

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

Gerrie & Martie Malan



In another article we dealt with the biblical concept of the New Jerusalem. This long-awaited new holy city is at the centre of the variations of end-times doctrines in Christendom. The other similar concept that is so awaited is the arrival of the new heavens and new earth. But is this concept that has been so embedded in our minds though doctrinal traditions really what the Scriptures describe?

We do not have the space or time to deal at length with this question here. While touching on it briefly based on

2 Peter 3, we do encourage you to download the following article for a more in-depth discussion: http://americanvision.org/3603/what_does_peter_mean_by_the_passing_away_of_heaven_and_earth_a_study_of_2_peter_3/. It is an article by Gary DeMar and David Chilton, two theologians of our time. Both have written extensive works on end-times theology.

But because the two authors above are not popular among the modern end-times prophets, we wish to begin this article with some quotations from theologians of old. However, before we do so, let us remind ourselves that a cardinal rule of biblical interpretation is that Scripture, and not the principles of Greek or other philosophy, must interpret Scripture. In this regard remember then that:

- the Old Testament contains the key to the interpretation of prophecies in the New Testament; and
- the New Testament is God's own inspired commentary on the meaning of the Old Testament.

The following quotations are all from the article *New Heavens and Earth* (www.preteristarchive.com/StudyArchive/n/new-heavens-earth.html):

John Brown (1853): *"Heaven and earth passing,' understood literally, is the dissolution of the present system of the universe, and the period when that is to take place, is called 'end of the world.' But a person at all familiar with the phraseology of the Old Testament Scriptures, knows that the dissolution of the Mosaic economy, and the establishment of the Christian, is often spoken of as the removing of the old earth and heavens, and the creation of a new earth and new heavens."*

John Lightfoot (1859): *"(...) the destruction of Jerusalem is very frequently expressed in Scripture as if it were the destruction of the whole world."*

John Owen(1721): *"It is evident, then, that in the prophetic idiom and manner of speech, by heavens and earth, the civil and religious state and combination of men in the world, and the men of them, were often understood. So were the heavens and earth that world which then was destroyed by the flood."*

Charles Spurgeon (1865): *“Did you ever regret the absence of the burnt-offering, or the red heifer, or any one of the sacrifices and rites of the Jews? Did you ever pine for the feast of tabernacle, or the dedication? No, because, though these were like the old heavens and earth to the Jewish believers, they have passed away, and we now live under a new heavens and a new earth, so far as the dispensation of divine teaching is concerned. The substance is come, and the shadow has gone: and we do not remember it.”*

In Deuteronomy 32:10-11 Moses described Israel’s salvation in the wilderness in terms of God’s Spirit hovering over a waste, just as in the original creation account. It is clear, therefore, that God expressed His covenant with Israel in terms of a new creation from the very beginning. Now God does the same with His New Covenant.

Modern end-times prophets take the Scriptures out of all contexts, including time context, and transport it to a time thousands of years in the future. This is not what Peter wrote! He was quite specific that he was dealing with something that was already taking place (2 Pet 3:10-13):

*“But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that [day] the heavens will pass with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, [it is clear] what sort of people you **[NB - his readers at the time]** should be in holy conduct and godliness as you **[NB]** wait for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be on fire and be dissolved, and the elements will melt with the heat. But based on His promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell”.*

Peter was writing of the dissolution of the ‘heaven and earth’, the Old Covenant system with all its obligatory rituals and sacrifices, and that it was already beginning to occur at that time. The ‘universe’ of the Old Covenant was coming apart and would never be revived again. How sad it is to find so many well-meaning individuals and groups today trying so sincerely to revive the Old Covenantal rituals and practices that Jesus completed on the cross?

It is so important to note that Peter was continually drawing his readers’ attention to events that were already beginning to take place, and not events that were to take place thousands of years in their future. The end of ‘all things’ in proper context of the apostle’s time was at hand: the end of the temple, of the Levitical priesthood, of the whole Jewish economy or system.

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Where then, one may ask, do we who are living in the present age come in? In completing the Law and the Prophets, filling up the hollow so to speak, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God, the new heavens and earth. We are to live the kingdom life here and now, and not one day ‘when we get to heaven’. That the world as we know it today is seemingly stumbling from one chaos to the other, is in no small measure the result of the relinquishing of a New Covenantal position by believers through the

man-made traditions they have been pacified within the institutional church – a church that has in so many ways become powerless and lost its voice in the world at large.

Compare the secular world with contemporary Christendom and search for the fruit of the light on the daily marketplace. Is it more to be found among Christendom than among the rest? There are most certainly many positive aspects, but does the community of believers really manifest the kingdom that Jesus announced? Instead of being the light in the Lord, believers are sadly again waiting for the light!

[We recommend reading our article on the New Jerusalem as well]

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