

# **The New Heavens and Earth (Revised)**

**By Elder David Pyles**

*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. 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. 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. 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. – Rev 21:1-5*

This revision of a paper I wrote many years ago differs nothing in its conclusions, but upon recently rereading that paper, I was not happy with it, finding that its arguments were not as strong as they could have been. I was pleasantly surprised at the number of people who read the first paper and agreed with it. I hope all will agree that the present paper represents an improvement.

## **The Literal Sense is Sensible**

The passage above is of great interest to all students of Bible prophecy; however, not all are at agreement as to its meaning. The intuitive reading of the text takes it to be a literal description of the final, glory state. However, there are some who claim it to be an allegorical description of temporal blessings one receives in the church.

Those holding this latter view should be deeply disappointed at their own conclusions. Though all Christians happily acknowledge the blessings of the church, its joys have been ever-mingled with tears, death and sorrow by all who have experienced it. The above text describes a state wherein it plainly declares that such things no longer pertain. Now if this is not literally true, and if the text is no more than an allegorical description of the temporal church, then we are constrained to conclude that “allegorical” must be a near-synonym for “exaggerative.” Such a conclusion is as troubling as any thought the mind could conceive. If biblical promises that would seem to speak of our resurrection and glorification cannot be taken for their literal, intuitive import, then one must question whether anything claimed by that book can be taken at its face value.

One rule of interpretation that all sensible Bible readers must follow is that if the literal sense of a passage is sensible then this is the sense that should be given priority. Some Bible students refer to themselves as “literalists,” claiming to be distinguished by their commitment to this rule, but the truth is that the rule is no more than common sense. Even an allegorist, if he has common sense, will follow it. If he believes *anything* in the Bible to be literal, then he must use

this rule for purposes of delineating between what is literal and what is not. Indeed, the rule is not unique to the Bible, but must be followed to interpret almost any human communication. For example, if a fisherman claims to have caught a bass that weighed six pounds and 12 ounces, then because his literal sense is sensible, we are safe to assume he intends for us to take him exactly for what he says. But if he claims to have caught a bass that looked “like a hog,” then the fisherman would consider us very naive for interpreting him as saying that the fish had pointed ears, a snout and a curly tail.

The point is that those who use allegory generally intend for their audience to know that allegory is in indeed being used, and will alert their audience to this fact by telling their story in such a way that the literal sense will not be entirely sensible. Conversely, those who speak literally will want to be taken literally, and will therefore tell their story such that the literal sense can be accepted. All this means that if the literal sense of a passage is sensible, then we should be very disinclined to move away from it. This is a common-sense rule that none should question. It should not be unique to “literalists.” Besides, titles like “literalist” or “allegorist” are not things that Bible students should wish to wear. Any sensible person knows that the Bible is replete with both literal and allegorical language. The aim should be to implement reliable rules by which one can be accurately delineated from the other.

The literal sense of this passage is entirely sensible, or at least when it is considered by itself. All Christians agree there is a future blissful state wherein there will be no sorrow, pain or death. It is therefore entirely sensible to suppose that the Apostle intended these words to be taken literally, and, as already argued, if they cannot be taken literally, then we are left with a sad irony indeed in that a statement evidently calculated to comfort does instead have implications that are absolutely disconcerting. Given all this, we should depart from the literal interpretation only if there is something external to the text that absolutely prohibits this interpretation.

But when we consult other scriptures on this subject, we find little, if anything, to prohibit the literal interpretation. Instead, they do far more to prohibit the idea that the new heavens and earth can only be an allegorical description of the temporal church. For example, consider the words of Peter:

*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. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 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? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. – 2Pet 3:10-14*

Observe that: 1) The new heavens and earth described here cannot be the temporal church because Peter lived squarely within that church yet viewed the new heavens and earth as being in his future. 2) Nor can the new heavens and earth be placed anywhere else in time because Peter plainly stated they will be realized after the end of time. 3) The new heavens and earth must be

things that are literal, because they are represented as being the replacements of that which is literal. The context clearly presents them as being replacements for the current heavens and earth after they have been dissolved and melted with a fervent heat. Earlier verses (5-7) made this final destruction analogous to what happened in the flood – a destruction that literally happened to the literal earth. Hence, the language of the text is clearly literal and futuristic to any unprejudiced mind.

This scripture is so definitive in its implications that our case should be settled provided that it and Rev 21:1 refer to the same thing. Among all rules of scriptural interpretation, none rank higher than the one dictating that, wherever possible, scriptures should be allowed to interpret themselves. That is, if two scriptures referring to the same subject are such that one is ambiguous but the other is clear, then the former should be interpreted in the light of the latter. Now I think only a belligerent position would deny that 2Pet 3:10-14 and Rev 21:1 are referring to the same thing. To deny the commonality of their terms and descriptions is to stick the neck out so far that the clumsiest axe-man could not fail to hit it. But this denial is also confronted by that self-evident truth known to logic as the “transitivity axiom.” This axiom simply states that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. Now all evidence says that these two scriptures are equal to the same thing, namely to an important prophecy in Isa 65:17-20:

*For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. 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. 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. – Is 65:17-20*

To see that Peter had this passage in view, consider how he said that we “*according to his promise*” look for a new heavens and earth. Where could this specific promise be if it is not either in Isaiah or Revelation? The new heavens and earth are referred to elsewhere by name only in Is 65:17, Is 66:22, and Rev 21:1. Add to this the fact that of all scriptural writers, none were more intensive in their use of other scriptures than the Apostle Peter. He will be found as either quoting scripture or alluding to scripture throughout almost everything he said or wrote. Given these considerations, the promise to which Peter referred was almost surely the passages in Isaiah. As for Rev 21:1, there can be little doubt that it too refers to this passage. Both it and Is 65:17-20 speak of a new heavens and earth; both speak of the passing of the former heavens and earth; both speak of the New Jerusalem; both speak of no crying, and I think by reasonable interpretation one can also conclude that both speak of eternal life for the righteous and of eternal punishment for the wicked. Since all evidence says these three passages are referring to the same thing, any ambiguities with one can be resolved by considering the others. When this is reasonably done, the new heavens and earth cannot be dismissed as a mere description, either allegorical or literal, of the temporal church. This leaves no reasonable alternative but to accept them as literal phenomena to be realized in the future.

## The New Jerusalem Corroborates the Literal Sense

Yet further proof is derived from what the scriptures say concerning the New Jerusalem. There can be no doubt this city is to be located in the new heavens and earth. Our primary text expressly states this. It is also stated in Isa 65:17-18 and implied in Isa 66:20-23. If one is literal, so must be the other, and if one is future, then the other must be future also. These two things must go together. Now Paul said:

*Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. – Gal 4:21-28*

One can be sure that when Paul spoke of “*Jerusalem which is above*” he meant the New Jerusalem. This city is repeatedly described as presently being in heaven (Heb 11:16, 12:22, Rev 3:12, Rev 21:2). But observe how Paul refers to the worldly city as being the Jerusalem that “*now is*”. The clear implication is that Jerusalem which is above is a city that *shall be*, and it must also be a literal city because it serves to replace a literal city. This interpretation is verified by considering what Paul said later:

*But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven... – Heb 12:22-26*

Hence, the New Jerusalem is no less literal than heaven itself. If we insist it is not literal, then we had just as well insist that neither is heaven literal, nor God, nor angles, nor spirits, nor Jesus Himself. Nothing but a hyper-extended imagination could conclude that part of the things listed here are literal and part allegorical.

Still, some in a feeble attempt to defend the allegorical interpretation will make a point of the fact that we “*are come unto*” this heavenly Jerusalem, which they say implies we are presently in it and enjoying its benefits. But exactly the same language is used with reference to the innumerable company of angels, who are nonetheless literal and in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, who are also literal and in heaven, and to Jesus, who is both literal and in heaven, so what else is there to conclude but that the New Jerusalem is also *both literal and in heaven*. But if there be any doubt about this, surely it should be dispelled a few verses later when Paul said: “*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For*

*here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come,*” (Heb 13:13-14). This verse states the crux of the matter: The New Jerusalem is not something that is now; rather, it is a literal city that is “*to come.*” Exactly the same must be said of the new heavens and earth because these are two things that go together as a hand in glove.

## Misconceptions Corrected

### The Literal Sense Does Not Defy Usual Notions

There are some who think that any position advocating a literal new heavens and earth has the intent of setting up revolutionary ideas about the life hereafter. This is not the case. The new heavens and earth do not replace usual notions of a future dwelling in heaven in the presence of God. The two ideas are essentially the same, but the fact that Bible sometimes refers to this future existence as a “new heavens and earth” gives additional insight regarding it. In particular, it shows that it is a real, material existence, suitable for real, material, resurrected bodies, and that it is an existence bearing similarity to the one we presently know in that it is endowed with the same types of natural wonders and beauties, though of course in greater degrees.

The Lord Himself concluded His promise of the new heavens and earth by saying, “*Behold, I make all things new.*” Observe He did not say “I make all new things,” but He said, “*I make all things new.*” No doubt many things will be different, but there must also be many similarities. To say otherwise is to suggest that God’s original plan of creation was inferior in every detail. The problem of course was not with His original creation but with what sinful man made of it. The similarity between the old state and the new can be seen in our resurrected bodies. The resurrected body will be different, but none believe that the resurrection will change us so radically as to destroy our identities. The resurrected body of Jesus Christ conclusively teaches otherwise. What is true of the body will be true of all else.

It is a created existence (Isa 65:17), though created to endure forever, not being cursed with the laws of entropy that cause all things in the present world to die and decay. Paul described both creations using language from Ps 102:

*And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; 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.* – Heb 1:10-12

The present creation is waxing old in all parts under the curse of sin, but Paul asserts this will be “*changed.*” This will occur in what he later called “*the world to come.*” In particular, he said, “*For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak,*” (Heb 2:5). Now this world to come of which he had spoken can be none other than the changed earth mentioned in 1:10-12. As one examines all prior verses, there are no other candidates besides these.

These interpretations of Paul's statements in Hebrews fully accord with what Peter said in the third chapter of Acts:

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. – Acts 3:19-21*

This text asserts a time of “*refreshing*” and “*restitution*” of all things. This blessed state is attained in a series of steps: First, there is a regeneration of the soul and spirit in man by means of the spiritual birth. Next, there is a regeneration of the body in the resurrection. Finally, there is a regeneration of the material creation resulting in the new heavens and earth. All forms of regeneration are accomplished in exactly the same manner, namely, by the supernatural power of God and without the aid or instrumentality of man.

### **The Literal Sense Does Not Imply Russellism**

The next misconception I wish to address is the idea that a literal interpretation of the new heavens and earth originated with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Only the uninformed would make such claims. The Jehovah's Witnesses did not exist as a body prior to 1872, and they have existed by their present name only since 1931. Many sound Christians held the literal view prior to this time, one being John Gill, who clearly set forth a literal interpretation in his commentary.

The Jehovah's Witness view is a distortion, because it claims an elite group of 144,000 will dwell in heaven, while others will dwell on a new earth. The Bible speaks of no such separations in the family of God, and if there were such a group of spiritual elites, then surely the Apostle Peter would be in it, but his personal testimony was that he also looked for the new heavens and earth. The Bible never makes a special connection between the new heavens and earth and the 144,000 of Revelations 7 and 11. If one can draw such conclusions on the basis of the inspired text, then the Bible could be made to mean anything.

### **The Literal Sense Does Not Imply Premillennialism**

The greatest reason many Christians are resistant to a literal interpretation of the new heavens and earth is that they associate it with the doctrine of premillennialism. There are of course a great number of Christians who support premillennialism – perhaps more now than at any other point in church history – but a great number of dissenters remain, many of whom are very passionate in their objections. This passion can be to such extent that minds become prejudiced against even valid ideas of that theory. Unfortunately, it does not occur to them that a literal new heavens and earth does more to compete with premillennialism than to complement it.

One problem with the premillennial theory is that runs against the grain of the principle of parsimony. Roughly speaking, this principle says that simple models with few variables and few assumptions tend to work better than complicated models with many variables and many assumptions. Now the premillennial theory is well beyond simple. It assumes two general apostasies, two comings of Christ, two resurrections, two future utopian eras and two blissful Jerusalems. As if the challenge of interpreting prophecy were not already enough, premillennialism increases the burden of the conscientious analyst by presenting him with the

difficulty of delineating between these near-indistinguishable pairs. For example, if he encounters a scripture speaking of a future apostasy, then the uncertainty of his interpretation will be furthered by the possibility that he mistakes the first apostasy for the second or the second apostasy for the first. But to the not-so-conscientious analyst – or one who is more interested in winning an argument than in being right – this aspect of premillennialism will prove more of a convenience than a curse. The reason is that he has so many variables and assumptions to juggle that he can easily conform his system to any given set of alleged facts. The problem is that, while such complicated models can be readily fitted to the data in hand, they have a notorious tendency to fall on their face when put to the actual task of forecasting the future.

While I do not have any great antipathy toward the premillennial theory, this particular problem has always disposed me against it. It is too complicated to be entirely true. It is also disturbing to see how widely this theory is now accepted without any serious reservation or challenge. Its advocates often present it as though the whole system is neatly and unmistakably laid out somewhere in the Bible, whereas this is not even remotely true of any eschatological system. But many premillennial tenets have become factoids of modern Christianity, being repeated by so many people so many times that a great number of Christians now accept them without due precaution. When Jesus repeatedly and urgently commanded His disciples to be watchful of His return, one must consider the possibility that His second coming will be as the first in that it could be very different from what nearly all people expect. With this being the case, His warnings were likely specifically intended to convey the idea that His disciples should not be married to popular, preconceived theories, but be ready to adapt the facts as they occur. The bottom line is that when too many people begin to believe a thing concerning the second coming of Christ, this is reason within itself for skepticism.

Of course central to this theory is the idea that the present world will be carried through a near-utopian era lasting 1000 years with Jesus Christ reigning as king from a blissful, world-wide capital at Jerusalem. While sincerely respecting the intellects of many who hold this view, I find them to be remarkably undeterred by the fact that Christ and His Apostles said *absolutely nothing* about any such Jerusalem. Indeed, in one of the final mentions the New Testament makes of Jerusalem, it describes it as being in such deplorable spiritual condition that it is compared to Sodom and Egypt (Rev 11:8). While scriptures are replete with evidence that God will pour out His Spirit on the Jewish people before Christ comes, the general impression is that such will happen very near the end of the world – not with a full seventh of its history to remain.

When Christ and His Apostles spoke of a future, blissful Jerusalem, they in every instance were referring to the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and earth. This fact is so clear in scripture that not even premillennialists will be eager to dispute it. The New Testament scriptures therefore provide no basis for expecting any blissful Jerusalem apart from the New Jerusalem. The premillennial idea is largely based on Old Testament scriptures, particularly those which predict a future blissful state, but in certain terms and details that are common to this present world, and this largely explains why premillennialists leap to the conclusion that the present world is intended. But as already mentioned, premillennialism has two of almost everything, and is therefore predisposed to the error of confusing one thing for another. My preferred view is that there is but one future utopian state and but one future Jerusalem, but these things will occur in a

new heavens and earth having many characteristics common with this world, and this will explain why certain Old Testament texts might *seem* to be describing a future blissful state in this world when in fact they are speaking of the world to come. Such verses would include: Is 3:2-4, Is 25:6-9, Is 35:1-10, and Is 65:17-25.

## Some Difficult Scriptures Considered

### Isaiah 65:20-25

Some will surely question how Isa 65:17 can be taken as a literal description of the eternal state when subsequent verses say:

*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. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. 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. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. 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. – Isa 65:20-25*

Hence, in this existence called “the new heavens and new earth,” it is suggested that infants potentially die, that people can be under the curse of sin, that people have offspring, etc. – none of which comport with our expectations of what the final, glory state will be. While some will use this to dismiss the literal interpretation, the fact is that the text presents a challenge to almost any interpretation, and therefore does little to favor one view over another. Nonetheless, I believe it can be reasonably reconciled with the literal view.

Premillennialists typically deal with the problem by postulating that the 1000-year reign will be a semi-utopian era in which things will be vastly improved over the present but significantly short of perfection. In particular, they commonly claim there will still be death, though they say that life-spans will be restored to pre-flood levels. They also commonly claim that unregenerate men will remain in the world, though it is claimed their wickedness will be held in check by Christ, who will rule over them with a rod of iron. While the premillennial position is an honest attempt to take the words of the text for their literal import, it is nonetheless fraught with numerous problems. This is a case where the literal sense is not entirely sensible so another sense must be sought.

Problems for the premillennial position begin with the fact that Isaiah’s 17th verse plainly states that he is here describing the new heavens and earth – not a 1000-year reign. Premillennialists claim these to be different eras. Also, Rev 21:1-4 closely parallels this passage – to the extent that they almost surely refer to the same era – but at the point where difficult parts of Isaiah commence, the Revelation passage simply says, “*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.*” So, following the rule that the Old Testament is to be interpreted under the guidance of the New, we can conclude that the difficult parts of the Isaiah passage were generally intended to convey the simple idea that the new heavens and earth will be void of sorrow and death. The guidance offered by the New Testament passage therefore casts further doubt on the premillennial explanation, because the latter anticipates a semi-utopian state whereas the former claims a utopian state *outright*. We can be confident upon the authority of the inspired Apostle that the sum and substance of the difficult Isaiah passage is that *“there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying...”*

The same conclusion can be reached by interpreting Isaiah in light of himself. His concluding words here were, *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.”* This *“holy mountain”* is presented at other points in his book as the capitol of the glory state, being the place from which God visibly reigns (2:2-3, 11:9, 25:6-10, 40:9, 65:25, 66:20), but at another point he said:

*And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it. – Isa 25:6-8*

To *“swallow up death in victory”* means to put a final end to it. One can be sure of this because the New Testament interprets it as such in one of its most famous passages (1Cor 15:53-55). Since the mountain considered in these two places in Isaiah is almost surely the same, this further establishes that the difficult passage in Isa 65 is to be interpreted as meaning *“there shall be no more death...”*

But a completely satisfactory explanation must of course answer why Isaiah conveyed these ideas in such an unexpected way. In pursuit of this, it should first be observed that it is not uncommon for prophetic texts to intermingle two future events or eras (e.g. 2Sam 7:12-16, Isa 7:14-17, 14:3-24, 44:28-45:13, Zech 4:5-10, Dn 11:31+Mt 24:15). These events or eras will be related but not the same. Accordingly, prophetic texts can oftentimes have dual fulfillments, with the first serving to vouch the second. So the second fulfillment will be the ultimate intent of the prophecy, but there will be a prior fulfillment foreshadowing what is to follow. Indeed, this tendency is so common to scripture that there is no greater key to understanding prophecy than to recognize it.

The likely explanation of the Isaiah text is similar to this. While it evidently does not have a double fulfillment in the usual sense, it accords with the pattern just described in that it contemplates two eras. The second of these is the actual new heavens and earth, but the first is the gospel era, and the text explains how perspectives in the first are changed by the prospects of the second. Infants of course die in the gospel era, but our view of this is radically changed by our expectation of the new heavens and earth. Though the child’s life was tragically cut short, even a 100-year life is infinitesimal when compared to eternity, so both spans are reduced to

meaningless equivalence when compared to eternity to come. When everything is considered, it is all the same as if the child had died at 100 years of age. On the other hand, another person in the gospel era may live to 100 years, and this is considered a blessing, but if they are not saved in Christ, their long natural life will be little solace to the eternal curse before them. Their case would have much better had they been the deceased infant. So the sinner, even though living 100 years, must be considered accursed. The remainder of the Isaiah passage can also be resolved by considering that it embraces two eras. In particular, when it speaks of “offspring,” the meaning is that offspring had in the gospel era will be common recipients with their parents of the blessings in the new heavens and earth (i.e. Acts 2:39).

The general idea of the Isaiah passage was expressed by Paul with: *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new,”* (2Cor 5:17). The meaning is that salvation has the effect of changing our *perspective* of everything – even things which in an absolute sense are no different than before. So if a man savors cornbread before being saved, then he apt to savor it afterward, but his perspective of cornbread will not be the same. He then understands that he is the object of grace and mercy, and that it is on account of such that he has cornbread on his plate. Accordingly, both regenerate and unregenerate men die, but they do not die for the same reasons, nor do their deaths have the same implications. One dies because he is under the curse of sin. The other dies because he is being carried along the same path as Christ (2Cor 4:10) and also *“that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us,”* (2Cor 4:7). Further, regenerate and unregenerate men experience both victory and defeat, but a regenerate man in Christ has a broadened perspective in which triumph can be seen even in his defeats: *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place,”* (2Cor 2:14). Now these changes in perspective are brought about in the gospel era but are occasioned by our prospects concerning the era to come.

## **Isaiah 66:22-24**

The next difficult passage to be considered is:

*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. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh. – Is 66:22-24*

Here the objection to the literal interpretation of the new heavens and earth will be that the subsequent verses would then imply that the eternal state will be characterized by sabbaths, lunar months, the visibility of carcasses and possibly also of eternal punishment. But much of this is likely a description of the new state in terms of the old familiar one. So the new moons and sabbaths will not literally apply to the new state; rather, the meaning is that *in the place of* these things there will be a new order of worship, which will be in God’s visible presence, involving people from all nations, etc. As for the carcasses, this is likely yet another case where the prophecy contemplates more than one event or era. It asserts things that are to come to pass, but

not necessarily in the same event or era, nor necessarily in the stated order. So the wicked will be finally judged and meet with their just end, and the redeemed shall have awareness of this fact, but scripture elsewhere clearly reveals that such will occur *prior to* the blissful existence of the new heavens and earth.

## **Revelation 22:14-15**

Finally, I will consider Rev 22:14-15, which states, “*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*” The objection here will be that too much seems to be conditioned on human works for it to apply to the graciously-given eternal state. The same objection will be raised against other such exhortations in Rev 21 and 22.

First, if anyone presumes to use this text to support Arminian doctrine, then they likely need to answer for a curious contradiction. Most Arminians prefer revised versions of the Bible, yet the manuscripts upon which most of them are based have the Greek word for “robes” or “garments” in place of the word translated as “commandments” in the KJV. Few would argue against the claim that robes and garments are commonly used in scripture as representatives of the *imputed* righteousness of Christ (Isa 61:10, Zech 3:4, Mt 22:11, Rev 7:13-14). One of the most notable of these occasions was in the parable of the wedding feast, where a guest was rejected for not having a wedding garment (Mt 22:11). This guest chose to wear his own garment rather than one supplied by the host of the feast. This represents one who errantly thinks his own righteousness to be sufficient and therefore thinks to have no need of the righteousness of Christ. So the manuscripts upon which modern bibles are based actually make a very strong case against the conclusions drawn by many who use them.

Of course possession of this imputed righteousness is confirmed by faith in Christ and obedience to His commandments, and it is upon this basis that the KJV rendering is the more practical and applicable exhortation. But if the KJV is thought to support Arminianism, then it should be considered that even Arminians claim to be unworthy sinners and disclaim “right” to heaven in the usual sense of the word. This shows that the usual sense is not here intended. Nor even can allegorists escape this problem, because they too disclaim “right” to the blessings of the temporal church. To construe the word “right” to have its usual sense of “deserve” flies into the face of the belief systems of all Christians and counter to everything the Bible said about salvation by grace. But while a Christian can never deserve heaven, he can surely have a *right* to expect heaven for himself and to make claims of such. This is because the same grace that *saves us to* heaven also *prepares us for* heaven in its effects on our hearts and behavior, so that when one has exhibited the latter, he has right to lay claims to the former. Accordingly, the text does not say those who do His commandments *will be* blessed; rather, they are *already* blessed. That is, they are not blessed on account of keeping His commandments; rather, they keep His commandments on account of being blessed (Mt 12:33-35, Jn 1:11-13, Jn 6:37, Jn 8:43-47, Jn 10:25-29, Jn 15:16-19, Acts 9:15, Acts 11:18, Acts 13:48, Acts 15:14, Acts 16:14, Acts 18:9-10, Rom 8:29-30, 1 Cor 1:22-24, 1 Cor 1:30-31, Gal 5:22-24, Eph 1:4-5, Eph 2:10, 1 Thes 1:4-5, 2 Thes 2:13-14, Tit 3:3-5, 1 Pet 2:9).

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