

## **“A New Heaven and A New Earth”** **John Hepp, Jr.**

*Here I will often call the “New Heaven and New Earth” the “New World.” I will consider how that world is related to Messiah’s coming kingdom. Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from the NIV, sometimes changing Christ to its equivalent Messiah or adding emphasis.*

“Who do you say I am?” Jesus asked the Twelve. “The Anointed One of God,” answered their spokesman Peter (Luke 9:20).

This Great Confession is emphasized in all the Gospels and Acts. In Greek this title “Anointed One” is *Cristos* (Christ); in Hebrew it is *Mashiac* (Messiah). As such, of course, Jesus will fulfill the meaning of His human name, “The Lord is salvation.” But “Anointed One” (*Christ, Messiah*) does not mean Savior; it means King. He is God’s designated Ruler (“Christ a King,” Luke 23:2), who will establish and rule over God’s long-promised kingdom on earth. It was the same title with which Peter identified the glorified Jesus on the Day of Pentecost. From heaven Jesus had just baptized many with the Spirit (Acts 1:4–5; 11:15–17), inaugurating the church. Other Jews had gathered. Peter told them what they must believe: “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord [= Master] and Messiah” (Acts 2:36).

Since Jesus is God’s King, He must—sooner or later—have a kingdom.<sup>1</sup> But though His kingdom drew near (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), there is no record that He established it on earth. In fact, Jesus predicted that He would first ascend to the Father before He would return and inaugurate His kingdom. For example,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him.... Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom...” (Matt. 25:31–32a, 34)<sup>2</sup>

The last book of the Bible shows the final preparations for Jesus’ return, then His coming and kingdom. That book comments on a thousand-year reign (Rev. 20), then ends (Rev. 21–22) by describing a New World called the “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1). This paper considers what relation that New World has to Messiah’s coming kingdom.

### **The Book of Revelation Previews Messiah’s Coming to Rule**

#### **Development of That Theme**

*Anticipation.* The Book of Revelation pictures Messiah, seen as the Lamb, preparing to come to earth and rule. “The time is near,” says the prologue (1:3). “I am coming soon,” proclaims the Lamb (22:7, 12, 20; cf. 1:7). In anticipation He is called “the ruler of the kings of the earth”

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<sup>1</sup> See my study course on *Christ’s Coming Kingdom*.

<sup>2</sup> For other clear promises to come and rule, see Matthew 16:27–28 and 19:28 (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1).

(1:5). He has prepared His kingdom people (1:6). To the overcomers He promises many aspects of His coming rule (see 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21). “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3:21). In much of the book He is opening the sealed scroll that will permit Him to take His royal inheritance (5:2–7). As He prepares to open the scroll, heavenly creatures and elders honor Him:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. (5:8–10)

Opening the scroll occupies chapters 6–18.<sup>3</sup> These show God and the Lamb pouring out their wrath on the kingdom’s opponents (6:16–17; 11:18; 15:1). This produces “the great tribulation,” in which many of God’s servants also suffer and die (7:14). But there are repeated promises (such as, 7:14–17; 10:6–7; 14:13) of God’s certain victory. For example, at the last of the seven trumpets “loud voices in heaven” anticipate that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (11:15). The heavenly elders give thanks and add:

The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth. (11:17–18)

*Fulfillment.* In chapter 19 Messiah’s waiting is over. God “has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth...He has avenged on her the blood of his servants” (19:2). Messiah returns to earth as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (19:16). Finally He can begin to rule.

### The Millennium and the New World

*John sees a thousand-year reign, then a rebellion.* For the first time in Scripture, Revelation 20 marks a specific length of time in which Messiah will rule. “Those who have part in the first resurrection,”<sup>4</sup> it says, “will reign with him **a thousand years**” (Rev. 20:4–6). Based on Latin, we call that period the Millennium.<sup>5</sup> During the same period Satan will be “bound...for **a thousand years**” (vv. 1–3). “When **the thousand years** are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations” (vv. 7–8a). He will get many to join him in a rebellion that God will end with His fire.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Although the last seal is opened in 8:1, it includes the seven trumpets of chapters 8–11. In the last trumpet “the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets” (10:7). For this reason, when that trumpet is sounded (11:15), loud voices announce the coming of the kingdom. That last trumpet includes the seven bowls with which “God’s wrath is completed” (15:1; see 15:7; 16:1; and especially 16:17, “It is done!”).

<sup>4</sup> The first resurrection began with Messiah as “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). It will include but is not limited to the resurrected martyrs, who are mentioned in Revelation 20.

<sup>5</sup> The prophet Isaiah often spoke of Messiah’s future rule. In one such prophecy (Isa. 24:21–23), he alluded to the same relatively short period and subsequent judgment as Revelation 20. God’s enemies, said Isaiah, “will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon...and be punished **after many days**” (Isa. 24:22).

<sup>6</sup> Where will the devil find these rebels? They will be descendants of some who will enter the Millennium (as

*After the rebellion, John sees the final judgment.* In Revelation 20 John next saw the “great white throne” of final judgment with “him who was seated on it.”<sup>7</sup> At that point, “earth and sky [heaven] fled from his presence, and there was no place for them” (Rev. 20:11). It may be to this event that John later refers when he says, “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (21:1). Similarly, Peter had said in some of his last written words, “The heavens will pass away ...and the earth and its works will be burned up [and] all these things are to be destroyed” (2 Pet. 3:10–11). The occasion Revelation 20 describes is the final judgment: “I saw the dead...standing before the throne [and being] judged according to what they had done’ (Rev. 20:12; cf. v. 13).

*After the judgment, John sees the New World.* When describing the judgment, John said he saw what we often call the eternal state (Rev. 21–22). “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (21:1). John proceeded to describe that New World in most of Revelation 21–22. Now use the chart to review these matters.

Messiah’s Kingdom as Reported by John in Revelation 19–21	
Chapter in Revelation	What John Sees
19	After previous judgments, Messiah returns to earth as King and Lord.
20	While Satan is bound, Messiah and others rule a thousand years.
20	After the thousand years Satan is released and leads a rebellion, ended by God’s fire.
20	In the presence of the throne of judgment, earth and heaven flee.
20	Final judgment takes place.
21	John sees and begins to describe “a new heaven and a new earth” (New World).

**An Interpretive Problem**

You can see why many interpreters, based on John’s visions, speak of Messiah’s “thousand-year rule.” They usually imply that His rule both begins and ends in Revelation 20. They think it will be completely replaced by the “new heaven and new earth,” the New World, of Revelation 21–22. But that interpretation contradicts many Scriptural predictions that “his kingdom will **never end**” (Luke 1:33). Peter calls it “the **eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Messiah” (2 Pet. 1:11). Hebrews 12:28 calls it “a kingdom that **cannot be shaken.**” In fact, the Book of

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little children?) without being glorified. They will marry and have children—not all of whom will get converted.

<sup>7</sup> The Judge will be Messiah Jesus. This fact was implied in the conclusion to Paul’s sermon in Athens: God “will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31; cf. John 5:22 and Rom. 2:16).

Revelation agrees: “He will reign **for ever and ever**” (Rev. 11:15; cf. 22:5).<sup>8</sup> An eternal kingdom can hardly be completed in a thousand years! How then are the Millennium and the New World related to it?

### How Are the Millennium, the New World, and the Eternal Kingdom Related?

#### The Millennium Will Be the First Stage of the Kingdom.

Probably all who believe in a literal Millennium agree that it will be Messiah’s coming kingdom (all of it or part of it). Some of them believe that He is also reigning already from heaven; yet, they admit that He will come to rule in a glorious kingdom on earth.

Since the coming kingdom is eternal, what will the thousand years be? Its first stage, its grand entrance. A thousand years of transition: “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25–26; cf. Rev. 20:14). “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). This shows that the Millennium, the first stage of the kingdom, will be mediatorial. During that stage the Father apparently will not rule directly but through “the Lamb” (Messiah) as mediator. The Lamb will have a throne on earth, but the Father’s throne will continue in heaven. When the Lamb perfects His kingdom, however, He will merge it with the Father’s universal kingdom. Apparently after the millennial stage heaven will finish its descent to the perfected earth.<sup>9</sup> Then Father and Son will rule together. In the glorious capital city there will then be one supreme throne, “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:3).

#### The New World Will Begin in the Millennium.

Some believe in Messiah’s literal coming kingdom but not in the stages just explained. They do not consider the New World (the “new heavens and new earth”) part of it. They assume that the many biblical passages about that kingdom refer to the Millennium but not to the New World. They are confident that John makes this distinction; he does not even mention the New World until Revelation 21, after the Millennium has been sketched. Yet, the biblical sources for John’s terminology about the New World identify it with the Millennium, as you will see. Those sources emphasize the first stage of the kingdom—whereas John emphasizes the completed stage. Yet, both are the New World.

<sup>8</sup> Several Old Testament passages (such as, Dan. 2:44; 7:14; Isa. 9:7) declare that Messiah’s/God’s future earthly kingdom will be eternal. It is obvious that any less permanent kingdom would mean that God will finally give up on His original plans and promises for the material world.

<sup>9</sup> In Revelation 21 John describes the new world. To begin, he “saw **the Holy City, the new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared as a bride**.” The record emphasizes the bride’s identity when the angel offers, “I will show you **the bride, the wife of the Lamb**. And he...showed me **the Holy City, Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God” (vv. 9–10). A voice from heaven tells what this wedding implies—that God will no longer dwell at a distance: “The dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (v. 3). When will this wedding take place? If chapter 21 is **after** the Millennium, it might be at that time. But the wedding was announced before the Millennium: “the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (19:7). That suggests that Revelation 21 (and its new world) takes place starting with the Millennium.

The expression “new heaven and new earth” was first used in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. There it included the Millennium. Peter used the same expression in 2 Peter 3:13, apparently in the same sense. John probably meant the same thing in Revelation 21:1.

*“New heavens and new earth” in Isaiah.* In the Old Testament, only Isaiah used this expression. It was what the Lord God promised: “Behold, I will create **new heavens and a new earth**. The former things will not be remembered” (Isa. 65:17; cf. 66:22). In Isaiah this promise summarized many earlier promises in the same book—many descriptions of a New World. In it God will rule from Jerusalem, with the nations living righteously and at peace (2:2–4). He will rule through the anointed Son of David (9:6–7; 11:1–4), who “will bring justice to the nations” (42:1, 3, 4). Animals will coexist in peace with mankind (11:6–10). “The desert...will blossom” (35:1). “The eyes of the blind [will] be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy” (35:5–6a). “The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (11:9).<sup>10</sup> Such will be the “new heavens and new earth” that God will create.

Jesus demonstrated that He is the Anointed One who can so transform the world. This is the main reason He did so many signs. Compare His miracles, one by one, to such Old Testament predictions of the New World. (Begin at Matthew 11:2–5, comparing it to Isaiah 35:5–6.)

However, the New World Isaiah proceeded to describe in chapters 65–66 will not be perfect. At first it will still be affected by the curse: “He who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth” (65:20, cf. 23). In other words, there will still be death. Yet, God calls it “new heavens and new earth” because eternal things, for some, will have begun.<sup>11</sup> As explained above, all things will be eternal after the millennial stage.

*“New heaven and new earth” in 2 Peter.* The apostle Peter, in some of his last written words, referred to the same promise and expression recorded in Isaiah. Since Peter suggested no different meaning, he must have meant the same as Isaiah. Notice two things about Peter’s repetition of Isaiah.

- Peter was not discussing our death but Messiah’s Second Coming: “this ‘coming’ he [God] promised” (2 Peter 3:4).
- Peter identified our hope as the New World. The future time of divine triumph he called “the day of the Lord” (v. 10) or “the day of God” (v. 12).<sup>12</sup> In “that day,” he said, “everything will

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<sup>10</sup> Here are some more passages where Isaiah describes the New World: 19:23–25 (The Lord adopts other nations along with Israel); 25:6–9 (The Lord provides a banquet and triumphs over death); 32:15–18 and 59:21 (He pours out His Holy Spirit); chapter 60 (He glorifies Jerusalem; is its light [no night]; kings bring their wealth; no more violence; cf. Rev. 21–22).

<sup>11</sup> Death will still exist until the end of the Millennium: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26). Yet, for those resurrected (glorified) at Jesus’ coming (v. 23), death will already have “been swallowed up in victory” (vv. 51–55). They will already be able to “inherit the kingdom” (v. 50). Jesus had described such people: “Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age **and in the resurrection** from the dead will **neither marry** nor be given in marriage, and they can **no longer die**” (Luke 20:35–36a).

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes the Bible merely calls it “the Day” without modifiers (1 Cor. 3:13; Heb. 10:25). How can it, if they are right whose theology distinguishes the “day of the Lord” from the “day of Christ”? Scripture, instead,

be destroyed” (vv. 10 and 12). Nevertheless, “**in keeping with his promise** we are looking forward to a **new heaven and a new earth**” (v. 13). Since the latter expression comes straight out of Isaiah 65 and 66, “his promise” must be God’s promise there. Since the promise and the expression in Isaiah include the Millennium, they must include it in 2 Peter. In other words, our hope is the eternal kingdom that will begin then.

*Equivalent expressions.* The Bible uses other expressions equivalent to “new heavens and a new earth.” These also refer to the kingdom Messiah will inaugurate at His Second Coming.

1. “**The renewal of all things** when the Son of Man sits on His throne in heavenly glory” (Matt. 19:28). The bolded words are the NIV’s rendering of a name the Lord Himself gave to His coming kingdom. The Greek term is *palingenesia*, which literally means “regeneration” (new birth of the world). The same word is used of individuals and translated “rebirth” in Titus 3:5.
2. “**The time...for God to restore everything**” (Acts 3:21). Peter in Acts 3 reminded Israel that through them God had fulfilled “that His Messiah would suffer” as predicted (Acts 3:18). But for the present, Messiah “must remain in heaven until **the time comes for God to restore everything**, as he promised long ago through His holy prophets” (v. 21; cf. Rom. 8:19–23). This implies that God will begin to restore all things when Messiah returns—not a thousand years later.
3. “**Inheritance**” for Messiah and us. Psalm 2:8 speaks of Messiah’s eternal “inheritance.” He will receive it when He begins to rule over “the nations...and the very ends of the earth” (Ps. 2:8–9). So will we, as He promised us. We will receive our inheritance when He “comes in His glory” and sits “on his throne in heavenly glory” (Matt. 25:31). At that time—not a thousand years later—He will tell us to “come...take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (25:34; cf. James 2:5). It will be the same occasion and gift referred to in 1 Peter 1, where Peter equated the following things:
  - “a **salvation** that is ready to be revealed **in the last time**” (1 Peter 1:5; cf. Heb. 1:14; 2:3, 5; 9:28)
  - “the **grace** to be given you **when Jesus Messiah is revealed**” (1:13)
  - “an **inheritance** that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1:4)

In short, our Lord at His coming will be God’s agent to renew and restore all things. The kingdom Messiah inaugurates at that time will be His eternal inheritance and ours. These are alternate ways to describe the “new heaven and new earth,” as Isaiah designates even the beginning of the Millennium. In Revelation John uses that same phrase to refer (apparently) to the perfected stage of Messiah’s kingdom. His usage, however, does not imply that the kingdom will come to an end.

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seems to use the terms interchangeably. Analyze the New Testament usage starting in Luke 17:24, 30; 1 Cor. 1:8; and 5:5.

**Will Heaven and Earth Cease To Exist?**

We have just looked at “new heaven and new earth” and equivalent expressions. We have seen that this New World will begin with the Millennium, the first stage of Messiah’s kingdom. In it God through Messiah will restore everything as predicted. It is our great expected salvation, our imperishable inheritance. Could that inheritance pass away in a thousand years? Of course not.

So how should we understand the following verses?

- Matthew 24:35 affirms that “Heaven and earth will pass away.”
- Hebrews 1:10–12 (quoting from Ps. 102) agrees: “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed.”
- Revelation 20:11 says that “earth and heaven fled” at the end of the Millennium.
- Revelation 21:1 notes that “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”
- 2 Peter 3:10–11 comments that “the heavens will disappear...and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare [and] everything will be destroyed.”

**Hyperbolic language**

*Various examples.* Here is evidence that such language just cited is often figurative and not designed as fully literal. In each case notice that what sounds absolute is not absolute but relative.

<b>Hyperbolic Language for Destruction</b>		
<b>Reference</b>	<b>Absolute Language</b>	<b>Indication that Meaning Is Relative</b>
Isaiah 24:1–4 24:18–20	“The earth will be <b>completely laid waste.</b> ” “The earth...falls, <b>never to rise again.</b> ”	Yet, after this (“In that day”) the wicked rulers on that earth will be punished, and the Lord will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem (24:21–23).
Deut. 32:22	God’s “fire... <b>devours the earth</b> and its harvests.”	Yet, the land remains. He “will make atonement for his land and people,” v. 43.
Micah 1:4–5	“Because of Jacob’s transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel...the <b>mountains melt</b> ...and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire.”	This was fulfilled, but not literally, in the Babylonian invasions of Judah, culminating in 586 BC.
Nahum 1:5–6	“The <b>hills melt away</b> ” when Assyria is punished.	This was fulfilled, but not literally, in the fall of Nineveh, 612 BC.

Hyperbolic Language for Destruction		
Reference	Absolute Language	Indication that Meaning Is Relative
2 Peter 3:5–6	“By God’s word the <b>heavens</b> existed and the <b>earth</b> was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the <b>world of that time</b> was deluged and <b>destroyed.</b> ”	Many elements of that first world survived that destruction by the flood and are now part of “the <b>present heavens and earth</b> ... reserved for fire” (3:7).
Revelation 6:14 and 16:20	After each great earthquake, every mountain and island was removed.	If these visions were fulfilled literally, there would be no civilization for the rest of Revelation. Yet, it continued.
Revelation 20:11	“earth and heaven fled”	Yet, John next saw “the sea gave up the dead that were in it” (20:13).

*The Coming Fire.* In the chart notice especially the language in 2 Peter 3:5–6: the original heavens and earth were **destroyed** by the flood. Yet, many parts of the original world survived that destruction and are now part of “the present heavens and earth...reserved for fire” (3:7). The effect of the coming fire will be analogous, for reasons given below. Though it is described in absolute terms,<sup>13</sup> the effect will be relative.

When will God use that purging fire? Not all at once—but as a process. Look up the following passages.

- Fire before the kingdom begins (Ps. 97:3-5; Mal. 4:1)
- Fire at the kingdom’s inauguration (Matt. 13:30, 40–42; 2 Thess. 1:7)
- Fire at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:9)

### **The Renewal Will Be a Process.**

As you just saw, the purging fire will not be one event but a process. As in the case of the first world’s destruction, much will again survive, whatever is eternal. This process is also pictured as a shaking (Haggai 2:21–23; Hebrews 12:26–29). “What can be shaken” will be removed “so that what cannot be shaken may remain.” This shaking and “the removing of what can be shaken” (Heb. 12:27) will be finished at the end of the Millennium. What will remain is our hope, the eternal “kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).

Now we can answer the question whether heaven and earth will cease to exist. In an absolute sense, no. (In this case, language that sounds absolute should be interpreted as relative.) Instead, they will be **renewed**, as God has often promised.

<sup>13</sup> “The elements will be destroyed by fire” (v. 10). “Everything will be destroyed” (v. 11). “Destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat” (v. 12).



**“New” does not mean “distinct.”**

In the expression “new heaven and new earth,” the Greek word for “new” is not the one for young or recent (*neos*) but for a better quality (*kainos*). God intends to renew rather than replace. The process and result are analogous to the renewal of an individual: “If anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Even though he is new, he remains the same individual. Likewise, Romans 8:19–21 promises that “the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation...itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” God does not threaten His creation with extinction but—after purging—promises it liberation. Like the resurrection body itself, the New World will be far superior yet the same entity (1 Cor. 15:35–44).

**Conclusion**

Thus, the Lord’s eternal inheritance—and ours—begins with the Millennium. That period is transitional; by the end of it, all will be new (Rev. 21:1, 5). “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father...For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

Many eternal things will begin when the Millennium begins. Therefore, it deserves the name “new heaven and new earth.” But after the first thousand years and the final judgment, everything will be eternal.

- **Individuals** who inherit that New World will enjoy eternal life, in glorified bodies joyfully serving God and ruling forever (Rev. 22:3–5).
- **Nations** will live in peace and righteousness, bringing their glory and honor to the capital (21:24, 26; Isa. 2:2–4).
- **Nature** will be liberated—no more curse—rejoicing with the sons of God (Rom. 8:18–22).
- **Messiah** will receive vindication and glory in the world that once rejected Him. Along with the many He redeemed, He will inherit as God's Firstborn Son and Abraham's Heir (Gal. 3:16, 29).
- **God the Father** will finally accomplish His purpose in creation and His promises to Adam, to Abraham, and to David.
- **The material world** will be forever and perfectly united to the spiritual world in a pleasing and powerful demonstration to the angels and all the universe of God's righteousness, goodness, and love.
- **The devil** and his works will be banished forever.

God will forever dwell with man, and man will forever rule with God.

Let us live for that world!