

“Other than the Bible itself, this may well be the single most
life-changing book you’ll ever read.” — STU WEBER

HEAVEN

OVER
750,000
IN PRINT



RANDY
ALCORN

Chapter 22

How Will We Rule God's Kingdom?

Our liveliness in all duties, our enduring of tribulation, our honoring of God, the vigor of our love, thankfulness, and all our graces, yea, the very being of our religion and Christianity, depend on the believing, serious thoughts of our rest [heaven].

Richard Baxter

When we read that God promises us “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4), we may think of this inheritance as Heaven or its pleasures. But God not only gives pleasures to his heirs, he also gives us power—positions of authority in his eternal Kingdom. Our vested interest in the New Earth couldn't be greater. It was purchased on the cross by the blood of God's Son. The New Earth isn't a blissful realm that we'll merely visit, as vacationers go to a theme park. Rather, it's a realm we'll joyfully rule with Jesus, exercising dominion as God's image-bearers.

In Romans 8:16-17, Paul writes, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” While we're on Earth, we serve Jesus, rejecting Earth's value system, but not because we despise the earth or have no interest in it. On the contrary, we reject much of what this fallen Earth offers us *precisely because we want all of what God offers us on the redeemed Earth*. We will forever please our Father by ruling over the earth that he'll refashion for us to live on forever. As co-rulers with Christ, we'll share in the glory of the sovereign ruler himself.

Some might protest, “How dare we imagine such a future for ourselves!” Certainly it would be blasphemous for fallen humans to claim a share of God's throne if it was *our* idea. But again, it's not our idea; it's God's idea. It's his sovereign plan, laid out before the foundation of the world, which he has gone to sacrificial lengths to implement. If we reject the idea that God has called us to rule the earth, then we reject his explicitly stated plan and his sovereignly orchestrated purpose. *How dare we?*

It's in the context of our being heirs and co-heirs with Christ, heirs and future rulers of the earth, that Paul writes of all creation groaning as it waits to be “liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). In this same context, Paul offers us perspective on how to view the hardships of life in a fallen world: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Why God Created Mankind and the Earth

In *The End for which God Created the World*, Jonathan Edwards writes, “God has a disposition to communicate himself, to spread abroad his own fullness. His purpose was for his goodness to over-spill his own Being, as it were. He chose to create the heavens and the earth so that his glory could come pouring out from himself in abundance. He

brought a physical reality into existence in order that it might experience his glory and be filled with it and reflect it—every atom, every second, every part and moment of creation. He made human beings in his own image to reflect his glory, and he placed them in a perfect environment which also reflected it.”¹⁶⁹

Earth exists for the same reason that mankind and everything else exists: to glorify God. God is glorified when we take our rightful, intended place in his creation and exercise the dominion that he bestowed on us. God appointed human beings to rule the earth: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26-28, NKJV).

God’s intention for humans was that we would occupy the whole Earth and reign over it. This dominion would produce God-exalting societies in which we would exercise the creativity, imagination, intellect, and skills befitting beings created in God’s image, thereby manifesting his attributes. To be made in God’s image involves a communicative mandate: that through our creative industry as God’s subcreators, we should together make the invisible God visible, thus glorifying him in the sight of all creation.

Culture encompasses commerce, the arts, sciences, athletics—anything and everything that God-empowered, creative human minds can conceive and strong human bodies can implement. In *The King of the Earth*, theologian Erich Sauer writes of the phrase in Genesis 1:26 “let them have dominion”: “These words plainly declare the vocation of the human race to rule. They also call him to progressive growth in culture. Far from being something in conflict with God, cultural achievements are an essential attribute of the nobility of man as he possessed it in Paradise. Inventions and discoveries, the sciences and the arts, refinement and ennobling, in short, the advance of the human mind, are throughout the will of God. They are the taking possession of the earth by the royal human race (Genesis 1:28), the performance of a commission, imposed by the Creator, by God’s ennobled servants, a God-appointed ruler’s service for the blessing of this earthly realm.”¹⁷⁰

This reigning, expanding, culture-enriching purpose of God for mankind on Earth was never revoked or abandoned. It has only been interrupted and twisted by the Fall. But neither Satan nor sin is able to thwart God’s purposes. Christ’s redemptive work will ultimately restore, enhance, and expand God’s original plan.

John, the same apostle who writes, “Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 John 2:15), also writes, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). Because God hates sin, he rejects the sinful world that fallen humanity tries to create: “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does” (1 John 2:16). But God loves the world he created, and he’ll restore it as part of his grand plan for humanity’s redemption.

“Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4). How do we understand passages such as this? Consider the predicament of decent German citizens under the Nazi regime. Did they love their homeland, Germany, or did they hate it? Both,

simultaneously. They hated the Nazi government, the arrogance, depravity, bigotry, brutality, and persecution. Yet they knew there was a better Germany, even though it was buried beneath the prevailing tide of fascism. They were loyal to that *better* Germany, and they could still see signs of it in the beautiful countryside, a concerto, the eyes of a kind neighbor, Germans jailed for resisting the Nazis, and faithful citizens quietly intervening to save Jews. Paradoxically, it was *their very love for Germany that fueled their opposition to Nazi Germany*. Likewise, our love for God's Earth fuels our opposition to fallen Earth.

We need to think carefully when we read Scriptures that talk about "the world." I recommend adding the words *as it is now, under the Curse*, to keep the biblical distinctions clear in our minds:

Friendship with the world [*as it is now, under the Curse*] is hatred toward God. (James 4:4)

Do not be conformed to this world [*as it is now, under the Curse*]. (Romans 12:2, NKJV)

The wisdom of this world [*as it is now, under the Curse*] is foolishness with God. (1 Corinthians 3:19, NKJV)

The world as it was, and the world as it will be, is exceedingly good. The world *as it is now*, inhabited by humanity *as we are now*, is twisted. But this is a temporary condition, with an eternal remedy: Christ's redemptive work.

Paul says that Christ "gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Not all worlds and all ages are evil, but only this world in this present age. When Jesus calls Satan "the prince of this world" (John 14:30; 16:11) and Paul calls Satan "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), it's a relative and temporary designation. God is still God over the universe, still sovereign over Earth and over Satan. But the devil is the usurper who has tried to steal Earth's throne from man, God's delegated king of the earth. In his time, God will take back the throne, as the God-man Jesus Christ, at last restoring and raising Earth.

Paul encourages us not to become engrossed in the world as it is because "this world in its present form is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). God will not bring an end to the earth—rather, he will bring to an end this temporary rebellion. He will transform Earth into a realm of unsurpassed magnificence, for his glory and for our good.

God's Kingdom . . . and Ours

In Daniel 7 we're given a prophetic revelation of four earthly kingdoms, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, that will one day be forever replaced by a fifth kingdom. "There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

Because the four pagan kingdoms are on Earth, the implication is that the fifth kingdom—God's eternal Kingdom—will also be on Earth.

Daniel said of the four earthly kingdoms, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts,

each different from the others, came up out of the sea” (Daniel 7:2). These nations might appear to rise to power arbitrarily, but their emergence is orchestrated by Heaven, and their ruling authority is granted by God for they are “given authority to rule” (v. 6), and later “their dominion was taken away” (v. 12, ESV).

In contrast to the tenuous and temporary rule of the nations, we’re told that the Messiah’s dominion—in context, a kingdom on *Earth*—will be “everlasting” and “will not pass away” and “will never be destroyed” (v. 14).

Notice the continuity between the ultimate earthly kingdom of the Messiah and the previous earthly kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, from which eventually comes the kingdom of the Antichrist. The kingdom with the everlasting dominion is not a dominion over a *different* realm but over the *same* realm—Earth. In speaking of these kingdoms, God is not comparing apples (Earth) with oranges (a spirit realm), but apples with apples. Christ will not merely destroy the earth where fallen kings once ruled. Rather, he will rule over the same Earth, transformed and new.

At Daniel’s request, an angel provides an interpretation of his vision: “The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth” (v. 17). Then the angel makes an extraordinary statement: “But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever” (v. 18). This statement makes clear both the kingdom’s location (Earth) and its duration (eternal).

Some theologians reduce Daniel 7 to a promise that God’s saints will reign with Christ during the Millennium. But the text couldn’t be clearer—it says “for ever and ever,” not a thousand years. Many other passages also affirm an earthly reign that will last forever (e.g., Joshua 14:9; 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 34:17; 60:21; Jeremiah 17:25; Micah 4:7; Revelation 22:5). The angel Gabriel told Mary that Christ “will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33). Regardless of whether one believes in a literal Millennium, passages such as the ones cited here shouldn’t be understood as millennial references. They refer instead to an everlasting Kingdom.

But where is that eternal Kingdom located? If the other four kingdoms, spanning centuries, rose “from the earth,” and if the Antichrist will rule on the earth, where will God’s Kingdom be in order to replace those kingdoms? *On the earth*.

Under God’s covenant with Israel, the people never looked for the Messiah to reign in Heaven. That would be nothing new, because God already reigns in Heaven. Establishing God’s Kingdom was never about an immaterial spirit realm. It always concerned the one place in the universe made for mankind, the one place where God’s reign has been disputed: *Earth*.

It’s a common but serious mistake to spiritualize the eternal Kingdom of God. Many people imagine that God will replace the earthly kings and their kingdoms with a transcendent sovereignty over the spiritual realm of Heaven. But again, that would be nothing new. Furthermore, the clear meaning of Daniel 7 is that the coming reign of God and his people will take place *on Earth*. It will directly and decisively replace the corrupt reigns of prior kings of the earth.

The ongoing succession of Earth’s unrighteous rulers should make us hunger for the day when our righteous God will rule, not just in Heaven but on Earth. At stake is whether God’s will shall be done on Earth. The answer is that it *will* be done on Earth, for all eternity, under the reign of Christ and redeemed mankind, his servant kings.

God has never abandoned his original plan that righteous human beings will inhabit and rule the earth. That's not merely an argument from silence. Daniel 7:18 explicitly reveals that "the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever." What is "the kingdom"? Earth.

Earth is unique. It's the one planet—perhaps among billions—where God chose to act out the unfolding drama of redemption and reveal the wonders of his grace. It's on the New Earth, the capital planet of the new universe, that he will establish an eternal Kingdom.

Daniel 7:21-22 says that an earthly ruler "was waging war against the saints and defeating them, *until* the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (emphasis added).

The same earthly kingdoms ruled by ungodly human beings will ultimately be ruled by godly human beings. Christ's promise wasn't figurative—the meek really *will* inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). And they will rule what they inherit.

The Kingdom Transfer

Daniel 7:25 tells us that the saints will be handed over to the earth's kingdoms, which will persecute them for a season. But then a stunning reversal will occur. "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (v. 27).

The Kingdom will be God's, yet he will appoint his saints as rulers under him, and they "will worship and obey him."

What is the "greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven" that will be "handed over to the saints"? I believe it includes all that makes the nations great. That would include, among other things, their cultural, artistic, athletic, scientific, and intellectual achievements. All of these will not be lost or destroyed but "handed over to the saints" as they rule God's eternal Kingdom on the New Earth. We will become the stewards, the managers of the world's wealth and accomplishments.

Consider the marvels of this revelation. God's children who suffered under ungodly earthly kings *will forever take their place as earthly kings*. The great cultural accomplishments of ungodly nations will be handed over to God's people to manage and (I assume) develop and expand.

The very Earth to which Satan once laid claim will be stripped from his grasp and given over to those whom he hates and seeks to destroy—God's saints. Notice it doesn't say that the earth's kingdoms will be destroyed, but that they will be "handed over" to the saints, placed under their just rule. All the wrongs done on Earth by tyrants will be a thing of the past. No more persecution and injustice. The Earth that was first put under mankind's dominion and was twisted by the Fall will be redeemed, restored, and put under the righteous rule of a redeemed and restored mankind.

If the Bible made no other reference to believers ruling over an earthly kingdom, the emphatic message of Daniel 7 would suffice: *The saints of God will rule the earth forever*.

Many people believe that if God rules the universe, there's no room for other rulers. But this can't be true, because we're told that "all rulers will worship and obey him" (v.

27). As we've seen from Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21, there will still be nations on the New Earth, and they will still have rulers. But they will be *righteous* rulers, subordinate to Christ. People of every national and ethnic group ("tribe and language and people and nation") will worship the Lamb (Revelation 5:9). Some will rule over cities; others will rule over nations.

An Ever-Expanding Government

God says of the reigning Messiah, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7). What does this mean? If it was simply that the Messiah's reign will never cease, it would more likely say, "His government shall never end." That's true, of course, but it's not the point of the text. If it means only that his government shall be all-encompassing, it might say, "Of his governmental authority there will be no limit." That's also true, but again it's not the point. The key word in Isaiah 9:7 is *increase*. Nearly every major English translation of the Bible renders the Hebrew word *marbiyth* as "increase" or "expansion." In other words, Christ's government of the New Earth and the new universe will be *ever-expanding*.

How could that be? Even if the New Earth were many times the size of the present one, wouldn't every inch of it immediately or eventually be under his control and under ours as his representatives? If so, it wouldn't be ever-expanding. So what can it mean? There are two ways in which a government can increase: (1) by expanding into previously ungoverned territories; or (2) by creating new territories (an option not available to us as humans).

It may be that Christ's government will always increase because he will continually create new worlds to govern (and, perhaps, new creatures to inhabit those new worlds). Or perhaps it will always increase because the new universe, though still finite, may be so vast that what Christ creates in a moment will never be exhaustively known by finite beings. From what we know of our current universe, with billions of galaxies containing millions of billions of stars and untold planets, this is certainly possible. The restoration of the current universe alone will provide unimaginable territories for us to explore and establish dominion over to God's glory.

Mankind's fall may have initiated a divine moratorium on creation. By analogy, imagine a skilled artist who encounters difficulties with one great painting, his magnum opus. For the time being, he sets aside everything else to focus on this one work to bring it to completion. He's still a creator, still an artist. A hundred other dream projects await him. Once his consuming central creation is finally done, he will return to his practiced habit of creating new works of art. (Of course, the analogy breaks down because God isn't limited to one "painting," one act of creation, at a time.)

If Christ expands his rule by creating new worlds, whom will he send to govern them on his behalf? His redeemed people. Some may rule over towns, some cities, some planets, some solar systems or galaxies. Sound far-fetched? Not if we understand both Scripture and science. Consider how our current universe is constantly expanding. Each moment, the celestial geography dramatically increases. As old stars burn out, new stars are being born. Is God their creator? Yes. Suppose the new heavens also expand, creating new geography in space and ever increasing the size of God's Kingdom. Will he fill that empty space with new creation? Will he dispatch exploratory and governing expeditions to these worlds, where his glory will be seen in new and magnificent creations?

The proper question is not, Why would God create new worlds? That's obvious. God is by nature a creator and ruler. He is glorified by what he creates and rules. He delights to delegate authority and dominion to his children to rule his creation on his behalf. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."

Is there anything in Scripture—anything we know about God—that would preclude him from expanding his creation and delegating authority to his children to rule over it? I can't think of anything. Can you?

The Saints Will Rule

God's throne is referred to forty times in the book of Revelation, appearing in sixteen of the twenty-two chapters. In *The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven*, Wilbur Smith writes, "The basic undertone of all that is revealed in the Apocalypse concerning the activities of heaven may be summed up in this one word *throne*."¹⁷¹ Revelation isn't primarily a book about the Antichrist or the Tribulation; it's a book about God reigning. He reigns over the fallen universe now, and he will reign uncontested over the new universe, with mankind reigning by his side. Concerning the repeated references to our reigning over God's universe, Dr. Henry Grattan Guinness writes, "We must not regard this as a figure of speech, but as the description of an actual reality."¹⁷²

Humans are made to be kingdom builders, but history demonstrates that when we try to build without God as King, our "utopias" become hell on Earth. "Tragically," writes Bruce Milne, "humanity failed to fulfill its calling as God's vice-regents. Instead we have tumbled down to the dust from which we were taken and groveled on the earth instead of reaching to the skies."¹⁷³ Pascal writes that man endures "the miseries of a dethroned monarch." He asks, "What can this incessant craving, and this impotence of attainment mean, unless there was once a happiness belonging to man, of which only the faintest traces remain, in that void which he attempts to fill with everything within his reach?"¹⁷⁴

By rebelling against the King of kings, mankind abdicated dominion over the earth. But Christ will restore us to the throne occupied so briefly by Adam and Eve. He will hand over to us the Kingdom. He said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Service as a Reward

Those coming out of the Great Tribulation will be specially rewarded by being given a place "before the throne of God," where they will "serve him day and night" (Revelation 7:14-15). Notice that the Master rewards his faithful servants not by taking away responsibilities but by giving them greater ones.

Service is a reward, not a punishment. This idea is foreign to people who dislike their work and only put up with it until retirement. We think that faithful work should be rewarded by a vacation for the rest of our lives. But God offers us something very different: more work, more responsibilities, increased opportunities, along with greater abilities, resources, wisdom, and empowerment. We will have sharp minds, strong bodies, clear purpose, and unabated joy. The more we serve Christ now, the greater our capacity will be to serve him in Heaven.

Reigning over cities will certainly not be "having nothing to do." I believe that those who rule cities on the New Earth will have leisure (rest) and will fully enjoy it, but they will have plenty to do. Dallas Willard suggests, "Perhaps it would be a good exercise for

each of us to ask ourselves: Really, how many cities could I now govern under God? If, for example, Baltimore or Liverpool were turned over to me, with power to do what I want with it, how would things turn out? An honest answer to this question might do much to prepare us for our eternal future in this universe.”¹⁷⁵

Will everyone be given the opportunity to rule in the new universe? The apostle Paul said that eternal rewards are available “not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). The word *all* is encouraging. “The Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free” (Ephesians 6:8). The word *everyone* is again encouraging. It won’t be just a select few rewarded with positions of leadership.

Should we be excited that God will reward us by making us rulers in his Kingdom? Absolutely. Jesus said, “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

God will choose who reigns as kings, and I think some great surprises are in store for us. Christ gives us clues in Scripture as to the type of person he will choose: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. . . . Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3, 5, 10); ““God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Look around you to see the meek and the humble. They may include street sweepers, locksmith’s assistants, bus drivers, or stay-at-home moms who spend their days changing diapers, doing laundry, packing lunches, drying tears, and driving carpools for God.

I once gave one of my books to a delightful hotel bellman. I discovered he was a committed Christian. He said he’d been praying for our group, which was holding a conference at the hotel. Later, I gave him a little gift, a rough wooden cross. He seemed stunned, overwhelmed. With tears in his eyes he said, “You didn’t need to do that. I’m only a bellman.” The moment he said it, I realized that this brother had spent his life serving. It will likely be someone like him that I’ll have the privilege of serving under in God’s Kingdom. He was “only a bellman” who spoke with warmth and love, who served, who quietly prayed in the background for the success of a conference in his hotel. I saw Jesus in that bellman, and there was no “only” about him.

Who will be the kings of the New Earth? I think that bellman will be one of them. And I’ll be honored to carry his bags.



eternal perspective ministries
with author Randy Alcorn

Learn more about *Heaven*

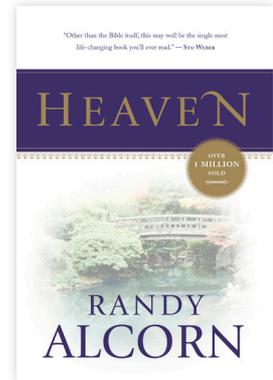
In the most comprehensive and definitive book on Heaven to date, Randy invites you to picture Heaven the way Scripture describes it—a bright, vibrant, and physical New Earth, free from sin, suffering, and death, and brimming with Christ’s presence, wondrous natural beauty, and the richness of human culture as God intended it.

God has put eternity in our hearts. Now, Randy Alcorn brings eternity to light in a way that will surprise you, spark your imagination, and change how you live today.

This is a book about real people with real bodies enjoying close relationships with God and each other, eating, drinking, working, playing, traveling, worshiping, and discovering on a New Earth. Earth as God created it. Earth as he intended it to be.

And the next time you hear someone say, “We can’t begin to imagine what Heaven will be like,” you will be able to tell them, “I can.”

[Purchase this book](#)



About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.

Randy resides in Gresham, Oregon with his wife, Nanci. They have two married daughters and five grandsons. He enjoys hanging out with his family, biking, tennis, research, and reading.



About Eternal Perspective Ministries

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God’s Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, unreconciled, and unsupported people around the world. The common element in all of our writing and teaching ministry is an emphasis on seeing life through the eyes of eternity, and thereby learning to live now to the glory of God.

You can order all of Randy’s books and products through EPM’s online store at www.epm.org.