Fulfilled Prophecies

What Was The World To Come In Hebrews?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† What did the writer of Hebrews mean when he spoke about "the world to come"? Was he describing a future planet, the end of human history, or a new order that was already approaching in the first century?

† The answer is found in the historical setting of Hebrews and the writer's repeated contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The world to come wasn't a future physical universe. It was the fully established New Covenant order under

the reign of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:6-13; 12:22-28).
† Hebrews was written during the transition from the Old Covenant system to the complete establishment of the New Covenant. The temple was still standing, the priesthood was still functioning, and the sacrifices were still being offered. Yet the writer declared that the old system was becoming obsolete and was ready to disappear (Hebrews 8:13; 10:11).
† The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 brought that covenant transition to its historical conclusion. What had been approaching in the first century became the established reality of Christ's everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 12:28).
† Understanding this changes how we read Hebrews. The writer wasn't directing his readers toward a world thousands of years in their future. He was explaining the fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus Christ and the approaching removal of the Old Covenant order (Hebrews 9:8-10; 12:26-28).

Hebrews 2:5
For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.
† The writer specifically identified the world to come as the subject he was discussing. His concern wasn't the physical destruction of the earth but the authority and reign of Jesus Christ over the coming covenant order (Hebrews 1:2-3; Ephesians 1:20-23).
† The Greek word translated "world" here is oikoumene, a term that can describe the inhabited world or an organized realm under authority. Its meaning must be determined by context, and Hebrews connects this coming realm with the exaltation of Christ (Luke 2:1; Hebrews 1:6).
† The world to come wasn't placed under the authority of angels because Jesus, the Son of Man, had been appointed ruler over everything. His resurrection and ascension established His authority, and the removal of the Old Covenant order publicly demonstrated the superiority of His kingdom (Matthew 28:18; Daniel 7:13-14).

† The writer wasn't promising that angels would eventually surrender control of the planet. He was declaring that the coming order belonged to Christ, whose authority had already been established in heaven (Acts 2:32-36; Colossians 1:13).

Hebrews 2:8-9
YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.
† The writer distinguished between Christ's established authority and the complete manifestation of that authority within the covenant transition. Jesus had already been crowned with glory and honor, even though the old religious order hadn't yet disappeared (Hebrews 1:3; 8:13).
† The words "not yet" must be understood within the writer's first-century setting. They don't automatically establish an unfinished prophetic program extending thousands of years beyond the original audience (Hebrews 10:37; James 5:8-9).
† Christ's victory wasn't dependent upon the physical destruction of the universe. His triumph involved overcoming sin, death, and the powers that held His covenant people in bondage (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 2:14-15).
† The world to come was therefore centered upon the glorified Son, not upon the creation of another physical planet (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 2:10).

Hebrews 6:4-5
For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,
† This passage provides one of the clearest indications that the coming age was already breaking into the lives of first-century

believers. They had tasted its powers before the Old Covenant system had completely disappeared (Acts 2:16-18; Hebrews 2:3-4).
† The Greek word aion, translated "age," concerns a period or order of existence. It doesn't inherently mean the physical planet. The coming age was the New Covenant reality introduced through Christ and brought to its completed covenantal establishment as the former order passed away (Matthew 12:32; Hebrews 8:13).
† The believers weren't waiting thousands of years to experience the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, and fellowship with God. They were already participating in the blessings associated with the coming age (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17).
† The miraculous signs and revelatory gifts of that transitional generation confirmed the message of salvation. They testified to the arrival of the promised kingdom and the authority of the risen Christ (Mark 16:20; 1 Corinthians 13:8-12).
† What they had tasted in advance belonged to the approaching New Covenant order, not to a distant civilization that would begin after the earth was destroyed (Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:26).

Hebrews 8:13
When He said, A new covenant, He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.
† This verse identifies the central historical transition in Hebrews. The first covenant had been made obsolete, but its institutional system was still approaching its final removal (Hebrews 9:8-10; 10:1-2).
† The writer didn't say that the physical universe was becoming obsolete. He was speaking about the covenant established through Moses, including its priesthood, sacrifices, and earthly sanctuary (Hebrews 7:11-12; 9:1).
† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 ended the functioning temple system and demonstrated that the former covenant

administration had reached its historical conclusion (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 21:20-22).
† The coming age wasn't an entirely different creation replacing the planet. It was the permanent covenant relationship established through the blood of Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:16-18).

Hebrews 9:8-10
The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.
† The writer described the earthly sanctuary as a symbolic arrangement belonging to the time then present. The first tabernacle represented the old system, whose continued standing demonstrated that the covenant transition hadn't reached its historical conclusion (Hebrews 8:5; 9:23-24).
† The time of reformation wasn't a prediction about rebuilding the physical universe. It concerned the replacement of temporary ceremonial regulations with the permanent ministry of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:18-19; Colossians 2:16-17).
† Jesus had already entered the heavenly sanctuary through His own blood. The approaching removal of the earthly system would leave His completed sacrifice and eternal priesthood as the only covenantal basis for approaching God (Hebrews 9:11-12; 10:19-22).
† This is why AD 70 matters. The destruction of the temple wasn't the beginning of Christ's priesthood. It was the historical removal of the earthly institution that had foreshadowed His greater ministry (Hebrews 7:23-25; Matthew 24:2).

Hebrews 9:26
Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of

the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
† The writer declared that Jesus appeared at the end of the ages. He didn't place the end thousands of years beyond his own generation. Christ had already appeared, suffered, and accomplished His sacrifice (Galatians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:20).
† The end of the ages referred to the culmination of the covenant history that had been moving toward fulfillment in Christ. The Law, the prophets, and the sacrificial system all pointed toward Him (Luke 24:44; Romans 10:4).
† If the writer believed the end of the ages had already arrived through Christ's sacrifice, we shouldn't automatically redefine that expression as the end of the physical universe (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:1-2).
† The cross accomplished redemption, and the approaching judgment upon Jerusalem brought the former covenant administration to its visible historical end (John 19:30; Matthew 23:36-38).
† Jesus didn't need to return repeatedly to complete His sacrifice. His offering was sufficient once for all, and the New Covenant rests upon that finished work (Hebrews 7:27; 10:12-14).

Hebrews 10:1
For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.
† The Law was a shadow, not the final reality. Its sacrifices anticipated the perfect sacrifice of Christ and the blessings of the New Covenant (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 9:11-12).
† The good things to come weren't new oceans, continents, or physical heavens. They concerned forgiveness, access to God, a cleansed conscience, and the permanent priesthood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:14; 10:19-22).
† These blessings began through Christ's completed work, while the old sacrificial order continued to exist during the

transition. The removal of that order in AD 70 confirmed that the shadow had given way to the permanent reality (Hebrews 8:13; 10:11-14).
† The New Covenant doesn't require another animal sacrifice, another earthly high priest, or another temple in Jerusalem. Christ accomplished what the Law could never accomplish (Hebrews 7:26-28; 10:17-18).

Hebrews 10:37
FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.
† The writer emphasized the nearness of Christ's coming. He wasn't describing an event that his readers should expect thousands of years after their deaths (James 5:8-9; Revelation 1:1-3).
† The coming judgment was connected with the approaching removal of the Old Covenant order. Jesus had already declared that Jerusalem's judgment would occur within the generation that heard His warnings (Matthew 23:36; 24:34).
† The language of a very little while had meaning for the original audience. Their endurance mattered because they were living through the closing period of the former covenant age (Hebrews 10:35-36; 12:26-28).
† Christ's covenantal coming in judgment in AD 70 confirmed His prophetic warnings and demonstrated that His kingdom couldn't be shaken (Luke 21:20-22; Daniel 7:13-14).

Hebrews 12:26-28
And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN. This expression, Yet once more, denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

† The writer explained that a great removal was approaching. The contrast was between what could be shaken and what would remain permanently established (Haggai 2:6-9; Hebrews 8:13).
† The reference to heaven and earth shaking draws upon prophetic judgment language. Such expressions could describe the collapse of nations and established orders without requiring the literal destruction of the universe (Isaiah 13:10-13; 34:4-5).
† The Old Covenant administration, centered upon its earthly sanctuary, belonged to the temporary order. The kingdom established through Christ belonged to the permanent order that couldn't be shaken (Daniel 2:44; Hebrews 7:24-25).
† Notice that the believers were already receiving this unshakable kingdom. The writer wasn't instructing them to wait for a kingdom that would begin thousands of years later (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:6).
† AD 70 marked the historical removal of the temple-centered order, not the destruction of the planet. Christ's kingdom remained because it was founded upon His everlasting priesthood and completed redemption (Hebrews 10:12-14; Luke 1:32-33).

Hebrews 13:14
For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.
† The city that was passing away was earthly Jerusalem, the center of the Old Covenant system. The city they were seeking was the heavenly Jerusalem, established through Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 12:22).
† The writer had already declared that believers had come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God. Their seeking wasn't evidence that the heavenly city didn't exist. They were anticipating the complete establishment of what they were already entering through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:19-22).
† Earthly Jerusalem couldn't provide permanent access to God. Its temple, priesthood, and sacrifices were temporary. The

heavenly Jerusalem represented the enduring covenant community gathered around the risen Christ (Hebrews 9:11-12; Revelation 21:2-3).
† When Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, the earthly city lost its role as the center of covenant worship. The heavenly city remained because its foundation was Jesus Christ, not a physical building (John 4:21-24; Revelation 21:22).
† The city to come wasn't another earthly capital awaiting construction. It was the New Jerusalem, the fulfilled dwelling place of God with His redeemed people (Revelation 21:9-10; 22:14).

Historical References
† Flavius Josephus, writing in The Jewish War, Books 5-7, described the Roman siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the devastating consequences for the Jewish nation in AD 70. His account provides historical confirmation that the temple-centered religious order was violently brought to an end.
† Josephus also described the burning of the sanctuary and the destruction of Jerusalem's defenses. These events correspond historically with Jesus' warning that the temple buildings would be thrown down (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 19:41-44).
† Tacitus, in Histories, Book 5, recorded the Roman campaign against Jerusalem and the circumstances surrounding the Jewish revolt. His surviving account independently places the conflict within the first-century Roman world.
† Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7, connected Jerusalem's destruction with the warnings of Jesus and reported the tradition that Christians departed from Jerusalem before the catastrophe.
† These historical writers don't establish the theological meaning of Hebrews. Scripture does that. Their writings confirm that the first-century destruction of Jerusalem and its temple was a real historical event, not an unfulfilled prediction awaiting another generation.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We're not waiting for the world to come described in Hebrews. From the fulfilled perspective, we're living in the permanent New Covenant order established through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:22-28; Revelation 21:3).

† We don't need an earthly temple, a Levitical priesthood, or repeated animal sacrifices. Jesus is our eternal High Priest, and His sacrifice is sufficient forever (Hebrews 7:24-27; 10:12-14).

† We have direct access to the Father through Jesus Christ. The way into God's presence is open because redemption has been accomplished (Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 10:19-22).

† The New Jerusalem isn't merely a future destination for believers. It's the heavenly covenant reality to which we've come through Christ, and its gates remain open to those who enter through Him (Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:25-27; 22:14).

† We're not waiting for Christ to begin reigning. He's already King, and His kingdom cannot be shaken (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).

† The world to come in Hebrews wasn't the end of human civilization. It was the arrival and completed establishment of the New Covenant age. That doesn't mean the physical earth ceased to exist or that history stopped in AD 70 (Ecclesiastes 1:4; Genesis 8:22).

† Our responsibility today isn't to search for another prophetic age. It's to live faithfully in the kingdom we've received, worship God in spirit and truth, and proclaim the completed work of Jesus Christ (John 4:23-24; Colossians 3:1-4).

Q & A Appendix

Q: What was the world to come in Hebrews?

A: It was the approaching New Covenant order under Jesus Christ, contrasted with the temporary Old Covenant system that was becoming obsolete (Hebrews 2:5; 8:13; 12:28).

Q: Did the world to come mean a new physical planet?

A: No. The context concerns Christ's authority, the heavenly

sanctuary, the removal of the former covenant, and the establishment of His permanent kingdom (Hebrews 2:5-9; 9:8-10; 12:26-28).

Q: Why did Hebrews call it the age to come if believers were already experiencing its blessings?
A: Because the New Covenant had already been inaugurated through Christ, while the former covenant system was still approaching its historical removal. Believers were experiencing the powers of the coming age during that transition (Hebrews 6:5; 8:13).

Q: Was the world to come fulfilled at the cross or in AD 70?
A: Christ established the New Covenant through His death, resurrection, and ascension. AD 70 marked the historical removal of the Old Covenant temple system and the completion of that covenant transition (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12-14; Matthew 24:34).

Q: Does Hebrews teach that Jesus is still waiting to become King?
A: No. Jesus was already enthroned at God's right hand. His kingdom was established through His exaltation, and the removal of the former covenant order demonstrated its permanence (Hebrews 1:3; Acts 2:32-36; Daniel 7:13-14).

Q: Why did the writer say they were seeking a city to come?
A: Because earthly Jerusalem wasn't permanent. The believers had already come to heavenly Jerusalem through Christ, and they anticipated the complete removal of the earthly system that stood in contrast to it (Hebrews 12:22-24; 13:14; Galatians 4:26).

Q: Did the destruction of Jerusalem mean the physical world ended?
A: No. It marked the end of the Old Covenant order, not the

destruction of the planet. God's creation continues, while Christ's New Covenant kingdom remains permanently established (Hebrews 8:13; 12:28; Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Q: Are Christians still waiting for another world to come?
A: Not in the covenantal sense described in Hebrews. We have received the unshakable kingdom, have access to the heavenly Jerusalem, and live under Christ's everlasting reign (Hebrews 12:22-28; Revelation 21:3; Colossians 1:13).

Q: What is the greatest lesson of the world to come?
A: God's promises reached their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The temporary shadows have passed away, the permanent reality has arrived, and believers now enjoy the blessings of the New Covenant (Hebrews 10:1; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Ephesians 2:18-22).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Hebrews 2:5; Hebrews 2:8-9; Hebrews 6:4-5; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:8-10; Hebrews 9:26; Hebrews 10:1; Hebrews 10:37; Hebrews 12:26-28; Hebrews 13:14
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7

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