

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

by Rev. William Macleod

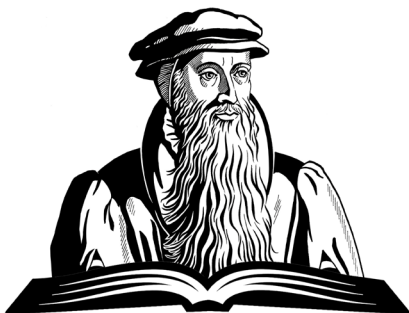
*Module 7:*

**ESCHATOLOGY—**

**THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS**

*Lecture 10*

**THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN**



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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### *Module 7 ~ The Doctrine of Last Things*

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10. **The Doctrine of Heaven**

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## *Module 7 ~ Lecture 10*

# The Doctrine of Heaven

We now come to our final lecture on Eschatology, lecture #10, and our subject is Heaven. Having dealt with the eternal state of the wicked, we now come to consider the eternal, everlasting bliss which lies ahead for the righteous. The Great Judge will say to the unbelievers, “Depart from me, ye cursed.” But he says to those who trust in him, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—Matthew 25, verse 34. How awful is that word “depart”—depart forever. But how wonderful is that word “come”—come and dwell with me forever. Jesus had comforted his disciples as he was about to leave them the night before he was crucified. He said: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”—John 14, verses 1–3.

But what will this Heaven, this house of many mansions, be like? Just as with Hell, the pictures and symbolism of Heaven presented to us are in graphic and metaphorical terms. None of us have been there, and therefore, we have difficulty in picturing. It will be very different from our present state. In many ways, the best we can say is in negative terms, contrasting Heaven with the troubles and sufferings of this present time. We know that it will be a very good place, and the best that the Almighty, the all-wise God, can give us. God knows us, and he knows how to make us really happy. He created us to glorify and enjoy him. In this world, because of the fall, we often fail miserably. But in Heaven, we will succeed perfectly, glorifying and enjoying God. All the sin and the misery which characterizes the state into which we fell shall be gone forever. Even in this life, we who have been born again, from time to time enjoy moments of felt fellowship with God, and to us they are, as it were, Heaven on earth. And in this way, we experience “joy unspeakable and full of glory”—1 Peter 1:8. And if those moments here below are so sweet, how wonderful will Heaven be?

Where will Heaven be? Obviously there is a place distinct from this world where Heaven is at the moment. We are told that Enoch and Elijah went bodily to Heaven, so there must be a location where they are living. Our Lord Jesus, having risen from the dead, on the fortieth day, ascended up to Heaven as the disciples watched, and a cloud received him out of their sight. So he too is living bodily in Heaven. Two angels then appeared to the disciples and said: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”—Acts 1:11. So at the present time, there is a place distinct from this earth, and it is called Heaven. God is omnipresent, yet he is especially present in Heaven. This is the dwelling place of the angels, who, although they do not have bodies,

are not infinite like God, but spatially limited. They can only be in one place at one time. Here also, the souls of the saints are who have died, and they dwell with their Savior. It is described as being “above us,” and yet it’s not somewhere that can be reached by a space rocket. And yet, at the same time, it’s not far away, because Saul of Tarsus could see clearly into Heaven from the Damascus Road, seeing the man, Christ Jesus, and speaking to him: “And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do”—Acts 9, verse 5–6. Heaven, it would appear, is a kind of parallel universe, not that far away, and yet impossible to see with a human telescope. It is interesting how Jesus, after his resurrection, could appear and then disappear.

The Apostle John, following his vision of the Judgment Day, is given a glimpse of Heaven. He tells us what he saw: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea”—Revelation 21, verse 1. The old heaven and earth was the universe which we now inhabit. It has many beautiful spots, mountains, forests, lakes, beaches, gardens. We have happy memories of delightful places where we have been in the past. There are also thorns and thistles, diseases and plagues, storms and disasters, wars and famines. But Heaven is a new world, where everything is beautiful, healthy, full of life, and very good. John tells us how he saw Heaven descending to earth: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”—Revelation 21, verse 2.

Some have argued that the present universe will pass out of existence, and Heaven will be totally new and unconnected. This, however, seems unlikely. God created a beautiful and wonderful world in the beginning, and Satan destroyed it. It’s certain that Satan will not have the ultimate victory. When the ancient world came under God’s judgment, it was destroyed with a flood, and a purified world arose from under the flood waters. The present world will be destroyed with fire: “But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”—2 Peter 3, verse 7. Peter adds: “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”—verses 10–12. From this massive conflagration, a new heavens and a new earth will emerge. But the new will have a continuity with the old. Just as the body of the saint is buried in the earth a natural and corruptible body, but rises from the grave with a perfect body fitted for eternity, so it will be with the new earth. Paul describes this as the restitution of all things: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”—Romans 8:22–23. The world around us is pictured as writhing in agony because of the curse which sin brought upon it. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes show the world in pain. It is personified as longing for redemption. One day, the heavens and the earth which are now will be regenerated, re-created, and the new heavens and the new earth will appear. This will take place alongside the resurrection of the saints, their bodies redeemed, and their status as the adopted children of God demonstrated. Heaven will be a restored and improved Garden of Eden,

where sin and Satan shall never again enter to destroy.

John describes the special presence of God enjoyed by those who are saved: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”—Revelation 21, verse 3. In a very real sense, God’s presence was with Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night led them. God’s presence was in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, and then later, in the temple, sitting on the mercy seat sitting above the ark of the covenant. But from time to time, he was grieved with the sin of Israel and withdrew. Also, there was the veil of the tabernacle which separated even the priests from God. But in the New Testament, God will pitch his tent among his people, and the veil has been torn down. The saints will have constant and enjoyable access to God. Moses pleaded with God, “Let me see thy glory.” God placed him in a cleft of the rock, and as it were, placed his hand over him and then passed by, and Moses was able to see the back parts of God. But God is a spirit and has no body. Yet something of the glory of God was revealed to Moses. Paul explains the future knowledge of God’s people: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”—1 Corinthians 13, verse 12. John, in his epistle, asserts: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”—1 John 3, verse 2. One day, we shall see God, and be transformed into his likeness, and not just get a glimpse, but fill our eyes and our hearts with the beatific vision.

Every human being, as someone said, has a God-shaped hole in their heart. As Augustine put it: “Thou has made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee.” We need God, we seek God, and in Heaven, we fully find him. God makes a great promise to those who reach Heaven: “They shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”—Revelation 21, verse 3. God, of course, has already made his covenant with us, and entered into a huge commitment. He has already revealed himself to us, and we have, by grace, embraced him. He is our God and undertakes everything that God can do for us. We commit ourselves to him, trusting him, and giving our hearts and our lives to him. However, in Heaven, we will fully, and forever, experience God. In this world, we sometimes grow spiritually cold. We backslide, and are caught up by the cares and pleasures of the world. And because of this, God, in his divine displeasure, chastises us by removing from us his felt presence. But in Heaven, we dwell in his presence forever. No sin can disturb our relationship with him, and we are fully satisfied with him.

Now thinking of the New Jerusalem. Sometimes Heaven is described as a city—the New Jerusalem. It’s not a lonely or a desolate place. This life is often a waste howling wilderness. But that is behind us. There are many lonely people in this world. Sometimes God’s people can be neglected in this world, particularly those who are chronically ill, or elderly, and are confined to their homes. But all who get to Heaven will have company, the very best of company there. It is a city inhabited by millions from every tribe and nation. It is God’s house of many mansions, or many homes. We are going home to be with our Father and the family. Other times, Heaven is described as a garden: “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations”—Revelation 22, verse 1–2. It is the new Eden. A paradise garden of trees and flowers, and a river running through it with crystal clear water. This river of the water of life proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb. God is the

source and sovereign Planner of our lives, and that of all men and women. And because the river is also expressed as flowing from the throne of the Lamb, we can see that the eternal life we enjoy has been earned for us by Christ through his atoning death on the cross. From the throne of the loving God and the suffering Savior, the Spirit flows to us as the life-giving, refreshing water. The Spirit beautifies the garden, and fills the children of God with eternal life. Just as in Eden there was a tree of life, so here, Christ is to us the tree of life. God's people have unrestricted access to its nourishing and varied fruits, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Christ is, of course, the very center of Paradise, and it is his presence that makes Heaven, heaven to his people: "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water"—Revelation 7, verse 17.

Another aspect of Heaven is that there's no suffering. In this life, there is much pain and suffering. But in Heaven, we're told: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"—Revelation 21, verse 4. This life can be described as a veil of tears. We enter it with a cry, and often leave it with a cry. There are tears due to physical pain, to psychological pain, to the unkindness of those around us, tears due to grief, and to bereavement. But in Heaven, God wipes away all tears. Many tears are shed in sorrow over sin, but now all our sins are washed away, and we will never sin again, and so joyfully, we sing: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood"—Revelation 1, verse 5.

There will be no more death. This is a huge part of the curse which came on mankind because of sin: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"—Genesis 3:19. The aging process began when Adam sinned. Man was subjected to all kinds of horrible illnesses and diseases. In the ancient world, leprosy was dreaded; today, it is cancer. But in Heaven, there is no illness, no weakness, no disability. All which in this world leads to death has been removed. There will be no more pain. What a wonderful truth that is. Some godly people know much pain and weakness in this life, and struggle long with disability. Many know the terrible pain of mental illness, the darkness of depression and anxiety. These former things are now passed away, and there shall be no more curse—Revelation 21, verse 4.

One of the things God's children look forward to most about Heaven is the end of sinning. We hate sin, and sin brings so much misery to us. But we're told: "His servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads"—Revelation 22, verse 3–4. Because we love God, we hate sin. We are constantly battling against temptation, against the world, the flesh, and the devil. When we are converted, we die to sin as our master. It no longer has dominion over us—Romans 6:14, but it is still constantly troubling us. As long as we are in this world, sin, sadly, is so easy. We are troubled with anger, lust, covetousness, hypocrisy, pride, idols. Cares and pleasures readily become gods to us. We long to be perfectly holy and pleasing to God, and it's wonderful to look forward to a Heaven where God is on the throne in our hearts, and self is completely subordinate to our Lord.

Thankfully, in Heaven, there is no devil. Satan and his demons will be locked up in the bottomless pit. The ungodly world will also be cast into Hell. The flesh will not enter Heaven. Nothing unclean will be there. How hard it is for us today to control our sinful thoughts and lusts, but in Heaven, that will be a thing of the past. Our heart's desire is to worship God without distraction, and to serve him without pride intruding. We long to be like him, and one day soon, we will be so like him, that we will have his name on our foreheads.

No night there. We are told in Revelation 22, verse 5 that there shall be no night there. There

will be no darkness in Heaven, and no works of darkness: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”—1 John 1:5. There will be no sun or moon—there is no need for such: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it”—Revelation 21, verses 23–24. Hell is the outer darkness, and “the blackness of darkness forever”—Jude 13. But Heaven is full of light. Night is the time of tiredness, but there will be no weariness or exhaustion in Heaven. Night is the time when thieves and robbers do their work, but there will be no criminals in Heaven. Wild animals hunt in the darkness, but in Heaven, there will be nothing to frighten. Night is the time of fear, but there will be no fear in Heaven. The prince of darkness delights in attacking in the night, disturbing our sleep, bringing waves of anxiety, but there will be no night there. Nights can, from time to time, be times of weeping, “but joy cometh in the morning”—Psalm 30, verse 5. Heaven will be one everlasting morning of joy.

No more sea. The Apostle John states: “There shall be no more sea”—Revelation 21, verse 1. This is initially surprising to us. Many of us enjoy going to the seaside, viewing the cliffs, the rocks, the sandy beaches. We love to sail on the sea, to fish in the sea, to see it’s great beauty, whether it’s calm or stormy. But for John, the sea meant something different—the sea meant imprisonment. He tells us that he was on the Island of Patmos as a prisoner: “For the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”—Revelation 1, verse 9. He would stand on the shore of the island, his island prison, and look across to the mainland, towards his beloved Ephesus, and think of his Christian brothers and sisters, and long to have fellowship with them, and to be ministering to them, but the sea separated him from the church. He looked forward to the day when there would be no more sea, no more separation from fellow Christians, but unity and fellowship forevermore. Others, as they look at the sea, they think of loved ones lost in storms. The Apostle Paul himself suffered shipwreck at least four times. On one occasion, he spent a night and a day in the deep—2 Corinthians 11:25. And after writing that epistle, he suffered another shipwreck, after a terrifying storm, and in answer to prayer, he landed on Malta. How many young lives have been lost at sea? But the sea shall give up the dead which are in it—Revelation 20:13. And now there shall be no more sea.

The glory of the city. In Revelation 21, there is a lengthy description of the city, the New Jerusalem. It is a great city—Revelation 21, verse 10, and that is required to house the enumerable crowds saved by the blood of Christ. Abraham was assured that his children would be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand by the seashore for multitude. A great city. It’s also a holy city—verse 10. Nothing sinful will enter Heaven: “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life”—Revelation 21, verse 27. It is further said that outside are “dogs, and sorcerers and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie”—Revelation 22, verse 15. The only ones to enter Heaven are those who are washed in the blood of Christ, justified, and sanctified: “These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat”—Revelation 7, verses 14 to 16. The New Jerusalem has the glory of God, and symbolically, it is “like a precious jasper stone, clear as crystal”—Revelation 21, verse 11. Heaven is made up of jewels. The gates are of pearls, and the streets of gold. We are told that it is



made up of the most precious things that we now know. Gold, for which many sell their souls, is as common as the dust under our feet in Heaven. The wall is great and high, because it is a great city. There are twelve gates facing in all directions. These gates are open, welcoming all who would receive the gospel and come. But the gospel must be accepted in this life, because “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment”—Hebrews 9:27. Once death comes, there’s no second chance. Death is immediately followed by judgment.

The walls of the city have twelve foundations, in which are written the names of the twelve apostles. The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”—Ephesians 2:20. The apostles had a vitally important role in organizing the church, and in revealing the truth. The perfection of the city is further emphasized in that it is a cube. The length, the breadth, and the height of it being equal. The length, and the breadth, and the height are twelve thousand furlongs. The number twelve is significant. It is three times four—three for the Trinity, and four for the four corners of the earth. Multiplied by a thousand, which emphasizes its greatness. So we have here the Trinity working for the salvation of the earth. The different foundations are of different precious stones, and so truly magnificent.

Then we’re told that there was no temple there. Temples and churches are very important to God’s people in this world, so we’re surprised by the fact that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem. But what we must remember is that it is all a temple. Many compare the Garden of Eden to a temple, but how much more will Heaven be a temple. The throne of God and of the Lamb is central. All of the inhabitants are pictured surrounding the throne. We think of John’s first vision into Heaven: “Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold”—Revelation 4, verses 2–4. The twenty-four elders represents the church of the Old Testament, and the church of the New Testament. Then we are told of the worship: “The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”—verse 10–11. “The four living creatures that were before the throne rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”—verse 8. The glory of the nations is prostrated at the feet of King Jesus: “And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it”—Revelation 21, verse 26.

Sometimes the question is asked, Will we know one another in Heaven? It would seem very strange if we did not. Surely, we will not be more ignorant than we are now. When Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, they did not require an introduction for the disciples to tell who they were. The rich man looking up to Heaven, recognized father Abraham. However, Jesus makes plain that family relationships will not exist as they are on earth. The Sadducees asked him concerning a woman who had, in turn, seven brothers as her husband. Whose wife would she be in heaven? Jesus states clearly that the Sadducees err, not knowing the Scripture: “For in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels, but are as the angels of God in heaven”—Matthew 22, verse 30. There will be no family groups, neither will there be special parties or cliques or denominations in Heaven. All will be the children of God, and all will be united in perfect love one for another.

How then would we view our loved ones in Hell? This is a question which perplexes many.

The thought of a child, or a spouse, or a parent, a sibling, or a friend ending up in Hell is hard for us to accept. We love our friends and family and hate to see them suffering. Would the lostness of someone precious to us spoil our Heaven? What we must realize is that nothing will spoil Heaven. The Judgment Day will demonstrate the wickedness of the wicked, and the justice of God. In this life, we have little understanding of the evil of sin, and particularly, how wrong it is to reject or even to ignore the call of the gospel. Christ suffered immense pain to save us, and offers salvation to us all. To reject Christ and, as it were, to trample his blood underfoot deserves great punishment. Our love being first and foremost to God, will mean we will acquiesce fully in his Judgment.

A further question, what will our occupation be in Heaven? Some think that our occupations will be similar to what they are in this life, but without sin. We cannot be sure of these things. Certainly, we will be praising and giving thanks to God. Will we get bored? Definitely not. God knows what is best, and he will decide in Heaven what suits his people and makes them completely happy. Central will be the worship of God. Just as in Hell, the punishments vary according to privileges and sins, so the rewards in Heaven will vary according to faithfulness, love to the Savior, diligence in labors for the Master, and holiness of life here, but all will be fully satisfied. God is infinitely great, and so, he will be a central part of Heaven, and our occupation will be more and more discovering God, understanding God, seeing God, studying him, and as we study him, praising him accordingly.

Heaven is described as the marriage supper of the Lamb. The bride has made herself ready, and “she shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace”—Psalm 45, verses 14–15. The garment of needlework is the holiness of the saints. The church will forever be married to Christ, and enjoy his company to all of eternity. “For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”—Revelation 7, verse 17. It will be a feast of love for Christ forever. Amen.