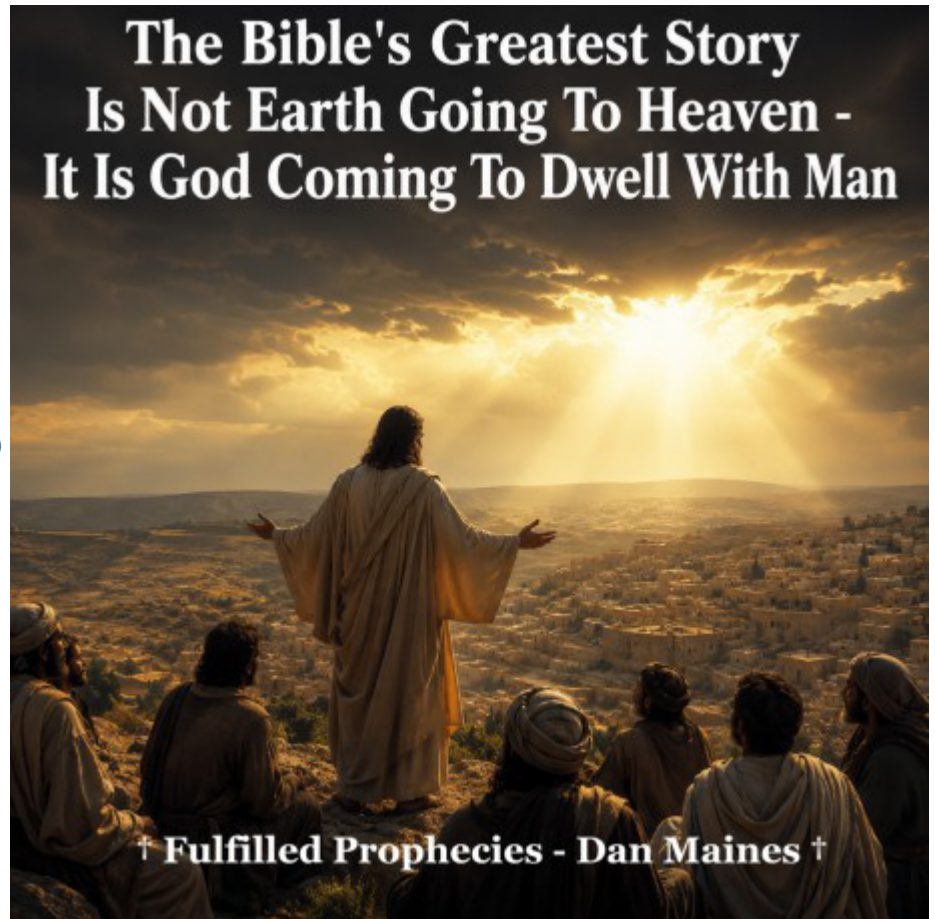


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**The Bible's
Greatest Story Is
Not Earth Going To
Heaven - It Is God
Coming To Dwell
With Man**



By Dan Maines

The Bible's Greatest Story Is Not Earth Going To Heaven - It Is God Coming To Dwell With Man

Introduction

† The Bible's story begins with God dwelling with humanity, and it ends with God dwelling with humanity. The movement of Scripture isn't ultimately about getting people off the earth and transporting them somewhere else. It's about God restoring His presence among His people.

† Eden introduces the pattern. God was present with man, sin brought separation, and the rest of the biblical story develops

the way God would restore fellowship through covenant, tabernacle, temple, Christ, and finally the New Covenant people of God.

† This theme runs straight through Scripture. God dwelt with Adam and Eve, placed His presence among Israel, filled the tabernacle, identified Himself with the temple, came among humanity in Jesus Christ, made His people His temple, and finally announced that His tabernacle was with mankind.

† Revelation doesn't end with redeemed humanity abandoning God's creation. It ends with the holy city coming down from God and the declaration that God's dwelling is with mankind (Revelation 21:2-3).

† Once we see this pattern, Revelation 21 stops looking like an escape story and becomes the completion of the Bible's great dwelling-place story.

Genesis 3:8

Now they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

† The Bible's dwelling theme is already visible in Eden. God's presence was associated with humanity in the garden, but after sin Adam and Eve hid from His presence (Genesis 3:8).

† The tragedy of Eden wasn't simply that humanity lost beautiful surroundings. Humanity experienced alienation from the presence and fellowship of God (Genesis 3:23-24).

† From this point forward, Scripture develops the story of God restoring what sin disrupted, His presence among His people (Revelation 21:3).

Exodus 25:8

Have them construct a sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them.

† Notice God's stated purpose for the sanctuary. He wanted to dwell among His people. The tabernacle wasn't merely a religious building, it represented God's covenant presence

among Israel (Exodus 25:8).

† The tabernacle carried the Eden pattern forward. God was again dwelling among a covenant people, although access to His presence remained restricted under the Old Covenant (Hebrews 9:6-8).

† This is why the tabernacle becomes so important when we reach the New Testament. What existed in physical and symbolic form pointed toward something greater that God would accomplish through Christ (Hebrews 8:1-5).

Leviticus 26:11-12

Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.

† The language deliberately brings together God's tabernacle, God's presence, and God's covenant people. He would dwell among them, walk among them, be their God, and they would be His people (Leviticus 26:11-12).

† This language becomes extremely important because the New Testament applies the same dwelling promise to the people of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 6:16).

† Revelation 21:3 uses this same covenant pattern, God's dwelling, God's people, and God's presence. John wasn't introducing an unrelated idea at the end of the Bible. He was announcing the completion of a theme running throughout Scripture.

1 Kings 8:27

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!

† Solomon understood that no physical building could contain God. Even at the dedication of the temple, Scripture warned us not to confuse God's presence with a structure made by human hands (1 Kings 8:27).

† The temple was significant, but it wasn't God's final dwelling place. Stephen later repeated this truth, declaring that the Most

High doesn't dwell in houses made by human hands (Acts 7:48-50).

† God's purpose was moving beyond stone buildings toward a living temple composed of redeemed people joined together in Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22).

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

† Here the dwelling theme reaches its decisive fulfillment in a Person. God didn't merely send another tabernacle or construct another temple. The Word became flesh and dwelt among humanity (John 1:14).

† Jesus identified His own body as the true temple when He spoke of destroying the temple and raising it in three days (John 2:19-21).

† The presence of God was no longer centered in Jerusalem's stone sanctuary. God had come among His people in Christ, and through Christ the dwelling place of God would become a people rather than a geographical building (Ephesians 2:21-22).

2 Corinthians 6:16

Or what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, I will dwell among them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

† Paul couldn't have made the transition clearer. He told living believers, we are a temple of the living God (2 Corinthians 6:16).

† Paul then used the language of Leviticus and applied it directly to the church. God's ancient promise to dwell and walk among His people was finding its New Covenant reality in people united to Christ (Leviticus 26:11-12).

† This destroys the idea that God's ultimate dwelling place must be another physical temple in Jerusalem. The apostles identified God's people themselves as His temple (1 Corinthians

3:16, Ephesians 2:21-22, 1 Peter 2:5).

Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

† Paul didn't tell believers they were waiting thousands of years to become God's dwelling place. He said they were already being built together into God's habitation in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

† Christ is the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets form the foundation, and God's people form the living structure. This is temple language transformed from stones into people (Ephesians 2:20-22).

† The New Covenant temple isn't located in one earthly city where people must travel to meet God. Jesus had already announced that worship wouldn't remain centered on Jerusalem, because true worship would be in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† Hebrews doesn't say believers will someday come to Mount Zion. It says, you have come. The first-century saints had entered the reality toward which the Old Covenant shadows had pointed (Hebrews 12:22).

† Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church, Jesus, and

the New Covenant are joined together in one magnificent description (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† This prepares us for John's New Jerusalem. Revelation's city isn't about humanity escaping earth for heaven. John sees the holy city coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2).

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,

† Here the Bible's dwelling theme reaches its covenant climax. Notice the direction of the movement. New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2).

† John's announcement isn't, Behold, mankind has finally escaped earth and moved into heaven. His announcement is that the tabernacle of God is with mankind and He will dwell with them (Revelation 21:3).

† The language reaches all the way back through Paul, Leviticus, the tabernacle, and Eden. What sin disrupted, God's redemptive work in Christ restored, fellowship between God and His covenant people (Genesis 3:8, Leviticus 26:11-12, 2 Corinthians 6:16).

† The passing of the former heaven and earth belongs to the covenant transformation that Revelation has been developing. The old temple-centered order passed away, while God's New Covenant dwelling remained forever (Hebrews 8:13, Hebrews 12:26-28).

† This also explains why John later says he saw no temple in the city. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. God's presence is no longer approached through the Old Covenant sanctuary system (Revelation 21:22).

† The Bible begins with God walking with humanity in a garden and ends with God's dwelling permanently established with His people. Eden's fellowship becomes New Jerusalem's reality.

Historical References

† Josephus recorded the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70, describing the burning of the sanctuary and the devastation that followed. That historical judgment permanently removed the physical temple that had stood at the center of Old Covenant worship (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6).

† Josephus' account is historically significant because Revelation's dwelling theme doesn't require the restoration of that destroyed sanctuary. The New Testament had already identified Christ and His people as God's true dwelling place before the old temple disappeared (John 2:19-21, Ephesians 2:19-22).

† Eusebius later recorded the tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed the city before the war and went to Pella. He connected the devastation of Jerusalem with the judgment that came upon that generation (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7).

† These historical witnesses don't establish our doctrine, Scripture does. They provide historical testimony concerning the first-century destruction of the city and temple that stood at the center of the Old Covenant world.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to travel to Jerusalem to find God's dwelling place. God's people are His temple, and believers have access to the Father through Christ in one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18-22).

† We aren't waiting for another stone sanctuary to restore God's presence. In Christ, God's dwelling is already among His covenant people (2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:22).

† We don't live outside New Jerusalem waiting for it to descend someday. Through Christ we've come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† This changes how we tell the entire biblical story. Christianity isn't fundamentally an evacuation plan from planet earth. It's the story of reconciliation, restored fellowship, and God dwelling with His redeemed people through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

† Eden showed us fellowship lost. The tabernacle showed us God dwelling among a covenant people. The temple showed us His presence symbolically centered among Israel. Jesus revealed God dwelling among us in flesh. The church became His living temple. New Jerusalem reveals the completed New Covenant reality, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men (Revelation 21:3).

† The Bible's greatest story isn't earth going to heaven. It's God coming to dwell with man.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does Revelation 21 describe believers leaving earth and going to heaven?

A: The direction described in the passage is the opposite. John sees New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, followed by the announcement that God's tabernacle is with mankind (Revelation 21:2-3).

Q: Was God's physical temple in Jerusalem intended to be His permanent dwelling place?

A: No. Solomon acknowledged that even heaven couldn't contain God, much less a house built by human hands. The New Testament identifies believers in Christ as God's temple and dwelling in the Spirit (1 Kings 8:27, Ephesians 2:19-22).

Q: When did God's people become His temple?

A: The apostles already described first-century believers as God's temple. Paul said, we are a temple of the living God, and told the Ephesians they were being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:21-22).

Q: Why does Revelation 21 use tabernacle language?

A: Because Revelation is bringing the Bible's dwelling-place theme to its climax. The promise that God would dwell among His people runs from the tabernacle and covenant promises into Christ, the church, and New Jerusalem (Exodus 25:8, Leviticus 26:11-12, John 1:14, Revelation 21:3).

Q: Why is there no temple in New Jerusalem?

A: Because the Old Covenant sanctuary isn't needed in the completed New Covenant order. God and the Lamb are its temple, and God's presence is directly among His covenant people (Revelation 21:22).

Q: Are believers waiting to enter the heavenly Jerusalem?

A: Hebrews told first-century believers that they had already come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem. The language is present covenant reality, not merely a distant geographical destination (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: What was ultimately restored from Eden?

A: The central restoration is fellowship with God. Eden presents humanity hiding from God's presence after sin, while Revelation concludes the covenant story with God dwelling among His people (Genesis 3:8, Revelation 21:3).

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

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Source Index

† Genesis 3:8; Exodus 25:8; Leviticus 26:11-12; 1 Kings 8:27; John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:1-3

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7

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