Fulfilled Prophecies

When Did The Old Heavens And Earth Pass Away, And When Did The New Jerusalem Come Down?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† One of the most misunderstood prophecies in Scripture concerns the passing away of the old heavens and earth and the arrival of the New Jerusalem. Many Christians believe these events will happen at the end of the physical universe, when God destroys the planet and replaces it with a literal golden city.

† But Revelation wasn't describing the destruction of the physical universe. It was describing the final removal of the Old

Covenant order and the full establishment of the New Covenant through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 21:1-3).
† The question is simple. Exactly when did the old heavens and earth pass away? When did the New Jerusalem descend from heaven? And if the city has streets of gold, why aren't we walking on them today?
† The fulfilled perspective identifies AD 70, when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by the Romans, as the historical completion of this covenantal transition. The physical earth didn't disappear, but the religious world centered on the temple, sacrifices, and Levitical priesthood came to its final end (Matthew 24:1-3; Hebrews 9:8-10).
† The New Jerusalem isn't a future construction project. It's the heavenly city of God's redeemed people, the bride of Christ, already identified in Scripture before Jerusalem's destruction (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-23).

The Old Heavens And Earth Were A Covenant World
Isaiah 65:17
For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.
† Isaiah introduced the promise of a new heavens and earth centuries before Revelation was written. His prophecy anticipated a new order established through God's redemptive work (Isaiah 65:18-19; Isaiah 66:22).
† The expression heavens and earth can describe an established order under God's authority. Isaiah's prophecy must be understood alongside the covenant promises that would be fulfilled through Christ (Isaiah 51:15-16; Jeremiah 31:31-34).
† The new creation promised by Isaiah wasn't dependent upon the destruction of the physical planet. It anticipated the establishment of righteousness and a restored relationship between God and His people (Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Peter 3:13).

Isaiah 51:16
I have put My words in your mouth and have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to establish the heavens, to found the

earth, and to say to Zion, 'You are My people.'
† Notice the connection between establishing the heavens and earth and God's declaration that Zion belonged to Him. The language is connected with His covenant relationship with His people (Isaiah 51:15-16).
† God wasn't describing another physical creation of the universe during Isaiah's lifetime. He was describing His work of establishing and preserving His covenant people (Isaiah 51:15-16; Exodus 19:5-6).
† This provides an important biblical foundation for understanding how heavens and earth can carry covenantal meaning in prophetic language (Isaiah 65:17; Hebrews 12:26-28).

The Old Covenant Was Already Disappearing
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.
† Hebrews was written while the Old Covenant system was approaching its historical disappearance. The writer declared that the first covenant had already become obsolete (Hebrews 8:6-13).
† Notice the distinction. The Old Covenant had already been made obsolete through Christ, but its visible institutions were still approaching their final removal (Hebrews 9:8-10; Hebrews 10:9).
† Jesus established the New Covenant through His death and resurrection. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 brought the temple-centered system to its historical conclusion (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 10:11-18).
† The passing away of the old heavens and earth wasn't the disappearance of mountains, oceans, and stars. It represented the end of the covenantal order that had governed Israel under Moses (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:26-28).

Jesus Identified The Generation Of Fulfillment
Matthew 24:34
Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.
† Jesus wasn't speaking about a generation thousands of years in the future. He was addressing His own disciples concerning the destruction of the temple standing before them (Matthew 24:1-3).
† The expression this generation identifies the generation living when Jesus spoke. His prophecy included the approaching judgment upon Jerusalem (Matthew 23:36-38; Luke 21:20-22).
† The Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 occurred within that first-century generation. This provides the historical setting for understanding the fulfillment of the covenantal judgment Jesus announced (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:32).
† The same generation that witnessed the ministry of Christ also witnessed the final destruction of the Old Covenant temple system (Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:2).

Revelation Was About Events That Were Near
Revelation 1:1
The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,
† Revelation begins with an explicit statement concerning timing. The events described were to take place soon, not thousands of years after John's original audience (Revelation 1:3; Revelation 22:6).
† The fulfilled perspective understands Revelation as a prophecy written before AD 70, concerning the approaching judgment upon Jerusalem and the completed establishment of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 24:34; Revelation 11:1-2).
† This interpretation connects Revelation's time statements with Jesus' earlier warnings concerning Jerusalem's destruction (Luke 21:20-22; Revelation 22:10).
† Revelation's closing instructions reinforce its opening

announcement. John wasn't told to seal the prophecy for a distant generation because its fulfillment was near (Revelation 22:6-10).

When Did The First Heaven And Earth Pass Away? Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

† John described the passing of the first heavens and earth as part of his prophetic vision. The fulfilled perspective understands this as the completed removal of the Old Covenant order (Isaiah 65:17; Hebrews 8:13).

† The decisive historical event was the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. That judgment ended the temple sacrifices, the functioning Levitical priesthood, and the physical center of the Mosaic system (Matthew 24:1-2; Hebrews 9:8-10).

† The expression no longer any sea belongs to the vision's symbolic language. It doesn't require the literal disappearance of the world's oceans (Isaiah 57:20; Revelation 17:15).

† Scripture doesn't provide a particular day or hour in AD 70 when the covenantal heavens and earth disappeared. It identifies the first-century generation and the approaching destruction of Jerusalem as the period of fulfillment (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-24).

† The destruction of the temple in AD 70 marked the historical completion of that transition. The physical universe remained because the prophecy concerned the passing of the former covenantal order (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:26-28).

The New Jerusalem Was Already A Heavenly Reality Galatians 4:26

But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

† Paul didn't describe the Jerusalem above as something that would begin existing thousands of years later. He identified it as the mother of believers while the earthly Jerusalem still stood (Galatians 4:21-31).

† Paul contrasted two women, two covenants, and two

Jerusalems. Hagar represented the covenant associated with Mount Sinai and the Jerusalem of Paul's day. Sarah represented freedom and the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:24-26).
† The New Jerusalem wasn't waiting to be constructed. It already existed as the heavenly reality associated with God's New Covenant people (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-23).
† AD 70 didn't create the heavenly Jerusalem. It completed the removal of the earthly covenantal system that stood in contrast to it (Galatians 4:25-31; Hebrews 8:13).

Hebrews 12:22
But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,
† Notice the words you have come. The writer didn't say believers would someday come to the heavenly Jerusalem after the physical universe was destroyed (Hebrews 12:22-24).
† Christians were already approaching God through the New Covenant established by Jesus Christ. They had entered a spiritual relationship with the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 10:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-24).
† The city was heavenly in origin and covenantal in identity. Its existence wasn't dependent upon physical streets, buildings, or geographical boundaries (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 11:16).
† This distinction is essential. The heavenly Jerusalem was already accessible through Christ, while the historical judgment of AD 70 completed the removal of the former covenantal order (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:26-28).

When Did The New Jerusalem Come Down?
Revelation 21:2
And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.
† John saw the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. The vision identifies its divine origin, not the physical relocation of a gigantic city onto the earth (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22).

† The city was prepared as a bride. This immediately connects the New Jerusalem with Christ's redeemed people rather than a literal collection of buildings (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 21:9-10).
† The fulfilled perspective places the consummation of this prophetic vision in AD 70, when the Old Covenant order was finally removed and the New Covenant stood without its former earthly rival (Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 21:1-2).
† The descent of the city represents the public establishment and completed covenantal reality of God's dwelling with His people. It doesn't mean a golden city physically landed somewhere in Israel (John 14:23; Revelation 21:3).

Who Is The Bride Of The Lamb?
Revelation 21:9
Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.
† The angel promised to show John the bride, the wife of the Lamb. What John saw next was the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down from heaven (Revelation 21:9-10).
† The identification is direct. The bride and the New Jerusalem belong to the same prophetic vision. The city represents the redeemed people joined to Christ (Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:7-8).
† A literal city made of precious metals cannot be married to Jesus Christ. Scripture identifies His people as those united to Him in covenant fellowship (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:31-32).
† The New Jerusalem is therefore understood as the glorified covenantal identity of God's people, not a future physical metropolis descending through the atmosphere (Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 21:9-10).

What Do The Streets Of Gold Represent?
Revelation 21:21
And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates

was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.
† John described the city's street as pure gold resembling transparent glass. The imagery communicates extraordinary purity, glory, and holiness (Revelation 21:18-21).
† Ordinary gold isn't transparent. John's description uses extraordinary imagery to communicate the perfection of God's heavenly city rather than ordinary construction materials (Revelation 21:11; Revelation 21:21).
† Gold was associated with holiness and God's presence in the tabernacle and temple. The New Jerusalem imagery communicates the glory of a people dwelling in fellowship with God (Exodus 25:10-11; 1 Peter 2:5).
† We're not supposed to search for literal golden pavement. The vision communicates the spiritual beauty and purity of the New Covenant relationship established through Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 21:27).
† The streets of gold don't prove that Christians are physically living in heaven. They illustrate the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem to which believers have already come through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).

God Now Dwells Among His People
Revelation 21:3
And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,
† The central promise of the New Jerusalem is God's dwelling with His people. This fulfills the covenant relationship promised throughout Scripture (Leviticus 26:11-12; Ezekiel 37:26-27).
† Under the Old Covenant, God's presence was associated with the tabernacle and temple. Under the New Covenant, believers themselves constitute His spiritual dwelling place (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22).
† God's presence isn't restricted to a physical building in Jerusalem. Through Jesus Christ, His people have direct

access to the Father (John 4:21-24; Ephesians 2:18).
† The New Jerusalem represents the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to dwell among His redeemed people (Hebrews 8:10; Revelation 21:3).

Why Are Nations Still Present Outside The City?
Revelation 21:24
The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.
† John's vision continues to describe nations walking by the light of the New Jerusalem. This language fits the ongoing proclamation of Christ's kingdom among the nations (Isaiah 60:3; Matthew 28:18-20).
† The city provides light because Christ is its source of glory. Those who belong to Him participate in that light and bear witness to His righteousness (John 8:12; Revelation 21:23).
† The presence of nations shows that the vision isn't simply describing the destruction of the physical world. It portrays God's kingdom and its relationship to the nations (Isaiah 60:1-3; Revelation 22:2).
† The New Covenant continues to welcome those who turn to Jesus Christ. Its blessings aren't limited to one nation, geographical location, or ethnic ancestry (Galatians 3:26-29; Revelation 22:17).

The Tree Of Life And The Healing Of The Nations
Revelation 22:2
in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
† The tree of life connects the New Jerusalem with the garden of Eden. What was once guarded from fallen humanity is now presented as accessible within God's redeemed community (Genesis 3:22-24; Revelation 22:14).
† The healing of the nations represents the blessings of redemption flowing through Christ. The New Covenant extends God's saving grace beyond the boundaries of ancient Israel

(Isaiah 49:6; Revelation 22:17).
† The continuing fruitfulness of the tree communicates life, provision, and the enduring blessings of God's kingdom (Ezekiel 47:12; John 15:4-5).
† The vision doesn't require literal leaves possessing medicinal properties. It communicates the restoration and life available through Jesus Christ (John 10:10; Revelation 22:1-2).

The Prophecy Was Not Sealed For The Distant Future
Revelation 22:10
And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.
† John was specifically instructed not to seal the prophecy because its appointed time was near. This statement directly addresses the timing of Revelation's fulfillment (Revelation 1:1-3; Revelation 22:6-7).
† Daniel had previously been instructed to seal his prophetic vision because its fulfillment concerned a later appointed time. John received the opposite instruction (Daniel 12:4; Revelation 22:10).
† The fulfilled perspective takes these time statements seriously. The New Jerusalem prophecy belongs to the first-century completion of the covenantal transition, not an event awaiting fulfillment thousands of years later (Matthew 24:34; Revelation 22:10).
† The prophecy's fulfillment in AD 70 doesn't mean God's kingdom ended. It means the promised New Covenant order was fully established and continues throughout succeeding generations (Daniel 7:14; Ephesians 3:21).

Historical References
† Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, described the Roman siege of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, and the terrible destruction that occurred in AD 70. His account in The Jewish War, Books 5-6, provides historical evidence for the judgment Jesus predicted (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 21:20-24).
† Josephus recorded that the temple was burned during the

Roman siege. The destruction permanently interrupted the temple sacrifices and brought the functioning temple-centered religious system to an end (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:11-18).
† Tacitus, the Roman historian, described the Jewish revolt and Jerusalem's destruction in Histories, Book 5. His account independently confirms the historical setting of the Roman war against Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24).
† Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, connected the destruction of Jerusalem with Jesus' warnings and preserved the tradition that Christians fled Jerusalem before its destruction. His Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7, reflects the early Christian understanding of Jerusalem's judgment (Matthew 24:15-16; Luke 21:20-22).
† These historians confirm the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. They don't independently establish every symbolic interpretation of Revelation, but they document the historical event that the fulfilled perspective identifies as the completion of the Old Covenant age (Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13).

How It Applies To Us Today
† We're not waiting for the physical universe to disappear before we can enjoy fellowship with God. Through Jesus Christ, believers already have access to the Father and belong to His heavenly city (Ephesians 2:18-22; Hebrews 12:22-24).
† We're not waiting for a future golden city to descend from the sky. The New Jerusalem represents the redeemed people of God living under the completed New Covenant (Galatians 4:26; Revelation 21:9-10).
† We don't need another physical temple, another Levitical priesthood, or another system of animal sacrifices. Jesus Christ completed the work necessary for our redemption (Hebrews 9:11-12; Hebrews 10:12-18).
† The passing of the old heavens and earth doesn't mean the physical earth was destroyed. God's covenantal order changed, and believers now live under the righteousness and freedom established through Christ (Romans 8:1-2; Galatians 5:1).
† The heavenly Jerusalem isn't the same thing as claiming that

every believer has already entered the eternal spiritual realm after physical death. Christians live on the physical earth while belonging to the heavenly city, and when we depart this life, we're present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23).
† The completed New Covenant gives us confidence that Christ's promises weren't delayed or forgotten. His kingdom is established, His people are His dwelling place, and His righteousness continues throughout all generations (Hebrews 12:28; Ephesians 3:21).

Q & A Appendix
Q: Exactly when did the old heavens and earth pass away?
A: The fulfilled perspective identifies AD 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, as the historical completion of the Old Covenant order. Scripture identifies the first-century generation but doesn't specify an exact calendar day for the covenantal transition (Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 21:1).
Q: Didn't the Old Covenant end when Jesus died on the cross?
A: Jesus established the New Covenant through His death and resurrection. The Old Covenant became obsolete through His completed sacrifice, but its temple-centered institutions continued until Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9-18).
Q: When did the New Jerusalem come down from heaven?
A: The heavenly Jerusalem already existed when Paul and the writer of Hebrews addressed the churches. The fulfilled perspective identifies AD 70 as the consummation of Revelation's vision, when the Old Covenant system was finally removed (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2).
Q: Does the Bible actually say the New Jerusalem is the bride of Christ?
A: Yes. Revelation 21:9 identifies the bride as the wife of the Lamb, and Revelation 21:10 shows John the holy city, Jerusalem, descending from heaven. The vision identifies the city with Christ's redeemed people (Ephesians 5:25-32).

Q: If we're living in the New Jerusalem, where are the streets of gold?
A: The streets of gold are part of the city's symbolic description. They represent its purity, glory, and holiness. The heavenly city isn't presented as an ordinary earthly construction project (Revelation 21:18-21; Hebrews 12:22-24).
Q: Does the New Jerusalem mean we're already living in eternal heaven?
A: No. Believers belong to the heavenly Jerusalem through Christ while continuing to live physically on earth. After physical death, believers are present with the Lord in the spiritual realm (Hebrews 12:22-23; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23).
Q: Why does Revelation say there will be no more death if people still physically die?
A: The fulfilled perspective understands Revelation 21:4 in connection with Christ's victory over covenantal death and separation from God. Physical death continues, but it no longer separates believers from Christ or prevents their entrance into His presence (Romans 8:38-39; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Revelation 14:13).
Q: Why does Revelation describe nations needing healing if the New Jerusalem has already arrived?
A: The healing of the nations represents the continuing blessings of redemption through Jesus Christ. People from every nation can still receive the life offered through the New Covenant (Revelation 22:2; Revelation 22:17; Galatians 3:28-29).
Q: Will God someday destroy the physical earth and replace it with another planet?
A: The fulfilled perspective doesn't interpret Revelation 21:1 as predicting the destruction of the physical planet. Scripture describes the earth as enduring through successive generations, while the heavens and earth of the former covenantal order passed away (Psalm 104:5; Ecclesiastes 1:4; Hebrews 8:13).
Q: Was AD 70 the final fulfillment of biblical prophecy?
A: Yes, according to the fulfilled perspective. Jesus placed the

judgment upon Jerusalem within His own generation, and Revelation described its events as near. The completed kingdom continues, but no additional prophetic fulfillment concerning Christ's return or the end of the Old Covenant age remains outstanding (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:22; Revelation 22:6-10).
Q: What is the most important lesson of the New Jerusalem?
A: God's people no longer approach Him through the Old Covenant temple and its sacrifices. Through Jesus Christ, we've been brought into fellowship with the Father, and we belong to His heavenly city now (Hebrews 10:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:18-22).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 51:16; Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 24:34; Revelation 1:1; Revelation 21:1-3, 9, 21, 24; Revelation 22:2, 10; Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-6; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7

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