

The Heavens and the Earth

by Brian Maxwell

The Bible uses the expression "the Heavens and the Earth" many times throughout its 66 books. It is the first thing talked about at the beginning of Genesis, and it is the focus of the last two chapters in Revelation.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

Therefore, it would be no surprise to find the rest of scripture addressing this topic of the heavens and the earth. In fact, one could make a solid assumption that it would be the primary focus of the entire Bible. So what is "the heavens and the earth?" Most evangelicals today would say something like "it is everything around us. It is the physical earth, and the physical sun, moon, and stars, the physical universe". But is that always the meaning of "the heavens and the earth" in the scriptures?

Think about something for a moment: If you were asked to describe what the entire Bible is about in one phrase, what would you say? Well, I know what I would say. I would say that it is about God and the redemption of His people. It's hard to argue with that, right? Now, think about this: How does this theme of God and the redemption of His people fit in with the creation and recreation of a physical universe? Seems a bit strange, doesn't it?

Today we live in a Christian culture dominated by Dispensational teaching. This method of interpretation teaches a rigid literalism, where "if the plain meaning of a text makes perfect sense, seek no other sense". So when we read in our 21st century English bibles the phrase "heaven and earth", we are taught to simply accept the meaning, as we would understand it in today's world, which is the physical universe and planet. This concept is relatively easy for us to accept as we have all seen pictures of planet earth from space. We've seen pictures from high-powered telescopes of distant galaxies. But, think about folks back in biblical days. They had not seen, nor had the knowledge, of what we have seen today. How would they have understood "heaven and earth"?

Let's look at a few examples:

Deuteronomy 4:26 I call **heaven and earth** to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

Job 20:26 All darkness shall be hid in his secret places: a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle. 27 The **heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him.**

Now, did Moses call the physical universe to witness against the people? What about

the passage in Job? Would the physical sky reveal iniquity? Would the physical dirt rise up against him? Passages such as these use hyperbole and metaphor to describe something else, something spiritual or covenantal. The Bible is full of this type of language. Now, I'm not saying that the Bible never uses "heaven and earth" in a physical sense. It clearly does many times. However, there are so many passages, such as the two cited above, which show that "heaven and earth" have a different meaning than the physical universe, that it is at least worthy of study. Let's look at another one:

Psalm 19:1 **The heavens declare the glory of God;** and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

This verse is often cited to show how the sun, moon, and stars (physical universe) show forth the glory of God. But take a look at the entire passage in context and think about it again:

Psalm 19:1 **The heavens declare the glory of God;** and the firmament sheweth his handywork. 2 Day unto day *uttereth speech*, and night unto night *sheweth knowledge*. 3 There is no speech nor language, where *their voice* is not heard. 4 *Their line* is gone out through all the earth, and *their words* to the end of the world. *In them* hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. 6 His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Do the physical heavens "utter speech"? Do they show forth knowledge? Notice how this passage speaks of the activities of the "heavens", and how it refers to "them" in the third person plural (*their line; their words; in them*). Who is it that declares the glory of God? This passage is about God's people and it has clear prophetic utterances about the New Covenant and Christ as the bridegroom. It is a covenantal passage using covenantal language. Now, does this mean that the physical heavens do not show forth the glory of God? I'm not saying that at all. I believe they do. I believe the physical heavens and earth are extremely glorious and I praise God for them. However, the physical is not the focus in many of these covenantal passages. God is using the imagery of the heavens to show forth a greater truth, a spiritual truth.

So you might be thinking, where do I get this crazy idea that the heavens and the earth represent God's people and His covenant with them? Do you remember what God told Abraham? How he would be the father of many nations and how his descendents would be as the stars of the heaven and as the dust of the earth?

Genesis 13:16 And I will make thy seed as the *dust of the earth*: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Genesis 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward **heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them:** and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. 6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 22:15 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, 16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: 17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the **stars of the heaven**, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; 18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

And He said to Isaac also:

Genesis 26:4 And I will make thy seed to multiply as the **stars of heaven**, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; 5 Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

Moses remembers:

Exodus 32:13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, **I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven**, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.

Before they entered the Promised Land, the promise to Abraham was fulfilled:

Deuteronomy 1:9 And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone: 10 The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, **ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude**.

Deuteronomy 10:22 Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the **stars of heaven** for multitude.

And Nehemiah remembers:

Nehemiah 9:23 Their children also multipliedst thou as the **stars of heaven**, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it.

God had laid the groundwork, which *related* the heavens to His covenant people. He used the metaphor of stars (heaven) and dust (earth) to describe the multitude of the seed of Abraham. Now let's look further. When Moses is drawing near death and the people are preparing to go in and take the Promised Land, look at how Moses addresses the people:

Deuteronomy 30:19 I call **heaven and earth** to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: 20 That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Deuteronomy 31:28-30 Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and **call heaven and earth to record against them.** 29 For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands. 30 And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.

Deuteronomy 32:1 Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

Moses addressed the people of God as the heavens and the earth. The physical heavens and earth do not have ears. He is speaking to Israel. Israel was God's heaven and earth. They were His covenant people. We will come back to this, but first let's see if we find examples of this language with reference to the *beginning*, or the original *creation*. Here is a passage from Zechariah, who is clearly alluding to the creation account in Genesis:

Zechariah 12:1 The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Compare with this creation passage:

Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the *dust of the ground*, and breathed into his nostrils the *breath of life*; and man became a living soul.

Notice what is happening here. It is subtle, but when God creates the first man He joins earth (dust of the ground) with heaven (the breath of life) and then man becomes a living soul. Adam was partly divine, in that he had the breath of life (the spirit of God). This is what made him alive (covenantal life). Now let's go back even further:

Genesis 2:1 Thus the **heavens and the earth** were finished, and **all the host of them.**

This is fascinating. God declares here that the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the *host* of them. The Hebrew word here for host is **tseba'ah** (pronounced sa-ba). The primary meaning of this word is "mass of persons, especially organized for war." So even here in Genesis 2 we are seeing how God calls the heavens and the earth a mass of persons. Here is one cross-reference to consider:

Exodus 6:26 these *are* that Aaron and Moses, to whom the LORD said, Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their *armies*.

The word here for "armies" is also *tseba'ah*. We see this word used this way throughout the Pentateuch describing the children of Israel.

Continuing:

Genesis 2:4 These are the ***generations of the heavens and of the earth*** when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

Again, we see an example of the heavens and the earth referring to people. The Hebrew word for generations here is ***toledah***, **the primary definition of which includes**

This word is translated "generations" 37 other times in the Old Testament, consistent with its translation here in Genesis 2. Adam was the beginning of the genealogy of the heavens and the earth. This is further evidence that the heavens and the earth created in Genesis 1 refer primarily to God's covenant people. Now look at Genesis 5:

Genesis 5:1 This is the book of the *generations (toledah)* of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him;

This is a direct restatement of Genesis 2:4. It even states: "In the day that God created man". Seeing it in this context makes it hard to miss. Generations primarily speak of the history of people, not inanimate objects of the universe. Now, as God continues to reveal the covenant line, he uses similar language.

Genesis 6:9 These are the *generations* of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. Genesis 10:1 Now these are the *generations* of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.

Genesis 11:10 These are the *generations* of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: Genesis 11:27 Now these are the *generations* of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.

Genesis 25:19 And these are the *generations* of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac: "descendants, genealogies, account of men and their descendants, genealogical list of one's descendants."

Genesis 37:1 And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are the *generations* of Jacob.

From Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob (Israel), this was the genealogy of the heavens and the earth. Luke 3 shows us how this genealogy leads to Christ. Christ promised a new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13) where righteousness would dwell (more on this later). Before moving on, here is another passage that shows how Israel understood the heavens and the earth. Remember Joseph's dream in Genesis 37?

Genesis 37:9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, *the sun and the moon and the eleven stars* made obeisance to me. 10 And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall *I and thy mother and thy brethren* indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? 11 And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

Israel (Jacob) did not need Joseph to interpret the dream. He knew exactly what it meant, that they (Jacob and his family) would bow down to Joseph. The eleven stars give direct reference to the eleven brothers of Joseph. The sun, moon, and stars (the heavens) were a direct reference to the family of Israel.

The Heavens and the Earth in the Psalms

You may be wondering if the rest of the Bible uses similar language concerning the heavens and the earth. I believe it does. Let's look at some passages from the Psalms. The Psalms are very often prophetic of the New Covenant and of Christ, and should give us more insights to the true meaning of "heavens and earth". We've already looked at Psalm 19. Let's continue with a few others.

Psalm 69:30 I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. 31 This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. 32 The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. 33 For the LORD heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners. 34 **Let the heaven and earth praise him**, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein. 35 For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. 36 The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein.

The passage is very clear: the heaven and earth praise Him, even the sea and all that is in it. Now, do fish and sharks and whales praise the Lord? Some would say YES they do. Those in the camp of rigid literalism would argue that because God created the sea and all that is in it that it somehow praises Him because of God's work in the physical creation. I would agree that God's work in the physical creation is extremely glorious and that we (His people) should praise Him for that creation; but I do not agree that fish, sharks, whales, dirt, rocks, skies, planets, or even galaxies praise Him. These are all word pictures representing something else. Again, who praises the Lord? Those who love Him and belong to Him give Him praise. Look further at the context of the passage. It begins by saying "I will praise the name of God with a song," so we see an individual praising Him. Then we see the heaven and earth praising Him. Look at the very next sentence: "For God will save Zion..." It is Israel praising God, as He will save them. How strange would it be for the writer of this Psalm to speak of the physical heavens, earth, and sea praising God for the salvation of Zion (Israel)? Rather, it is God's covenant people who praise Him for *their* salvation.

This next passage may remind us of the imagery of the Exodus. God led Israel by a pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of cloud by day. His glory was above them (above the heavens):

Psalm 113:4 The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the **heavens**. 5 Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, 6 Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in **heaven, and in the earth!**

Notice here how heaven and earth are God's servants:

Psalm 119:89 For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in **heaven**. 90 Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the **earth**, and it abideth. 91 **They for all are thy servants.**

Who declares God's righteousness?

Psalm 50:4 He shall call to the **heavens** from above, and to the **earth**, that he may judge his people. 5 Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. 6 And the **heavens shall declare his righteousness**: for God is judge himself. Selah.

Psalm 97:6 The **heavens** declare his righteousness, and *all the people* see his glory.

Psalm 22:31 They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

Here are a few more examples to consider from the Psalms: continue this day according to thine ordinances:

Psalm 73:8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the **heavens**, and their tongue walketh through the **earth**. 10 Therefore *his people* return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

Psalm 96:10 Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. 11 **Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad**; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof.

Psalm 102:23 He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. 24 I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations. 25 Of old hast thou laid **the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands**. 26 They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, **all of them shall wax old like a garment**; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: 27 But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. 28 **The children of thy servants shall continue**, and their seed shall be established before thee.

It should be very apparent that these verses concerning the heavens and the earth have much greater meaning than simply the physical earth, sun, moon, and stars.

The Heavens and the Earth in the Prophets

In the Prophets, we see a continued use of the heavens and earth motif. The prophets add use of even further apocalyptic language. This language is highly metaphoric. We see the heavens and the earth in the prophets under great judgment, and great blessing. We must ask ourselves: do the physical heavens and the physical earth come under judgment? Do the physical heavens and physical earth need to be redeemed? Keep these questions in mind as we look at several passages from the prophets.

Isaiah 13:10 For the **stars of heaven** and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not

cause *her light* to shine. 11 And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. 12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. 13 **Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place,** in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

Look at the judgment of the heavens and the earth. The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give *her* light. The heavens will be shaken and the earth removed out of *her* place. Notice two things here: The personal pronoun "her" used twice, "her light", and "her place". God is referring to a people, not a physical world. Secondly, sandwiched in between these verses, God proclaims that He will punish the world for evil and the wicked for their iniquity. Here's another example where a rigid, literal interpretation of sun, moon, heavens, and earth makes no sense at all. The context is God's judgment on Babylon for their iniquity. In this context, Babylon is being shaken and removed out of her place. Here is another similar passage of judgment on the heavens and the earth:

Isaiah 34:4 And all the host of **heaven shall be dissolved,** and **the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll:** and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. 5 For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and *upon the people of my curse, to judgment.*

And here is another passage which is prophetic of the New Covenant:

Isaiah 51:4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. 5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. 6 Lift up your eyes to *the heavens,* and look upon *the earth* beneath: for *the heavens shall vanish away* like smoke, and *the earth shall wax old like a garment,* and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

This verse speaks of the heavens and the earth waxing old and vanishing, but the Lord's righteousness and salvation enduring forever. The New Testament gives more light:

Matthew 9:16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

Hebrews 1:10 And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid *the foundation of the earth;* and *the heavens are the works of thine hands:* 11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall *wax old* as doth a garment; 12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

Hebrews 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

Hebrews 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and *waxeth old* is ready to vanish away.

It is made clear by the writer of Hebrews that the old covenant is the heavens and earth of which the prophets spoke, which was waxing old and was about to vanish away. The New Testament tells us that the time was then. The darkness of the Old Covenant was waxing old and starting to vanish, and the light of the New Covenant was beginning to shine forth like the sun. The language is rich with metaphor and hyperbole. However, if we consistently compare scripture with scripture we begin to see these things come into view. Returning to the prophets:

Isaiah also speaks much like the Psalms. We see many examples of the heavens and the earth praising God. Also, we see examples of the heavens and the earth as God's covenant people.

Isaiah 1:1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. **Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth:** for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

Isaiah 44:23 **Sing, O ye heavens;** for the LORD hath done it: **shout, ye lower parts of the earth:** break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel. 24 Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that **stretcheth forth the heavens** alone; that **spreadeth abroad the earth** by myself;

Here we see God calling His people *mountains* as well as the heavens and the earth:

Isaiah 49:13 **Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth;** and break forth into singing, O *mountains*: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

Isaiah 51:16 And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the *heavens*, and lay the foundations of the *earth*, and say unto Zion, *Thou art my people*.

There are many more examples of this covenant use of the heavens and the earth in the other prophets' writings:

Jeremiah 51:48 then the **heaven and the earth**, and all that is therein, **shall sing** for Babylon: for the spoilers shall come unto her from the north, saith the LORD

Ezekiel 32:7 And when I shall put thee out, I will cover **the heaven**, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. 8 All the bright **lights of heaven** will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD.

1 Chronicles 16:30 Fear before him, all the earth: the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved. 31 Let the **heavens be glad**, and **let the earth rejoice:** and **let men say among the nations**, The LORD reigneth.

Look at this amazing covenant passage in Hosea. Notice the connection between the heavens and the earth and the covenant people of God:

Hosea 2:18 And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the **beasts of the field**, and with the **fowls of heaven**, and with the **creeping things of the ground**: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. 19 And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in **righteousness**, and in **judgment**, and in **lovingkindness**, and in **mercies**. 20 I will even betroth thee unto me in **faithfulness**: and **thou shalt know the LORD**. 21 And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, **I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth**; 22 And the **earth shall hear** the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. 23 And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and **I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy**; and **I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God**.

Now let's look at another amazing passage from Jeremiah. This passage leads us back to Genesis 1 and the creation itself:

Jeremiah 4:22 For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. 23 I beheld the **earth**, and, lo, **it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light**.

Notice how Jeremiah describes the foolish and silly children of Israel, who are wise to do evil. He says that he beheld the earth, and "it was without form, and void, and the heavens had no light." This language describes Israel's unrighteousness. The heavens had no light (were in darkness). This sounds eerily like Genesis 1:

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And *the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep*. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The heavens and the earth are God's covenant people, even at the beginning. God uses the metaphor of sky or expanse (heavens) and dust or land (earth) to represent His people and His covenant with them, and He does this through His inspired scribes throughout the entire bible. Notice again how Jeremiah describes the earth mourning and the heavens as black (in darkness):

Jeremiah 4:27 For thus hath the LORD said, *The whole land shall be desolate*; yet will I not make a full end. 28 For this **shall the earth mourn**, and the **heavens above be black**: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.

Does the physical earth mourn? No. However, God's people mourn when He comes with rebuke.

Jeremiah 10:11 Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made *the*

heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. 12 He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. 13 When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.

This is difficult language, but from the context it is clear that He speaks of His people and their calamity, thus again showing how God uses the phrase "heavens and earth" when describing what will befall His people. What about the Minor Prophets?

Joel 2:10 The **earth** shall quake before them; the **heavens** shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining:

Joel 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: 29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. 30 And I will shew **wonders in the heavens and in the earth**, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. 32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

In the New Testament, Peter preached in Acts 2 that this passage was being fulfilled as he saw the evidence of the Holy Spirit being given. The entire passage concerns the gospel. Included within this passage is how God would show signs and wonders in the *heaven* and in the *earth*. These wonders were done through Christ and the Apostles in the land of Israel, or God's covenant economy (God's heaven and earth). Continuing with the Minor Prophets:

Who has praise for the Lord God of Hosts but His people? The heavens and the earth praise the Lord, and His glory covers them:

Habakkuk 3:3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. **His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.**

Haggai 2:6 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will **shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;** 7 And I will **shake all nations**, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

This prophecy in Haggai refers to the destruction of the old covenant to give place to the new (Hebrews 12:26-29). It is not referring to the destruction of the physical planet. Notice how God references the heavens, the earth, the sea, the dry land, and then *all nations*! These are all alluding to peoples through the metaphor of the physical creation. Continuing in Haggai:

Haggai 2:20 And again the word of the LORD came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, 21 Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, *I will shake the heavens and the earth*; 22 And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.

We have seen many Old Testament scriptures pointing to the heavens and earth being God's covenant people. But what about the *new* heavens and the new earth that we see in the New Testament? The bible is one book. It is one story. The New Testament writers took much of their language from the Old Testament writers. So would it be any surprise to see the new heaven and earth in the New Testament referring to God's covenant people as well? It would *not* be a great surprise and in fact we do. Let's first look at a couple of Old Testament passages which speak of the *new* heavens and earth:

Isaiah 65:17 For, behold, I create ***new heavens and a new earth***: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. 18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. 19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

Isaiah 66:22 For as the ***new heavens and the new earth***, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

It is easy to see from the above verses the covenant context of the new heavens and the new earth. Jerusalem (synonymous here with the new heavens and the new earth) is created a rejoicing and her people a joy. There will be no more weeping heard in her, nor the voice of crying. The rigid literalists have a field day with these passages. They insist that God will remake this entire universe and planet earth. They insist that this new universe and earth will be a physical paradise where there will be no more death, no more pain, and no more tears. But is this really what these verses are teaching? From the wealth of evidence gathered above, we are compelled to conclude that *the new* heavens and the *new* earth are *covenantal* just as the old heavens and old earth were. It is speaking of the surpassing glory of the new covenant.

The New Testament

The more I have studied the Old Testament, the more I do not like the break between the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament is simply a continuation of the story, the grand finale! Many Christians could call themselves "New Testament Christians" as they spend very little time in the Old Testament and know very little of what it is all about. I was guilty of this myself going back about 10-12 years. The New Testament is the end of the story, but what good is the end if we do not understand the beginning? The revelation of God ceased for over 400 years. God was silent. However, if we look at the end of the Old Testament, we will see that the New Testament picks up right where it left off.

Malachi 4:4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; 2 *As it is written in the prophets*, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Matthew 11:13 *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John*. 14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. 15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The New Testament picks up with the prophecy of Elijah uttered by Malachi at the end of the Old Testament. Jesus confirms for us that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the coming of Elijah. Why is this so significant? It demonstrates that the Bible is *one* book. It is *one* story. There is cohesiveness from Old to New. Actually, the Old Covenant continued during the first century. It did not immediately vanish when Christ went to the cross, but continued during the writing of the New Testament (which is made clear in Hebrews 8) until God destroyed the city and the sanctuary in 70AD. It is important to remember that the new heavens and the new earth was not new language to the Jews in the first century. It was language they were very familiar with from the Old Testament. So we too must appreciate the way it was used in the Old Testament, if we are to accurately understand its meaning in the New.

We will look at a few key verses in the New Testament. 2 Peter 3 is by far one of the most cited passages to support differing views of eschatology and it uses the phrase "the heavens" several times.

2 Peter 3:1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: 2 *That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets*, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:

Notice first how Peter encourages his readers to be mindful of the words of the prophets. The New Testament writers taught nothing that had not already been prophesied in Old Testament scripture (Acts 26:22). He wants them to remember that the prophets had spoken of a new heavens and a new earth.

2 Peter 3:5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God *the heavens were of old*, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 6 Whereby *the world that then was*, being overflowed with water, perished: 7 *But the heavens and the earth, which are now*, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Ask yourself a question: Did the flood of Noah's day destroy the physical heavens? Whether you are a global flood advocate or a regional flood advocate, you

would have to agree that the physical heavens were not destroyed. Yet, God calls that time "the heavens of old" and "the world that then was" and says that it "perished". Those "heavens" perished in the flood. Was the physical heavens and earth destroyed? No. The flood was a judgment on people! People are the ones who perish, not physical matter. The physical universe and physical earth remained. So those "heavens" must have been referring to something other than the physical sky and planet. They were referring to a people. This people was the covenant line which had come down from Adam through Seth and had corrupted themselves as is stated in the first part of Genesis 6.

The "heavens and the earth which are now" also speak of a people. After the flood, God instituted a covenant with Noah and through the line of Shem this covenant went forth. Through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and finally culminating with Jesus Christ, the "heavens and the earth which are now" point back to their beginnings with Noah and Shem. God had promised Noah that He would not destroy the land again with water or flood. Peter now tells us that the "heavens which are now" are reserved unto the judgment of fire. If you have a preterist understanding of the New Testament, then you will understand that the judgment of fire spoken by Peter was imminent at the time of his writing. What "heavens" were judged by fire soon after Peter wrote? The Romans in 70AD outwardly manifested this judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem.

2 Peter 3:10 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, Peter describes the "heavens" which shall pass away. The elements are not physical elements, but have direct reference to the Old Covenant economy (do a study on the Greek word for "elements" and this will become crystal clear). "The earth and the works therein" have direct reference to the law and the failure of Israel to be justified by the "works" of the law. The elements of the old economy all melted in the fires of 70AD and the works of the law were burned up when the temple was destroyed and burned to the ground ("not one stone shall be left upon another that will not be thrown down").

So what does all this have to do with the *new* heavens and the *new* earth? Peter is getting to that next.

2 Peter 3:11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein *the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?* 13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Now what promise could Peter possibly be referring to? Most agree it is a direct reference to Isaiah 65. Let's take a look at Isaiah 65 again and compare it with Revelation 21:

Isaiah 65:17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former

shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

Notice the parallel between "and the former shall not be remembered" and "for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." We have to ask a question. What were the "first" heavens and the "first" earth? Is there any other place in scripture which speaks of the creation of a heavens and an earth other than Genesis 1? I don't think there is. So this passing away of "the first" must be referring to the heavens and the earth in the *beginning*. Preterists affirm we are in the new heavens and the new earth and that it is a spiritual kingdom. So what passed away, the physical heavens and earth? Preterists affirm that what passed away was the Old Covenant (the old Jewish economy). So it is a logical connection to see the "first" heaven and the "first" earth of Genesis 1 as Old Covenant Israel.

Isaiah 65:18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. 19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

Revelation 21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.⁴ And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away

God will rejoice in the (new) Jerusalem and there shall be no more weeping or crying *because the former things are passed away*. This is the new covenant in Jesus Christ where God's people are no longer under the law of sin and death which produced pain, crying, sorrow, and spiritual death. Christ has made all things new.

Revelation 21:5 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 . 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Notice what else is going on in the new heavens and earth:

Isaiah 65:20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. 21 And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. 22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

The words spoken here in Isaiah 65 are prophetic of the New Covenant. The long life spans represent the eternal life found only under the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Eating the fruit of the vineyards is symbolic of partaking of the fruit of the Vine (think *new wine*). Jesus tells us in John 15 that He is the True Vine.

Isaiah 65:25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

Revelation 21:24 And the *nations* of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the *kings of the earth* do bring their glory and honour into it. 25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the *nations* into it.

The wolf and the lamb are not literal here as so many would try to say, but are symbolic of the reconciliation to God of two adversarial groups, Israel and the Gentiles. The dust being the serpent's meat is a direct reference back to the Garden and the curse. The Lord declares that *no* one (not even the serpent) will hurt or destroy in all His holy mountain (the New Jerusalem, the New Heavens and the New Earth) where the curse has been lifted forever. The nations will come into her (Gentile believers) and the Kings of the Earth also (Jewish believers) being raised up together in a holy temple in the Lord. Look further at Revelation 21 and see how John describes the city in his vision. The 12 gates represent the 12 tribes of Israel. The 12 foundations are the 12 apostles, and we know that Jesus Christ is the Chief Cornerstone. Is this some sort of physical heavenly city? No, the passage tells us that the New Jerusalem is the church, the Bride of Christ:

Revelation 21:9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee *the bride, the Lamb's wife*. 10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me *that great city, the holy Jerusalem*, descending out of heaven from God,

The bride, the Lamb's wife is equivalent to that great city, the holy Jerusalem. It is very clear. The New Heavens and the New Earth are God's holy city, the Lamb's wife, the Bride, the Church of Jesus Christ. With this in mind, wouldn't it also be reasonable to view the *first* heavens and the *first* earth as referring to God's people, or God's covenant? As a matter of fact, it brings a great deal of consistency to the entire story. It also helps bring understanding to previously difficult New Testament passages such as Luke 16:16-17:

Luke 16:16 the law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. 17 And it is easier for *heaven* and *earth* to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

Jesus then tells us plainly in the Olivet Discourse that heaven and earth would soon pass away:

Luke 21:33 *Heaven* and *earth* shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

So again, what *heaven* and *earth* is Jesus referring to that will pass away? We reasonably conclude that it is the same heaven and earth of Genesis 1 and that it is covenantal. Yes, this does go against church history, the creeds, and church tradition. But, what is our authority? History? The creeds? What about the scriptures? All through the scriptures we have seen verse after verse where the heavens and the earth are something other than physical, or spatial. They are referring to God's people, their conscience under law (guilt), and then grace (no shame). It's a spiritual story. I'm sure what I have written here will cause many questions and there will be many doubters. I'll be the first to admit I don't have all the answers. All I would ask is that you carefully consider the scriptures, and purpose to leave behind any preconceived ideas and let the scriptures be your guide.

In conclusion, I would like to ask several questions: What kind of book is the Bible? What was God's main purpose in giving us the Scriptures? Is it a science book designed to prove that God is the creator of the universe? Or is it principally a book of covenant in which God is revealing how He relates with mankind? In light of this study of the heavens and the earth, I would conclude that God's word is about covenant, and He uses the imagery of *heavens and earth* to describe His relationship with His people. This in no way diminishes the glory of God's physical creation; but it points us to an even greater glory: His creation of covenant with man and ultimately His new creation in Jesus Christ our Lord.