

Eschatology



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Overview

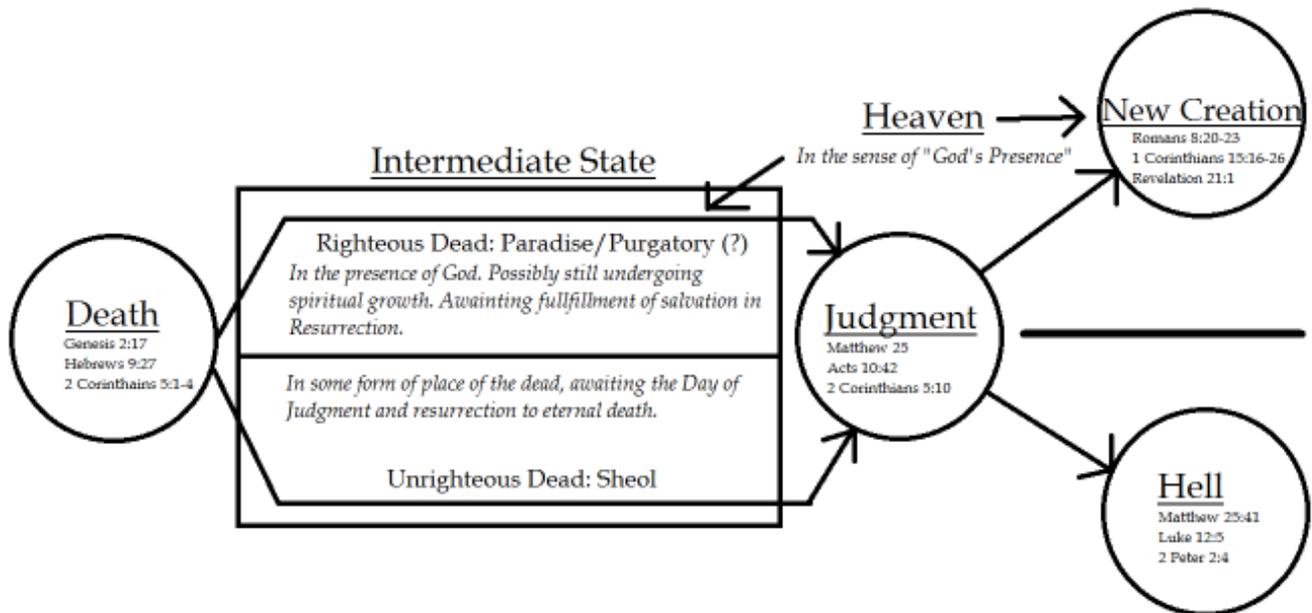
Four Last Things

“Eschatology” is the study of the Last Things. Thus the *eschaton* is another word for the final days, the end, or the future return of Christ, often implying the future reign of God and recreation. In the catholic tradition this is typically divided into the “Four Last Things” which are:

- 1- Death
- 2- Judgment
- 3- Heaven
- 4- Hell

Essentially eschatology is all about the consummation of salvation and the final triumph over evil. I think Heaven should be covered last, however, so we will go in a different order and end on that.

Overall the process looks like this:



Minimum required to believe

- 1- Jesus will return to earth physically.
- 2- There will be a physical resurrection of our bodies.
- 3- There will be a day of judgment for both Christians and non-Christians, and will include everyone who has ever lived.
- 4- There will be a new Heavens and New Earth, redemption will be complete.

All other aspects of eschatology can be held legitimately by Christians. Some other things are more certain than others, but a lot of eschatology is very speculative.

Physical Death

Human Beings are both physical and spiritual (Matthew 10:28)

“the death of a man differs from the death of a horse or a rabbit. the death of a man is the violent separation of the body from the immortal spirit; it is a necessary part of the human person, which is not complete without it.” (C.B. Moss, The Christian Faith p.120)

- ✘ Humanity, in a sense, stands between the animal world and angels in having both a material and spiritual component.
- ✘ We are not “souls trapped in a body”, but our bodies are truly a part of who we are.
- ✘ Our souls are not immortal by nature, but by grace.

Physical Death is a result of judgment on sin (Genesis 2:17)

- ✘ We were not supposed to die, this is a result of sin, not a natural part of life.
- ✘ Death is not our friend or good, it is the enemy (Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 Corinthians 15:26)

There is some form of preliminary judgment at death (Hebrews 9:27)

- ✘ This is not the final judgment, that happens at the return of Jesus.
- ✘ Although it is not final in chronology, it is “final” in setting the trajectory for the rest of eternity. (in other words, death is it! No second chances!)

The righteous go into the presence of God (Philippians 1:22-23)

- ✘ We are promised that upon physical death Christians will go to be with Jesus.
- ✘ But this is only a temporary situation. We are not there for eternity, but are waiting for the Day of Resurrection after Jesus’ return to earth for judgment.
- ✘ See also: “Abraham’s bosom” Luke 16:19-31, “Paradise” Luke 23:43

The Wicked seem to go to a “land of the dead” (Luke 16:22-23?)

- ✘ In the OT the general term for where everyone went was “Sheol” which was some type of land of the dead which in the NT is “Hades”.
- ✘ Although there is indication that Christians go to be with God, it seems by default that all others are left going to Sheol/Hades to await final judgment.
- ✘ Based on the parable of Lazarus and other passages this punishment in Hades seems to include loss of earthly goods and pleasures, loss of any heavenly joys, withdrawal of the Holy Spirit, accusations of conscience, and evil associates. (*Theological Outlines*, Francis Hall p.299)
- ✘ Evil spirits seem to be in Tartarus: 2 Pet 2:4, it is unclear if this is the same place. “Tartarus” is a *hapax legomena* (a word only used once) for the New Testament. In Greek mythology Tartarus was the place where the Titans were thrown for eternity after the war with the Olympians.

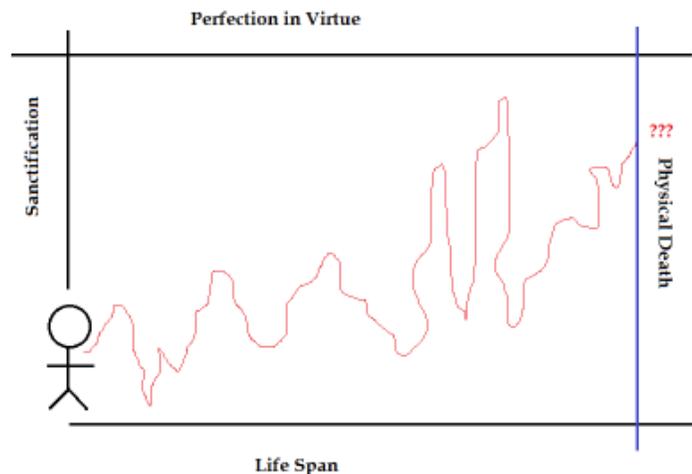
Intermediate State / Purgatory

The idea that the intermediate state involves some type of spiritual growth or purgation goes back to at least St. Augustine (cf. *Handbook on Faith, Hope and Charity*, 69). Initially this concept was only one of purification, a type of post-mortem sanctification. During the Middle

Ages this idea developed into a punitive concept, where those who had not achieved perfection in this life underwent punishment for their sins in purgatory before being able to enter Heaven. In popular piety the fires of purgatory were connected to the fires of hell. Many of the abuses of the Medieval Church, in terms of selling indulgences to free loved ones from suffering in the afterlife, were

connected to the growing emphasis of Purgatory particularly as a punitive state. This is one of the several ideas the Protestant Reformers rejected, and until the Anglo-Catholic revival was generally rejected in Anglicanism.

Although the Anglican 39 Articles condemns belief in the “romish doctrine of purgatory”, Anglo-Catholics have in general held to a belief in an “Anglican doctrine of purgatory”. Purgatory is seen as state of the soul where it undergoes continual growth in grace and virtue. It is a version of post-mortem sanctification. The soul is not being punished for sins (this was taken care of by Jesus on the Cross), but as the soul is also



corrupted by sin, it must be sanctified as well, and merely being separated from the body does not make the soul perfect.

To be fair, The Roman Council of Trent condemned many of the same abuses that Luther pointed out, although not denying the basic ideas of purgatory and indulgences for the dead. Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism has also revised the way they talk about Purgatory, and has started to call it the “vestibule of Heaven” and a time of purification instead of punishment. They have also clarified that it is not a “place” in a proper sense, but a “state”. In many ways the Anglicans, Catholics, and Orthodox (who call it paradise) are all in agreement about purgatory. It is also important to note that no Church ever held that purgatory was a second chance at salvation! All those in purgatory are destined for Heaven as Christians.

Final Judgment

All people will eventually be judged by Christ

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Salvation is by grace, but there is still a judgment by works (Rev 21:8)

- ✘ There is a tension in scripture. On one hand it frequently declares salvation is through God’s grace to sinners, but on the other warns of real judgment for those who sin.
- ✘ I think the best way to synthesize this is to say that all are judged based on their deeds. Those who have been righteous will be resurrected to glory, and those unrighteous to condemnation. But, there is no one truly righteous, all have sinned, so all would be condemned. Through Jesus Christ, however, God gives us the grace to be resurrected into the new creation in spite of our deeds.

This judgment is eternal

⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering-- ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10)

- ✘ The Church has always borne witness to the belief that judgment is eternal, burden of proof on those who say otherwise. See Francis Hall, *Theological Outlines* p.300

Eschatological Speculation

Important Terms and Ideas

Terms related to the Second Coming

1. Parousia: Coming, presence, arrival (1 Thess 2:19)
2. Apokalipsis: unveiling, revelation (2 Tim 1:10)
3. Epiphaneia: Manifestation, appearance (2 Tim 6:14)

Apotelesmatic

Like looking through a telescope. The idea is that it would be like looking at something far away and thinking that two objects are really close to each other, but when getting closer realize that the second one is quite a distance from the first. In terms of prophecy this means that some prophecies might include two or more events that in the prophecy happen right after each other, but in reality will take place at a longer interval.

Dispensationalism/Covenantalism:

These terms are more about Hermeneutics (how to interpret the Bible) than about Eschatology, but they do influence it. Broadly, Dispensationalism holds to a strong distinction between Israel and the Church. Covenantalism holds that the Church is the new covenant people. Dispensational Premillennialism believes that the 1000 years of Jesus reigning on earth will be over Israel (Israel will inherit the land promised to Abraham in Genesis 12). Historical Premillennialism follows Covenantalism and believes that the Church has replaced Israel, and so will be the ones to inherit those promises. There are few Historical Premillennialists. Most Premillennialists are Dispensationalists, and most Covenantalists are Reformed and so typically Amillennialists.

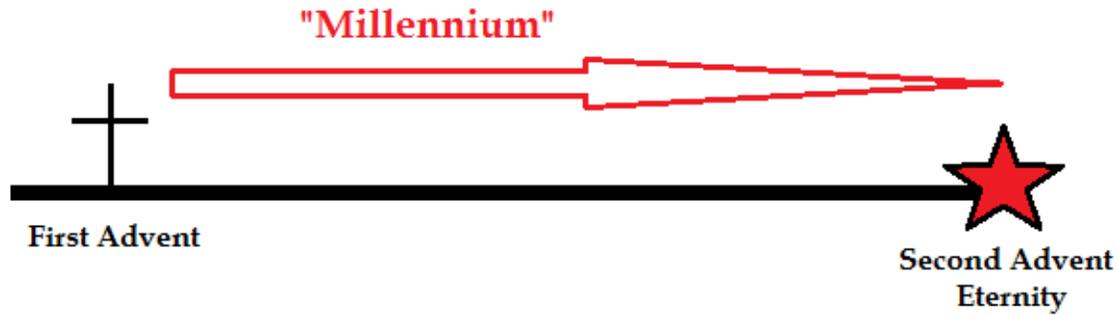
Views of interpreting the Book of Revelation

<u>Theory</u>	<u>General Ideas</u>	<u>Issues</u>
Preterist	Believes that either all (Full Preterism) or part of (Partial Preterism) Revelation has already taken place. They take a literal reading of “this generation” in the Olivet Discourse of Luke 21 and emphasis on “these things must take place soon” in Revelation 1:1. Partial Preterism sees many of the events in the Early Church, such as the destruction of the Temple in 70AD, as being much of the purpose of the prophecy.	<p>1- Full Preterism denies any future resurrection, judgment, or second coming (it already happened in 70AD). This is outside of Christian orthodoxy.</p> <p>2- For partial: some of the events seem to match, but others start to break down or are subjective.</p> <p>3- Jesus also uses “this generation” in a broader sense. (Matt 23:25-36)</p>
Historicist	Similar in some ways to Preterism. Revelation is being fulfilled throughout Church History. Often the letters to the seven churches are taken as seven successive church ages, most already occurred and a few are in the future. The rest of Revelation is then either in various stages of completion or taken in an almost idealist sense.	1- There is too much subjectivity in the correlations

<p>Idealist</p>	<p>Puts emphasis on the nature of apocalyptic genre. Revelation is to be seen as a metaphorical account of the Church's struggle against evil until the second advent and has no correspondence to historical events.</p>	<p>1- Some of the parts seem very historical (such as the letters to the seven churches)</p> <p>2- Would not even apocalyptic imagery have a basis in historical reality? (Like Daniel and the four beasts as nations)</p> <p>3- The imagery itself follows a linear path. Seems very long, wordy, and directed for being mere allegory.</p>
<p>Futurist</p>	<p>Maybe one of the more common in modern times. This is the theory that most, if not all, of Revelation is about the future. Within this camp are several views over how this plays out exactly, but all see Revelation as genuine prophecy about the future.</p>	<p>1- Much of the language seems too symbolic to be taken literally. Why a literal thousand years and no literal dragon?</p>

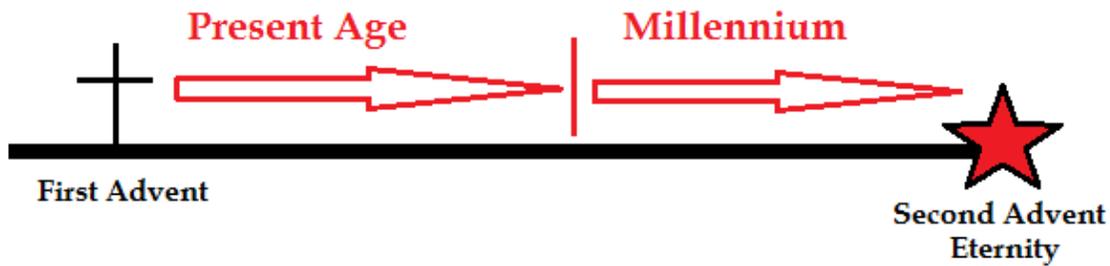
Millennium and Rapture theories

Amillennialism (not a millennium)

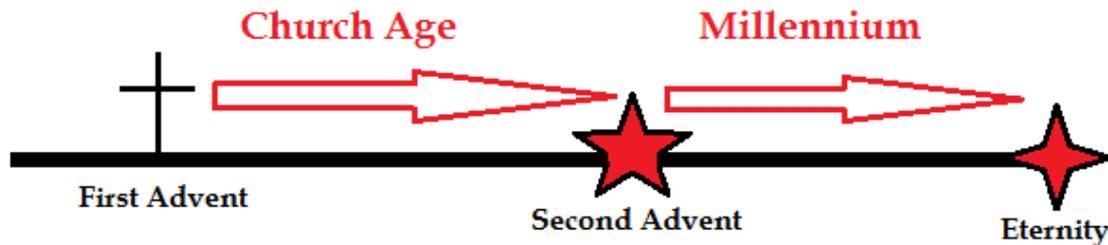


The Millennium is a metaphor for the entire age of the Church we are presently in. At some point in the future Jesus will return, judgment day will happen, and Jesus will usher in the rest of eternity.

Postmillennialism (before the millennium)



The Millennium is a literal 1000 years, and will be brought about by the Church when we bring the Kingdom of God on earth and bring about a Church golden age. This view is not very popular anymore, but was common before the two World Wars when people had high levels of optimism in human progress.

Premillennialism (after the millennium)

The Millennium is a literal 1000 years, but will not happen until the return of Jesus. The Church will evangelize and undergo persecution until the end. There are two variations. Historical Premillennialism views the Church as the new Israel which will inherit the Kingdom. Dispensational Premillennialism believes that the promises of land were given to ethnic Israel only. In this view the Kingdom will be inherited by Israel, although all Christians will be part of it.

Rapture Theories

Among some theologians, there is a belief that on the return of Jesus, Christians still living will be “raptured” (take up) by Jesus to Heaven. Usually this is seen in reference to the Tribulation (seen in futurist millennialism as a time of intense judgment on the earth).

1. Pretribulationism [Church will be saved from entire tribulation]
 - a. Claims a “plain” approach to hermeneutics
 - b. Tribulation is God’s wrath/punishment and so not directed towards the Church
 - c. Idea that immanency of return implies lack of any verified signs or prerequisites.
2. Midtribulationism [Church will be saved halfway though, so still undergo persecution]
 - a. Rapture in middle of Daniel’s 70th week
 - b. Seen as about the time as the 7th trumpet, or 5th and 6th seals
 - c. Believers will be delivered from wrath of God, but not from persecution, as Scripture always indicates
 - d. Rev 6 shows transition from wrath of man to wrath of God
3. Posttribulationism [Church will be present the entire time]
 - a. God’s judgment has always been with believers present
 - b. vocabulary of second coming does not necessitate rapture and advent as separate events

Hell

Concept

Hell is the final state of those who have rebelled against Christ

⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Jesus talked about Hell frequently (Mark 9:43, Matt 5:22, Luke 12:5)

- ✘ The word Jesus used was *gehenna*.
- ✘ This was a physical location outside of Jerusalem. It was the Valley of Hinnom.
- ✘ This place was used in ancient Israel by some to worship the idol Moloch, which included the sacrifice of human children (2 Kings 16:3, 21:6, Jeremiah 7:31-32)
- ✘ Later it also came to be connected to Divine judgment of the wicked (Jeremiah 7:31-32, Isaiah 30:33)
- ✘ The combination of the atrocities committed there along with being connected to divine judgment gave the place the connection with the destiny of the unrighteous.
- ✘ Even if all this, and the idea of fire and darkness, are “metaphorical”, they must be metaphorical for something! Even if Jesus meant “it would be like thrown into fire and darkness”, it will not be *better* to claim it was only symbolic, for even if it is *like* that experience it will be *just as bad of a punishment*.

Hell is the logical result of belief in free will or choice

“If man has free will at all, he must be capable of continuing to misuse it to the end” (C. B. Moss, *The Christian Faith* p451)

“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.” (C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*)

- ✘ God has given us the responsibility of our actions.
- ✘ Part of this responsibility, is also the responsibility of committing evil
- ✘ As people sin they develop a “habit” of sin. This habit turns into a character which seems to be crystallized after death.

- ✘ The reason hell is eternal is not just due to evil committed on earth, but the fact that those who end up there continue in their rebellion and hatred of God forever. They are eternally unrepentant.

The Rationale for Hell

- 1) God has given human beings free will
- 2) Human beings can use that free will to accept or reject God
- 3) God will eventually triumph over evil and redeem the world
- 4) To redeem this world requires either a) override free will and “make” everyone “good”, or b) exile those who refuse to follow his rule to somewhere else
- 5) “a” cannot be an option because God appears in scripture to desire humanity to be able to choose
- 6) “b” only works if there is somewhere outside of the Kingdom of God, and the New Heaven/Earth that these people go
- 7) This place of exile is then what we term “hell”
- 8) This implies two things a) It must be an active judgment of God to send people there, and b) it will be a very traumatic existence (literal fire is irrelevant, even if Jesus is being metaphorical, the metaphor means something!)
- 9) This state of hell is backed up then by the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:22-30, Mark 9:43-47)

Other Theories

Restorationism: a version of universalism that says one day all unbelievers will be saved, usually held after a period in punishment. Hell is real, just not eternal.

Annihilationism: The idea that God will wipe out the souls of the wicked from existence.

Heaven

Salvation is about Resurrection, not an escape from the physical world

²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22-23)

“It is the resurrection of the body, not the immortality of the soul, that is promised to us by the Resurrection of our Lord”

-The Christian Faith, C.B. Moss p.121

Brief difference between Gnostic and Christian view of salvation

Gnostic: God did not create the material world; therefore its existence is a mistake and/or evil. Humans are, then, not really physical and spiritual creatures, but are instead souls “trapped” in material bodies. So for Gnostics, part of salvation is an *escape* from the material world, and being *freed* from physical bodies.

Christian: God is the maker of all things, in Heaven and on Earth. Because God made the physical world and called it “good” (Genesis 1) then we as humans are intended to be spiritual and physical creatures. Salvation follows the pattern of Jesus, who was physically resurrected. Therefore we too will be physically resurrected.

God promises to remake creation (Romans 8:19-23, Rev 21:1)

- ✘ God’s goal is not just the salvation of our souls, but the salvation of his entire creation.
- ✘ The resurrection will take place on the New Earth cf N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* p.159

We will receive resurrected bodies (1 Cor 15:12-26)

- ✘ The resurrection is life after life after death cf N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* p.151
- ✘ The resurrection body of Jesus will be the model for our own 1 john 3:1 cf N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* p.149
- ✘ It is not the same particles of our bodies that are resurrected, but there is some type of continuity cf Francis Hall, *Theological Outlines* p.284
- ✘ When St. Paul says we will have *spiritual* bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44) he means they will be dominated by the spirit, and not the *flesh* (which does not mean physical matter, but internal desires). This is like saying a steam boat instead of a sail boat. It does not describe what the bodies are made out of, but what powers them.

“Heaven” means in the presence of God, not immateriality (Rev 21:22-27)

- ✘ The language of heaven in the NT is not postmortem destiny or escape from this world, but God’s sovereign rule coming on earth as it is in heaven cf N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* p.18
- ✘ When we talk about “Heaven” as the future life, we must do so in the context of the physical resurrection.
- ✘ The best way to think about this is that Heaven comes to Earth.

The New Heavens and New Earth will be a glorious place

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 ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ 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.
(Revelation 22:1-5)

The Joys of the Resurrection: (From Francis Hall, *Theological Outlines*)

1. Perfect contemplation of God (The *beatific vision*)
2. In perfect fellowship and friendship with God in Christ
3. Mystical communion and fellowship with the saints, and continuation of relationships with others we have known in this life.
4. Being able to fulfill our vocations and gifts.
5. No more pain and weariness (not an end to activity). Being able engage in activity without the things that make that activity a physical burden.
6. Victory over evil and a sense of perfect security
7. Personal glorification and advance in spiritual greatness.
8. Seeing and living in the consummation of the Kingdom of God in the New Heavens and New Earth.