

New Heavens and a New Earth
(2 Peter 3:13-18)
Expository Lessons from the Second Letter of Peter

I. Review from Previous Lessons

- a. The tone of this letter is that of a Farewell Address. Peter says he anticipates dying soon and wants to leave the Christians with some final warnings and admonitions.
- b. Peter closes this letter by talking about the fact that Jesus will return.
 - i. While it may appear to be delayed, it will happen at the right time (covered in the prior lesson).
 - ii. We need to be prepared for that (covered in the current lesson).

II. A New Heaven and a New Earth

- a. **Personal Note:** I have tended to avoid teaching on the End Times and from most of the **Book of Revelation** for two reasons:
 - i. First, there are a lot of theories out there, and I am not sure what the truth is on this, how the pieces actually fit together.
 - ii. Second, I have thought it is more important to be spiritually prepared for the last days, than to know the mechanics of how it all will happen.
 - 1. Many Christians are all caught up in **Revelation** and the Last Days; yet are leading ungodly lives; perhaps I am reacting against that modern phenomenon.
 - iii. However, here we find Peter writing about “new heavens and a new earth”. If we are doing expository teaching through this letter, it seems to me that I can’t ignore what Peter discusses here!
 - 1. This reminds me of what Jesus had said to Peter, that someone would take him where he did not want to go (**John 21:18**).
 - 2. Today, *Peter is taking me* somewhere I did not particularly want to go: studying and teaching about the details of what will happen to the earth on the Last Day!
- b. Read **2 Peter 3:10-13**. (Although we discussed this in the prior lesson, there is more here, plus it ties in with what follows.)

- c. Peter says we are looking for new heavens *and a new earth*.
 - i. The term “heaven” or “heavens” can refer to the sky, or to the realm where Christ is now, seated at the right hand of God.
 - ii. Peter indicates that the present earth and sky will be dissolved in great heat, to be replaced by “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (**2 Peter 3:13**).
- d. Recall that our bodies also will be resurrected and transformed, as it says in **1 Corinthians 15** and throughout the New Testament, just as the body of Jesus was physically raised from the dead (the tomb was emptied) and transformed.
 - i. Many Christians today think that salvation and what is yet to come is purely spiritual, with no physical (material) component. However, when we look to the resurrection of Jesus, we see that both body and spirit were involved. Until the third day, His spirit was in Hades, as it says in **Acts 2**. Then He was bodily resurrected (real flesh and bones, nail marks in His hands, hole in His side, ate with the apostles, etc.).
 - ii. If we look to the example of Jesus, we see what will happen to those who follow Him, as well (physical resurrection of the body and transformation).
 - iii. It appears from Scripture that just as our physical bodies will be resurrected and transformed, something similar will happen to the earth.
- e. **Question:** Can you think of anywhere else in Scripture where it speaks about a new heaven and earth?
 - i. In the passages we will read next, ask yourself the question: “How much of this are we to take literally versus figuratively?”
 - ii. Read **Isaiah 65:13-25**.
 - 1. There shall be *a new heaven and a new earth* (**Isaiah 65:17**).
 - 2. Painful memories of the past will be forgotten.
 - 3. There will be great longevity, “according to the days of the tree of life”.
 - a. This refers to the *tree of life* that was in the Garden of Eden, which when a person ate from it he or she could live forever (**Genesis 2:9** and **3:22-24**; **Revelation 2:7** and **22:14**).

4. People will build houses and live in them; they will plant trees and eat of the fruit.
5. Wolves and lambs will feed together in peace.

iii. Read **Isaiah 66:15-24**.

1. The Lord will come like fire.
2. All the earth will be judged in the fire of the Lord.
3. All nations will be judged on that day.
4. The glory of the Lord will be declared among the Gentiles.
5. The *new heavens and the new earth*, which the Lord shall make, shall remain before Him. (**Isaiah 66:22**)
6. Regarding the transgressors: “their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be extinguished” (**Isaiah 66:24**).
 - a. Jesus quotes this in **Mark 9:42-49**, regarding how the wicked shall be punished in the end.

iv. Read **Revelation 20:11-21:5**.

1. This passage discusses the Day of Judgment.
 - a. All people, from all nations and times, will be judged on one day. This contradicts the popular (incorrect) idea that each of us is judged individually immediately after death.
2. Each one is judged “according to his works”.
 - a. Recall that Jesus began his brief addresses to each of the seven churches, in **Revelation 2-3**, with “I know *your works*”.
 - b. In **Matthew 25**, the sheep and the goats account of the final judgment, they are judged on the basis of their works (what they have done, whether they followed the commands of Jesus or not).
3. Anyone whose name is not found written in the *Book of Life* is cast into the lake of fire.
 - a. The idea of there being a Book of Life *does not* imply that God arbitrarily selects some for inclusion in this book while arbitrarily excluding others from it.

- b. Jesus told the few faithful in the church of Sardis: “He *who overcomes* shall be clothed in white garments, and *I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life*; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” (**Revelation 3:5**, NKJV)
 - c. When we follow Jesus and become Christians, our names are written in the Book of Life. However, Jesus warned the Christians in Sardis that our names can be *blotted out* if we allow ourselves to die spiritually and do not overcome temptation.
 - 4. There will be no more tears, death or sorrow.
 - 5. The former things will have passed away.
 - 6. There will be a new heaven and a new earth (**Revelation 21:1**).
 - 7. He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, *I make all things new*.” (**Revelation 21:5**)
- v. Those are the four passages (including **2 Peter 3:13**) that discuss the “new heaven(s) and new earth”. But are they alluded to anywhere else?
 - 1. The story of the Flood of Noah (**Genesis 6-8**) foreshadows the Day of Judgment, as well as the destruction of the world, followed by a new earth. In that story, the former world is destroyed and purged of evil, and the righteous who are delivered from that destruction repopulate a ‘new’ world.
 - a. Recall also the promise that God made in his rainbow covenant: He will never destroy the world again... *by water*! (**Genesis 9:11-15**)
 - b. The next time, according to Peter, the destruction of the world will come *by fire*.
 - 2. Read **Psalm 102:26-28** (designated **Psalm 101:26-28** in the LXX).
 - a. Regarding the heavens and the earth, it says *they will perish*; and like a garment, *they will be changed*.
 - i. I think of the process of metamorphosis (change in form) in which a caterpillar is *changed* into a butterfly, something new and wonderful.

- ii. Similarly, our *physical bodies* will be changed at the resurrection of the dead, as Paul explains in **1 Corinthians 15**. Also, *the world itself* will be changed, as we see in the passages we have been studying.
 - b. Note also that the reference to the “Lord” is applied to Jesus when this passage is quoted, from the LXX, in **Hebrews 1:10-12**.
3. Read **Matthew 5:5**.
- a. “Blessed are the meek, For *they shall inherit the earth*.” (**Matthew 5:5**, NKJV)
 - b. **Question:** When does *that* happen?
 - i. It appears to me that this will happen at the coming of the new earth.
 - ii. Will the meek actually *inherit the earth*? If so, that certainly will not happen in this life. That can happen only *after the resurrection*.
4. Also, consider what Peter said to the Jews in Jerusalem after healing the paralytic. Read **Acts 3:13-21**.
- a. The Jews killed Christ, God raised Him from the dead, and heaven has received Him. However, the Lord will send Him to us again.
 - b. Jesus remains in heaven “until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” (**Acts 3:21**)
 - c. Note that Peter here is speaking about the same things he addresses later in **2 Peter 3**: awaiting the return of Jesus and “*the restoration of all things*”, as the prophets had promised.
- f. Some early Christian writers commented on how they understood these pieces to fit together, regarding what will happen at the end.
- i. The following quote is from Irenaeus (c. 130-200), bishop of the church in Lyons, Gaul. In his youth, Irenaeus had been taught by Polycarp, who had been a disciple of the apostle John.
 - 1. “Now this is what has been said by the apostle: ‘For the fashion of this world is passing away.’ (**1 Cor. 7:31**) To the same

purpose did the Lord also declare, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away.' (**Matthew 24:35**) When these things, therefore, pass away above the earth, John, the Lord's disciple, says that the new Jerusalem above shall [then] descend, as a bride adorned for her husband; and that this is the tabernacle of God, in which God will dwell with men.

2. "...For as it is God truly who raises up man, so also does man truly rise from the dead, and not allegorically, as I have shown repeatedly. And as he rises actually, so also shall he be actually disciplined beforehand for incorruption, and shall go forwards and flourish in the times of the kingdom, in order that he may be capable of receiving the glory of the Father. Then, when all things are made new, he shall truly dwell in the city of God. For it is said, 'He who sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And the Lord says, "Write all this; for these words are faithful and true." And He said to me, "They are done."' (**Rev. 21:5-6**) And this is the truth of the matter.
3. "For since there are real men, so must there also be a real establishment (*plantationem*), that they vanish not away among non-existent things, but progress among those which have an actual existence. For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but 'the fashion of the world is passing away;' (**1 Corinthians 7:31**) that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them.
4. "And therefore this [present] fashion has been formed temporary, God foreknowing all things; as I have pointed out in the preceding book, and have also shown, as far as was possible, the cause of the creation of this world of temporal things. But when this [present] fashion [of things] passes away, and man has been renewed, and flourishes in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, [then] there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain [continually], always holding fresh converse with God. And since (or, that) these things shall ever continue without end, Isaiah declares, 'For as the new heavens and the new earth which I do make, continue in my sight, says the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.' (**Isaiah 66:22**)
5. "And as the elders say, Then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the

delights of paradise, and others shall possess the splendour of the city; for everywhere the Savior shall be seen according as they who see Him shall be worthy.”

- a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapters 35-36; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 566–567)
- ii. From Origen (c. 185-255), a teacher in the church from Alexandria, Egypt:
 1. “But since Paul says that certain things are visible and temporal, and others besides these invisible and eternal, we proceed to inquire how those things which are seen are temporal—whether because there will be nothing at all after them in all those periods of the coming world, in which that dispersion and separation from the one beginning is undergoing a process of restoration to one and the same end and likeness; or because, while the form of those things which are seen passes away, their essential nature is subject to no corruption. And Paul seems to confirm the latter view, when he says, ‘For the fashion of this world is passing away.’ (**1 Corinthians 7:31**)
 2. “David also appears to assert the same in the words, ‘The heavens shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; and they all shall wax old as a garment, and Thou shalt change them like a vesture, and like a vestment they shall be changed.’ (**Psalms 102:26**) For if the heavens are to be changed, assuredly that which is changed does not perish, and if the fashion of the world passes away, it is by no means an annihilation or destruction of their material substance that is shown to take place, but a kind of change of quality and transformation of appearance. Isaiah also, in declaring prophetically that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, undoubtedly suggests a similar view. For this renewal of heaven and earth, and this transmutation of the form of the present world, and this changing of the heavens will undoubtedly be prepared for those who are walking along that way which we have pointed out above...”
 - a. (Source: Origen, *De Principiis*, book 1, chapter 6.4; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 262)
- g. This world (the earth) will be changed, and we will continue on it.

- i. I have always enjoyed the natural beauty of this world. Personally, I find it encouraging to think that we will continue to enjoy the world (the earth) in some fashion even after the Second Coming of Jesus.
- ii. These Scriptures demonstrate the beauty and importance of God's creation. Even though the creation is being corrupted, it will one day be made new, and it appears even more beautiful and glorious than it is today!
- iii. I want to be among those who inherit the world that is to come. I certainly never want to be *blotted out* of the Book of Life!
- iv. **Question:** What does Peter say *we need to do* in order to inherit the new heavens and the new earth? (This is the most important thing!)

III. Looking Forward to These Things, How We Should Live

- a. Re-read **2 Peter 3:11**. Read **2 Peter 3:14-18**.
- b. Peter explains how we should live, in order to inherit the promised new heavens and the new earth:
 - i. In holy conduct and godliness.
 - ii. Diligent to be found without spot and blameless.
 - 1. Growing in holiness.
 - 2. Repenting of sin.
 - 3. *Not just* believing in Jesus and waiting for His return.
 - iii. Living in peace with others.
 - 1. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord..." (**Hebrews 12:14**, NKJV)
 - 2. John Wesley (1703-1791, famous Anglican preacher) referred to this verse (**Hebrews 12:14**) as being perhaps the most unpopular verse to preach in all the Bible, in his day. It remains very unpopular today, as well!
 - 3. Note that this is the first major teaching that Jesus introduces in the Sermon on the Mount. Read **Matthew 5:21-26**.
 - a. **Challenge:** Take an inventory of your relationships today. Make it a top priority to do everything you are able to do, in order to live at peace with all people.

- b. *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* (**Romans 12:18**, NKJV)
 - iv. Note that in the Sermon on the Mount, after addressing living at peace with others, Jesus then goes on to address purity and giving to the poor. All three are discussed by Peter as essential if we want to participate in the age to come.
 - 1. Peter spoke about living in peace and harmony with others in **1 Peter 1:22**, **1 Peter 3:8-9** and **2 Peter 1:7-8**.
 - 2. Peter addressed purity in **1 Peter 2:11** and **1 Peter 4:1-4** and **2 Peter 2:12-22**.
 - 3. Peter discussed sacrificing to meet the needs of others in **1 Peter 4:9-11**.
 - c. Jesus, in one of the last teachings He gave before his death, also discussed what He will be looking for in us upon His return.
 - i. Read **Matthew 24:45-51**.
 - 1. He leaves his servants with instructions to take care of the needs of others.
 - 2. Jesus then expands upon this teaching, illustrating it with three stories, in **Matthew 25** (the parables of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids, and the Talents; and the story of the Sheep and the Goats).
 - 3. Read **Matthew 25:31-46**.
 - a. He will separate the just from the wicked, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
 - b. Both the sheep and goats are those who believe and who refer to Jesus as 'Lord'.
 - c. Jesus tells them that whatever they did (or *did not* do) for the least of their brothers, they did *for Him*.
 - d. Peter confirms what Paul wrote as Scripture.
 - i. Read **2 Peter 3:15-18**.
 - ii. Peter confirms the authority of Paul's writings.
 - 1. He says that Paul wrote "with the wisdom given to him".

2. He says Paul's writings are twisted by untaught and unstable people "as they do *the rest of the Scriptures*".
 - a. Therefore, Peter considers Paul's writings to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, on the same footing as *the other Scriptures*.
- iii. Today I see two groups of people who misuse the writings of Paul, just as in the times when Peter was writing.
 1. The first group denies the authority of Paul's writings. They claim that they will happily follow the teachings of Jesus, but not those of Paul.
 - a. This is especially the case where Paul addresses unpopular subjects that go against the grain of modern culture, on topics that Jesus did not directly address. For example, the role of women in the church or homosexuality.
 2. The second group takes what Paul writes and distorts it into something that Paul never intended.
 - a. One example is Calvinists, who distort what Paul wrote in **Romans** to derive their teachings on the total depravity of man and unconditional election.
 - b. Another example is evangelical Protestants who distort what Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:8-9** to support their teaching that what we do (works, obeying the teachings of Jesus) has absolutely nothing to do with our salvation.
 - c. A third example, one I was reminded of recently, is misapplying what Paul said in **Romans 14** about "disputable matters", sometimes referred to as "opinion matters".
 - i. I read a paper someone had written on the subject of head covering/uncovering (from **1 Corinthians 11:1-16**, where the writer concluded that this teaching of Paul was an example of a **Romans 14** type "opinion matter".
 1. However, did Paul (who wrote both **Romans 14** and **1 Corinthians 11**) think it was a disputable, opinion matter for a man to cover his head while praying?

- a. No! Paul said that *every man* praying or prophesying with his head covered dishonors his head, which is Christ. (**1 Corinthians 11:4**)
- b. Paul *did not* tell the men and women in Corinth regarding head covering/uncovering, “Just do whatever seems right in your own mind.”
- e. The final charge of Peter.
 - i. Read **2 Peter 3:17-18**.
 - 1. Do not fall from your secure position.
 - 2. Do not be led astray by false teachers.
 - 3. Grow in the favor and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.