

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”



THE NEW HEAVENS

The words above are taken from 2 Peter 3, at verse 13. This prophecy provides us with an opportunity to examine an incident where the Heavens and the Earth are used symbolically.

If you review the entire context of this chapter, you will find that there are actually three periods of time mentioned that are each referred to as a “heavens and earth”.

HEAVENS BEFORE THE FLOOD (1st)

These 3 periods of time are identified. In verse 6 and 7 we are told that **first** “the heavens of old and the earth standing out of the water and in the water.” The writer explains that the world that was then was overflowed with water and it perished. We understand this to mean that the world before the flood had its heaven or ruling powers and its earth or subjects. This heaven and earth was destroyed by water.

HEAVEN AND EARTH NOW (2nd)

Peter goes on to remark that the heavens and earth which are now, are reserved unto a judgment by fire.

We must accept the fact that the prophecy reveals that there will be a severe judgment on this present world. This impending judgment will effect both the governments and the common people.

THE NEW HEAVENS (3rd)

This judgment will become necessary because of the immorality practiced by the majority of the people, who refuse to acknowledge and serve God.

We are not left without hope for those who do believe and trust in the living God. The prophecy speaks of a new heavens and a new earth which will have righteousness in it.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT

The new heavens will be the ruling powers of the Kingdom of God on this earth.

When Christ returns to this earth, he and his mighty angels, along with the faithful saints, will judge and subdue the nations of the earth.

The saints will then reign as kings and priests over the nations. (see Rev 5:10) They will be the “new heavens” of the Kingdom age.

THE NEW EARTH

Christ and his saints will rule on this earth. The subjects of this great Kingdom will be the “new earth”.

This earth will include the restored nation of Israel. Mary was told at the time when Jesus was to be born that he “would reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there shall be no end.” (Luke 1: 33)

The subjects of the Kingdom will also include all of the inhabitants of the earth that are left alive after the judgment period.

(See Daniel 7: 27)

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HEAR, O HEAVENS, AND GIVE EAR, O EARTH

The Prophet Isaiah addressed the leaders and the people of Israel with the words that we have shown above. These are the opening words of his prophecy in Isaiah chapter 1, verse 2.

This salutation is only an example of the many times that the Bible uses symbolic language. To appreciate the hope of the gospel of salvation, we must have an understanding of the language of the scriptures.

The Creation Clue

One of the clues given to us to help us with symbolic language is found in Romans 1: 20 (NIV):

For since the creation of the world **God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made**, so that men are without excuse.

We understand this verse to mean that God uses the natural things that have been created to teach us about the spiritual lessons that will help us to know Him.

Heavens and Earth

The major elements of the creation were the heaven and the earth. These are used by Isaiah symbolically to illustrate the message of his prophecy.

Isaiah spoke to the Heavens and the Earth of his day, but he did not leave us to guess who he really was talking to. In verse 10 of Isaiah 1, he addressed them a second time. This time he called them the **Rulers and the People**.

Heaven = Rulers Earth = the People

The interpretation leaves no doubt. The word “Heaven” refers to the rulers or the government, and “Earth” is the symbolic term for those who were the subjects of the kingdom, the common people.

The symbols are logical when the counterparts are considered. The natural Heavens are the dwelling place for God, who rules over all the kingdom of men. (See Daniel 4:17)

The natural earth is far below the Heavens. It is totally dependent on the elements of Heaven.

Sun, Moon and Stars.

In addition to the symbolic use of Heaven, the lights in Heaven are also representative of the various rulers. On the fourth day of the creation we are told: “God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night.” (Gen 1: 16-18) These elements in the natural heavens ruled the day and the night.

For example, the natural “sun” rules over the day. In the Bible, the sun is used in symbol to refer to the chief ruler or the king.

There are many examples of the symbolic use of the heavenly elements in scripture. We will look at some of these in this issue.

We should always keep in mind that it is important to look carefully at the context before interpreting.



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I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.

On the back page of this issue we have reviewed a prophecy by Peter that speaks about three time periods in history as distinct heavens and earths.

This account is one that compliments the difficult passage quoted above which is taken from the first part of **2 Corinthians 12**.

The Apostle Paul

Paul uses an interesting approach, in this reading, to tell about one of his own experiences. He expresses some reservation about identifying himself as this "man in Christ", because he received a marvelous vision about the Kingdom which he was not allowed to reveal.

The 3rd Heaven

We are especially interested in his use of the term the "**third heaven**". What did he mean?

If we read the entire account, we will note that he also states that he was "caught up to paradise" (in verse 4).

We understand then that the 3rd Heaven and "paradise" are different words which have the same meaning.

From the prophecy in 2 Peter 3, we already know that the heavens refer to various forms of government and that the "new heavens" refers to the government in the coming Kingdom of God on the earth.

We doubt that it is just a coincidence that in Peter's prophecy, the "new heavens" is the third heavens that is mentioned.

We believe that Peter and Paul were both speaking about the Kingdom period as the 3rd heaven.

Paul's Vision

Paul evidently saw a vision which described certain features of the future Kingdom (the 3rd Heaven).

We will recall that the Apostle John also saw visions of the Kingdom period. John was allowed to express his

visions, which he did in the book that we know as "The Revelation".

The entire Revelation is a series of visions about events then future. These visions covered a continuous historical description (in symbolic language) of the events that would transpire from the first century period through history and down to the future Kingdom of God on the earth.

John saw a complete vision of the "new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (as mentioned by Peter), and he was allowed to write about the "third heaven" revealed to Paul.

Paradise

Paul used the word "paradise" to refer to his "third heaven". We will find with examination that this word is consistent with the revealed purpose of God concerning the coming "heavens" (Kingdom).

The word "paradise" means "a future place of happiness" It is closely linked with the word EDEN.

We know that Eden was the garden of the Lord. It was a paradise on earth, where everything was "very good".

Garden Restored

When sin entered into the world, through the disobedience of the first man, man was sentenced to death, the ground was cursed and man was expelled from the garden.

Through the sacrifice of Christ, the way back to the tree of life is now possible.

When the Kingdom of God (the **3rd Heaven**) comes, fellowship with the Creator will be restored and man will be allowed access again to the "tree of life which is in the midst of the **paradise** of God".

(Rev 2:7)

HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND THE EARTH IS MY FOOTSTOOL

The word heaven must not always be considered as symbolic. It is very important to examine the usage of the word in its own context before we attempt to interpret.

We must never forget that Heaven is first of all the dwelling place of God. Heaven is a literal place that is high above this earth. This fact is demonstrated in many Bible references, including the phrase above taken from Acts 7:49.

This exalted dwelling existed first, as one of those created elements that are provided so that we can learn about God, and understand the "invisible things". (Romans 1:20)

The real Heavens are a fitting type for the governments, and for all that are in authority. God rules over all from his throne, and it is He that allows certain men to be elevated to the ruling heavens of this earth, in accordance with His will.

We are told in Daniel 4:17 that "The Most High ruleth in the Kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

High Above the Earth

The prophet Isaiah tells us about the important distinction that must always remain between man and God.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

This distinction is further clarified when we consider these

words: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: **for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.**" (Eccles 5:2)

Habakkuk adds: "The Lord is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." (Hab. 2:20)

What is Man?

When we actually think about God in Highest Heaven, and all of the wonders of His creation, we cannot help but reflect on the words of the Psalmist who said:

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; **What is man, that thou art mindful of him?** and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8: 3-4)

Fear God

We are instructed in God's word to have honor and respect for the ruling powers of this world (the Heavens which are now). We are told in Romans 13: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (verse 1)

Further in Romans 13, we are also told never to resist the authorities and to pay tribute (our taxes).

If we have respect for the natural rulers of this world, how much more shall we honor and serve God in Heaven. We should always "fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Eccles 12:13)