

THE NEW HEAVEN, THE NEW EARTH, AND THE NEW JERUSALEM

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there was no more sea...and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from God” (Rev. 21:1, 2). As we have noted many times in *The Living Waters Newsletter* “The book of Revelation was basically a message to the church in John’s day just as the epistles of Paul were messages to the recipients of the churches in his day. The book of Revelation is about the fall of Jerusalem and the Jewish system and the rise and triumph of the Christian faith. Accepting the fact that these words, like the rest of Revelation, were written in symbolism, we must turn to the rest of Scripture to interpret the symbols.”

With that in mind let’s identify the “first heaven and first earth.” Isaiah 51:15, 16 states: “I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared; the Lord of host is His name, and I have put my words in your mouth and have covered you with the shadow of my hands that I may plant the *heavens*, and lay the foundations of the *earth*, and say to Zion ‘You are My people.’” Here God is not speaking of the Genesis creation, but rather He is speaking of Israel’s old covenant world. On these verses John Owen, famous English theologian in the seventeenth century, wrote in *The Banner of Truth*: “The time when the work here mentioned, of planting the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, was performed by God, was when He ‘divided the sea’ (ver. 15), and gave the law (ver. 16), and said to Zion, ‘Thou art my people’ that is, when He took the children of Israel out of Egypt and formed them in the wilderness into a state. He planted the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, made a new world; that is brought forth order, and government, and beauty, from the confusion wherein before they were. This is the planting of the heavens and laying the foundation of the earth in the world.” God is speaking to Israel in Isaiah 1:1-2 “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. “Listen, O *heavens* and hear O *earth*, sons I have reared and brought up but they have revolted against me.” He is speaking to old covenant Israel.

In Leviticus 26:19 in warning Israel to not break His commandments, God warns “I will break the pride of your power, and I will make *your heaven* as iron and *your earth* as brass.” This passage does not reference the original creation. Rather he speaks of *your heaven* and *your earth*. God is speaking definitely of Israel’s heaven and earth. This is covenant language in Scripture. The first heaven and the first earth were the old covenant God made with Israel on Mt. Sinai. The Israelites in Moses’ day and in Isaiah’s day as well as the Jews in Jesus’ day certainly understood the words spoken of Israel’s heaven and earth.

The first heaven and first earth passing away could not be referring to the literal heaven and earth is seen in following Scriptures: “He commanded and they (the heavens) were created. *He also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away*” (Psalm 148:5, 6). “He establi-

shed the earth on its foundations, so that *it will not totter forever and forever*” (Psalm 104:5). “He built His sanctuary like the heights, like *the earth which he has founded forever*” (Psalm 78:69). “A generation goes, and a generation comes, but *the earth remains forever*” (Ecc. 1:4). “You established *the earth and it stands*” (Psalm 119:90).

Romans 8:18-11 shows the earth will not be destroyed, rather it will be redeemed. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” Not only did the sin of Adam bring a curse upon the whole human race, but the earth suffered a curse as well. Now the children of God are waiting eagerly for the redemption of their bodies (ver. 23) and the creation itself is also waiting to be redeemed (ver. 21,22). Far from being destroyed the earth is going to be redeemed when the curse is taken away. Just as we receive a new body at resurrection (Eph. 1:14, I Cor. 15:38-44) so we will inherit a renewed earth on which to dwell with that new body.

A cursory look at the statements of Jesus in the Gospels prove that the heaven’s and earth that passed away were not the literal heaven and earth but rather to the old covenant system. “For truly I say to you *until heaven and earth pass away*, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until it all things be accomplished” (Matt. 5:18). The word translated “accomplished” in the NASV, and “fulfilled” in the KJV the Greek word means “come to pass.” That is, all the purpose of the law would “come to pass” or be accomplished or fulfilled. An example is seen in the fact that the law condemns sin, and the condemnation of sin is death. The law pronounces that death must pass upon all who have sinned. This punishment must be carried out. Christ therefore paid our penalty of death by dying on the cross. When that “came to pass” the purpose of the law was “accomplished” or fulfilled.” Notice the word *until*. “Until” indicates a specified time in the future. This shows heaven and earth will pass away and the law will “come to pass” or accomplish its purpose or be fulfilled. “*Heaven and earth shall pass away*, but my words will not pass away” (Matt. 24:35, Mark 13:31; Luke 21:23). That which would pass away is stated in Hebrews 8:13: “In that He says a new covenant, He has made the first old. Now that which decays and grows old is near vanishing away.” Also, Hebrews 10:9: “He takes away the first that he may establish the second.”

Hebrews describes these things in these words: “His voice then shook the earth (Mt. Sinai), but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.’ This expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes those things

which can be shaken, as created things, so that those things that cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:26, 27).

We turn now to II Peter 3, a chapter usually interpreted to mean the destruction of the world. However, Peter writes of the “*world* at that time (in Noah’s day) was destroyed being flooded with water. But by His word the *present heavens and earth* are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (ver. 6, 7). Instead of referring to the *world* in the rest of the chapter, he refers to the *earth and elements*. Peter is writing to a people who were versed in the writings of the Old Testament. They were Jews, “aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (I Pet. 1:1). He is not reluctant to quote from the Old Testament writings (1:16, 24; 2:6-8; 3:10-12; II Pet 2:22). He refers to events in the Old Testament with which they would be familiar (3:20; II Pet 2:4-8, 15) and mentions “the fathers” (3:1). We mention all this to show that when he uses imagery from the Old Testament they would have understood what he was talking about. When he speaks of “the heavens passing away, elements being destroyed, the heavens destroyed by burning and elements melting with intense heat” he is using the “collapsing universe” terminology which was characteristic of the Prophet’s writing when they wrote of God’s Judgment. What are these *elements*? Prophecy preachers say the word refers to the physical components of the universe. However, the word *elements* is used many times in the New Testament, but is never used in reference to the physical universe. It is always used in connection with the Old Testament Law system (see Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20 and Heb. 5:12. In context it is always referring to Old Testament covenant truths.

II Peter 3:10,13: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be *destroyed* with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be *burned up*. Since all these things are to be *destroyed* in this way what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by *burning* and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” The promise Peter is referring to is Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66:22-24.

Concerning this promise in Isaiah that God will create these new heavens and new earth, wherein righteousness dwells, to quote John Owen again: “This is a prophesy of Gospel times only; and that the planting of these new heavens is nothing but the creation of Gospel ordinances, to endure forever. The same thing is so expressed in Hebrews 12:26-28.” Contrary to what “the soothsayers of the second advent” would tell us, Isaiah 65 and 66 is not a prophesy of the Millennial reign of Christ after he returns to earth. According to Isaiah the prophesy speaks of birth, death, building and planting, growing old etc. (65:20-23). Both Peter and Isaiah are speaking of the day of the Lord when He brings His judgment upon the unbelieving Jews by the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the whole *heaven and earth* of the Old Testament system and the ushering in of the *New Heaven and New earth* inaugurated by the death of Christ on the cross. He states that “according to His promise *we* are looking for a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells... therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found in him in peace, spotless and blameless” (verses 13, 14). This shows Peter expects it to happen at any time.

The identity of the New Jerusalem: Hebrews 12:22 states: “You have come to Mt. Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...” Revelation 21:2,3, identifies the heavenly Jerusalem: “And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a voice from the throne, saying ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be among them’.” In verses 9-22:6 John is giving the details of verses 2 and 3. Nowhere in this chapter does it say this is heaven, a city in the sky. Note verse 9: “and one of the seven angels come and spoke to me saying, ‘Come here and I shall show you the bride, the wife of *the Lamb*.’” The angel did not say “I will show you heaven.” Rather. “I will show you the *bride*, the wife of the Lamb.” No one can doubt or dispute the fact that the bride of the Lamb is the church (Eph. 5:27, 32). Note verse 10: “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” He does not say we go “up” to dwell with God, rather He comes “down” to dwell with us. This is the community of the redeemed in fellowship with God. “Coming down from heaven” says it is always a work of God’s sovereign grace. The symbolism of the rest of the chapter describes the church as it should be. It reflects the glory of God in a world of darkness (ver. 11). Christ, the lamb, the true light drives away the darkness of ignorance, misery, guilt, and moral pollution. In and through him the glory of God becomes manifest in the church. The holy city needs no natural or artificial light (ver. 23). The word is God’s light (Psalm 119:105) which is the message of the church and has no need to use gimmicks to reach people for Christ. It has walls great and high (ver. 12-20). Walls represent salvation (Isa. 26:1, 60:18). The wall also divides between the holy and profane (Ezek. 42:20). The church is a holy people, separated from the world. The twelve foundations are the teaching of the Apostles which they received from Christ, the corner stone (Eph. 2:20). This means the foundation of the church is Christ (I Cor. 3:11). The twelve gates (ver. 13) are for entrance. Jesus first entered heaven itself (Heb. 9:12, 13) and made it possible for us to enter the very presence of God, the prerogative of the church (Heb. 9:19, 20). Contrary to modern thought, there is only one street in the city (ver. 21, 22:2) and only one way to God and this is only through Christ Jesus (John 14:6). There is no temple in the city (ver. 22). No temple is needed for the fellowship of the believers with God is direct and immediate. “The Lord God and the Lamb are its temple.” Both God and Christ dwell in the believer through the Spirit (John 14:23), therefore, they become the sanctuary of the church. Nations will walk in the light of the church and kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it (ver. 24). This is an astonishing statement. Yet Isaiah 60, which is a prophesy of “the city of the Lord” (ver. 14) or the church, states “the nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising” (ver. 3) and the wealth of the nations will come to you” (ver. 6). Further “the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish” (ver. 12). This is a “prolepsis” (that is God declares something to be true when it has not yet happened). We do not yet see this happening (as the Hebrew writer said) “but we do not yet see all things subjected to him, but we see him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely Jesus” (Heb. 2:8,9), and what he has done and who he is.

The New Jerusalem is “the tabernacle of God among men, and He will dwell among them, and shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (Rev. 21:3).