

## The Fate of the Present Heavens and Earth

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by Bill Crews

Many religious groups maintain that the earth upon which we live and the heavens that surround us (the cosmos or the universe) are going to be “cleansed,” or “made over.” This will be done, we are told, in order that God’s people, the “redeemed,” may dwell upon the “new” earth for, some say, a thousand years, or for, others say, eternity. This idea is not taught in the Scriptures, and it is certainly not the Christian’s hope. The Christian’s hope is “laid up for you in the heavens” (Col. 1:5). It is “within the veil: whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us” (Rev. 6:18-20). It is “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:3-4). The word “heaven” or “heavens” in the Greek language of the New Testament (usually plural in the Greek, but rendered singular in our English translations) is used of (1) the atmosphere surrounding the earth, (2) the expanse of the universe, and (3) the abode of God. In Colossians 1:5 and 1 Pet. 1:3-4 it is used of the eternal abode of God. **Our hope is not to live here on this present earth.**

But what will be the fate of the present heavens and earth? “But the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment, and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7). “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?” (2 Pet. 3:10-12). Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

“But,” someone says, “the New Testament also speaks of new heavens and a new earth.” Quite so, but that is not the earth we now live on or anything like it, and that is not the present heavens that surround our earth. They will not be material, corruptible, or perishable. “But according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more” (Rev. 21:1). “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev. 20:11 -- the passage goes on to depict the resurrection of all the dead and the judgment of all men).

Our temporal abode, our dwelling place while in fleshly bodies, is the present, physical earth. Our eternal abode, unless we die in sin and are forever separated from God, is spoken of in many ways: (1) “new heavens and a new earth,” (2) “in my Father’s house are many mansions ...for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:2-3). (3) “for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Rev. 11:10), (4) “but now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city” (Rev. 11:16 -- read verses 13-16; at the time they were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth”), (4) “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:2; see also vv. 10, 27), and (5) “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them” (Rev. 21:3). These are various ways, in language that is beautiful and appealing to men, to describe the eternal abode of the redeemed of all ages. And why do we talk about “going to heaven”? Jesus said, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you” (Matt. 5:12). Paul

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