



What Is God's Purpose For The Earth?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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What is God's purpose for the earth? Sometimes, it is claimed that God's purpose for this earth is that there will be a paradise on earth – because He originally created it in that way. However, is that really God's true purpose for the earth? Or, does He have a different purpose for the earth? Let's investigate.

All Things Were Created For God's Glory

Why did God create the world originally? The book of Psalms records several passages that provide us with the same answer. Consider the following verses. Psalm 8:1 says, "O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens!" Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork." Psalm 50:6 says, "Let the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is Judge." Psalm 89:5 says, "And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O Lord; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints."

What do all of these verses have in common? They all demonstrate how the things God has created work to glorify God. As you consider the wonders of God's creation, you must realize that each thing God has made offers evidence for the existence of God. And, not only do they offer evidence for the existence of God, but they offer evidence to demonstrate that God is God and that He possesses limitless power (see Romans 1:19-21).

Yes, all things in the heavens and on the earth were created in order to glorify God. This even includes mankind. In Isaiah 43:7, the Lord said, "Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." So, God's purpose for creating man in His own image was so that man would choose to live in a way that would glorify His Creator.

As you read about God's creation of the world in Genesis 1 and 2, you read about how God created all things in a way that was absolutely perfect. And, this is exactly what you should expect.

You would certainly *not* expect for the perfect God to create anything in a way that was less than perfect. So, as you read about each one of the six days of creation, you discover how that God declared each thing He had made “good.” Then, at the conclusion of God’s work to create all things, Genesis 1:31 says, “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”

At this point in God’s earthly creation, there was no imperfection. He placed Adam and Eve in the paradise that was the Garden of Eden (as described in Genesis 2). There was no sin. There was no suffering. There was no pain. There was no sorrow. There was no death – as they had access to the tree of life (see Genesis 2:9 and Genesis 3:22-24).

Man’s Sin Resulted In Death

Everything was perfect as the result of God’s creation. This is what God intended for His creation. However, God also created mankind (who had been made in His image) with free will. That is, God created mankind with the ability to make his own decisions about whether or not he would listen to God.

For this reason, God gave man a law to live by. Genesis 2:16-17 records that law. “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” Of all the trees God had created, there was only one tree that was “off limits” for Adam and Eve.

However, Satan enters the Bible story in Genesis 3:1, taking the form of a serpent and tempting Eve. He questioned whether God actually said that they were forbidden to eat of every tree that was in the garden. The woman answered by repeating the law that God had given them. However, the serpent told Eve that she would “not surely die.” Instead, her eyes would be opened and she would be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:4-5). Then, it is at this point that Genesis 3:6 records: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”

As a result of this sin (just as God had promised), death entered the world. First (and most significantly) was spiritual death. Remember, God had promised that they would die “in the day” they ate of the forbidden tree. Yet, as you read the verses following Adam and Eve’s sin, you notice they did not die *physically* in the day they ate of the forbidden tree. Instead, they went on to live outside of the Garden of Eden and even live long enough to have and raise children. So, the death they experienced “in the day” they ate of the forbidden tree was a different kind of death – a spiritual death. They were separated from God that day. Their relationship with Him was changed. They no longer would be given full fellowship with and access to God outside of the Garden of Eden.

Then, there were also physical consequences that occurred because of their sin. This is depicted in Genesis 3:14-24. The woman would suffer in childbirth. The man's work would become difficult. They were cast out of the Garden of Eden. They were separated from the tree of life. Physical death, suffering, pain, sorrow, evil, etc. were now in the world. The world would simply no longer be the same as God had created it.

God's Future Purpose For The Earth

Now what? That is the big question as we move beyond Genesis chapter 3. What hope is there for mankind? What will become of this earth?

You must remember the reason God created all things to begin with. The heavens and the earth were created to glorify God, just as mankind was created to glorify God (as we established in the beginning of this lesson). That purpose has not changed. In fact, take a moment to consider that all of the passages we considered earlier in the lesson were written *after* death had entered the world. Yet, God still said that His creation served the purpose of glorifying Him – as it still manifests the same truths it did when it was first created.

Regarding mankind, God made provisions for him to be saved eternally from the consequences of his sins. Even in Genesis 3:14-15, God vaguely points to one who would come and destroy the work of the devil. That one would be Jesus Christ. He is the one who came to this earth and gave His life on the cross so that mankind could be forgiven of his sin and have everlasting life (John 3:16).

But, what about this earth – now that it is subject to decay and death? Some claim that this earth will be restored to its original condition of being a true paradise. They believe that God will rejuvenate this earth one day and mankind can live forever in a Garden-of-Eden-like paradise.

To validate their claim, they often point to passages like the following. Psalm 37:29 says, "The righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever." Psalm 78:69 says, "And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has established forever." Psalm 104:5 says, "You who laid the foundations of the earth, So that it should not be moved forever."

While these passages may appear to support this claim at first glance, there are some problems with this interpretation of these passages. Consider a few points quickly. (1) The word "forever" can be used in different ways in the Bible. For instance, the Passover was to be observed by the Israelites "forever" (Exodus 12:24). Yet, the feast of the Passover is not part of God's new law today. (2) The Scriptural references that are generally used to support a future paradise on earth often come from books of poetry. For instance, the book of Psalms (that contained all of the references we considered) is a book of poetry. And, just like in modern poetry, it is improper to force literal interpretations on all poetic expressions. (3) The Bible contains several clear passages that teach God will destroy this world in the future. And, if God is going to destroy this earth in the future, He is not also going to establish a paradise on this earth.

2 Peter 3 is, perhaps, the passage with the most extensive amount of information on this subject. The primary discussion in the chapter is the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Then, we are also told about some of what will transpire whenever He comes. Verse 7 says that “the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word [God’s word], are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” Verse 10 says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” Verses 11-13 continue, “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

This passage (written to be interpreted in a literal way) could not be clearer. This earth is “reserved for fire,” “will pass away,” “will melt with fervent heat,” “will be burned up,” and “will be dissolved.” And, this is not the only passage that teaches such an idea. Genesis 8:22 says, “While the earth remains...” (implying that the earth will not always remain). Hebrews 1:10-12 (quoting from Psalm 102:25-26) says that the heavens and earth “will perish.” And, Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35). There should be no doubt that God means it when He says that this world will be destroyed whenever Jesus returns.

Then, God has promised that there will be a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). Revelation 21-22 pictures this new paradise in which those who have obeyed God will spend eternity (having access to the tree of life again). However, this paradise *cannot* be upon this earth (because this earth will have been destroyed). Instead, this paradise will be in Heaven. Read this passage and notice that God and Jesus will also dwell in this same place! In addition, 1 Peter 1:3-9 speaks of the eternal inheritance that is “reserved in heaven” for those who are faithful to God.

Conclusion

God’s purpose for this earth continues to be that it brings glory to Him. That has not changed. However, due to man’s sin, this world will not last forever. God has promised to destroy it. Yet, those who live according to God’s teachings will spend eternity with God in Heaven and enjoy that true paradise!

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