

30. THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH

Most commentators make what I think is a mistake in assuming that Revelation 21-22 follows ch. 20 chronologically. It is not possible to have the end of the physical universe (Rev 20:11) followed by the nations walking by the light of Jerusalem and bringing their splendor to it (Rev 21:24-27). Mounce (*The Book of Revelation* p. 384) admits there is a problem with Rev 21:24-26, 22:2, 15 which continues to talk about the nations and 'dogs' being outside the city. His limp explanation, quoting Glasson is that: "The prophets were thinking mainly of a future under the historical conditions of our present life. John makes use of their sublime visions, lifting them onto the eternal plane; and at times he retains words not entirely appropriate to this new setting."

The problem is that amillennialists are often reticent to interpret the word of God literally and end up adding to revelation. No place in the Bible teaches that God will create a new Earth, but there is a lot of evidence for renewal. There is no focus on an 'eternal state' which is not a biblical phrase. The Bible only talks about eternal life which begins at conversion and climaxes with the Messianic reign.

John does not say: *Then* I saw a new heaven and a new Earth, he simply says: And I saw a new heaven and a new Earth. An angel told John: Come, I'll show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried him away in the Spirit to a great high mountain and showed him the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. We must ask ourselves when this event will take place. The present Earth is still there because John saw the holy city coming *down* and the nations walk by its light and bring their wealth to it. This is evidence enough to show that Revelation 21-22 does not follow the dissolution of the Earth (Rev 20:11). The angel equates the holy city with its inhabitants, the Church which is the bride of Christ. The Holy City is presently in heaven (Heb 12:22) and is called 'the city of the living God' and 'the heavenly Jerusalem.' The descent of the city must be simultaneous with the resurrection of the righteous because at that moment the human inhabitants of the holy city, 'the spirits of the

righteous made perfect' are resurrected and meet the Lord in the air. The New Jerusalem descends from heaven, the resurrected righteous rise from the Earth, and they're forever with the Lord. This is their home during the Millennium when the Church rules with the Messiah for a thousand years. they're resurrected, immortal people living in the heavenly realm in New Jerusalem, from there they rule the Earth.

Most Amillennialists don't accept an earthly kingdom, so they make interpreting the New Heavens and the New Earth as a new creation, perhaps a new planet, whereas Isaiah 65 makes it very clear that the New Earth is our present Earth, renewed after the devastation caused by the Great Tribulation and God's wrath. The Bible is silent about an 'eternal state' that amillennialists rely on to fulfill their interpretation of end-of-age prophecy.

Justice, peace, and the knowledge of the Lord

Both Jew and Gentile will benefit from the ideal conditions under the reign of the Messiah, but not the Church; they're living in paradise, in New Jerusalem. The Messiah will ensure that fairness and rights prevail everywhere. Even wild animals will become peaceful as the Edenic curse is lifted from the world.

Isa 11:6-9 Wolves will live with lambs, leopards will lie down with goats, calves and lions will feed together, and a little child will lead them. Cows will feed with bears, their young will lie down together, and lions will eat straw like cattle. Infants will play near cobras' dens, and young children will put their hands into the vipers' nests. They won't harm or destroy on all my holy mountains, for the Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as water covers the seabed.

Isa 51:4-5 Listen to me my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will be a light for the nations. I'll soon make people righteous, my salvation is on the way; I'll rule the nations justly. Coastal peoples will put their hope in me and trust in my power.

Jer 33:15 In those days and at that time I'll cause a scion to sprout from David's line; a good man who will do what is just and right in the land.

Messiah's kingdom is international and eternal

Jesus' expression 'the Kingdom of God' is not geographical. It expresses the Messiah's sovereignty, his royal authority or kingship. But the Messianic prophecies are geographical. The rule is centered in Jerusalem and encompasses the whole world.

2 Sam 7:16 Your (David's) dynasty and your kingship will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

This promise of an everlasting kingdom for the house of David became the focal point for many prophecies and influenced the development of the Messianic hope in Israel.

Ps 2:8 Ask me, and I'll give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the Earth as your possession.

Ps 22:27-28 The whole world will pay attention to the Lord and turn to him, and all the families of the nations will worship him, for kingship belongs to the Lord; he rules the nations.

Ps 72:8, 11, 17 He'll rule from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the Earth. ... All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. ... His name will endure forever and continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him and they'll call him blessed.

Ps 86:9 All the nations you've made will come and worship before you, Lord, and they'll bring glory to your name.

Ps 89:27-29 And I'll appoint him to be my regent, the most exalted of the Earth's kings. I'll maintain my loving relationship with him forever, and my commitment to him will be firm. I'll establish his dynasty forever, his throne for as long as the sky exists.

Ps 89:35-37 Once for all, I've sworn by my holiness and I won't lie to David, I said that his dynasty will continue forever and his throne will endure before me like the sun. It'll be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.

Isa 11:10 In that day Jesse's root will stand as a banner for the nations who will rally to him, and his dwelling place will be glorious.

Isa 60:3, 10a Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ... Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you.

The whole chapter describes the peace and prosperity of Zion in its future glory, and its political domination of the nations.

Dan 2:44-45 In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed or be left to another people. It'll crush all those former kingdoms and bring them to an end and will itself endure forever.

Dan 7:14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power, and people of all nations and languages worshiped him. His dominion will endure forever, it'll never end. His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth.

Isa 65:17-19 See, I'll create a new heavens and a new Earth. The former things will not be remembered or come to mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I'll create, for I'll create Jerusalem to be a delight that its people rejoice in. I'll rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. The sound of weeping and crying will no longer be heard there.

At the very beginning of God's revealed word, he created the heavens and the Earth. Sin entered and throughout human history, the creation has been in a state of corruption and frustration. At the end of the Bible God says: Behold, I'm making everything new. John saw a new sky and a new Earth, for the first sky and the first Earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. No biblical prophecy suggests that God will make a new planet. Isaiah's prophecy is clearly to do with a renewed Earth and according to Romans 8:21, that is what we're to expect: The creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. That there is no longer any sea implies that we're talking about the same planet Earth. The meaning of 'the sea' is figurative, referring to the turbulent nations, as is so often the case in Revelation and elsewhere.

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. Throughout all 66 chapters, there are prophecies about the Messiah and the Day of the Lord at the end of the age. He spoke to Israel as a nation and prophesied their return to their land, the

conversion of the remnant of their nation, and a glorious future for them and their capital city Jerusalem. His prophecy about a new heaven and Earth is made in this context as the above quotation makes clear. Peter's reference to this prophecy must also be taken in that context. We look forward to a renewed sky and Earth where righteousness dwells.

A heavenly Jerusalem will come down to Earth to rest in the sky above Jerusalem and will dominate the new sky to the extent that the city will not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the Earth will bring their splendor to it (Rev 21:23-24). This prophecy is based on Isaiah 60:1-3. Arise (Jerusalem), shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. Look! 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.

The new sky and the new Earth prophesied by Isaiah and John refer to the renewed 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 *palingenesis*, a new birth or regeneration. Creation will be redeemed from its curse. During this time the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne and his Jewish disciples will also sit on thrones and rule over Israel. These thrones are in the New Jerusalem, there are no Scriptures that teach that the Messiah or the saints will live on Earth during the Millennium. However, the Messiah will have a glorious throne in both New Jerusalem and on Earth in the Jerusalem temple. The unregenerate nations who survived the Great Tribulation will inhabit the Earth and make pilgrimages to the temple, bringing 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. The New Jerusalem and ancient Jerusalem exist in different realms and overlap each other in the same way that physical and spiritual realms have always done. God is not far away from us, even now, but during the Millennium and afterward, God will dwell with his resurrected saints in the New Jerusalem: Look! God's residence is now among the people, and he'll live with them. 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 the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city that comes down out of heaven from God at the same moment when the saints are resurrected and raptured to meet the Lord in the air. It all happens in the twinkling of an eye at the Lord's coming. The heavenly community that lived in the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24) now descends to the Earth and rests in the sky. 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 of 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. They'll 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 human inhabitants, except for the light of its glory. John gives the dimensions of the city as 12,000 stadia cube, approximately 22,000 km in length, breadth, and height, which is symbolic because time and space are not relevant in the heavenly realm. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders worshiped the Lamb, saying: You were slain, and with your blood, you purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You've made them to be a monarchy and to be 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 21-22) as occurring before the last judgment (Rev 20:11-18). The descent of the Holy City from heaven to Earth is the climax of the book and the inhabitants continue on into eternity, so is left to last. The Earth and the heavens will flee from God's presence without leaving a trace, the end of the physical universe. The Messianic reign lasts for a thousand years and after that, God's purpose for the world is finished, only the heavenly realm remains.

Peter talks about the new heavens and a new Earth that we wait for (2 Peter 3), an era that will follow the destruction of the world and godless people. The Day of the Lord he refers to is the day when Jesus returns, when earthquakes occur worldwide and cities collapse bringing great destruction and judgment upon the wicked. Jesus taught 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 he considers worthy to rise from the dead and attain to the age to come will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They'll no longer die for they're like angels. They're God's children because they've been resurrected (Lk 20:34-36).

Jesus confirmed that when he returns and this age comes to an end, there will be a new age, the Millennium, in which the righteous, God's children, will participate, living as resurrected immortals. Like angels, they won't marry or be married, and in their supernatural resurrected bodies, they'll live and move in the spiritual realm as Jesus did after his resurrection. They'll visit the Earth at will, enabling them to reign over the Earth (Rev 5:10).

The Bible teaches the renewal of heaven and Earth, not the creation of a new cosmos. The prophesied new heaven and Earth are material and temporary, not immaterial and permanent. The animal world will be released from the curse resulting from Adam's sin, but animals will not be redeemed as immortal, resurrected beings as the saints are. Sin is not eradicated from the new Earth as evidenced by the final rebellion. The new sky and Earth will endure for a thousand years, whether exactly a that or thereabouts is not revealed, but the number is repeated six times for emphasis (Rev 20:2-7).

Isaiah was the first to prophesy concerning new heavens and new Earth (Isa 65:17-25, 66:22-24). His new Earth is definitely a renewed Earth, not a new creation. As such it is material, the present physical Earth with an extensive change in conditions. During this period, 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 will come and worship the Lord. Isaiah 66:15-16 refers to the judgment of the nations known as the battle of Armageddon. Many are those slain by the Lord and their bodies will remain unburied on the outskirts of Jerusalem, to be observed by the nations during the Millennium as a warning against rebellion (Isa 66:24). The context is the battle of Armageddon. The Lord said he'll gather people of all nations and languages to come and see his glory in Israel (Isa 49:3, 52:1, 55:5, 60:9, 66:18).

Peter, when talking about the Day of the Lord, said that the sky will disappear with a roar, and the Earth and everything done in it will be laid bare, and: In keeping with his promise, we're looking forward to a new sky and a new Earth, where righteousness dwells. This agrees with Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would return to rule the Earth: He'll strike the Earth with the rod of his mouth and he'll 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).

The apostle John also saw a vision of a new sky and a new Earth: Then I saw a new sky and a new Earth, for the first sky and the first Earth had passed away (Rev 21:1). This final vision that John saw (Rev 21:1-22:5) should not be interpreted as following the last judgment and the fleeing of the Earth and the sky from God's presence, described in Revelation 20:11-15, even though it precedes it. After all, he still refers to the nations being present (Rev 21:24-26). New Jerusalem will come down out of Heaven from God simultaneously with the Resurrection of the Church because New Jerusalem is the bride of Christ. Millions of saints (if not a billion!) will meet Jesus in the air and from that moment will be forever with the Lord in their new home, the heavenly Jerusalem. This is where Paul leaves the Church, in the sky (1 Thess 4:17), and as the New Jerusalem is a heavenly city, and the saints are now resurrected beings, we can assume that they now find themselves in that city in the heavenly realm. Daniel calls them the saints of the most high places (Dan 7:18, 22, 27 Darby). Paul says: God has raised us with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6). The new Earth John saw is the millennial Earth, and the new sky he saw is the New Jerusalem and the glory of God that surrounds it.

So the Earth is the same planet Earth which has undergone great destruction by the wrath of both man and God, as repeatedly described in Revelation. 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 new Earth is material and temporary, existing only for a thousand years. It contrasts with the New Jerusalem which is immaterial and eternal. The Earth will be populated by the survivors of the Great Tribulation from all nations, including Israel. Saved after the Messiah's return, Israel will not be resurrected, they'll live as normal

human beings on Earth, supervising 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.

We are not told how the resurrected righteous will reign over the Earth, but we've the example of angels and the risen Lord to guide us. Angels are spirits, immaterial beings, but when they appear on Earth, they're 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're immaterial spirits, but when they enter the physical realm, they appear as humans, just as Jesus did after his resurrection. When he appeared to his disciples, he was in human form. They talked to him, looked at him, touched him, and even gave him food to eat. They didn't always recognize him, which may mean that he could control that. Then suddenly he'd disappear as he went back to the spiritual realm where he exists as a spirit.

The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the New Jerusalem and his servants will serve him and reign forever and ever. they're living in the new sky, in New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God and shines in the sky above Jerusalem (Isa 60:1-3, 19-21). This is the place that Jesus told his disciples he'd go and prepare for them and would come again and take them to be with him where he was (Jn 14:3). New Jerusalem is a heavenly city (Heb 12:22), immaterial, and permanent. It is the eternal home of God, angels, and resurrected human beings.

Revelation 20:1-6 describes the Millennium, vv. 7-10 describe Satan's release and the world's final rebellion, and vv. 11-14 describe God's judgment of the dead and their consignment to hell. Those whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life have been enjoying eternal life in New Jerusalem since Jesus' return so they're not present.

Some people talk about the redemption of animals and plants, but what could that mean? There is no evidence that they'll be resurrected. There will be a renewal of all things. Paul talks about creation being

delivered from its bondage to decay and being brought into the glorious liberty of God's children (Rom 8:21). The appearance of the God's glory near the 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 because of Adam's sin. The plant and animal worlds will flourish, and animals will live in harmony with each other and man.