God's plan in creation.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

*99. New Heavens and New Earth*

When Christ returns and the children of God are revealed, the creation itself will be made new. Like the resurrected bodies that Christians will one day receive, the physical world itself will undergo a similar transformation, so much so that the Scriptures describe it as a new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:13). Scripture describes the new earth as a city (Rev. 21:10-11, 21-26) and as a physical place that will include eating and drinking (Luke 22:18; Rev. 19:9). Best of all, Christ will be all and in all, and we shall see Him face to face.

## 1. Christ will return to make all things new (Rev. 21:1-5).

Do you ever sense some kind of solidarity between people and statues made in their likeness? While a bronze statue is far from actually being the living human person it represents, we nonetheless detect a real connection between the two. Similarly, there is a real connection between God and ourselves. You and I are made in the image of God, yet we are far from actually being God. This is why God is making all things new—to get us back to a full, image-bearing relationship with Him.

*<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

*<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

Sometimes we need to look to the past to understand the future. These verses in Revelation provide one of those times. Back in the garden of Eden, the serpent posed a question to Eve: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1). To which Eve replied, “God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die’” (3:3). Satan proceeded to do what he does best—twist the words of God just enough to make us believe the lie ourselves. He told Eve, simply, that God did not want her to be like Him. A bold-faced lie. And she ate. Eve, along with her husband, traded eternal freedom for the bondage found in that piece of fruit.

In Adam and Eve’s singular act of rebellion, the image of God was shattered, and we live with that reality today (Rom. 5:12). Satan disguised himself as a creature that was under the rule of humankind—a serpent—and overthrew his masters by convincing them that they needed more than what they had already been given. And they lost it all.



In what ways do people continue to try to be like God in their own efforts?

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In an eerily similar scene in Matthew 4, Jesus *was led* by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted*. Jesus wasn't caught off guard by the devil's appearance. Satan didn't trap Jesus; Jesus trapped Satan. God the Son, the very image of God (Col. 1:15), stepped into human history as a man to restore the image and likeness of God in humankind that had been fractured by the fall of Adam and Eve. In the wilderness, Jesus snatched the keys to creation back from the enemy who had stolen them so long ago.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit that we might be renewed in the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Jesus even tells His disciples (and us by extension) that through the Holy Spirit, they would do greater works than He did (John 14:12-17).

This all sounds astounding on the surface—and it is. But Jesus is merely reminding us that He came to destroy darkness and that we would take the gospel, the good news of redemption, to the world by His authority. As Jesus' emissary within believers, the Spirit empowers us to advance the gospel to the ends of the earth, pointing to the day when the King of kings will reign over the completely restored creation, where the effects of Adam and Eve's blunder are mere memories.



### Voices from the Church

"Disciples imitate the Son, who is the definitive image of God and dramatic representation of God's being (Heb. 1:3) when they too glorify God in their bodies by performing works of grateful obedience (1 Cor. 6:20)."<sup>1</sup>

—Kevin J. Vanhoozer

By understanding the past—the sin of Adam and Eve, the incarnation of God's Son, Jesus' ascension to the throne of the universe, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to us—we understand how and why God is renewing all things. More than that, we understand why it is important to live in light of eternity now. All things are broken, but one day God will make all things new.



How should the future hope of restoration and eternity impact how we live today?

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## 2. Christ will separate believers from unbelievers (Rev. 21:6-8; 22:8-15).

Because God is good, loving, and just, one day sin, evil, and death will be no more. God will eradicate all ungodliness from creation, and we will live for eternity with Him without any fear of slipping back into sin or losing a loved one to cancer or war. The end of Revelation gives us a clear picture of this:

*<sup>6</sup> And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. <sup>7</sup> The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup> But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*

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*<sup>8</sup> I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, <sup>9</sup> but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”*

*<sup>10</sup> And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. <sup>11</sup> Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”*

*<sup>12</sup> “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”*

*<sup>14</sup> Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

When we think of Jesus separating believers from unbelievers and those unbelievers being cast into a place of eternal torment—of eternal separation from God and all that is good—we recoil in horror. We don't want to think about that, so we use some of the same coping mechanisms as we use with physical death. We deny, detach, and distract.

The eternal separation of people we love—of anyone for that matter, even those we struggle to love or those we don't know—should break our hearts. We trust in God's justice and goodness, and we know that judgment is what all sin deserves, even ours. Yet we should look toward this day soberly, being driven to action as we pour our lives into sharing the hope of the gospel—the good news of Jesus, the only reason we will not be numbered among those cast away from God's presence—with the unbelieving world around us.



### Voices from Church History

"I take it that our view of our own death is one of the readiest tokens by which we may judge of our own spiritual condition."<sup>2</sup>

—Charles H. Spurgeon  
(1834-1892)



Why is it helpful to force ourselves to remember day-by-day that apart from Christ our sin deserves separation from God too?

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Physical death should be mourned, and the second death should be grieved, but for those in Christ, it should also be a reason to long for Jesus' return. Yes, we mourn, and it's right and acceptable to do so. But we do not mourn like those without hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Death does not have the last word—not for those who love Christ.

God is a God of life. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, he didn't leave them for dead. Expulsion from the garden was the consequence, death was inevitable, but in His grace, He still clothed them (Gen. 3:21). When Jesus died, He was resurrected to secure His people's final resurrection to life with Him. But because God is a righteous and good Judge, everyone will be resurrected, but not everyone will be resurrected to eternal life with Him.

One day, death will not be inevitable. Those who repent and place their faith in Christ will be born again, with no need to die again. Death will be defeated once and for all. It will be tossed into a lake of fire with its father, Satan. And through Christ, we will stand in the new heavens and new earth with the tree of life, feasting on its life-giving fruit forever (Rev. 19–22).



Why is it significant that we will eat from the tree of life again in the new heavens and earth after Adam and Eve were barred from eating from it in Eden?

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### 3. God's people will be in God's place under God's rule forever (Rev. 22:1-5).

*<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*

Our hope is not that we escape earth altogether one day and live somewhere in heaven. We were not designed for that; we were designed to live *here*, on earth, but not the way we currently experience earth. We were supposed to live here in a place where heaven and earth are fused together. If we were sent out of the world forever, it would mean Satan won at least a partial victory and that God failed and had to come up with a Plan B. But God is sovereign and good and works out all things for His glory and our good (Rom. 8). So Edenic perfection will be restored one day, only it will be even better—the world will look like it was eventually supposed to, covered in image-bearers who bask in the rays of God's glory for eternity. This is not something to fear; it's something to rejoice in.



What do you imagine living on the new earth will be like?

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Jesus' model prayer, His words in the Sermon on the Mount, His transfiguration, His call for multiplying disciples of all nations, and so much more are all signposts for the new heavens and new earth. Jesus sends us out to mirror what the end of Revelation promises. Our lives should shout eternity to the world around us. We are ministers of reconciliation. God uses His people to show the world what redemption looks like.

We cannot forget to preach this truth to those near and far from us: the "end times" are not something to be afraid of but rather good news to shout from the rooftops.



How can we express the seriousness and hope of Jesus' return to others without scaring them off or giving them false hope?

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How can we live as ministers of reconciliation with one another and in our community?

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## Voices from the Church

"The triune mission carried out in the person of Jesus is our hope. We are forgiven because of Jesus. We are made new because of Jesus. We will be resurrected because of Jesus. We will live on the New Earth because of Jesus. We'll live faithful on this earth, waiting for the clouds to roll back with Jesus sitting on a white horse, ready to make temporary war in exchange for eternal peace. Let's look to him."<sup>3</sup>

—J. A. Medders  
and Brandon D. Smith

## Conclusion

And with that, the story has come full circle. What began with God—creating everything good and making humanity as the pinnacle of creation ruling under His sovereignty, enjoying relationship with Him and one another, and enjoying rhythms of work and rest for His glory—has ended the same way. Well, nearly the same way; the ending is much better than the beginning.

Through the course of our journey through the Bible, we have seen God’s glory deeper and more clearly with every turn of the page. What we ruined in our sinful rebellion, God has redeemed in Christ Jesus, who will one day return and restore all things as they should have been. Our God is a pursuing God who came after us to bring salvation from sin, and He continues to pursue others until the end.

As we have seen, our hope rests in what Christ has done *and* what He will do one day. Until then, though, we don’t just sit and wait—we join in on God’s mission to continue to extend the gospel to the entire world. We take the hope that we have and we share it with all who will listen so that they too will join with us in worship and praise of Jesus at His return.



### Voices from Church History

“As often as this life’s idle show tries to charm you; as often as you see in the world some vain pomp, transport yourself in mind to Paradise, essay to be now what you will be hereafter.”<sup>4</sup>

—Jerome (circa 345–420)

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** This present age will come to an end when Christ returns to fulfill His promises and reign with His people for all eternity. The relationship lost in the garden when Adam sinned will be gloriously restored when the garden city is unveiled and Jesus wipes away every tear from every eye. The way to be part of God’s new world is to be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb shed for our redemption.



# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to live in light of His promise to make all things new.

1. How can we reflect the image of God in the name of Jesus in our community and beyond?

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2. How has the story of Scripture, from beginning to end, opened your eyes to the glory and splendor of Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

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3. With whom will you share the gospel this week? Write a prayer asking God for boldness and for the light of Christ to shine in the heart of the unbeliever.

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**The Gospel Project®**

Adult Personal Study Guide ESV  
Volume 6, Number 4 Summer 2018

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Printed in the United States of America

*The Gospel Project®: Adult Personal Study Guide* ESV  
(ISSN 2330-9393; Item 005573553) is published  
quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources,  
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234,  
Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2018 LifeWay  
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