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# The Church Age

By Elder Keith Ellis

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."  
Matthew 24:35

This is a beautiful verse when rightly understood. Of course when you read the closing statement in the last section you may want to think there is no way heaven and earth have passed away literally. But in what sense does Jesus refer to heaven and earth? And what heaven and earth are under consideration? Is the natural creation spoken of here?

Jesus states that heaven and earth shall pass away. He also states that His word will not pass away. His words are that which establishes the new order of things in the new testament church age. The truths He speaks are the fulfillment of many dark sayings of old testament types and shadows. The ceremonial law of Moses has seen its fulfillment and has passed away. The words and teachings of Jesus will stand forever and shall never pass away. They are truth. Yet here in context with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem He is referring to the passing of heaven and earth.

Earlier in this writing we discussed the great reformation which the service of God was undergoing between the beginning of Jesus ministry and the destruction of Jerusalem. How the law was suffered to diminish and fade away after its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. This is what I understand the passing away of "*heaven and earth*" to mean in context of Matthew chapter twenty-four verse thirty five.

If you will permit me to do so, I will prove this point from at least two witnesses within God's holy word. First of all let's consider the church and how it is referenced in scripture. In the book of Hebrews after Paul has taught the reality of the end of the law, he goes on and speaks of that which would take its place. "*The new testament church.*" In the twelfth chapter of Hebrews Paul is contrasting the difference between the law service and the grace dispensation. He tells the Hebrews of the spiritual nature of God's kingdom as opposed to the law of Moses.

"...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." Hebrews 12:22-24

There are several things here we should note. Remember, the types and shadows of the law of Moses were only that, types and shadows of the true in heaven. Once the anti-type or fulfillment of the type was manifested there is no longer a need for the type.

In the above text we see the necessity for the destruction of Jerusalem. Just as the law of sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Himself, so did the old city of Jerusalem point towards something greater. The new Jerusalem. The heavenly Jerusalem.

Notice Paul in the Hebrew's text refers to the "*heavenly Jerusalem*." He goes on in the same sentence to refer to this heavenly Jerusalem as the general assembly and CHURCH of the firstborn. This fact can not be denied. This is the universal church, where we the saints of God worship Him in Spirit and in truth. I am not referring to the local house or church, but the spiritual realm where we are permitted to sit together in heavenly places in Christ. (Ephesians 2:6) Now we may from time to time experience this in the local meeting house, but the universal church is here under consideration.

Next I want to look at the Revelation letter. But before we do I must remind the reader of John's opening remarks in the Revelation letter. As we discussed earlier we saw the things spoken by Christ were to "*shortly come to pass*." As well John states in verse three of chapter one "*the time is at hand*." Keeping these facts in mind I want to move on to the twenty first chapter. I quote from verse one;

"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."

Revelation 21:1

The Greek word for *heaven* as it is used in the above verse is *Ouranos*. It means "**The Gospel**." John is saying he saw a new gospel. The children of Israel did have the gospel preached to them. This was the law dispensation.

"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."  
Hebrews 4:2

The old gospel was given under moon light. It was a lesser light, but nonetheless it was light. Christ is to be found on most every page of the old testament. That gospel was to be replaced by one given by a great light. Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. This constitutes the new heaven, the second heaven which John said he saw. The is dispensation of grace. In connection with this John also saw the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband. Remember this heavenly Jerusalem refers to the church, the bride of Christ. In this city there is no temple, for The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. In this city

there is no need for natural light in this city, for the glory of God lightens the city. (Revelation 21:22-23) There is no darkness or night in this city. This is the city which has gates of pearl and streets of pure gold. This is the city which is built foursquare. In this city God wipes the tears from our eyes. In this city there is no death. (separation from the presence of God, He will never leave us nor forsake us.) In this city God has prepared us a table that we may eat at His table in His kingdom. In this city we are allowed to drink from the fountain of water of life freely. In this city we are permitted to worship God in Spirit and in truth. Here we can sit together in heavenly places in Christ. **This is the church, the holy city, the new Jerusalem.** In order to enter into this city we must walk in the Spirit of God. Those who commit the deeds of the flesh will not be permitted to enter into the kingdom of God. Be reminded this is not speaking of heaven and immortal glory, but of the church.

I am often asked that if I believe the above, then what will heaven be like? I am convinced the scriptures say very little, if anything too describe the third heaven, or paradise. This must be the same paradise which Jesus mentioned to the thief on the cross when He said, *“today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”*

(see Luke 23:43) Paul was not even permitted to speak the things he heard when he was caught up to this paradise. (see 2 Corinthians 12:2-3) The writer of Hebrews, when referring to the cherubim's and the mercy seat, which were types of the true mercy seat in the third heaven or paradise says, *“of which we can not now speak particularly.”* (see Hebrews 9:5) On the contrary John the apostle is told to write the things he sees in his visions. (see Revelation 1:11) Again in Hebrews, the writer says *“For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, of which we speak.”* (Hebrews 2:6) Remember he is speaking to Hebrews here, who may still be holding to the law. The apostle here argues to them of the world to come, the gospel dispensation. Remember the word *‘world’* often means *“an age.”* This age, or world was manifest to many. However it was not yet manifested to many of the Jews, they were not yet convinced or convicted. In this world he says the angels are not put in subjection. This is not referring to ministering spirits or guardian angels, or those who at Gods dispatch carry out His commands in the affairs of providence. This refers to the devil and his angels. In the gospel dispensation God has laid hold of him and bound him in a great chain. He will remain bound during the thousand year reign of Christ. (see Revelation 20:1-2) The point in all of this is that the Apostles are permitted to speak of the dispensation of grace and the things concerning it. They are not permitted to speak of the third heaven and paradise.

So where is paradise and what will it be like? Paradise is where ever Jesus is. Period. This place will be one of complete satisfaction. John the apostle in his first general epistle says;

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

1 John 3:2

If it were possible to describe paradise or Christ, John would not have made such a statement as “**it doth not yet appear.**” If it appeared and he were permitted, he would have told us what things will be like in the glory world. So we will find the descriptions found in Revelation deal with the present condition of things in the church of Jesus Christ. This new heaven is where the holy city, new Jerusalem is.

Solomon had built a house and dedicated it unto The Lord. Solomon and the house he built are types of Jesus building the temple unto the Father. God tells Solomon, “*I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there **for ever**; and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually.*” (see 1 Kings 9:3) First of all God said His name would be there forever! And His heart would be there perpetually. Did this cease to happen when the first temple was destroyed? I think not. I believe this has a higher meaning than the physical building which Solomon built. To find out what he was speaking about let us find where God's name is now, today, 1998. Remember we are lively stones, according to Peter which comprise a spiritual house. (see 1 Peter 2:4-6) So where is God's name today? And where is God's heart if not in the temple of Solomon? The name of God is written in the foreheads of His people. (see Revelation 22:4, 14:1) This means God is in their minds and in their thoughts. This is where God's name is. This is where Christ reigns. After all our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit! We are built together a habitation of God through the Spirit. (see Ephesians 2:22) The point in all this is to show that even in the absence of Solomon's temple, God kept His promise to place His name and His heart with His people. This takes place in the new Jerusalem.

Now the new earth under consideration would indicate the foundation or basis of the gospel of The Lord Jesus Christ. There is a new foundation or basis upholding the new covenant. Jesus Christ is the foundation of the new testament church. (see 1 Corinthians 3:11) This is the same foundation the Apostles spoke of. Moses was the foundation of the old testament. This foundation was not faultless. This was the first earth. However the new earth is that which is not able to be corrupted. It is incorruptible. The first heaven and the first earth have passed away.

“But now he hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was **established upon better promises**. For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.”

Hebrews 8:6-7

Paul mentions in the Roman letter; For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh...” (Romans 8:3) The children of Israel did not have the guidance of the Spirit with the same degree of light that you and I have. The law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus establishes our relationship with God on a better promises. (see Romans 8:1) This in my understanding is the new earth.

We may want to ask ourselves this question also; Why use the words *first* heaven and *first* earth? This naturally implies there would be a second! When he mentions a new heaven does he mean God re-created the place of His abode! Of course not! But He did supersede the old heaven (law of Moses) with the new heaven. ( the gospel of grace) He also replaced the old earth, the law of sin and death, with the new earth, promises based upon the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. (see Romans 8:1)

Revelation twenty one verse one is not teaching a physical "new earth" or a physical "new heaven." What it is saying is the law and all of its types and shadows have passed away. It is saying a new order has been established by God. The new testament church! The covenant of grace has replaced the covenant of works. The sacrifice of Jesus once for all has replaced the multitude of animal sacrifices. All the carnal ordinances and divers washings of the law were done away with, including the molten sea which was made by Solomon as it is mentioned in first Kings chapter seven verses twenty three through fifty one. This brasen or molten sea was used for the priest to wash their hands and feet. This is the 'sea' which John refers to in Revelation twenty one. There is no longer a necessity for it under grace.

Now let us look at verse two of chapter twenty one in the book of Revelation.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Revelation 21:2

If we remember what we mentioned a few paragraphs ago about the new or heavenly Jerusalem we can easily see this is referring to the church. The new Jerusalem is the church.

Now the learned Bible reader will remember the statement made by the apostle Paul about his experience in the Spirit. He says;

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven."

2 Corinthians 12:2

We know from study Paul was speaking of himself. He went on to say this "*third heaven*" was paradise (verse 4) and heard things which were not lawful to speak.

It is generally held that this third heaven is '*the*' heaven which is the hope and anticipation of all of God's children. If there is a third heaven, it follows there must be a first and second heaven. There must be a first heaven before there can be a second heaven! A verse from Matthew may help at this juncture. Again we read;

"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

Matthew 13:33

I can see the kingdom of God unfolded to God's people in three phases. The Law, Grace, and finally Glory. So when the apostle John saw a new heaven, he was seeing the "*second heaven*" or grace under the new testament. We are now in the second heaven, and at the conclusion of time will enter into the "*third heaven*" or eternal glory. We know the number *three* signifies "*divine completion*" or "*divine perfection*." And the woman mentioned in the verse above must have reference to the church. Even though the new testament church did not have its beginning until the preaching of John the Baptist, the church has been in existence prior to that time. In the book of Hebrews Paul mentions a reformation took place. (Hebrews 9:10) What was it which was reformed? You can not reform something which does not exist. Something first has to be created or instituted before it can be formed again. Some say the church had its beginning on the day of Pentecost. This would be a creation, not a reformation. It was the church and its gospel message which God was reforming. Although its existence was in dark types and shadows of the law, nonetheless it existed. This was the "*first heaven*" which passed away as the gospel of grace was being spread throughout the world. The church in many places in scripture is referred to as a woman, the bride of Christ. This is the woman Christ refers to in the text about the kingdom of heaven. And until the elect of God are born into this world, regenerated or born again the kingdom will not be whole and prepared to move into its third phase. Immortal glory.

Next I want to challenge the reader to take up a study of Second Peter chapter three. The language in this chapter is remarkably like the language Jesus uses in Matthew chapter twenty-four. This chapter itself would require a writing as large as the current one to explain each verse. Yet this writer is satisfied Peter speaks of the things which Jesus taught him in the private conversation concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. Remember Peter, James, Andrew and John were all present in this private conversation. This must be where Peter draws from when he says;

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

2 Peter 3:13

Peter also references the judgment of God upon the earth when he mentions the flood. He likens the impending judgment and doom about to come upon Jerusalem unto the flood of Noah's day. But this time God is going to end the world (complete the age) by burning all the elements therein with a fervent heat. This is how the Temple and the city were destroyed. To say this text means God will permit the earth to be destroyed with a nuclear bomb is removing it from the context again.

As you read Peter keep in mind what we have already determined concerning the “*day of The Lord.*” When the day of the resurrection comes the Bible says that Jesus Himself shall descend with the great sound of a trumpet. In Peter he mentions The Lord coming as a thief in the night. There is a vivid difference between the two. If someone announces his arrival with a great shout and a trumpet it is not intended to be hidden from anyone. However I have never heard of a thief who makes all the noise he can when he breaks into a house. This would blow his cover and compromise the element of surprise. In my understanding when the scripture mentions The Lord coming as a thief in the night, it refers to Him coming to us in judgment here in this time world. He says the same concerning the ten virgins. Five had oil in their lamps and give did not. However I am not prepared at this time to say the five which had no oil were non-elect. (see Matthew 25:1-13) I would say though that they were not permitted to enter into the kingdom (blessings in this life) because they did not add to their faith the things Peter directs us to. (make their calling and election sure) They were left in outer darkness. (see 2 Peter 1:1-11) Peter tells us if we lack these things we are blind and can not see afar off. Oil in the lamp allows there to be light, and therefore allows us to see. Same thing.

Practically all the references in the new testament which speak of Jesus or the “*son of man*” coming as a thief in the night mention “*light and darkness.*” We live in a dark world. However The Lord has equipped us with the ability to walk in the light.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

1 John 1:7

When we walk in the light we experience the peace of the forgiveness of sin. When we walk in the light judgment does not overtake us a though a thief had broken in upon us. If our treasures are laid up in heaven (our hearts) moth or rust does not corrupt, nor do thieves break through and steal. This is part of the message Peter gives us in his second epistle.