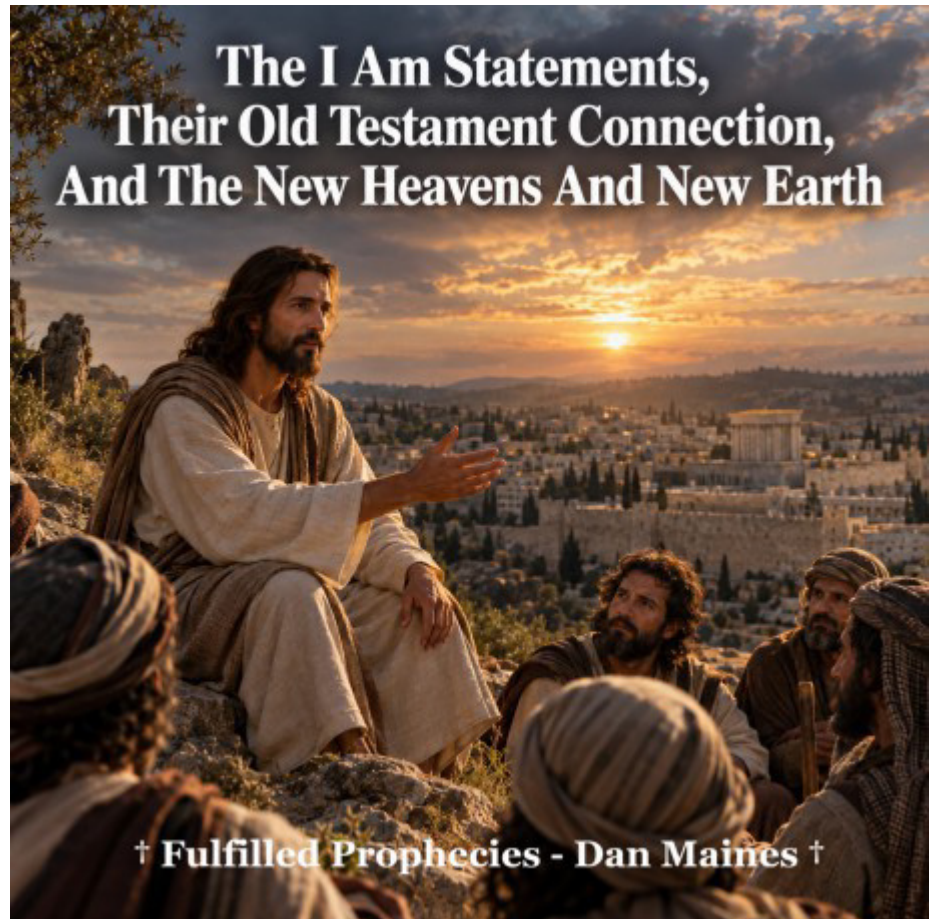


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The I Am Statements, Their Old Testament Connection, And The New Heavens And New Earth



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The "I Am" statements of Jesus aren't isolated sayings. They reach back into the Old Testament and reveal that the promises, symbols, and expectations of Israel were finding their fulfillment in Christ.

† Jesus identified Himself as the bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, life, way, truth, and vine. These were realities Israel had already encountered through covenant symbols,

promises, and prophetic language.

† This becomes especially important when studying the new heavens and new earth. If the Old Testament shadows find their spiritual reality in Christ, we shouldn't suddenly require the prophets' new creation language to describe the physical destruction and replacement of the universe.

† The new creation is centered in Christ. The old covenant world passed away, and God's people entered the new covenant creation where righteousness dwells (2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 8:13; 2 Peter 3:13).

Exodus 3:14

And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

† The foundation begins with God's revelation of Himself to Moses. God identified Himself as the great I AM, the covenant God who would deliver His people from bondage.

† John's Gospel repeatedly records Jesus using "I am" language. This isn't accidental. Jesus was revealing His identity while showing that Israel's covenant story was reaching its fulfillment in Him (John 8:24, 28, 58).

† The same God who delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage brought the greater deliverance through Christ. The first exodus pointed toward a greater covenant exodus from sin, death, condemnation, and the old covenant order (Luke 9:31; Hebrews 3:1-6).

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty.

† Israel ate manna in the wilderness, but the manna wasn't the final reality. Jesus identified Himself as the true bread from heaven (Exodus 16:4, 15; John 6:32-33).

† This shows how biblical fulfillment works. The Old Testament gave a physical sign, but Christ revealed the greater spiritual

reality. The manna wasn't fulfilled by giving believers better physical bread. It was fulfilled in Christ Himself.

† This principle matters when we reach Isaiah's language about new heavens and a new earth. Physical imagery can communicate covenant realities. Scripture itself teaches us to recognize the greater spiritual fulfillment behind earlier physical shadows (Colossians 2:16-17).

John 8:12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

† Light was deeply connected with God's presence and salvation throughout the Old Testament. God led Israel by light, and the prophets promised that His light would shine upon His restored people (Exodus 13:21; Isaiah 60:1-3).

† Jesus didn't announce that He would merely bring the promised light. He said He was the light. The prophetic expectation was centered in Him.

† Isaiah connected restoration with light shining upon God's people. Revelation uses the same imagery for the New Jerusalem, where God's glory illuminates the city and the Lamb is its lamp (Isaiah 60:19-20; Revelation 21:23).

† This is covenant creation language. The darkness of the former order gives way to the light of Christ in the new covenant world.

John 10:9

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

† Jesus didn't point His followers toward a future geographical entrance into God's kingdom. He identified Himself as the entrance.

† Access to God isn't through Jerusalem, the Temple, the Levitical priesthood, or the old covenant sacrificial system. Access is through Christ (John 14:6; Hebrews 10:19-22).

† This helps explain the New Jerusalem. Revelation describes

gates that aren't shut, with the nations walking in its light (Revelation 21:24-26).

† The New Jerusalem isn't primarily about entering a future physical city. It's covenant language describing access to God through Christ in the completed new covenant order.

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

† The Old Testament repeatedly described God as Israel's shepherd. Ezekiel condemned Israel's corrupt shepherds and promised that God Himself would search for His sheep and establish His servant David as shepherd over them (Psalm 23:1; Ezekiel 34:11-12, 23).

† Jesus declared Himself to be that good shepherd. The promise wasn't waiting for another shepherd in another age. It was being fulfilled before their eyes.

† Jesus also spoke of bringing other sheep into one flock under one shepherd (John 10:16). This points toward the covenant unity created in Christ.

† Jew and Gentile weren't destined to remain divided forever. Christ created one new humanity and reconciled both to God in one body (Ephesians 2:14-18).

John 11:25-26

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

† Jesus didn't merely say that He would cause resurrection. He said He is the resurrection and the life.

† Resurrection is inseparable from union with Christ. The movement from death to life begins with Him and is found in Him (John 5:24; Colossians 2:12-13).

† This is another example of fulfillment being centered in Christ rather than merely in physical events. Jesus moved the focus from an abstract event to Himself.

† The new creation follows the same Christ-centered pattern.

Anyone in Christ belongs to the new creation reality that the prophets anticipated (2 Corinthians 5:17).

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

† Under the old covenant, access to God's presence was represented through the Tabernacle, Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and Most Holy Place.

† Jesus declared that access to the Father is through Him. He is the reality toward which the old covenant system pointed (Hebrews 9:8-12).

† When the old covenant system disappeared, God's people didn't lose access to God. The opposite happened. The better and living way had been opened through Christ (Hebrews 10:19-22).

† This is exactly what we should expect in the new heavens and new earth, not separation from God, but completed covenant access to Him.

John 15:1

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

† Israel was repeatedly pictured as God's vine in the Old Testament, but that vine failed to produce the fruit God required (Psalm 80:8-11; Isaiah 5:1-7).

† Jesus' statement is powerful because He didn't merely say that He was another vine. He said He was the true vine.

† Covenant identity was now centered in Christ. Life and fruitfulness came through abiding in Him, not through physical descent, national identity, or attachment to the old covenant order (John 15:4-5).

† This directly supports a spiritual understanding of the new creation. God's covenant people are defined by their relationship to Christ.

Isaiah 65:17-18

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the

former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness.

† Isaiah's prophecy places the new heavens and new earth directly alongside the creation of Jerusalem as a rejoicing. The context is covenant restoration.

† Isaiah continues to describe people building houses, planting vineyards, having offspring, and experiencing ordinary earthly life (Isaiah 65:20-23). That doesn't describe the disappearance of planet Earth.

† The prophetic language describes a new covenant world, a new order under God's Messiah. The old creation represented by the condemned covenant order gives way to the new creation centered in Christ.

† This fits perfectly with Paul's declaration that anyone in Christ is a new creation. The new creation isn't waiting for the physical universe to disappear before it can exist (2 Corinthians 5:17).

2 Peter 3:13

But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

† Peter wasn't inventing a new prophecy. He specifically said this expectation was "according to his promise," directing his readers back to Isaiah's promise of the new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22).

† Peter's readers were living during the final years of the old covenant age. The old covenant was already described as becoming obsolete, growing old, and ready to disappear (Hebrews 8:13).

† The fiery judgment language in Peter should be read through the Old Testament prophets, who repeatedly used cosmic and creation language for historical covenant judgments (Isaiah 13:9-13; Isaiah 34:4-5).

† Peter wasn't teaching that God's physical creation would cease to exist. He was describing judgment upon the old covenant world and the full establishment of the righteous new

covenant order promised by the prophets.

Revelation 21:1-3

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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† Revelation brings the entire covenant story together. The new heavens and new earth, New Jerusalem, bride, and dwelling place of God are interconnected pictures of the completed new covenant reality.

† Notice the direction of the city. John didn't describe believers leaving Earth to reach a city in heaven. He saw the New Jerusalem coming down from God.

† The central promise is God's dwelling with His people. That theme runs from Eden through the Tabernacle and Temple and reaches its fulfillment in the new covenant people of God (Leviticus 26:11-12; Ezekiel 37:27; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

† This brings us directly back to the "I Am" statements. Jesus is the bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, life, way, truth, and true vine. Every road of fulfillment leads to Christ.

Historical References

† Josephus recorded the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70, showing the historical end of the old covenant center of worship that had dominated Israel's national life.

† Josephus described Jerusalem's devastation, famine, warfare, fire, and the destruction of the Temple in The Wars of the Jews, especially Books 5-7.

† Eusebius later connected the destruction of Jerusalem with the judgment that came upon that generation and recorded the early Christian understanding that believers escaped the city

before its destruction.

† These historical witnesses don't establish our doctrine, Scripture does. They confirm that the first-century historical setting described by Jesus and the apostles wasn't imaginary. Jerusalem and its Temple actually came under devastating judgment in that generation.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't have to wait for God's promised new creation to begin. In Christ, believers live in the reality of the new covenant creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

† We don't need an earthly Temple to approach God. Christ is the way, and God's people are His dwelling place (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:19-22).

† We don't need physical Jerusalem to become the center of God's kingdom. We have come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† We don't need another covenant age. We have the better covenant established through Christ (Hebrews 8:6).

† We don't need to wait for the true bread, the true light, the true shepherd, the resurrection life, or the true vine. They're realities found in Christ right now.

† The "I Am" statements teach us how fulfillment works. Old Testament physical symbols and covenant pictures reached their greater reality in Christ.

† That same biblical pattern gives us strong reason to understand the new heavens and new earth as covenant new creation language rather than the future destruction and replacement of planet Earth.

† The physical earth continues according to God's established order, while the old covenant world has passed away and the everlasting kingdom of Christ continues (Genesis 8:22; Ecclesiastes 1:4; Hebrews 12:28).

† The question isn't when we'll finally enter God's new creation. The question is whether we recognize what God has already accomplished through Christ.

Q & A Appendix

Q: How do the "I Am" statements support a spiritual understanding of the new heavens and new earth?

A: They demonstrate a consistent pattern of fulfillment. Manna pointed to Christ as the bread of life, Israel's light pointed to Christ as the light of the world, Israel's shepherd imagery pointed to Christ as the good shepherd, and Israel as God's vine pointed to Christ as the true vine. The physical and covenant shadows reached their greater reality in Him (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:11; 15:1).

Q: Does a spiritual new heavens and new earth mean the new creation isn't real?

A: No. Spiritual doesn't mean imaginary. Our access to God, salvation, reconciliation, new birth, and life in Christ are spiritual realities, but they're completely real. Paul said that anyone in Christ is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Q: Did Isaiah predict the destruction of the physical planet?

A: Isaiah 65 doesn't require that interpretation. His new heavens and new earth include people building houses, planting vineyards, having offspring, and living upon the earth. Isaiah's language describes covenant restoration under God's promised salvation (Isaiah 65:17-25).

Q: Why did Peter use fire if he wasn't talking about the destruction of the planet?

A: The Old Testament prophets regularly used fire, collapsing heavens, darkened heavenly bodies, and shaking creation to describe God's judgment upon nations and covenant peoples. Peter used the prophetic vocabulary his Jewish readers already knew (Isaiah 13:9-13; 34:4-5; 2 Peter 3:10-13).

Q: When did the old covenant world finally pass away?

A: Hebrews said the old covenant was already obsolete and ready to disappear before the Temple was destroyed (Hebrews 8:13). Its visible covenant system, Temple, priesthood,

sacrifices, and Jerusalem-centered order came to their decisive historical end in AD 70.

Q: Where is the New Jerusalem today?

A: God's people have already come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24). Paul also identified the Jerusalem above as our mother (Galatians 4:26). Revelation's New Jerusalem describes the bride and dwelling place of God in new covenant imagery (Revelation 21:2-3, 9-10).

Q: What is the central message connecting all of these passages?

A: Christ is the fulfillment. He's the bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, life, way, truth, and true vine. The new creation isn't separated from Him. It's centered in Him. What the old covenant pictured and promised reached its goal in Christ and His completed new covenant kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 12:22-28).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Exodus 3:14; John 6:35; John 8:12; John 10:9; John 10:11; John 11:25-26; John 14:6; John 15:1; Isaiah 65:17-18; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-3

† Historical writers: Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3

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