

22. NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

Gn 1:1 In the beginning God created **the heavens and the Earth**.

Isa 65:17-19 I will create **new heavens and a new Earth**. People will not remember the former things; they will not enter their minds. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I'll create, for I'll create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people to be happy. I'll rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. The sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more.

2 Pe 3:13 In keeping with his promise we look forward to **a new heaven and Earth** where righteousness dwells.

Rev 21:1 And I saw **a new heaven and Earth**, for **the first heaven and Earth** had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

Rev 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and he who sat on it. **The earth and the heavens** disappeared from before him without leaving a trace.

At the very beginning of God's revealed word, we have the declaration that God created the heavens and the Earth. He created everything good, but Satan entered and tempted mankind to disobey God. They succumbed, and sinful behavior took over human society. Since then, throughout human history, creation and human government have been in a state of corruption and frustration.

The prophet Isaiah revealed a promise made by God that he would one day create a new heaven and Earth where weeping would be replaced by joy. God would rejoice over Jerusalem and his people, Israel. People would live longer and be secure in their homes.

The apostle Peter, writing to Christians, said that in keeping with God's promise, we are looking forward to this new heaven and Earth where righteousness will dwell. Cf. Isa 32:1-2, 15-18).

The apostle John had a vision of this new heaven and Earth (Rev 21:1). All he said was that the first heaven and Earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. No longer any sea infers that the Earth is still there and ‘sea’ is not literal, it refers to the rebellious nations as often in Scripture (Dan 7:2-3, Rev 13:1). The Messiah will rule from sea to sea, the western border of millennial Israel is the Mediterranean Sea (Ezek 47:20), and the river that flows out of Jerusalem flows half to the Mediterranean Sea and half to the Dead Sea (Zech 14:8). So the seas are still there.

Following his one-verse description of the new heaven and Earth, John spends the rest of the chapter describing New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God. We are not told the destination of the holy city, only that it comes down from heaven. It is a heavenly city and will exist in the heavenly realm, but the impression is that it will overlap with the earthly city of Jerusalem. God’s throne will be in New Jerusalem, and he says: I’m making everything new!

The creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay to enjoy the freedom of the glorious state of God’s people (Rom 8:21).

The heavens are made new by the presence of this city, which is surrounded by the light of the glory of God. God will renew the Earth in the person of the Messiah, who will be king of the Earth, and by his monarchy, the Church, who will rule with him. We are told six times in Revelation 20 that this reign will last for a thousand years.

The nations walk by the light of New Jerusalem, and their kings bring their wealth to it as tribute (Rev 21:24-26). This shows that the descent of New Jerusalem occurs at the beginning of the millennium. The final victory over Satan and the judgment of the dead (Rev 20:7-15) follow Revelation 21 chronologically. At the judgment of the dead, the renewed heavens and the Earth are finally dissolved. “The Earth and the heavens fled from God’s presence without leaving a trace.”

The first prophecy about new heavens and a new Earth was made by the prophet Isaiah, who lived in the latter half of the eighth century B.C. Almost all 66 chapters have prophecies about the Messiah and the Day of the Lord at the end of the age. He is speaking to Israel as a nation and prophesies their return to the land, the conversion of a remnant of their nation, and a glorious future for them and their capital, Jerusalem. His prophecy about a new heaven and Earth is made in that

context of this Earth, and passages that mention a new heaven and a new Earth in the NT affirm the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision.

The word for heaven in Hebrew is always plural and may mean the visible sky, the universe, or the invisible home of God. In John 21:1 'heaven' is singular and refers to the new sky that is transformed by the presence of God's glory. John said he saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, and Isaiah, speaking to millennial Jerusalem, said:

Arise and shine for your light has come,
the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

Darkness covers the Earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn (Isa 60:1-3).

God's heavenly abode, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22-24), will come down to Earth to rest in the sky above Jerusalem and much of the Middle East. New Jerusalem will dominate the new sky as John saw: The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminates it, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the Earth will bring their wealth to it (Rev 21:23-24).

John refers to the new world that will exist during the Messianic reign, otherwise known as the millennium. Following the wholesale destruction that will take place during the Great Tribulation, whether caused by world warfare or the wrath of God, a renewal will take place which Jesus called a *palingenesia*, a new birth or regeneration. All of creation will be redeemed. During this time the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne and his disciples will also sit on thrones and rule with him. These thrones are in New Jerusalem, not on the Earth. No Scriptures teach that the Messiah or the saints will live on Earth during the millennium. The unregenerate nations who survive the Great Tribulation will inhabit the Earth and make pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem, which will be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isa 56:7) to bring their gifts to the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the new Earth where the Messiah rules the world with a rod of iron resulting in peace, righteousness, and justice. New Jerusalem and ancient Jerusalem will exist in different realms and overlap in the same way that the physical and spiritual realms have always done. God is not far away from us, even now. But during the millennium, we'll see

him. Look! God's dwelling place is now with mankind. He'll dwell with them, and they'll be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Rev 21:3).

The new sky will be dominated by the presence of New Jerusalem, especially in the Middle East. The heavenly city will descend from heaven at the same time that the saints are resurrected and raptured. It'll all happen in the twinkling of an eye at the Lord's coming. The heavenly community that lived in the heavenly Jerusalem will descend to the Earth. It is still heavenly because it is in a spiritual dimension, inhabited by God, Jesus, angels, and the resurrected saints. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They'll see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they'll reign forever and ever (Rev 22:3-5).

The city will be invisible to humans on Earth; only the light of its glory will be seen. John gives the dimensions of the city as 12,000 stadia cube, the number of the redeemed is 144,000, and the thickness of the city's wall is 144 cubits. We can be confident that these numbers are symbolic, twelve being the symbolic number for God's people and a thousand symbolizing a large number. The city is made of precious jewels, its streets of gold, and its gates of pearls; all symbolizing the amazing glory of the place.

You were slain, and you purchased for God with your blood people from every tribe, language, and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they'll reign over the Earth (Rev 5:9-10).

This interpretation requires us to understand John's final vision (Rev 21:2 - 22:5) as occurring before the last judgment (Rev 20:11-18) which is logically the last event described by John when the Earth and the heavens flee from God's presence. This is the end of the Earth and the physical universe. The Messianic reign lasts for a thousand years, after which Jesus surrenders his regency to the Father (1 Cor 15:24) as God's purpose for the world is finished.

Jesus told the Sadducees that the righteous would be resurrected and live in a new age, saying:

The people of this age marry and are given in marriage but those whom God considers worthy of taking part in the age to come

and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage. And they can no longer die, for they are like the angels. They are God's people, being resurrected people (Lk 20:34-36).

Jesus confirmed that when he returns and this present age ends, there will be a new age in which the righteous, God's people, participate, living as immortal resurrected people. They will be like angels, they won't marry, and as resurrected people, they will live in the spiritual realm as Jesus did after his resurrection. Like him, they'll be able to visit the Earth as they rule it (Rev 5:10). Jesus didn't say the resurrected would live on Earth; he said that they would take part in the Messianic age to come.

Does the Bible teach the renewal of heaven and Earth or the creation of a new cosmos?

The prophesied new sky and Earth are physical and temporary. They will be dissolved when Jesus surrenders his regency to the Father.

The redeemed will live forever in their immortal bodies. By contrast, the animal world is not redeemed but will be relieved from the curse caused by Adam's sin during the millennium. Sin will not be eradicated from the renewed Earth as shown by the fact that the final rebellion will take place when Satan is released from his prison in the Abyss. Apart from that, the inhabitants of the Earth during the millennium are not regenerated people; the saved are with the Lord in the holy city.

The new heaven and the new Earth which Isaiah prophesied is a renewal of the Earth on which we live now, not a new cosmos. The Lord will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in his people Israel. Israel will live in security and there will be no premature deaths. People will live as old as trees but death is not eliminated. All mankind, the Gentile nations, will come and worship the Lord at his temple. Isaiah 66:15-16 refers to the final judgment upon the nations and Israel. Many are those slain by the Lord and their bodies will remain unburied on the outskirts of Jerusalem, to be looked at by the nations when leaving as a warning against further rebellion. The context appears to be the battle of Armageddon and the following

Messianic reign. The Lord will gather people of all nations and languages to come and see his glory (Isa 66:18).

Peter spoke about the day of the Lord, saying that the heavens will disappear with a roar, and the Earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. This refers to the Messiah's return and reign as expressed by Isaiah: He'll strike the Earth with the rod of his mouth, and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist (Isa 11:4-5).

New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God simultaneously with the resurrection and rapture because New Jerusalem is the bride of Christ. Millions of saints (hopefully a billion!) will meet Jesus in the air and will be forever with the Lord in their new home, the heavenly Jerusalem. This is where Paul leaves the Church, in New Jerusalem, a heavenly city where the saints are now resurrected beings living in the heavenly realm. Daniel called them the saints of the high places (Dan 7:18, 22, 27 Darby). Paul said: God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6).

The new Earth is a renewal; physical and temporary, while New Jerusalem is heavenly and permanent

The millennial Earth is the same planet that has undergone great destruction by the wrath of man and of God during the Great Tribulation. The Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne and renew all things (Mat 19:28) and his disciples will also sit on thrones (Rev 3:21, 5:10, 20:4) and reign with him, renewing the world. The territory (planet Earth) they rule over is material and temporary. It will last for 1000 years as stated six times (Rev 20:2-7). Even if the duration is symbolic or rounded, one thousand years suggests a long time but not eternal. It contrasts with the New Jerusalem which continues forever and ever. The Earth will be populated by the survivors of the Great Tribulation, representative of all the nations, and also by Israel, fulfilling many OT prophecies. All Israel will be saved after the Messiah's return, too late for the resurrection, and they will not inherit the kingdom (Mt 21:43-46). They'll live as normal human beings on Earth, controlling the worship of the Lord at Jerusalem (Ezek 40-48).

Sin will still exist on Earth during the millennium (Zech 14:16-19, Rev 20:7) but will be absent from the New Jerusalem.

Few details are revealed concerning how the resurrected righteous will reign over the Earth, but we have the example of angels and the risen Lord to guide us. Angels are spirits; immaterial beings, but when they appear on Earth, they are seen as human beings, not with wings as commonly portrayed. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it (Heb 13:2). Angels on a divine mission can transform themselves into human form. In the heavenly realm, they are immaterial spirits, but when they enter the physical realm, they appear as humans, in the same way that Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. He was in human form and asked them to look at him, touch him, and give him food to eat. They didn't always recognize him, which may mean that he could control that. Then suddenly, he would disappear as he returned to the spiritual realm where he exists as a spirit.

The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the New Jerusalem together with the redeemed who will serve him and reign forever and ever. They are living in the new heavens, New Jerusalem, which descends from heaven and whose glory can be seen shining in the sky above Jerusalem (Isa 60:1-3, 19-21). Jesus told his disciples he would go and prepare a place for them and come again and take them to be with him where he was (Jn 14:3). The New Jerusalem is a heavenly city (Heb 12:22), immaterial and permanent. It is the eternal home of God, angels, and resurrected human beings.

A brief description of the millennial reign (Rev 20:1-6) is followed by Satan's release and the world's final rebellion (Rev 20:7-10), and finally by God's judgment of the wicked and their consignment to hell (Rev 20:11-14). Those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life are not being judged because they were resurrected and raptured at Jesus' return and have been enjoying eternal life in New Jerusalem.

At the judgment scene, John saw the Earth and sky flee from God's presence, and *there was no place found for them*. This last sentence

occurs in the same Greek as the Septuagint version of Daniel 2:35, where it is translated by NIV as ‘*without leaving a trace*.’ The Septuagint version was commonly read in the early Church. Nebuchadnezzar’s statue of world kingdoms was struck by a rock that smashed it to pieces so that it became like chaff on a threshing floor in summer, and the wind swept them away *without leaving a trace*. That is what happens to the Earth and sky at the last judgment.

Some people talk about the redemption of animals and plants, but what could that mean? There is no evidence that they will be resurrected or that they could live forever. The survival of the species is important, not the resurrection of individuals. There will be a renewal of all things. Paul talks about creation being delivered from its bondage to decay and being brought into the liberty of the glorious state of God’s people (Rom 8:21). The appearance of the glory of God near Earth, which outshines the sun and moon, means that the world will be a different place meteorologically. The Earth will be relieved of the curse that came as a result of Adam’s sin. The plant and animal worlds will flourish, and animals will live in harmony with each other and with man.

The only hope that the animal kingdom will, in some shape or form, continue into eternity is the fact that the living creatures of Revelation 4-5, who are throne attendants, seem to represent the animal world. They each have six wings as do the seraphim in Isaiah’s vision of God (Isa 6:1-3) and in Ezekiel’s vision of God (Ezek 1:10). John describes them as being like a lion, an ox, a man, and a flying eagle (Rev 4:6-8). They are immaterial, eternal, rational beings, representing the animal kingdom. As attendants on God’s throne, they worship him and invite John to see what the opening of the seals reveals, and one of them initiates the action.