

## THINKING ABOUT HEAVEN

February 25, 2024

### 1. Opening Prayer and Introduction

Modest disclaimers: Personal qualifications to teach such a course.

### 2. Credit to source material.

Bible; Church History; NT Wright, *SURPRISED BY HOPE*; Randy Alcorn, *HEAVEN*; John Walton, various YouTube presentations.

View on End Times: A-millennial

### 3. Our Starting Place

A. The most comprehensive view of History that we can think.

- a. Ancient Ontological argument for the existence of God: Biggest thought you can have.
- b. Similar for time and history: Biggest THING you can think of; the Universe(s).

B. Christian v. Secular view of History

- a. Secular: History is random acts and happenings abutting each other.
- b. Christian: History is the Story of Redemption (Col 1:15-20; JN 1:1-4)

C. The story of the Christian human life:

Life/death → present heaven (Rev 6:9-11) → New Creation

### 4. "Christo-platonism" Vs. God's Love of Material

A. Plato and the Gnostics and world-flight

- a. World isn't real, only shadows. Knowledge is reality and it can only come from outside of the material earth. Material, biological, physical is evil and leads to ruin.
- b. Salvation comes only by escape from the physical world.

D. God's Love of "All Things" (Isa 65:17; Isa 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; Eph 1:8-10).

### 5. From Eden to the New Jerusalem; from Genesis through Revelation (and beyond) one **Christo-centric** story.

"The Creation" from GOD'S TROMBONES by James Weldon Johnson

Colossians 1:15-20 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, **whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**

**John 1:1-4; 14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. .... <sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Rev 6:9-11 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup>They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” <sup>11</sup>Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters,<sup>[e]</sup> were killed just as they had been.

**Rev 21:1** Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...

Isa 66:22 “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure.

<sup>2</sup> Pet 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Epe 1:8-10 With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup>he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup>to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—**to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.**

John 5:28 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

Consider this, if God's plan was merely to take mankind to the present heaven – – the heaven that was made the dwelling place of spirit beings – – there would be no need for new heavens and a new earth. (Randy Alcorn, *HEAVEN*)

Look at world around you and imagine all that you see without any touch of sin or brokenness or evil. THIS world with all the parts that don't belong, taken out. (Alcorn)

Redemption is not a matter of an addition of a spiritual or supernatural dimension to creaturely life that was lacking before; rather it is a matter of bringing new life and vitality to what was there all along... The only thing redemption adds that is not included in the creation is the remedy for sin, and that remedy is brought in solely for the purpose of recovering a sinless creation... God restores nature, making it whole once more. (NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope*)

The New Testament doesn't say much about the in between 'heaven'. We have little hints: today you will be with me in paradise isn't the ultimate restoration it is the peaceful garden where you go until I return and make all things new. In Philippians Paul says my desire is to depart and be with the Lord but going to be with Christ when we die isn't the end of the story. 'Heaven' is the temporary place in which Christ looks after us until the time of his second coming, universal judgment, and the fullness of the new creation.

SALVATION is not salvation from the world it is, rather, salvation of the world.

(NT Wright YouTube video course. "Thinking about Salvation")

In his redemptive activity, God does not destroy the works of his hands, but cleanses them from sin and perfects them, so that they may finally reach the goal for which he created them. Apply to the problem at hand, this principle means that the new earth to which we look forward will not be totally different from the present one, but will be a renewal and glorification of the earth on which we now live. (Anthony Hoekema)

According to Scripture the present world will neither continue forever nor will it be destroyed and replaced by a totally new one. Instead, it will be cleansed of sin and re-created, reborn, renewed, made whole. While the kingdom of God is first planted spiritually in human hearts the future blessedness is not to be spiritualized. Biblical hope, rooted in incarnation and resurrection is creation throughout, this-worldly, visible, physical, bodily hope. The rebirth of humans is completed in the glorious rebirth of all creation, the new Jerusalem whose architect and builder is God himself. (Herman Bavink)

It is quite striking that virtually all of the basic words describing salvation in the Bible imply a return to an originally good state or situation. Redemption is a good example. To redeem is to "buy a free," literally two "buyback"... The point of redemption is to free the prisoner from bondage, to give back the freedom he or she once enjoyed. (Albert Wolters).