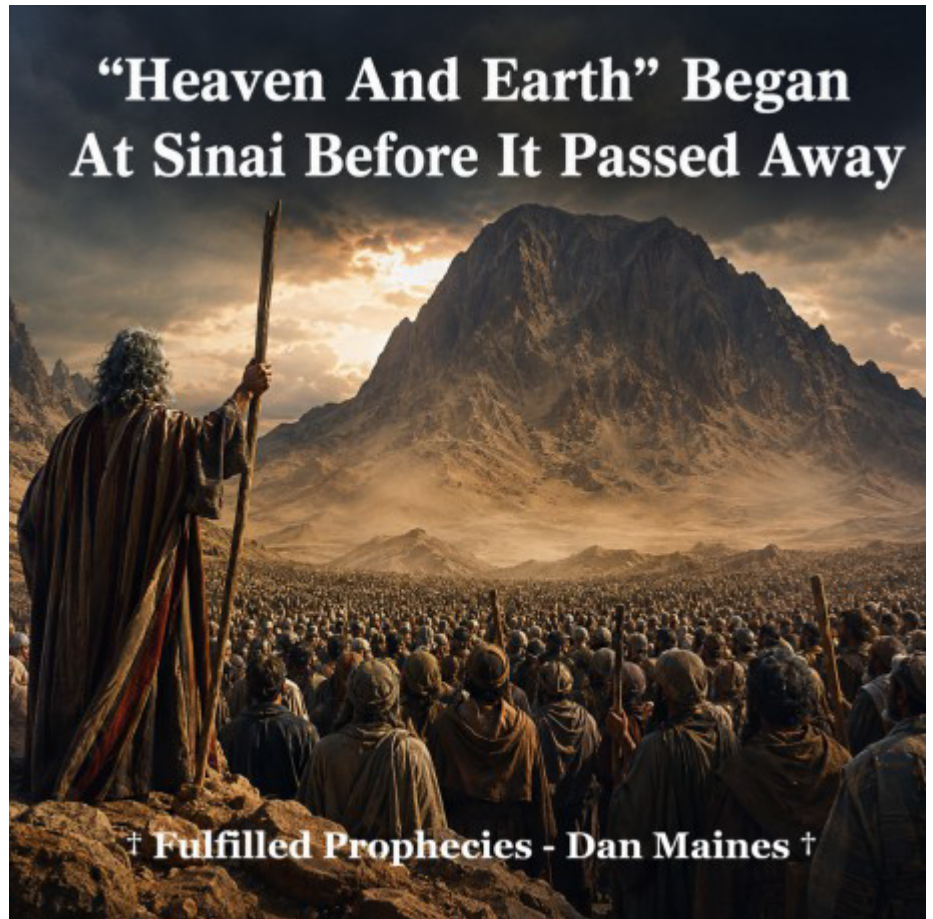


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**Heaven And Earth
Began At Sinai
Before It Passed
Away**



By Dan Maines

"Heaven And Earth" Began At Sinai Before It Passed Away

Introduction

† When many Christians hear "heaven and earth," they automatically assume the Bible must be talking about the physical universe. But Scripture itself uses heaven and earth as covenant language connected with Israel, the Law, judgment, and the establishment of a new covenant order.

† This language didn't suddenly appear in Revelation. Moses used heaven and earth as covenant witnesses over Israel, Isaiah addressed heaven and earth while speaking directly to

God's covenant people, Jesus connected the passing of heaven and earth with the fulfillment of the Law, Peter described new heavens and a new earth according to God's promise, and John finally saw the first heaven and earth pass away.

† The point isn't that the physical creation began at Mount Sinai. The sun, moon, stars, land, and seas existed long before Moses. The point is that Scripture developed a covenantal "heaven and earth" order around the nation formed under the Mosaic covenant. That covenant world could therefore be shaken, judged, dissolved, and replaced without the physical planet being destroyed.

† Once we follow this language from Moses through the prophets, Jesus, Peter, and Revelation, the Bible interprets itself.

Deuteronomy 4:26

I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today, that you will certainly perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to take possession of it. You will not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed.

† Moses wasn't warning the physical sky and planet. He was establishing covenant witnesses against Israel concerning the consequences of violating God's covenant.

† Heaven and earth were summoned in a legal covenant setting. Israel could be judged, scattered, and removed from the land because she had violated the covenant established through Moses (Deuteronomy 4:23-31).

† This gives us an important biblical foundation. Heaven and earth language can function within covenant judgment without requiring the destruction of the physical universe.

Deuteronomy 31:28-29

Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against them. For I know that after my death you will behave very corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will confront

you in the latter days, because you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.

† Notice the connection Moses makes between heaven and earth, Israel's covenant rebellion, and "the latter days." This is covenant language from the beginning.

† The latter days in this passage concern what would eventually happen to Israel because of covenant unfaithfulness. Moses was looking forward to covenant judgment, not the destruction of planet Earth.

† The same covenant framework continues through the prophets and reaches its climax in the New Testament, where Israel's last days were already present (Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 2:16-17; Hebrews 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20).

Deuteronomy 32:1

Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth!

† Moses begins his covenant song by addressing the heavens and the earth. This follows immediately after he said he would call heaven and earth as witnesses against Israel (Deuteronomy 31:28-30).

† The Song of Moses is about Israel's covenant history, rebellion, judgment, and God's vindication. Heaven and earth are therefore embedded in covenant lawsuit language.

† Revelation later uses the Song of Moses in connection with the victory of God's people and the judgment of the old persecuting order (Revelation 15:2-4). The Bible's ending deliberately reaches back to Moses.

Isaiah 1:2

Listen, heavens, and hear, earth; For the Lord has spoken: Sons I have raised and brought up, But they have revolted against Me.

† Isaiah uses the same language Moses used. He calls heaven and earth to hear God's case, then immediately identifies the subject, God's rebellious children.

† This isn't astronomy. It's covenant prosecution. Judah had broken covenant, and the prophetic lawsuit of Moses continued through Isaiah (Deuteronomy 32:1; Isaiah 1:2-4).

† When later prophets speak about heavens shaking, earth burning, or a new heavens and new earth, we can't ignore the covenant vocabulary already established in the Law and the Prophets.

Isaiah 51:15-16

For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar (the Lord of armies is His name). And 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.'

† This passage is one of the clearest keys to covenant creation language. God speaks of planting heavens and laying the foundations of earth while saying to Zion, "Thou art my people."

† The language of creation is connected directly with the establishment and restoration of God's covenant people. God can describe covenant ordering in creation terminology.

† This means prophetic language about heavens and earth doesn't always require us to interpret the words as the physical cosmos. Context determines whether the subject is material creation or covenant creation.

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 doesn't separate the new heavens and new earth from Jerusalem and God's people. He places them together.

† The creation of new heavens and a new earth describes a new order in which God's people rejoice in what He creates. Isaiah's own context points toward covenant restoration rather than the annihilation and replacement of the physical universe.

† Peter later says he was expecting new heavens and a new

earth "according to his promise" (2 Peter 3:13). Isaiah is one of the foundational promises behind Peter's expectation.

Matthew 5:17-18

Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the Law, until all is accomplished!

† Jesus directly connects heaven and earth with the Law and its fulfillment. He didn't say the Law would disappear without fulfillment. He said not even the smallest part would pass until all was accomplished.

† This creates a serious problem for anyone who says the Law has passed but the heaven and earth Jesus spoke about haven't passed. Jesus tied the two together.

† Either the Law remains unfulfilled today, or the heaven and earth associated with that covenant order passed when everything written concerning that covenant judgment reached fulfillment (Luke 21:20-22; Luke 21:32-33).

Matthew 24:34-35

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

† Jesus placed the fulfillment of "all these things" within the lifetime of His generation. The very next statement says heaven and earth would pass away.

† We shouldn't detach verse 35 from verse 34. The generation would witness the fulfillment of the things Jesus had just described concerning Jerusalem, the temple, tribulation, judgment, and His coming (Matthew 24:1-3, 29-34).

† Jesus wasn't predicting the destruction of the globe within that generation. He was announcing the end of the covenant world centered on the temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and Mosaic order.

2 Peter 3:10-13

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

† Peter doesn't invent the language of heavens and earth. He stands inside the prophetic tradition of Moses and Isaiah.

† Peter specifically says the new heavens and new earth were expected "according to his promise." That sends us backward into the prophets, especially Isaiah's promise of new heavens and a new earth associated with God's restored people (Isaiah 65:17-18; Isaiah 66:22).

† Peter had already told his first-century readers that "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7). His expectation wasn't presented as something thousands of years away.

† The fiery dissolution language fits the Old Testament pattern of prophetic judgment language. God's covenant order with Israel was approaching its final judicial removal, making way for the fully established New Covenant order.

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 covenant story to its conclusion. The first heaven and earth pass away, and New Jerusalem appears

as the bride.

† John isn't describing believers leaving Earth for another planet. New Jerusalem comes down from God, and God's dwelling is with His people.

† This fulfills the covenant promises that run throughout Scripture. The old covenant world centered in earthly Jerusalem gives way to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Galatians 4:24-26; Hebrews 12:22-24).

† The contrast is covenantal, old Jerusalem and New Jerusalem, old covenant and New Covenant, the order that could be shaken and the Kingdom that can't be shaken (Hebrews 12:26-28).

Historical References

† Josephus records the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. He describes the sanctuary being consumed by fire and the city being devastated during the Roman siege (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6, Chapter 4; Book 7, Chapter 1).

† Josephus isn't being used to interpret biblical symbolism for us. His value is historical. He confirms the extraordinary first-century destruction of the temple and Jerusalem that Jesus had placed within His generation (Matthew 24:1-2, 34).

† Tacitus also records the Roman siege and the fall of Jerusalem, along with reports of unusual signs associated with that period (Tacitus, Histories, Book 5).

† Eusebius records the tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed before the war and later describes the destruction that overtook the Jewish nation (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7).

† These historical writers don't prove the covenantal meaning of "heaven and earth." Scripture establishes that meaning. The historians provide outside testimony that the first-century judgment Jesus predicted actually came upon Jerusalem and its temple.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't live waiting for the Mosaic heaven and earth to pass away. That covenant order has already reached its end, and we live under the everlasting New Covenant.

† We aren't waiting for an earthly temple, Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifices, or earthly Jerusalem to become the center of God's redemptive plan again. God's people are His temple, Christ is our High Priest, and the heavenly Jerusalem is our city (Hebrews 8:1-6; Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:19-22).

† The new creation isn't merely something we're waiting to see after the physical universe is destroyed. In Christ, new creation reality is already present, and believers belong to the New Covenant world established through Him (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15).

† We should read prophetic language the way the Bible teaches us to read it. Moses gives us the vocabulary, Isaiah develops it, Jesus announces its fulfillment, Peter describes its transition, and Revelation shows its completed covenant picture.

† The story begins with heaven and earth standing as witnesses over Israel's covenant and ends with the first heaven and earth passing away as New Jerusalem is revealed.

† That's the deeper connection. Sinai established the covenant world that could eventually be judged and removed. Christ established the Kingdom that can't be shaken.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does saying "heaven and earth" is covenant language mean Genesis 1 isn't about creation?

A: No. Context controls meaning. Genesis 1 describes God's creation of the heavens and the earth. The point is that later Scripture can use creation language symbolically and covenantally when describing nations, judgment, restoration, and God's people (Deuteronomy 32:1; Isaiah 1:2; Isaiah 51:16).

Q: Did the physical universe begin at Sinai?

A: No. The physical creation existed long before Sinai. What began at Sinai was Israel's formal Mosaic covenant order.

Scripture then uses heaven and earth language as covenant witnesses connected with that order (Deuteronomy 4:26; Deuteronomy 31:28).

Q: Why did Moses call heaven and earth as witnesses?

A: Because Israel was entering a covenant with blessings for obedience and judgment for rebellion. Heaven and earth functioned as witnesses against Israel concerning that covenant (Deuteronomy 4:23-31; Deuteronomy 30:19; Deuteronomy 31:28-29).

Q: Did Jesus say heaven and earth would pass away?

A: Yes. He also said His generation wouldn't pass away until all the things He had described were accomplished (Matthew 24:34-35).

Q: Does 2 Peter 3 have to mean the physical universe was going to be destroyed?

A: No. Peter says his expectation came "according to his promise," directing us back to prophetic promises of new heavens and a new earth. Those prophetic passages use covenant restoration and judgment language (Isaiah 65:17-18; Isaiah 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13).

Q: What replaced the old heaven and earth?

A: The New Covenant creation, pictured as the new heaven and new earth and New Jerusalem, where God dwells with His people (Revelation 21:1-3; Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: Are Christians living in that New Covenant reality now?

A: Yes. Believers have come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem, belong to the Kingdom that can't be shaken, and are God's dwelling place through the Spirit (Hebrews 12:22-28; Ephesians 2:19-22).

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

Source Index

† Deuteronomy 4:26; Deuteronomy 31:28-29; Deuteronomy 32:1; Isaiah 1:2; Isaiah 51:15-16; Isaiah 65:17-18; Matthew 5:17-18; Matthew 24:34-35; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-3
† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6, Chapter 4; Book 7, Chapter 1; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7

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