

A NEW HEAVENS & A NEW EARTH

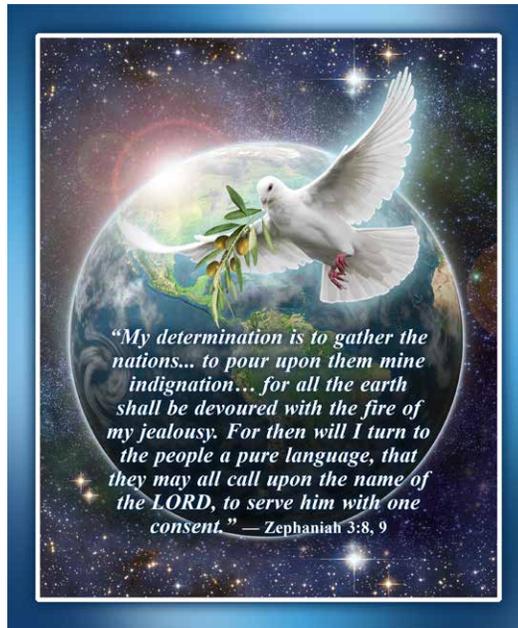
“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” — Matthew 6:10

In this time of great prophetic expectation, the expression “*new heavens and new earth*” is frequently interpreted to mean the complete destruction of planet earth, followed by the creation of a new planet. However, this gloomy prospect is far from the intent of this statement by the Apostle Peter: “*We, according to His promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.*” (2 Peter 3:13) Examination of Peter’s words will reveal the truth of this highly *symbolic* verse, which describe the end of an *era of evil* — not the destruction of planet earth. As we will see, the *new earth* symbolically refers to a transformed society on earth in which righteousness will flourish under the administration of Christ — the rightful King of the *new earth and the new heavens*.

“WORLD THAT THEN WAS... PERISHED”

Earlier in his message to the Church, the Apostle Peter described the time when our world had previously *perished*: “...*the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.*” (2 Peter 3:6) But, did our planet perish in the flood of Noah’s day? Obviously not! What perished was the evil condition of things which then prevailed on the earth before the Great Flood. This end of the corrupt society of Noah’s day then gave way for humanity to have a fresh start free from the influence of the Nephilim — wicked giants. (Genesis 6:4-7) After this cleansing, God promised Noah: “*I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake... neither will I again*

smite any more every thing living, as I have done.” (Genesis 8:21) Yes, “*the world that was*” did perish, but in a *symbolic* sense. It was the wicked and their brutal society that came to an end, for God has promised that the literal “*earth abideth forever.*” Ecclesiastes 1:4



HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS

To find harmony between conflicting interpretations, there are several very important Bible study methods which can be utilized. These are helpful in understanding the meaning of phrases such as “*the earth shall be devoured.*” These study tools provide a means of handling the Word of God responsibly. “*Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth.*” (2 Timothy 2:15) Thus, we will appreciate more

clearly the generous and loving character of our great Creator by understanding His gracious plan for the earth and its inhabitants.

Conflicting Bible interpretations can be harmonized by gathering together other Bible passages on the topic. This method of Bible study is termed **topical Bible study**. Determining whether a passage is **literal** or **symbolic** is another method of Bible study. In addition, reading scriptures in **context** is another important study tool. In the chart below, we have listed seemingly conflicting sets of scriptures as examples:

TOPIC AND CONTEXT

Earth Destroyed:

Revelation 21:1; Matthew 24:35
Heaven & earth shall pass away
 Hebrews 1:10-12
Heaven & earth shall perish
 Zephaniah 3:8 *Earth devoured with fire*
 2 Peter 3:5, 6 *World that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*
 2 Peter 3:10 *Earth shall burn*

Earth Remains:

Matthew 6:10 *Thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven*
 Ecclesiastes 1:4 *The earth abides forever*
 Matthew 5:5 *The meek inherit earth*
 Isaiah 45:18 *God created earth not in vain, formed it to be inhabited*
 Psalm 104:5 *Foundations of earth shall not be removed forever*

New Earth:

Revelation 21:1 *New earth replaces old*
 Revelation 21:5 *Christ will make all things new*
 Isaiah 65:17 *Creation of a new heaven and a new earth*
 2 Peter 3:13 *Look for a new heaven and a new earth*
 Isaiah 66:22 *New earth remains forever*

Note that God *created the earth not in vain* and that He *formed it to be inhabited*. Note, too, that the *meek shall inherit the earth*. An interpretation that claims the literal earth will be destroyed fails to harmonize with the clear thought that the earth will *abide forever* for the meek and teachable to inherit.

Now note on our chart Zephaniah 3:8 as an example of *symbolic* Bible language: “...*all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy*.” Taken literally this seems to indicate that the earth will be burned up, but consider the logic when the word “*fire*” is interpreted in a symbolic sense — it harmonizes with all other scriptures that state that God created the earth to endure forever.

Fire is a fitting *symbol* which applies to the destruction of all the corrupt and selfish elements that currently exist on earth in the activities of fallen humanity. This corruption is what has fueled God’s anger, thus, it is not the earth itself that needs to be destroyed, but the *evil influences* upon it. Furthermore, this symbolic interpretation harmonizes perfectly with the next verse in Zephaniah 3:9, which concludes with the promise that God will then “*turn to the people a pure language that they may... serve him with one consent*.” If everything and everyone were to be burned up, who would be left to learn this *pure language*?

As a further evidence of the importance of using *symbolism* as a Bible study method, consider God’s promised declaration: “*The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool*,” and “*I will make the place of my feet glorious*.” (Isaiah 66:1; 60:13) Surely, the earth would not be glorious if burned up. Likewise, 2 Peter 3:10 reads: “*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*.” Again, it is every evil *work* that will be destroyed. A literal interpretation would present a significant problem if the literal heavens were to be destroyed. Jehovah, His Son and all the holy angels abide there. Here again, the symbolism of *fire* represents the destruction of the deceptive ecclesiastical heavens under the limited reign of Satan and his minions. Every evil *work* of injustice and selfishness throughout Satan’s empire in the *symbolic* heaven and on earth will soon be thoroughly destroyed by Christ, the worthy King!

FIRST ARMAGEDDON — THEN THE NEW EARTH

The Scriptures do speak of the *Battle of Armageddon* — a momentous *time of trouble* coinciding with the final collapse of this old order of society. (Revelation 16:16; Daniel 12:1) However, the true purpose of Armageddon is to do the *cleansing work* which will finally rid the earth of the *systems of corruption* under the control of Satan, the fallen angels and Satan’s earthly servants. This great *time*

of trouble will be the ultimate lesson of man’s inability to govern righteously by God’s *Law of Love*. But note carefully, it is the selfish human institutions that will be destroyed forever as a result of the Battle of Armageddon, and not the billions of humanity who have never known or accepted Jesus in this life.

The trouble of our present evil day will be in *spasms* — a series of convulsions more frequent and severe until the final painful spasm. The Apostle so indicates this symbolism when he says that the trouble will be “*as travail upon a woman*.” (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3) The relief will come only with the birth of the *new order* of things — a *new heavens* (under the spiritual control of Christ) and a *new earth* (reorganized society) wherein justice and love prevail, instead of oppression, evil and selfishness.

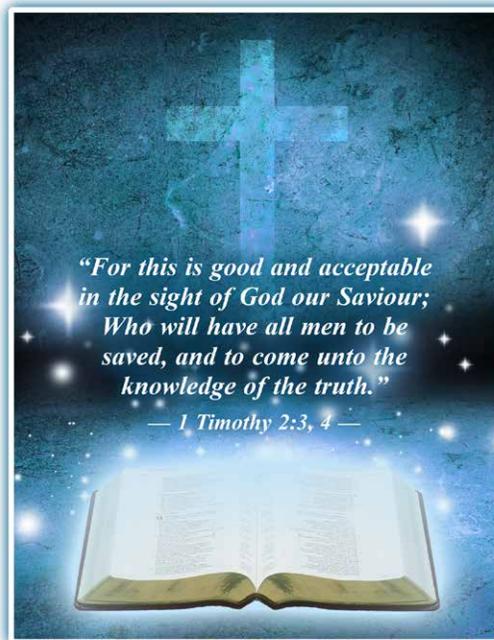
After the *cleansing* work of Armageddon has removed the world’s corrupt systems, God’s Kingdom of blessings through Messiah will immediately follow. Although the trouble will be a harsh lesson, Jesus promised that “...*except those days were shortened, not any flesh would be saved. But on account of the elect, those days will be shortened*.” The “*elect*” here includes Christ with his faithful Church, and because of their merciful intervention, these evil days will be *shortened* and *all flesh will be saved!* Matthew 24:22 (LITV)

During the promised thousand year Kingdom reign of Christ and the Church, all those in their graves will “*hear his voice, and shall come forth*” to receive an opportunity to learn the “*pure language*” — the accurate and logical understanding of God’s Word, His plan and His will. (John 5:28, 29; 1 Timothy 2:4) This clear understanding will provide every person the prospect of receiving everlasting life right here upon the *new*, renovated earth.

In the numerous prophecies regarding the trouble of Armageddon, we find the same promise repeated — following the trouble will come the blessings of God’s Kingdom on earth. Haggai 2:6, 7 states, “*I will shake the heavens, and the earth... And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory*...” And what is it that all people desire? — peace, health, happiness, security, freedom from fear and anxiety — but above all, everlasting life! The opportunity for all of these desires is promised by God for every man, woman and child in His Kingdom — an earth restored to Edenic beauty!

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH ENJOYED BY ALL

This peace and prosperity was prophesied by the angels at Jesus’ birth: “*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people*.” (Luke 2:10) Sadly, most Christians are taught that only a few who accept Jesus now benefit from the offer of salvation and that all others will be destroyed,



or worse, sent to an eternal life of torture. But, reasoning on the Scriptures we see that ever since Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, his children have inherited sin and have been plagued by this sin and its resulting sorrow and death. Most have never really had a chance to learn of God or to have an opportunity for salvation — the real *good news*. God knew that, through inherited weakness and the influence of Satan, the majority of mankind would not be capable of responding to His counsels, and hence, God “*so loved the world*” that He provided an opportunity of salvation *in due time* for everyone! Jesus Christ “*tasted death for every man*” and provided “*a ransom for all to be testified in due time.*” John 3:16; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:6

Even Christ himself stated that this present age is not the *due time* for the majority of humanity to learn of him. He declared that the Bible was purposely written in *parables* and *symbols* so that none but those of faith now would be converted. “*Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without all these things are done in parables. That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.*” (Mark 4:11-12)

If now is the only time for all to be converted, why did Jesus not give a clear message so that all could have an equal opportunity to understand his words of salvation during this lifetime?

The reality is that now is the time for the selection of a few with “*ears to hear*” — the Church — “*a people for God’s name.*” (Acts 15:14-17) After this nighttime of sorrow, and after mankind’s experience with sin and self-rule, most will come forth from their graves anxious to hear — seeking the full knowledge of the Lord! With the promise that Satan will be bound, they will have, *for the first time*, a reasonable chance to be brought to perfection and everlasting life. Jeremiah 31:34 says of that time, “*...they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest.*” Jeremiah also shows that they will no longer die for the inherited sins of their fathers, but, in God’s Kingdom, if they refuse God’s generous mercy during the reign of righteousness, they will then die for their own iniquity. (Jeremiah 31:29, 30) All others — every reformed sinner who took advantage of God’s benevolence — will have the Law of God written in his heart. Jeremiah 31:33

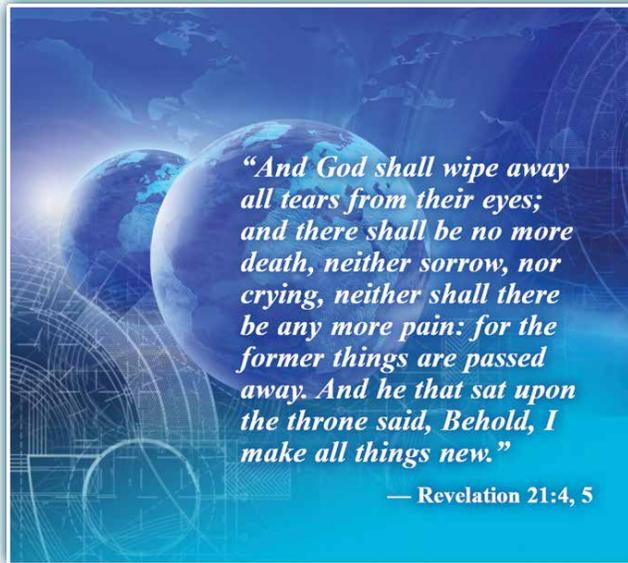
Herein is the key to understanding God’s ultimate plan for His human creation — to recognize that the Scriptures clearly teach that there are two distinct time periods for mankind to receive salvation — one *due time* for the faithful who go to heaven and one *due time* for those who remain on earth or who are raised from their graves after the Armageddon battle.

Examples of Heavenly Salvation Scriptures:

- “*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection... they shall be priests of God and Christ...*” Revelation 20:6
- “*...we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*” 1 John 3:2
- “*...holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling...*” Hebrews 3:1
- “*... the saints shall judge the world...*” 1 Corinthians 6:2
- “*...we shall bear the image of the heavenly.*” 1 Corinthians 15:49
- “*...partakers of the divine nature.*” 2 Peter 1:4

Examples of Earthly Salvation Scriptures:

- “*He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth...*” —Ephesians 1:10
- “*...when judgments are in the earth,... the world will learn righteousness.*” Isaiah 26:9
- “*...earth hath he given to the children of men.*” Psalm 115:16
- “*...earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*” Isaiah 11:9
- “*...every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth...*” Philippians 2:10 (ASV)
- “*His flesh shall become fresher than a child’s...*” Job 33:24-25

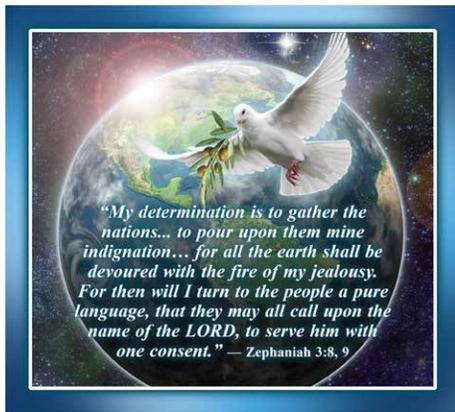


“BEHOLD! I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW”

A refreshing educational process will help mankind in their journey up what Isaiah called *the highway of holiness*. (Isaiah 35:8) All of Isaiah Chapter 35 describes this promised time. By the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ with his Church, mankind will once again be perfect in mind and body — in the image of God. But, also promised is a trial for a “*little season*” where each will be given a final, individual test of obedience which will expose any rebellious characteristics. (Revelation 20:3) Those who have only feigned obedience will be mercifully removed in what the Bible calls the “*second death*” — a condition from which there will be no hope of a future resurrection. However, God’s plan will be so irresistible to the majority of His human family that nearly all of mankind will love and obey their Creator for all eternity — not because they had no choice, but because it will be the desire of their hearts.

“*And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*” (Revelation 21:5) The most momentous event of earth’s history is the establishment of God’s Kingdom on *earth* in the hands of our Lord Jesus and his Church ruling from *heaven*. This great event, toward which all of God’s promises point, we now see just upon us. No desire has been more eagerly expressed; no wish has been more sincerely wished; no need has been more earnestly felt than for a Kingdom of peace, joy, and happiness to replace present evil conditions on planet earth. “*Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven*” — both made NEW!

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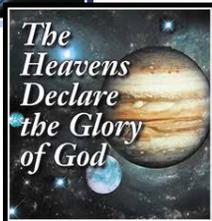
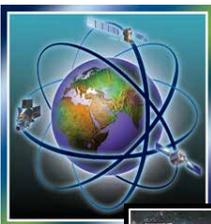


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