

## The New Heavens and New Earth

"Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Other references in the Bible:

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isaiah 65:17).

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain." (Isaiah 66:22).

"And 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 21:1).

### What Is The First Heaven And First Earth?

The word "heaven" is used in the plural number in the Bible, and Paul refers to the "third heaven" in 2 Corinthians 12:2 as the place where God dwells. The first heaven is the aerial heaven or sky, the region of the earth's atmosphere. And so we read of the "fowls of the heaven" (Jeremiah 15:3). The second heaven is the sidereal or starry heaven, thus the region of the stars (Isaiah 13:10). The third heaven is the heaven where the throne of God is (Psalm 11:4; Revelation 4:2, 8-10).

Peter says heaven and earth will pass away:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which 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 (2 Peter 3:10-11).

The heavens which are to pass away are those immediately above the earth and associated with it. The earth, of course, is the place where man now lives. These heavens and the earth are to suffer dissolution in a mighty fire. This great event will be attended by a great noise and the elements (rudimental portions, minute parts of the earth system) will melt with fervent heat. This earth and heaven are to perish. They are to lose their form and to be returned to the atoms

of which they were constructed. Jesus emphatically said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away..." (Matthew 24:35).<sup>1</sup> John says, the first heaven and first earth were "passed away." (Revelation 21:1). This is the heavens and earth that will pass away.

It is obvious that this passing of the heavens and earth refers to eschatological or end time events. This passing will occur at the coming of Christ. Peter says that in the last days scoffers will come with the question "where is the promise of his coming." (2 Peter 3:4, [also see the argument below on this verse]). The subject under consideration then is the coming of Christ. In verse nine, he assures his readers that God is not slack concerning his promise. Then in the next verse: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise..." (2 Peter 3:10), and he proceeds to detail the melting, burning and dissolving of the material universe. This is the first heaven and first earth that will pass away.

### The Destruction Of Jerusalem Or The End Of The World?

Some think that this refers to the Destruction of Jerusalem. But it is hard to believe that Peter is telling Christians to earnestly desire the Destruction of Jerusalem and all the horrors that would accompany it. What kind of encouragement and joy could that possibly bring them? But it would be a great comfort for them to know that the day of their redemption was coming. That is what they were (and we are) to expectantly look for and earnestly desire. As I said, we are to look forward to that day. "Is it today, Lord?" If we live that way, the question is: "What manner of persons ought we to be?"

Those who think these verses are discussing the Destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) and not the end of the world should notice this: If this is talking about the Destruction of Jerusalem, why the question of the mockers in verse 4? They refer to the stability of the earth as an argument against the Lord's coming. Other cities had been destroyed. Other nations had ceased to exist. So when they say, "...all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," they have to be referring to the stability of the earth.

Things, cities, governments, nations, have gone by the wayside. And so they cannot end their argument that everything has stayed the same for they know that governments have gone, that cities have disappeared, and so they have to be talking about something different, and that is the stability of the earth. That is what they are talking about.

Peter has to answer this argument. Peter answers this objection stated in verse 4 by his reply in verses 5-7. Peter shows that the world of mankind (kosmos) had been destroyed by water, which shows Peter is talking about a calamity of a universal nature. Not local, but universal. He is not talking about some small, local event. He is talking about the whole universe. He goes on to say in verse 5 that "...the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water..." This has to refer to the literal earth and skies. Verse 6 shows that the world that then was, was literally destroyed with water. So the conclusion found in verse 7 has to be that the heavens and the earth which are now are also going to be literally destroyed by fire. One is not figurative and the other literal. They are both, the same, or what would be the answer? The destruction of the world before was literal. Therefore the destruction of the physical world when Jesus comes again will also be literal. We are not talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. That is not the subject here. It is the end of the world.

Then in verse 14, Peter says that we need to be fit for the new heavens and new earth. We are to "look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." If this is not talking about the end of the world, if everything is just going to continue on and stay the same – what goal is there to all of this? What goal is there to our lives? We need to be fit for that new heavens and new earth. That we are ready, and that God will choose us and put us into that new world, the new dwelling place of God and man.

### The New Dwelling Place Of The Righteous And Ungodly

The new heavens and the new earth shall exist after this world shall have been destroyed by

fire. This will be the new abode for the righteous. He describes this place in Revelation 21:1-5:

And 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. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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. And 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. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

“The holy city, new Jerusalem” comes does in a vision for John to see and describe. But that is not the only place of dwelling, for verse 8 tells more:

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

This new heavens and new earth is a new place, a new dwelling. What is Heaven? Right now it's the dwelling place of God. What is earth? Earth is the dwelling place of man. What is going to be the new heavens and new earth? The new dwelling place of God and man for eternity. The old is going to be gone, done away with, no longer exist, and will be melted with fervent heat. All of those who were not godly and did not follow God's ways, are going to be gone into “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” And all of us who are living godly will live with God in “the new heavens and new earth,” forever. The new heavens and new earth are the new dwelling place of God and man. And it cannot be this earth, for it will “melt with fervent heat.”

### **Was this Earth Ever to Be the Final Dwelling Place?**

God has never intended for this present physical

world to be the final abode of man. Many are they who believe that this present world is only going to be renovated and turned into another physical Garden of Eden on earth. The new heavens and earth is synonymous with Heaven. It will be the abode of righteousness because righteous, resurrected people will be the only ones to inhabit this realm. The population will be made up of “just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23).

Peter gives no hope for those sad and misguided people who advocate their future-kingdom on earth theories. All that is taught by these false teachers depends on the continuation of this old earth. Peter makes it clear that this old earth will cease to be, burn up, melt away with fervent heat. Therefore, these false teachings and false systems will cease to be, burn up, and melt away, also.

### **Conclusion**

Peter brings up again that new, eternal dwelling place in verse 14:

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. Peter notes several things which are to characterize those who look for that dwelling place and expect to live there when eternity dawns. When the Lord returns, the faithful will be found serving Him. By his words Peter causes the serious thinker to ask himself, “In what circumstances will the Lord discover me when He comes again?”

<sup>†</sup>Dub McClish, Studies In The Revelation, The Third Annual Denton Lectures, (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co, 1984), p. 466.

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Mid-West Lectures, “God's Precious Promises.” To hear or view the complete lesson go to [www.kc-cofc.org/2009Lectures.htm](http://www.kc-cofc.org/2009Lectures.htm) or contact the 39th Street Church of Christ 15331 East 39th Street Independence, MO 64055-4240 USA

# *God's Precious Promises...* **The New Heavens And A New Earth**

by  
Michael Wyatt

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