

*Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Each week I visit with Wes McAdams, minister and author, and together we explore biblical passages and topics. I hope you enjoy this second part of our study on the new heavens and the new earth.*

TRAVIS: Yeah, and I think -- yeah, I know I bring up "story" too much, but I do believe, as I think you and I kind of share this, that "story" is a really big deal and I think it's just, as a concept, something that God has given us to better understand him. Not just the stories, but the concept of "story."

WES: Yeah.

TRAVIS: And so this idea of, in the original creation there's death, you know, there's -- sin brings about death and the access to the tree of life is cut off --

WES: Yes.

TRAVIS: -- and then in the middle of the story, like you said, middle of history, there's death and then there's resurrection. There's a surprise that -- it's not a surprise if you're paying attention, but there's this surprise that, oh, death can be conquered and that Jesus receives this new body. And so then -- you know, again, another story rule is not everybody -- not every story or movie, or things like that, follow this, but generally they do, is in the beginning of your story you've got to tell people exactly how it's going to end. So they might -- it might be masked enough so that it's a surprise ending, but you got enough of the picture

that it's going to make sense. It's going to feel right when it ends.

And so then I fast-forward and -- again, I think about what I used to believe. That doesn't -- that story's not satisfying. That story's not -- you know, and I think the story needs to be satisfying to me now because how else do I have the hope of the things not seen?

WES: And I think -- I think you hit on something really good, and I think that it has to be satisfying in light of scripture. I can see how you could be satisfied, because I was. I was satisfied with the idea that, okay, Jesus is going to come back and then I'm going to float off and I'm going to be a spirit in a really good afterlife that I don't understand or know anything about. I'll just trust him. Whatever's to come is to come. And that was satisfying to me in a certain -- to a certain extent, and that's fine if that's satisfying to someone else.

But when I read through the Old Testament, and I -- and most people know that I wrote a book, *Beyond the Verse*, and so I -- as a part of that book-writing process, I went through and read every book in one sitting, and I sat down and read Genesis, one sitting, one day; read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers. So I sat down and I read it, like you said, in story form, read through the entire narrative and try to get this big picture and understand what story is being told. And, you know, it really struck me, and I thought if Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the Torah, the Pentateuch, the books of Moses, the law -- if this is supposed to be the introduction to this narrative, to this story that's going to culminate in Jesus and in his first coming and at his second coming, then how is it introducing us to that story? And if this is

a story about how to go to heaven when you die, what -- in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, what in the introduction gives us the idea that this is a story about how to go to heaven when you die? In fact, you could read through the entire Old Testament and you could say there is nothing -- or at the very least there is very little in there that would ever give anyone the idea that this is a story of how to go to heaven when you die, yet that's how we tend to explain what the Bible is. What's the Bible? Well, it's the instruction -- it's God's instructions about how to go to heaven when you die. Really? Well, what gave us that impression?

Now, there are some New Testament verses that you could take and you could say, "See, right there, that verse right there." It's like, okay, yeah, but let's talk about that in light of this big picture. But if the big picture of scripture is about how God has promised an inheritance to his holy people and how he's going to make his people holy and then fulfill his promises to them, and then we find out that he ultimately makes his people holy and fulfills his promises to them through Jesus, then it makes perfect sense. That's what the whole story is about, how he makes a people a holy people. People not just of the descendants of Abraham, but the descendants of all the nations, the descendants of Adam and Eve, how he makes those who have faith in him -- makes them a holy people and then gives to them their inheritance. That's what the story is about. And you cannot disconnect -- in my mind, anyway, you cannot disconnect that from the promises that he's made about the earth.

Again, even Jesus says the meek will inherit the earth. Peter says we're waiting for a new heavens and new earth. Different than it is now? Absolutely different than it is now. Nobody's saying that Jesus is going to come and -- or I'm not saying -- and I think we have to -- we have to acknowledge this. There are those that teach what's known as premillennialism or post-millennialism, which basically says Jesus is going to come and just set up some earthly kingdom and reign from Jerusalem or reign from --

TRAVIS: For a thousand years or 2,000.

WES: Exactly. Reign for a thousand years, and then after that, then we all go to heaven. That's not what I'm saying. In fact, what I'm saying, what I believe is true, is incompatible with that idea. It's completely incompatible with that idea.

TRAVIS: I've now -- just a quick thought. I've now come to think of those doctrines, like even the rapture or thousand-year reign, is -- it's like, oh, that -- I've always kind of been taught and have dismissed those ideas, but now I think, oh, it's a part of the picture.

WES: Right, yeah. Everybody's picking up on different passages and trying to put the puzzle pieces together in their own different ways, and premillennialism is really a pretty new idea, that idea of the rapture is pretty new. But the idea that -- no, no, no, Jesus is reigning now. This is the thousand -- I believe this is the thousand-year reign of Jesus right now. And by "thousand years," it's not literally a thousand years. It's ever since he became king, and he's reigning right now. But at the end of his reign -- the way Revelation tells the story is at the end of this

thousand years, then the enemies of God will be totally destroyed, that death and Hades will be totally destroyed, that all things will come to this huge culmination, and that death and wickedness and evil will all be taken away and that the city of God will come down out of heaven from God and that heaven and earth will be fully and completely and totally united. That's the way Peter seems to tell the story in II Peter 3. That's the way John tells the story in Revelation, is that there's going to be this reunification of heaven and earth, not for a thousand years, but forever. And not on the earth as it is now, but on a new earth, a changed, transformed, gone-through-a-metamorphosis type of an earth; renewed, recreated, restored, however you want to put it, but that's what we're looking for, and that doesn't fit the idea of premillennialism.

Premillennialism is a totally different idea, and I think sometimes people think that that's what we're talking about when we're saying these things. With premillennialism, they have this idea sometimes, depending on who you're talking to, that Jesus came to set up an earthly kingdom, like just become king in Jerusalem and live and dwell there, but that he was rejected and so that didn't work out, and so as a plan B he established the church, but eventually, he's going to come and set up his kingdom in Jerusalem. That's not what I believe at all. I believe that Jesus accomplished his mission, that he is reigning right now over his kingdom, that his kingdom is in existence and his reign has been established, but then that it is already -- I like the way some theologians talk about it as "already, but not yet." So it's "already" in the sense that Jesus is reigning, but all things are not on earth as they are in heaven,

but at the culmination of all things, at the -- the way Jesus puts it is "the restoration of all things" -- at the restoration of all things, everything that is opposed to God, every enemy of God, including death itself, will all be eliminated and Jesus will reign forever and ever. The Son of Man, rather, will reign -- as we've talked about before -- that all humanity will reign with Jesus. And when I say "all humanity," I don't mean universalism, as if all people are saved. I mean all those who have faith in God, all of those who are born again by the water and the Spirit, all those who belong to Jesus, all those that he judges to be faithful will reign with him and will reign under the rule and the reign of God with everything subject to God the Father.

That's the way I Corinthians 15 tells the story, that God is all in all. There is not a single passage in the Bible, not one -- I believed it for a long time, but it's not there -- that teaches the elimination of all physical things or the annihilation of the earth. It's just not there. The judgment of the earth? Absolutely. Fire on the earth? Absolutely. But the nonexistence of the earth? I don't think it's there. And, again, I want to be as respectful and as kind as I possibly can because I know -- you know, we've been talking about this for 2,000 years, you know, and we'll continue to talk about it, and I'm not the final word on anything, but there's just not a passage in the New Testament that teaches that the earth will cease to exist. That just isn't there. I understand how some people have come to that conclusion. I came to that conclusion. I taught that conclusion for a long time, but I've just come to understand that the Bible is about God's people being made holy and receiving an

inheritance, and that inheritance includes the earth. That's what Jesus says.

*I apologize for the interruption, but if you're enjoying this Bible study, you might also enjoy the audio version of my book, "Beyond the Verse." If you're not already an Audible subscriber, you can get the book for free with a 30-day free trial of Audible. Just visit [radicallychristian.com/audible](http://radicallychristian.com/audible). Now back to the Bible study.*

TRAVIS: I just thought I've never asked you when in your life you came to this point, but as somebody who is new to this idea of new heavens and new earth, what do you think that does to and for our faith?

WES: Man, I -- you know, it really helped me read the Old Testament better. So as far as like what has that done for my faith? Like it's helped me to not -- we used to jokingly call, you know, verses that you just kind of skipped over "practicing the Passover," like "I just practiced the Passover on that verse."

TRAVIS: You passed over it.

WES: Yeah, we just passed right over it. But it's really helped me to embrace a lot of the Bible that I just kind of was like, "That's weird. Like, that's weird. I don't understand that." I skipped over it or I turned it into a metaphor or, like, figurative. So like Leviticus -- like what do you do with that? What do you do with all of this blood and bodily fluids, and what do you do with all of this? Well, I mean, with this understanding, well, now I understand that we live in a creation that is

cursed with sin and death, and that death -- like physical, real death, not a metaphor for, quote-unquote, spiritual death -- but real death, blood and decay and death, is tied to sin and that our humanity is plagued with sin and death and that atonement comes and cleanses and makes new, but that that atonement and cleansing only lasted for a little while and then the cycles of life would plague us again and we'd go through the same cycles over and over and over and over again until the creator himself became human and came and made atonement and brought new creation in which no more sacrifices would have to be made.

So you start to see this big picture of the Bible and then you're like, oh, even Leviticus, which was a creepy book to me before, and then I just had to make all metaphors out of it and -- well, maybe like this was just a metaphor for sin or -- no, it's more than that. And it's about -- it's about the creation that is currently plagued with the cycles of sin and death versus what is coming, and every sacrifice and every high priest and every ram and every bull, it was pointing forward to the day when one sacrifice would be made that would bring about the new creation, and that's what the story's about.

So it helps me to read the Old Testament better, but it even helps -- Romans 8 -- we haven't talked about that yet, but Romans 8 is where this doctrine -- I mean, again, it's right there. It's core, and it helps me to not dismiss it but to actually deal with it and embrace it, and I feel -- I feel like I'm in a place in my life for the last four or five years, since I've really come to a better understanding of this, where I feel like I can embrace the totality of scripture and I can deal with -- it doesn't mean I

feel like I know everything at all, like far from it. The more I learn, the more I realize I don't know. But it does help me to embrace the big picture and not to have parts of scripture that it's like, well, I just don't talk about that, and I feel like that's where I was before. I felt like I just don't know what to do with that, and all of a sudden it feels like the puzzle pieces began to really come together for me when I started to understand what is the story of scripture.

TRAVIS: Well, and to go back to a point you were making before about metaphor and how -- I think we tend to do that with scripture that we -- we approach it almost expecting a metaphor --

WES: Yes, yes.

TRAVIS: -- because we need that -- you know, and I admit to being guilty of this even now, that I still approach scripture with, "Okay. But what does it mean for me?" And I skip over what it said, and so I think -- and I think one of the big ones that this doctrine -- again, going back to the beginning of our theology and what we believe about God and the setup that he has made, it makes me even take -- the new-heavens-and-new-earth doctrine makes me even take a look at baptism. And before I -- you know, before, what I believed, I would say, well, I do think it's important to be baptized, but I'll admit I don't know why. You know, it's just a blind act of obedience, which I think was a huge, huge part of my faith journey to -- like you said, to be satisfied with that and get confidence from that, you know, in my salvation even though I didn't know what it meant. And now I look at it and I can confidently say, A, that there's more to learn, but, B, that it's -- it is a

necessary -- it's our middle of the story. It's our chance to be -- to die and be buried and be resurrected in Christ and see even Christ went through -- you know, he had his baptism, but then he has his death, burial, and resurrection, and it's a template for me. You know, if I'm going to walk in Christ's footsteps, maybe I need to walk a little bit more literally than I allowed myself before. It's like, no, I need to be baptized like he was baptized, but in his baptism. And then one day I'm going to be -- I'm going to die and then I'm going to be buried and yes, I'm going to be resurrected.

WES: Quite literally.

TRAVIS: Yeah, quite literally. And not just letting -- you know, because I think metaphor -- it's like metaphor is so easy to be a matter of opinion, of interpretation --

WES: Right.

TRAVIS: -- which is a word that we come across a lot, and more and more I approach scripture from -- and I think it's because of this doctrine, this idea of, no, they were talking about a new heavens and a new earth, and I approach it more with a literal -- I want to have a literal understanding of what does this mean for me? What do I -- you know, if it sounds like a checklist, maybe it is.

WES: And, yeah, I mean, it -- I think that the key for -- a lot of times when we talk about interpretation and we talk about literal versus figurative, even that -- you know, there's always interesting discussions around what do you mean by "literal"? And so like sometimes somebody will say things like -- we've even gone so far with our use of

"literal" that we have a figurative -- a figurative usage of the word "literal."

TRAVIS: Yes, our generation ruined it.

WES: Right. We did, yeah. So we'll say things like, "It's literally raining cats and dogs outside." And so I think that the best way to think about it is the plain meaning of the text or the way that the original audience would have read the text or the way that the original author meant for the text to be understood. And the only way to do that -- the only way to do that -- and I'm not saying that you and I -- or I have, you know, the final say on what the right way to read scripture is, but what I'm saying is that there's really no way for any of us to have a good grasp on it without reading the big picture, without reading from the beginning to the end, and that's, I think, one of the biggest mistakes that we make when we pull out verses, because I'm sure that there are verses, as people listen to us talk about this and they're thinking about different passages of scripture and saying, "Well, Wes, what about this verse or what about that verse?" And those are great verses and, obviously, I believe them. You know, somebody is probably going to send me an e-mail with one verse. I get that all the time. Somebody will send me a verse and it's like, what do you mean by sending me that? Like do you think I don't believe that verse? Like what do you think you're saying by just reading me a verse or by sending me a verse?

You know, obviously, I believe all of the verses, but the only way to understand a particular verse of scripture is to understand it in light of the big picture of what that author was saying. And so sometimes things

are figurative, sometimes things are poetic, some things are meant to be read as a metaphor, but the only way to understand what sort of metaphor or how should I understand this figure of speech is to read it in light of the big picture of scripture. But I think what we do is we come up with our own framework, our own big picture, and we assume this is what the Bible's about, and if it doesn't fit that framework, we say, well, that must be a metaphor. That must be a figure of speech. And it's like, well, maybe it is, but you're trying to fit it into the wrong framework, you know. I mean -- and so if you think the Bible is primarily a story of instructions of how to go to heaven when you die, when you read things about Leviticus or when you read, you know, we're waiting for a new heavens and new earth, you'll think, well, that just doesn't fit my paradigm. It doesn't fit my framework, and so you have to either throw it out -- and I'm not accusing anybody of throwing it out -- but you have to interpret it as something other than what the author intended because it doesn't fit your framework. What I'm saying is we all have to break down our own framework and build up a framework that is the framework of the entirety of scripture, Genesis to Revelation, the grand big-picture narrative of the entire body of scripture, and once we have that big framework, then when we encounter a particular verse, then we say, well, how does it fit into that framework, not how does it fit into my framework.

TRAVIS: Well, when I thought back about that, I think a lot of it for me was unconscious because I thought back to thinking about new heavens and new earth, I was like, yes, I've read that a million times, but to your

point, it never -- it never even entered my framework because I think I just -- I didn't understand it.

WES: That's not what the Bible was about to you, yeah.

TRAVIS: Exactly. Exactly. And I think, you know -- but I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that with anything. I want to live in the light, not in the dark. I want to be awake to what Jesus wants me to know and I want to -- to the point about, you know, at the end of the -- works on the earth will be exposed, it's like I think it's my job as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, to expose it as much as I can for myself, and as I go out -- as I go into the world, to expose it for others.

WES: That's what light does. Yeah, absolutely, for sure, definitely. And we can't really finish this conversation without talking about Romans 8, and I think we've got to get there, but I do want to just throw out a couple different passages real quick, and you can stop me or change my direction on time if we're running out. But there's a couple passages that always seem to come up when we have these conversations, and one of them -- one of them is from I Thessalonians chapter 4. So in I Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul is talking about the coming of the Lord. He says, "This we declare to you by a word from the Lord that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep." So he's talking about people who have died, and he's talking about what's going to happen when the Lord comes or when the Lord appears. He says, "The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in

Christ will rise first." So again, resurrection. It's all about resurrection. "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

And so a lot of people will just, I'm sure -- will probably -- without listening to this part of the podcast, will just send me I Thessalonians 4:17 -- and I believe I Thessalonians 4:17. I believe we'll be caught up together with him in the clouds, but what we have to recognize is a couple things. First, it just says we'll be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air and we'll always be with the Lord. Where? It doesn't say where we will be with the Lord, unless you think it's in the clouds, which I don't know anybody who thinks that.

TRAVIS: No.

WES: I don't think anybody thinks we'll literally be in the clouds spending eternity.

TRAVIS: I've been up there. I haven't seen anything.

WES: Right. Yeah, exactly. And so nobody believes that. So you have to make an assumption -- on face value, when you're just reading this in English, you have to make an assumption about whether you will come to the earth -- a new earth -- or whether you will go up to some other place -- again, I'm putting in quotes -- "up" in the sky, in the heavens, or where you will spend eternity, but the text itself doesn't say. But a lot of people have read this one verse and made the assumption from I Thessalonians 4:17 that it can't be on the earth because we're being caught up together with him.

One of the things that we fail to recognize -- and I failed to recognize this, because the English word "meet," m-e-e-t, is ambiguous. It just means two people come together, right? "Meet" just -- I mean, you could meet at the grocery store and you could say, "I met Travis at the grocery store," or, "Travis and I were going down the aisle and we met each other," and it's really ambiguous to what the meaning is about, where you go from there. It's ambiguous. So the word "meet" in English isn't as helpful as the Greek word. The Greek word, though, is a very specific word; it's not ambiguous. So if you read this in English, it's ambiguous to where you go after the meeting, but in Greek it's not.

Every single time -- every time -- not some of the times, but every time this word is used, "apantesis" -- every time this word is used it has to do with welcoming a dignitary, every time. That someone important is coming and you go out to welcome them. You meet them outside to welcome them in. That's what the word means. That's how it's used. So, you know, the English word "meet" doesn't mean that. I understand that. That's one of the only words that we have to translate that, and that's the word that our translators have picked, but we have to understand that behind that word is a Greek word, and that Greek word has a very specific meaning and it means to welcome someone, especially someone of great importance, like a dignitary. Like Jesus, when Jesus was coming in, triumphal entry, they went out to meet him and -- but they didn't just stay there and they didn't turn around and go with him wherever he came from. They welcomed him into town. The same is true when Lazarus' sister goes and meets Jesus before he comes

in to Bethany and she goes out to meet him. The implication is that she brings him back. She went out to welcome him to town. And so we have to understand that that's the meaning of that word.

So when Paul says -- and, again, this is all part of a bigger story, a story in which John says the city of God is going to come down to earth like a bride. Like there's going to be like a wedding between heaven and earth and Jesus is going to wed the two together. And here Paul says we're caught up together with the Lord to meet him or to welcome him in the air so that we will always be with him. The implication of that word -- the implication of that Greek word is that we welcome him to -- I hate to say that we will welcome him to the earth, as if it's our earth or as if it's the same as it is now. Again, everything is going to be changed. Everything is going to be transformed. The world to come is not like this world. It's going to be transformed by his coming, but this text does not prove that we'll live in the sky forever. It doesn't. That's not the implication of what Paul says. It's about welcoming him.

Another text that people often point to is John chapter 14. I've even heard people say, "Well, this is just it. These two verses, like that's it. I don't need anything else, just these two verses." John 14:1: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I'm going." Okay. So Jesus says, "I'm going to prepare a place for you in my Father's house," and a

lot of people just assumed that that means, you know, Jesus is going to go up to heaven and get the house ready or something.

Now, John is an interesting gospel account -- and we could spend forever on this text here. But John's an interesting account because, you know, when you ask the question, well, does he mean this or does he mean that, the answer is usually both. Like does Jesus mean when he's crucified, like when he dies, when he's "going away," or does he mean when he ascends? The answer is usually both. It's kind of ambiguous and, usually, it's tying the two together. So when Jesus is glorified and "lifted up," does that mean lifted up like to the Father's right hand or lifted up on the cross? The answer is yes, it's both. And so when Jesus says, "I'm going away to prepare a place for you," the most immediate going away is his death. It's not his ascension; it's his death, but it's actually, I think, both. It's both his death and his ascension. And so in his going away, he's preparing a place for us in the Father's house.

Well, in the gospel of John, that idea is always about being glorified, being welcomed into the family of God, that where I am you may be also. And where is Jesus? Jesus is -- as he prayed, "Glorify me with the glory that I had with you before the world began." I want to be in that glory, in that royal, lifted-up, reigning and royal place. I want to be with -- and now, as he's lifted up, as we've talked about before as the Son of Man, and he rules and reigns in that glory as the Son of Man, and then he tells his disciples, "I'm going to prepare -- through my death, my resurrection, my ascension to the Father's right hand, I am going to prepare a place for you in the Father's house that you, too, can share in

that glory, that you can be part of this royal and deified -- this God-family, that you can be partakers in the divine nature, that you can be glorified with me, that where I am you may be also."

So is it about a place? And I'm doing "place" in quotation marks. Yeah, maybe it's about a place. But in the gospel of John it's probably more about status than it is location. It's more about relationship with the Father and closeness with the Father than it is about a literal place. But even if it is, even if Jesus really literally means, "I'm going to get you a room ready in my Father's house," well, according to the book of Revelation, the city of God, which is the house of God, is going to be reunified with the earth and so it's all going to come together anyway. It's not about -- there's nothing in that text or in I Thessalonians 4, there's nothing in either of those texts to say the earth will cease to exist and you're not going to be -- no. Yes, he is preparing us a room in the city of God, in the house of God, quite literally, I believe, but I also believe that in the new heavens, new earth it's all coming together. The place of God and the place of people is all coming together, according to Revelation 20:21. It's all going to be unified, so let's not worry about, you know, there or here, because it's -- yes, it's both. It's there and here. There and here is coming together.

That's not to say heaven will -- I hate when people say things like "Heaven will be on earth." That's not really true because "heaven" means the unseen place beyond the sky, and the whole point is there will be no unseen place beyond the sky because the sky will be dissolved and burned up and there will be no more sky and there will be no more

separation and that the place of God -- the city of God and the place of humans will all become one. And so the heavens and the earth, the place of God and the place of people, will all be one and it will be different, and, yes, we will have a room in the Father's house, quite literally. But, again, I think in that text Jesus is probably talking more about status and relationship than he is simply about a room with pink wallpaper or something. I'm being silly. I'm sorry, I shouldn't be, you know, frivolous with it, but Jesus isn't -- it's not just about like a literal room; it's about your status with God as a glorified human. It's about your relationship with the Father and becoming one with the Father through Jesus. So I think it's more about that than it is the other.

So let me hit Romans 8 real quick before we close. So, I mean, this text is just so rich and I just want to encourage people to read it. Just read it. Don't read a commentary. Just read it. Read the whole book of Romans and then read Romans chapter 8, but let's start in verse 18. Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" or in us or through us. "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Now, I mean we could go through the whole text, and we should, but we don't have time.

But some people read this, and because it doesn't fit their framework to say the creation is longing to be set free -- like the creation

is enslaved and it wants to be set free and that someday it will be set free -- that doesn't fit their framework that the Bible is about how to go to heaven when they die, so they say maybe by "creation" -- sometimes when that Greek word is used it means "creatures," and by "creatures," it means "people." So maybe by "creation" it means "people," that people are longing to be set free. Okay. Well, people -- like what people? Well, the other people in that text are the sons of God, the children of God, which are whom? Us. Christians. So are you telling me that there are the children of God, and then the creatures, the creation, the other people, the nonsaved people, are longing for freedom and that they'll be set free from their bondage to corruption? That sounds a whole lot like what we call "universalism," which means everybody's going to be saved, not just Christians, not just the children of God, but everybody will be saved. I don't believe that. I don't think that fits the framework of scripture. I think scripture teaches that those who will be redeemed and saved -- in fact, that's what the whole book of Romans is about, is that the Jews and the Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus will be set free, so I don't think that it's even possible. I think it's -- the only way to read "creation," quote-unquote, as "people" is to read it as teaching universalism, which Paul does not teach, I don't believe, in Romans 8 or anywhere. So I think the only interpretation that makes sense is for creation to be the creation, and that's why every translation I know of translates it that way, as in the physical creation. That it -- Paul puts it in terms of the creation, the cosmos, is like a woman who's pregnant expecting a child. It's groaning, waiting, but it's waiting and groaning

and hurting in anticipation of being set free.

Paul again, as you've pointed out, takes the story all the way back to creation and says that in the fall, in the curse, the earth, the planet, the creation was subjected to futility. It was cursed. It was put into bondage and it's groaning and it's in turmoil, but someday it will be set free and it will be released from its bondage. Now, that's a very different thing than saying it will be annihilated from existence. If that's what is in Paul's mind, he picked some really weird language. I mean, I'll tell you, he picked some really weird language to describe the earth being eliminated from existence because I don't know any pregnant woman who giving birth to a child is an apt comparison to ceasing to exist. That doesn't make sense. He is describing the creation waiting for something better to come, because right now all of it, from the trees to the dirt to the waters, the seas, the mountains, it's all beautiful and wonderful, but it's in turmoil. It's quaking. It's falling apart. It's -- you know, it's plagued with all kinds of horrible catastrophes, but it's doing so in anticipation. Paul says it's like the entire creation is anticipating being set free and becoming what it's always meant to be, and that is such a beautiful picture, but yet we've convinced ourselves that scripture somehow teaches that it just will cease to exist. That's not what Paul is describing. Paul is describing a time when the entire creation will inherit the same redemption that the children of God are inheriting. He says that you and I and our mortal bodies will be redeemed, and he says the same is true for creation.

Now, again, I love my brothers and sisters who believe what I had

always believed, that the earth will cease to exist and we'll just float away to some spiritual realm, and if you want to believe that, you know, you can believe that. I'm not going to come to your house and make you believe what I believe and I'm not going to say, you know, I don't want to have anything to do with you or you're not part of my spiritual family because you believe something different. I love you. We'll all get along. That's fine. But I just don't know how we explain this in that framework. What Paul is describing here is that the creation is waiting in anxious anticipation to become what we will become when our mortal bodies are redeemed. The entire creation will be redeemed in the same way and will become something brand-new and it's all waiting for that day, and, personally, I'm waiting for that day, as well.

*I really hope you enjoyed this Bible study and I hope you'll subscribe to hear future episodes of the podcast. A big thank you to Travis Pauley, as well as our McDermott Road church family, for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.*