

~New Heavens and New Earth--the New Covenant~

2 Peter iii. 11 "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth.

John Owen (1616-1683)

(On the New Heavens and Earth)

It is evident, then, that in the prophetical 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.

On this foundation I affirm that the heavens and earth here intended in this prophecy of Peter, the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men, mentioned in the destruction of that heaven and earth, do all of them relate, not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state

'First, There is the foundation of the apostle's inference and exhortation, seeing that all these things, however precious they seem, or what value soever any put upon them, shall be dissolved, that is, destroyed; and that in that dreadful and fearful manner before mentioned, in a day of judgment, wrath, and vengeance, by fire and sword; let others mock at the threats of Christ's coming: He will come- He will not tarry; and then the heavens and earth that God Himself planted, -the sun, moon, and stars of the Judaical polity and church, -the whole old world of worship and worshippers, that stand out in their obstinacy against the Lord Christ, shall be sensibly dissolved and destroyed: this we know shall be the end of these things, and that shortly."

(Sermon on 2 Peter iii. 11, Works, folio, 1721.).

(On the downfall of Rome, and the heavens and earth)

"(the empire) was shivered to pieces by many barbarous nations; who, settling themselves in the fruitful soils of Europe, began to plant their heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, growing up into a civil state,"

(vol 8, p. 265)

(On Matthew 24:29)

"Not to hold you too long upon what is so plain and evident, you may take it for a rule, that, in the denunciations of the judgments of God, through all the prophets, heaven, sun, moon, stars, and the like appearing beauties and glories of the aspectable heavens, are taken for governments, governors, dominions in political states, as Isa. 14:12-15; Jer 15:9, 51:25. Isaiah 13:13; Ps. 68:6; Joel 2:10; Rev. 8:12; Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25; Isa 60:20; Obad. 4; Rev 8:13; 11:12; 20:11."

(vol. 8, p. 255, in a sermon entitled Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth, preached on April 19, 1649)

(On Matthew 24:30)

"So upon or in the destruction of Jerusalem, Luke 21:27, the Son of man is said to 'come in a cloud, with power and great glory' - and they that escape in that desolation are said to 'stand before the Son of man', ver. 36."

(vol. 9, p. 139)

(On Hebrews 10:25)

"It is not such a day, such a motive, as is always common to all, but only unto those who are in some measure in the same circumstances with them....Wherefore, this day was no other but that fearful and tremendous day, a season for the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, city, and nation of the Jews, which our Saviour had forewarned His disciples of, and which they had in continual expectation"

(Commentary on Hebrews , in loc.)

John Brown (1853)

Dr. Owen's remark is full of good sense- "*If the Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all:*" and it is just as applicable to the prophecies as to any other portion of Scripture.'-

Dr. John Brown, Sufferings and Glories of the Messiah, p.5

" '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 the '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" (*vol. 1, p. 170*)

"It appears, then, that is Scripture be the best interpreter of Scripture, we have in the Old Testament a key to the interpretation of the prophecies in the New. The same symbolism is found in both, and the imagery of Isaiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets helps us to understand the imagery of St. Matthew, St. Peter, and St. John. As the dissolution of the material world is not necessary to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, neither is it necessary to the accomplishment of the predictions of the New Testament. But though symbols are metaphorical expressions, they are not unmeaning. It is not necessary to allegorise them, and find a corresponding equivalent for every trope; it is sufficient to regard the imagery as employed to heighten the sublimity of the prediction and to clothe it with impressiveness and grandeur. There are, at the same time, a true propriety and an underlying reality in the symbols of prophecy. The moral and spiritual facts which they represent, the social and ecumenical changes which they typify, could not be adequately set forth by language less majestic and sublime. There is reason for believing that an inadequate apprehension of the real grandeur and significance of such events as the destruction of Jerusalem and the abrogation of the Jewish economy lies at the root of that system of interpretation which maintains that nothing answering to the symbols of the New Testament prophecy has ever taken place.

Hence the uncritical and unscriptural figments of double senses, and double, triple, and multiple fulfillments of prophecy. That physical disturbances in nature and extraordinary phenomena in the heavens and in the earth may have accompanied the expiring throes of the Jewish dispensation we are not prepared to deny. It seems to us highly probable that such things were. But the literal fulfillment of the symbols is not essential to the verification of prophecy, which is abundantly proved to be true by the recorded facts of history."

(vol. i. p.200).

David Chilton (1987)

"Moreover, the phrase *heaven and earth* in these contexts does not, as Owen pointed out, refer to the physical heaven and the physical world, but to the *world-order*, the religious organizations of the world, the "House" or Temple, God builds in which He is worshipped."

(Days of Vengeance., p. 544)

Gary DeMar (1996)

"Jesus does not change subjects when He assures the disciples that "heaven and earth will pass away." Rather, He merely affirms His prior predictions, which are recorded in Matthew 24:29-31. Verse 36 is a

summary and confirmation statement of these verses. Keep in mind that the central focus of the Olivet Discourse is the desolation of the "house" and "world" of apostate Israel (23:36). The old world of Judaism, represented by the earthly temple, is taken apart stone by stone (24:2). James Jordan writes, "each time God brought judgment on His people during the Old Covenant, there was a sense in which an old heavens and earth was replaced with a new one: New rulers were set up, a new symbolic world model was built (Tabernacle, Temple), and so forth.". The New Covenant replaces the Old Covenant with new leaders, a new priesthood, new sacraments, a new sacrifice, a new tabernacle (John 1:14), and a new temple (John 2:19; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21). In essence, a new heaven and earth.

The darkening of the sun and moon and the falling of the stars, coupled with the shaking of the heavens (24:29), are more descriptive ways of saying that "heaven and earth will pass away" (24:35). In other contexts, when stars fall, they fall to the earth, a sure sign of temporal judgment (Isaiah 14:12; Daniel 8:10; Revelation 6:13; 9:1; 12:4). So then, the "passing away of heaven and earth" is the passing away of the old covenant world of Judaism led and upheld by those who "crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). "

"John Owen, the Puritan scholar, knows his Bible better than most of the rest of us, and he tells us exactly where the Old Testament foretells a 'new heaven and earth.'"

"Because of what may be called the 'collapsing universe' terminology used in this passage, many have assumed that St. Peter is speaking of the final end of the physical heaven and earth, rather than the dissolution of the Old Covenant world order."

(Last Days Madness, p. 540)

"Owen is right on target, asking the question that so many expositors fail to ask: Where had God promised to bring "new heavens and a new earth" The answer, as Owen correctly states, is only in Isaiah 65 and 66 - passages which clearly prophesy the period of the Gospel, brought in by the work of Christ."

(ibid., p. 495)

Jonathan Edwards (1739)

"Thus there was a final end to the Old Testament world: all was finished with a kind of day of judgment, in which the people of God were saved, and His enemies terribly destroyed."

(History of Redemption, vol. i. p. 445)

Holman Bible Dictionary

"Jesus as Doer of God's Mighty Works This One who was raised, the same One who died, had performed the miracles of God's kingdom in our time and space. John testified that in the doing of God's mighty works Jesus was the prophet sent from God (John 6:14). He healed all kinds of persons, a sign of God's ultimate healing. He raised some from the dead, a sign that He would bring God's resurrection life to all who would receive it. He cast out evil spirits as a preview of God's final shutting away of the evil one (Rev. 20). He was Lord over nature, indicating that by His power God was already beginning to create a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). The spectacular impact of His mighty works reinforced and called to mind the power of His teachings.

(J. Ramsey Michaels in the Holman Bible Dictionary.)

J. Marcellus Kik (1971)

"But what about the new heaven and the new earth? Will there not be a renovated material heaven and earth? When the Scriptures speak of a new heaven and new earth it is not a material concept, but a spiritual concept."

"Just a little reflection will show that to take Revelation 21 and 22 in a literal way is to make utter foolishness of that which John revealed. In that figurative passage you cannot say that the "new heaven and new earth" is a material concept while the rest is to be taken in a figurative way. The "new heaven and new earth" is but the same as "the holy city" and "the Lamb's bride."

(An Eschatology Of Victory, p. 254-256)

John Lightfoot (1859)

"That the destruction of Jerusalem is very frequently expressed in Scripture as if it were the destruction of the whole world, Deut. 32:22; 'A fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.' Jer. 4:23; 'I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light,' &c. The discourse there also is concerning the destruction of that nation, Isa. 65:17; 'Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered,' &c. And more passages of this sort among the prophets. According to this sense, Christ speaks in this place; and Peter speaks in his Second Epistle, third chapter; and John, in the sixth of the Revelation; and Paul, 2 Cor. 5:17, &c.

(vol. 2, pp. 18-19)

"With the same reference it is, that the times and state of things immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem are called 'a new creation,' 'new heavens,' and 'a new earth.' When should that be? Read the whole chapter; and you will find the Jews rejected and cut off; and from that time is that new creation of the evangelical world among the Gentiles.

Compare 2 Cor. 5:17 and Rev. 21:1,2; where, the old Jerusalem being cut off and destroyed, a new one succeeds; and new heavens and a new earth are created.

2 Peter 3:13: 'We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth.' The heaven and the earth of the Jewish church and commonwealth must be all on fire, and the Mosaic elements burnt up; but we, according to the promise made to us by Isaiah the prophet, when all these are consumed, look for the new creation of the evangelical state"

(vol. 3, p.453)

"That the destruction of Jerusalem and the whole Jewish state is described as if the whole frame of the world were to be dissolved. Nor is it strange, when God destroyed his habitation and city, places once so dear to him, with so direful and sad an overthrow; his own people, whom he accounted of as much or more than the whole world beside, by so dreadful and amazing plagues. Matt. 24:29,30, 'The sun shall be darkened &c. Then shall appear the 'sign of the Son of man,' &c; which yet are said to fall out within that generation, ver. 34. 2 Pet. 3:10, 'The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,' &c. Compare with this Deut. 32:22, Heb. 12:26: and observe that by **elements** are understood the **Mosaic elements**, Gal 4:9, Coloss. 2:20: and you will not doubt that St. Peter speaks only of the conflagration of Jerusalem, the destruction of the nation, and the abolishing the dispensation of Moses"

John Locke (1705)

"That St. Paul should use 'heaven' and 'earth' for Jews and Gentiles will not be thought so very strange if we consider that Daniel himself expresses the nation of the Jews by the name of 'heaven' (Dan. viii. 10).

Nor does he want an example of it in our Saviour Himself, who (Luke xxi. 26) by "powers of heaven" plainly signifies the great men of the Jewish nation. Nor is this the only place in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians which will bear this interpretation of heaven and earth. He who shall read the first fifteen verses of chap. iii. and carefully weigh the expressions, and observe the drift of the apostle in them, will

not find that he does manifest violence to St. Paul's sense if he understand by "The family in heaven and earth" (ver. 15) the united body of Christians, made up of Jews and Gentiles, living still promiscuously among those two sorts of people who continue in their unbelief. However, this interpretation I am not positive in, but offer it as matter of inquiry to those who think and impartial search into the true meaning of the Sacred Scriptures the best employment of all the time they have."

(Ephesians 2:9-10, in loc.)

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727)

"The figurative language of the prophets is taken from the analogy between the **world natural** and an empire or kingdom considered as a **world politic**. Accordingly, the world natural, consisting of heaven and earth, signifies the whole world politic, consisting of thrones and people, or so much of it as is considered in prophecy; and the things in that world signify the analogous things in this. For the heavens and the things therein signify thrones and dignities, and those who enjoy them: and the earth, with the things thereon, the inferior people; and the lowest parts of the earth, called Hades or Hell, the lowest or most miserable part of them. Great earthquakes, and the shaking of heaven and earth, are put for the shaking of kingdoms, so as to distract and overthrow them; the creating of a new heaven and earth, and the passing of an old one; or the beginning and end of a world, for the rise and ruin of a body politic signified thereby. The sun, for the whole species and race of kings, in the kingdoms of the world politic; the moon, for the body of common people considered as the king's wife; the stars, for subordinate princes and great men; or for bishops and rulers of the people of God, when the sun is Christ. Setting of the sun, moon, and stars; darkening the sun, turning the moon into blood, and falling of the stars, for the ceasing of a kingdom."

(Observations on the Prophecies, Part i. chap. ii)

Origen (2nd Century)

"For if the heavens are to be changed, assuredly that which is changed does not perish, and if the fashion of the world passes away, it is by no means an annihilation or destruction of their material substance that is shown to take place, but a kind of change of quality and transformation of appearance. Isaiah also, in declaring prophetically that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, undoubtedly suggests a similar view. *(Principles, 2:6:4)*

Stanley Paher

"Several Biblical references show that the phrase 'heaven and earth' is a figurative expression to denote the Jewish economy, its religious society and government."

Luke 16:17 declares that it 'is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fall.' Again, the Jewish society is meant. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:18), Jesus declared, 'Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away till all things be accomplished.' All things needed to be fulfilled which had been written in the Psalms, Moses, and in the scrolls of the other prophets (Luke 24:44; see also John 17:4). The last of these temporal events would be the dissolution of the Jewish economy."

C.H. Spurgeon (1865)

"Did you ever regret the absence of the burnt-offering, or the red heifer, of 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 the 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."

(Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. xxxvii, p. 354).

Moses Stuart (1836)

(On Heb. 12:25-29) "That the passage has respect to the changes which would be introduced by the coming of the Messiah, and the new dispensation which he would commence, is evident from Haggai ii. 7-9. Such figurative language is frequent in the Scriptures and denotes great changes which are to take place. So the apostle explains it here, in the very next verse.

(Comp. Isa. 13:13; Haggai 2:21,22; Joel 3:16; Matt. 24:29-37). (Hebrews, in loc.)

Milton Terry (1898)

"That these texts may intimate or simply foreshadow some such ultimate reconstruction of the physical creation, need not be denied, for we know not the possibilities of the future, nor the purposes of God respecting all things which he has created. but the contexts of these several passages do not authorize such a doctrine. Isaiah 51:16, refers to the resuscitation of Zion and Jerusalem, and is clearly metaphorical. The same is true of Isa. 65:17, and 66:22, for the context in all these places confines the reference to Jerusalem and the people of God, and sets forth the same great prophetic conception of the Messianic future as the closing chapters of Ezekiel. The language of 2 Pet. iii, 10, 12, is taken mainly from Isa. 34:4, and is limited to the parousia, like the language of Matt. 24:29. Then the Lord made 'not only the land but also the heaven' to tremble (Heb 12:26), and removed the things that were shaken in order to establish a kingdom which cannot be moved (Heb. 12:27,28)." *(Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 489).*

J. S. Russell

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. (See Isa. lxx. 17, and lxxvi. 22.) The period of the close of the one dispensation and the commencement of the other, is spoken of as "the last days," and "the end of the world," and is described as such a shaking of the earth and heavens, as should lead to the removal of the things which were shaken (Hag. ii. 6; Heb. xiv. 26, 27).'"

(Quoted in The Parousia)