

THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH

Many commentators make a huge mistake in assuming that Revelation 21-22 follows Chapter 20 chronologically. That is not possible. The end of the physical universe (Rev 20:11) cannot be logically followed by the nations walking by the light of Jerusalem and bringing their splendor to it (Rev 21:24-27). Ladd (Commentary on Revelation p. 284) says that John is describing the universality of the knowledge of God in the eternal order and quotes Isaiah 2:3, 60:3 to support his claim. But Isaiah 2:2 begins with “in the last days.” Is that the eternal order? And Isaiah 60:2 says, “See, darkness, covers the Earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.” Is that the eternal order?

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. There is no new creation of heaven and Earth, only the renewal of the old during the Millennium. There is no focus on the ‘eternal state’ which is a non-biblical phrase made up to describe a fabricated theology.

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 will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” When did the Holy City descend? The present Earth is still there because John saw the Holy City coming down towards the Earth. This is evidence enough to show that Revelation 21-22 does not follow the dissolution of the Earth (Rev 20:11). The angel equated the Holy City with its inhabitants, the Church which is the bride of Christ. The Holy City is presently in heaven (Heb 12:22). It is called ‘the city of the living God’ and ‘the heavenly Jerusalem.’ The descent of the city is 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 are forever with the Lord. This is their home during the Millennium. The Church rules with the Messiah for a thousand years. They are resurrected, immortal people. They live in the heavenly realm in the New Jerusalem and from there they rule the Earth.

Most Amillennialists don’t accept an Earthly kingdom, so they make the mistake of 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 but renewed after the devastation caused by the Great Tribulation and God’s wrath. The Bible is silent about a “New Earth” and an “Eternal State” that amillennialists rely on to fulfill their interpretation of end-of-age prophecy. There is also a general misunderstanding of what ‘kingdom’ means. See, “The Kingdom from God.”

Justice, peace, and the knowledge of the Lord

Both Jew and Gentile will benefit from the ideal conditions under the reign of the Messiah. He 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 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. *They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

Isa 51:4-5 Listen to me my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm.

Jer 33:15 *In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he 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 house and your kingdom 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 will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the Earth your possession.

Ps 22:27-28 All the ends of the Earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

Ps 72:8, 11, 17 May he rule from sea to sea and from the (Euphrates) River to the ends of the Earth. ... May all kings bow down to him, and all nations serve him. ... May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.

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

Ps 89:27-29 And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the Earth. I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.

Ps 89:35-37 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness - and I will not lie to David - that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.

Isa 11:10 In that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples, the nations will rally to him, and his resting 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 a future glorified Zion and its political domination of the nations.

Dan 2:44-45 In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

Dan 7:14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting kingdom that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

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

Isaiah 65:17-19 See, I will create new heavens and a new Earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more.

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 am making everything new." John saw a new heaven and a new Earth, for the first heaven and the first Earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea." There is no prophecy in the Bible 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 are to expect: "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." That there is no longer any sea is also an indication that we are 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, and the prophecies about a new heaven and Earth in the New Testament are based on this original vision.

The word for heaven in Hebrew is always plural and may mean the visible sky or the invisible home of God. In John 21:1 'heaven' (in Greek) is singular and refers to the new sky which will be God's new abode. John said: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

The heavens of the OT will come down to Earth to rest in the sky above Jerusalem and will dominate the new sky to the extent that "The city does 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 into it" (Rev 21:23-24). This prophecy is based on Isaiah 60:1-3 "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you (Jerusalem). See, 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 *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 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 dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will 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 towards 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 will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. 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 will 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 to the heavenly realm. “You were slain, and with your blood, you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on (or 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). It is the last event described by John, but the descent of the Holy City from heaven to Earth is the climax of the book and 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 (2 Peter 3) talks about the new heavens and a new Earth that we wait for, a day 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 who are considered 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 children since they are children of the resurrection" (Luke 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, the children of God, participate, living as resurrected Immortal like angels, they won't be married, and as children of the resurrection, they will move in the spiritual realm as Jesus did after his resurrection. They will have the ability to visit the Earth as he did and, in this way, they will 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 is released from the curse resulting from Adam's sin, but animals are not 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 heavens and the new Earth endure for a thousand years, the period known as the Messianic reign or Millennium. Whether exactly a thousand years or thereabouts is not revealed.

Isaiah was the first to prophesy concerning "new heavens and new Earth" (Isa 65:17-25, 66:22-24). His new Earth is a renewed Earth, not a new creation. As such it is material, it is 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 a previous judgment of the nations and Israel. 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. The context is 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, when talking about the day of the Lord, said that the heavens will disappear with a roar, and the Earth and everything done in it will be laid bare, and: "In keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new Earth, where righteousness dwells." This agrees with Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would return to rule the Earth: "He will strike the Earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist (Isa 11:4-5).

The apostle John saw a vision of a new heaven and a new Earth: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new Earth, for the first heaven 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 heavens 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). The New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God simultaneously with the resurrection and rapture 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 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 heavens 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 will 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 reign over the Earth, but we have the example of angels and of 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, just as it was with Jesus 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 would 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 are living in the new heavens, the 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 would go and prepare for them and would come again and take them to be with him where he was (John 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.

Revelation 20:1-6 describes the Millennium, verses 7-10 describe Satan's release and the world's final rebellion, and verses 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 already been enjoying eternal life in the New Jerusalem since Jesus' return so they are not present.

Some people talk about the redemption of animals and plants, but what could that mean? There is no evidence that they will 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 the children of God (Rom 8:21). The appearance of the glory of God 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 with man.