

Will Heaven & Earth Pass Away?

Futurist Eschatology in the ‘flavour’ of “Late Great Planet Earth”¹ and “Left Behind”² have led us to believe that Heaven and Earth will be destroyed and rebuilt. This is based on a literal understanding of a few biblical passages.³ However, many in the past and the present disagree and say that the statement in the Bible is metaphorical, like a lot of the Bible’s content.

Before we look at what authors have written about the question, take note of this extract from Paul Penley’s book, ‘Reenacting the Way (of Jesus): How can you follow Jesus when you don’t know what he was doing?’⁴

“Jews did not always mean “the physical universe” when they spoke of heaven and earth together. In Jewish literature, the Temple was a portal connecting heaven and earth. They called it the “navel of the earth” and the “gateway to heaven”.⁵ Just like the Mesopotamian Tower in Genesis 11, the Temple connected God’s realm to where humans lived.

To reflect this belief, the Jerusalem Temple had been built to look like a microcosm of the universe. We typically overlook how literally true the Temple hymn preserved in Psalm 78:69 is: “He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded for ever.” The actual holy place and most holy place inside the Temple building were constructed like earth and heaven. The courts outside represented the sea. I am not making this stuff up.

According to Josephus, two parts of the tabernacle were “approachable and open to all” but one was not. He explains that in so doing Moses “signifies the earth and the sea, since these two are accessible to all; but the third portion he reserved for God alone because heaven is inaccessible to men”⁶. The veil between the accessible and inaccessible parts of the Temple was designed to represent the entire material world during Jesus’ day...

Interpreting Jesus’ language of “heaven and earth passing away” in Matthew 5:18 as the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple fits with the rest of Jesus’ prophetic message. Like Jeremiah smashing a pot outside the city to predict Jerusalem’s fall to Babylonian invaders,⁷ Jesus symbolically acted out God’s judgment on the Jerusalem Temple and verbally condemned it.⁸ Remember all those tables he flipped over as he yelled, “You have turned God’s house of prayer into a den of thieves!” In Luke 21:20-24 Jesus gave a graphic picture of how Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies and the Temple destroyed.”⁹

Below are some quotes from those who believe the destruction of Heaven and Earth a picture expression, not a physical reality sometime in the distant future.

IMPORTANT: You make your own choice as to what you believe about this topic because it’s not relevant to living today in the Kingdom.

REMEMBER: Your eschatology determines much of what else you believe theologically.

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1 – Hal Lindsey (1970) “The Late Great Planet Earth” [www.amazon.com.au/Late-Great-Planet-Earth/dp/031027771X](http://www.amazon.com.au/Late-Great-Planet-Earth/dp/031027771X)

2 – Tim LaHaye (1995) “Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days”  
[www.amazon.com.au/Left-Behind-Novel-Earths-Last-ebook/dp/B004CYF3CU](http://www.amazon.com.au/Left-Behind-Novel-Earths-Last-ebook/dp/B004CYF3CU)

3 – Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1

4 – [www.amazon.com.au/Reenacting-Way-Jesus-Paul-Penley-ebook/dp/B00AJNATCM](http://www.amazon.com.au/Reenacting-Way-Jesus-Paul-Penley-ebook/dp/B00AJNATCM)

5 – Jubilees 8:19; 1 Enoch 26:1

6 – Flavius Josephus “Antiquities of the Jews” 3:181 (compare with 3:123) [josephusonline.weebly.com/antiquities.html](http://josephusonline.weebly.com/antiquities.html) [FREE online]

7 – Jeremiah 19

8 – Mark 11

9 – “When Heaven and Earth Passed Away: Everything Changed”

[www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/when-heaven-and-earth-passed-away-everything-changed879420187179853150181](http://www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/when-heaven-and-earth-passed-away-everything-changed879420187179853150181)

\*“‘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.”<sup>11</sup>

\*“It appears, then, that if Scripture [is] 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.”<sup>12</sup>

\*“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).”<sup>13</sup>

\*“Owen<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup>

10 – [preteristarchives.org/new-heavens-and-earth](http://preteristarchives.org/new-heavens-and-earth)

11 – John Brown (1853) vol. 1, p;170

12 – John Brown (1853) vol. i, p;200

13 – Gary DeMar (1996) “Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church” p:191-192

14 – John Owen, the Puritan scholar

15 – Gary DeMar (1996) “Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church” p:495

*“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.”*<sup>16</sup>

*\*“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.”*<sup>17</sup>

*\*“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”.*<sup>18</sup>

*\*“All authorities concur in the declaration that “when all these things should have been done” “The End” should come : that “the mystery of God should be finished as he had declared to His servants the prophets” : it should be completed : time should now be no more : the End of all things (so foretold) should be at hand, and be fully brought to pass : in these days should be fulfilled all that had been spoken of Christ (and of His church) by the prophets : or, in other words, when the gospel should have been preached in all the world for a testimony to all nations, and the power of the Holy People be scattered (abroad), then should the End come, then should all these things be finished. I need now only say, all these things have been done : the old and elementary system passed away with a great noise; all these predicted empires have actually fallen, and the new kingdom, the new heaven and earth, the new Jerusalem—all of which were to descend from God, to be formed by His power; have been realised on earth ; all these things have been done in the sight of all the nations ; God’s holy arm has been made bare in their sight: His judgments have prevailed, and they remain for an everlasting testimony to the whole world. His kingdom has come, as it was foretold it should, and His will has, so far, been done; His purposes have been finished; and, from that day to the extreme end of time, it will be the duty, as indeed it will be the great privilege of the Church, to gather into its bosom the Jew, the Greek, the Scythian, the Barbarian, bond and free; and to do this as the Apostles did in their days—in obedience, faith and hope.”*<sup>19</sup>

*\*“That the destruction of Jerusalem is very frequently expressed in Scripture as if it were the destruction of the whole world, Deuteronomy 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’. Jeremiah 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, Isaiah 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 Corinthians 5:17, &c.”*<sup>20</sup>

*\*“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 Corinthians 5:17 and Revelation 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.*

16 – Gary DeMar (1996) “Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church” p:540

17 – Jacob Marcellus Kik (1971) “An Eschatology Of Victory” p:??

[www.amazon.com.au/Eschatology-Victory-J-Marcellus-Kik/dp/0875523137](http://www.amazon.com.au/Eschatology-Victory-J-Marcellus-Kik/dp/0875523137) (1974 edition)

18 – Jacob Marcellus Kik (1971) “An Eschatology Of Victory” p:254-256

[www.amazon.com.au/Eschatology-Victory-J-Marcellus-Kik/dp/0875523137](http://www.amazon.com.au/Eschatology-Victory-J-Marcellus-Kik/dp/0875523137) (1974 edition)

19 – EUSEBIUS Bishop of Caesarea (c. 265 – 340) Extract from the ‘Theophania’ (the quote may have come from notes written during the translation of the works of Eusebius by Samuel Lee, published before 1923)

20 – John Lightfoot (1859) “The Whole Works of the REV. John Lightfoot: Master of Catharine Hall, Cambridge” vol. 2, p:18-19

[www.amazon.com.au/Whole-Works-Rev-John-Lightfoot/dp/1011171325](http://www.amazon.com.au/Whole-Works-Rev-John-Lightfoot/dp/1011171325) [2019 edition]

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"<sup>21</sup>

\*"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. Matthew 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 Peter 3:10, 'The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,' &c. Compare with this Deuteronomy 32:22, Hebrews 12:26: and observe that by elements are understood the Mosaic elements, Galatians 4:9, Colossians 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"<sup>22</sup>

\*"It is evident, then, that in the prophetic 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.

4. 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 obstinancy against the Lord Christ, shall be sensibly dissolved and destroyed: this we know shall be the end of these things, and that shortly."<sup>23</sup>

\*"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 (Matthew 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."<sup>24</sup>

\*"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. Isaiah 13:13; Haggai 2:21,22; Joel 3:16; Matthew 24:29-37)."<sup>25</sup>

21 – John Lightfoot (1859) "The Whole Works of the REV. John Lightfoot: Master of Catharine Hall, Cambridge" vol. 3, p:453 [www.amazon.com.au/Whole-Works-Rev-John-Lightfoot/dp/035357211X](http://www.amazon.com.au/Whole-Works-Rev-John-Lightfoot/dp/035357211X) [2018 edition]

22 – John Lightfoot (1859) "The Whole Works of the REV. John Lightfoot: Master of Catharine Hall, Cambridge" vol. 3, p:452 [www.amazon.com.au/Whole-Works-Rev-John-Lightfoot/dp/035357211X](http://www.amazon.com.au/Whole-Works-Rev-John-Lightfoot/dp/035357211X) [2018 edition]

23 – John Owen (1721) "Sermon on 2 Peter iii. 11, Works, folio, 1721" [lastdayspast.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-New-Heavens-and-Earth-Dr.-John-Owen.doc](http://lastdayspast.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-New-Heavens-and-Earth-Dr.-John-Owen.doc)

24 – Stanley Paher p:152 [most like from "Matthew 24: First Century Fulfillment Or End-time Expectation?" (1996)]

25 – Moses Stuart (1836) "A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews" [His comments on Hebrews 12:25-29]

*\*“That these texts may intimate or dimly 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 Isaiah 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 Peter iii, 10, 12, is taken mainly from Isa. 34:4, and is limited to the parousia, like the language of Matthew 24:29. Then the Lord made ‘not only the land but also the heaven’ to tremble (Hebrews 12:26), and removed the things that were shaken in order to establish a kingdom which cannot be moved (Hebrews. 12:27,28).”<sup>26</sup>*

*\*“In this essay it is argued that the principal reference of ‘heaven and earth’ is the temple-centered cosmology of second-temple Judaism which included the belief that the temple is heaven and earth in microcosm. Mark 13 and Matthew 5:18 refer, then, to the destruction of the temple as a passing away of an old cosmology and also, in the latter case, to the establishment during Jesus’ ministry and at His death and resurrection of a new temple cosmology — a new heaven and earth.”<sup>27</sup>*

*\*“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 a 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.”<sup>28</sup>*



Also these quotes:

*\*“When St. John tells us that he saw “a new heaven and earth”, we should recognize that the primary significance of that phrase is symbolic, and has to do with the blessings of salvation.”<sup>29</sup>*

*\*“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.”<sup>30</sup>*

Laurence

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(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)

26 – Milton Terry (1885) “Biblical Hermeneutic” p:489

[www.thestairview.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/milton\\_terry\\_biblicalhermeneutics.pdf](http://www.thestairview.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/milton_terry_biblicalhermeneutics.pdf)

27 – Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis (1997) p:145

In “The Reader Must Understand: *Eschatology in Bible and Theology*” Mark Elliott and Kent Brower (ed.) Intervarsity Press

28 – C.H. Spurgeon (1865) “Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. xxxvii” p:354 [No. 2211]

[ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons37/sermons37.xxx.html](http://ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons37/sermons37.xxx.html)

29 – David Chilton (1987) “Days of Vengeance” p:539

[www.rhythmsofgracecommunityfellowship.com/uploads/3/0/3/0/30306439/commentary\\_on\\_revelation.pdf](http://www.rhythmsofgracecommunityfellowship.com/uploads/3/0/3/0/30306439/commentary_on_revelation.pdf)

30 – John Owen, “Works” 16 vols. (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965-68), Vol. 9 p:134

(Quoted in David Chilton (1987) “Days of Vengeance” p:541-542)