



**A Simplified Look at a
Complicated Belief**

Part III

The New Testament

Session 23

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 23 – The End of the Ages

How will the world end?

Global warming, an asteroid collision or nuclear war??

Just as God created the Universe and set it in motion, He will bring it to an end

Life on earth will not end by some natural disaster, but when God decides to end it through His final judgment

The date for the end of life on earth has already been set by God.

The Bible does teach that the world will become more evil as time passes, and that many people will reject the message of good news about Jesus. One day, however, God will intervene when Jesus returns to earth to judge all human beings, living and dead.

⁶ And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don't panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won't follow immediately. ⁷ Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world. ⁸ But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come. **-Matthew 24:6-8 NLT**

¹² "Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." **-Revelations 22:12-13 NLT**

Jesus will return to earth to restore God's Kingdom

The Old Testament prophets, who looked forward to the coming Messiah, had visions of two kinds:

The Suffering Servant and the Conquering King

When Jesus came to earth in 4 BC He lived the life of the Suffering Servant

His death fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about God's Servant who would die for the sins of the people

However, the other Old Testament prophecies about the Conquering King still remain to be fulfilled

Jesus must return to finally restore God's Kingdom. Jesus spoke about His future return:

- **John 14:1-4 – Jesus will prepare a place for His followers and will return for them**
 - o Jesus told His disciples that He was going to leave them to prepare a place for His followers to live (verse 2)
 - o He promised that He would come again one day to take His followers to be with Him (verse 3)

- **Matthew 24:26-31, 36-44 – the second coming of Jesus will be in power for all to see**
 - o When Jesus returns He will appear in the sky in power and great glory and everyone will see Him (verse 30)
 - o All Christians from all parts of the earth will be gathered to Him (verse 31)
 - o No one knows the day when this will happen, so we should get ready now (verses 36-44)

The apostles also spoke about the return of Jesus. Paul wrote to several churches about the hope it gives to Christians:

- **I Thessalonians 4:13-5:3 – the return of Jesus will reunite all Christians**

- o Jesus will return with all the Christians who have died before He comes again (4:13-15)

- o Dead Christians will be raised to life first, then the Christians on earth will meet Jesus in the sky (4:16-17)

- o No one will know the date when Jesus will come again – it will be sudden (5:1-3)

- **I Corinthians 15:35-58 – the resurrection body for Christians**

- o The resurrection body will be similar to, but different from the present body as it cannot die or decay (verses 35-42)

- o The resurrection body will be full of power like the resurrection body of Jesus (verses 43-49)

- o All Christians will receive a new body, since our current bodies cannot live forever (verses 50-58)

So, one day in the future, Jesus will come again to earth, but that this time He will be the Conquering King. He will destroy the enemies of God, but those Christians who have died will be raised again and will come with Him, and the Christians who are alive at the time will join them.

What happens to people who die now?

Jesus taught that there is more to a human being than just a body

28 “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

-Matthew 10:28 NLT

We have both body (the physical part) and soul (the invisible part that is the center of our thoughts, emotions and will). When the body dies, the soul continues to exist. The Bible teaches that human beings only live once on this earth, and then they must answer to God for how they have lived.

27 “it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment”.

-Hebrews 9:27 NLT

We do not get a second chance at how we live our lives – we live one life and then God will judge us based on how we have lived.

The souls of Christians who die return to God to be with Jesus:

⁶ So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. ⁷ For we live by believing and not by seeing.⁸ Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

-2 Corinthians 5:6-8 NLT

We do not know if these people are conscious or whether they are unaware, just as if they were asleep.

Not much is said about the place where non-Christians go after their death, but we know that they await the future Day of Judgment that will come after Christ returns to earth. On that day all people will be judged by Him, both those who are alive at the time and those who have died (who will be raised to life again).

Heaven and Hell

Jesus taught that there are only two possible permanent destinies for people after the final judgment: eternal punishment and eternal life

46 “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”
-Matthew 25:46 NLT

These two alternatives are often called Hell and Heaven.

HEAVEN (the New Earth) – Eternal Life

The word “heaven” in the Bible simply means the place where God lives (the plural form “heavens” means the sky and outer space),

However.. people often use it to describe the place where Christians will live forever.

28 Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, 29 and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.

-John 5:28-29 NLT

Christians will live forever in a physical resurrected body. The whole human person is a body together with a soul, and we will not live forever as spirits or ghosts. The Bible teaches that Christians will live in these resurrection bodies on a New Earth in a new Universe.

The prophet Isaiah foresaw this (Isaiah 65:17-25), and Simon Peter also told Christians that they should look forward to this new creation:

¹³ But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. -II Peter 3:13 NLT

In the book of Revelation the new Universe is revealed:

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.
-Revelation 21:1 NLT

The New Earth will be created from the same material that the current earth is made from. The earth will be melted down (II Peter 3:12) and reformed into a new planet. Life on the New Earth will be different from now because:

- All animals will be vegetarian – just as before the Flood (Isaiah 65:25 – compare with Genesis 9:3)
- Everyone will be right with God – there will be no more sin (II Peter 3:13)
- There will be no more death, or sorrow, or crying or pain – the Curse God put on the Universe because of Adam and Eve’s sin will be reversed (Revelation 21:4 – compare this with Genesis 3:14-19)
- People can eat again from the Tree of Life (Revelation 22:2), from which Adam and Eve were banned from eating after they sinned (Genesis 3:24). This means they will be able to live forever

On the New Earth mankind will be perfect in their relationship with God, with one another and with the universe, just as God intended. Sin and all its effects will be gone.

God's Kingdom will be finally restored in fullness! HELL (the Lake of Fire) – Eternal Punishment

Hell is the place where God and His love are not present. In the Bible Hell is often described as a place of great suffering: the main picture is of a lake of burning fire

14 Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. **-Revelation 20:14 NLT**

This suffering is both a result of the person's own rejection of God and also God's punishment on them for their sins. The Lake of Fire was actually prepared for the Devil as a place where he will be punished

10 Then the devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. **-Revelation 20:10 NLT**

But people who have not responded to God in faith will also be cast into it after the final judgment. There is no hope of escape.

The Final Judgment

Throughout the Bible it is clear that God **must** judge and punish sin. He cannot ignore it – there is no hope for a future perfect New Creation if sin is allowed to continue. Jesus spoke more about this judgment than anyone else in the Bible.

After Jesus returns, He will judge all people by His standard of perfection. **Revelation 20:11-15** tells us how people will be judged on this final Day of Judgment:

- Jesus Christ will sit on the throne in judgment
- All people will stand before Him to be judged – there will be nowhere to hide
- God knows everything we have done – our actions are recorded in His books
- All the people whose names are not written in another book, the Book of Life, will be thrown into Hell

So, the final judgment will be fair and just with all the evidence taken into account and no miscarriages of justice.

The evidence against people will be the sins they have committed, but the reason they will be condemned to Hell will be because their names are not written in God's book of life. The people whose names are written in this book are people who have trusted in God to forgive them.

For Christians there will not be any punishment on this Day of Judgment, because they have had their sins forgiven by Christ – there is no longer any judgment or condemnation for them, rather the return of Christ will mean salvation for them (Romans 8:1; I Thessalonians 5:9).

Remember that the New Covenant promised that God would never keep a record of the sins of His people (Hebrews 8:12). Christians will, however, have to give account for the way they have lived their lives. This is called the Judgment Seat of Christ, Romans 14:10-12, I Corinthians 3:11- 15, and II Corinthians 5:10.

The reality, according to Jesus, is that people are either free from the coming judgment if they have believed in Him or they will face that judgment. In fact, those who reject Him have already been judged because they have rejected the truth God has shown them (John 3:18-21).

How Christians should live in view of the future return of Christ

The promise that Jesus is coming again is full of hope and meaning for Christians. Many New Testament passages challenge Christians to change their behavior and beliefs in light of this hope. The following are just two examples:

The apostle John

² Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. ³ And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. **-1 John 3:2-3 NLT**

- Christians are children of God, and it is not clear yet exactly what we will be like in our resurrection bodies
- We know that on the day when Jesus returns we will see Him as He is and become like Him
- As a result of this hope, Christians should aim to live like Jesus now, keeping themselves pure

The apostle Peter – II Peter 3:3-14

- Some people will mock the idea that Jesus will come again, just as they deny that God created the world (verses 3-7)
- God is not slow at keeping His promise but is patient, giving people an opportunity to repent (verses 8-9)
- When the “day of the Lord” does come it will come suddenly (“like a thief in the night”) and will mean judgment for godless men and the melting down of the whole Universe and formation of a new Universe (verses 7, 10, 12-13)
- Christians should be holy and godly because we are looking forward to the day of God. The return of Christ will bring our final deliverance from the presence of sin, but there is a challenge for us to live lives focused on God because everything in this world will pass away. Nothing matters more than our relationship with Him (verses 11 and 14).

Key Lesson: After death people must answer to God for how they have lived

The death of our bodies is not the end of our existence. In the future Christ will return to the earth to set up God's perfect Kingdom, and when He returns He will judge all people. Those whose sins have been forgiven will be part of God's Kingdom on the new earth, but those who have not trusted God will be punished in the Lake of Fire.

