

Heaven Is Not A Place On Earth

By Dave DeWitt

Who Says Heaven Is a Place On Earth

Today, the idea that heaven for the believer is a place on this earth, comes from the covenant reformed branch of Christianity. In the ancient world, it was part of early Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and the ancient Greeks. The idea that this earth will be restored and believers will live on it was common in the early church. But most of the references in the early church are about the Millennial Kingdom, not the eternal state of resurrected believers. [Most preserved are the works of Justin Martyr (c. 100–165 AD) and Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202 AD).]

In this century, the idea, that heaven for believers is a place on this restored earth, is held mainly in the reformed, covenant, amillennial camp, specifically represented by N. T. Wright (Anglican theologian born in 1946) and Anthony Hoekema (1913-1988, professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan). The covenant reformed camp does not take prophecy literally, according to the author's intended meaning. The verses they use about God's kingdom on earth are usually about the Millennial Kingdom, a future kingdom focused on fulfilling God's promises to Israel. It is called a 1,000 year period on earth (six times in Revelation 20), not the eternal destination of believers.

Recently, this (reformed covenant) idea has been restored and promoted by Michael Wittmer in his book "Heaven Is a Place on Earth" (Zondervan 2004). Here are a couple of summary statements about Wittmer's book. The back cover of his book says:

"This planet is more than just a stop-over on your way to heaven. It is your final destination. God wants you to enjoy your earthly existence, and to think otherwise is to miss the life he intends for you."

A recent blog site summarized the book this way:

"Wittmer uses the creation-fall-redemption-consummation framework to argue that Christian hope ultimately involves the renewal of creation rather than escape from earth. Wittmer follows the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation model, spending the majority of his time in creation and the creation or cultural mandate. A summary that can be used is:

Creation – everything God made is good

Fall – everything has been broken by sin

Redemption – everything must be restored to its original goodness." [coramdeotheblog.com]

His redemption idea is interesting in that he sees redemption not only for us sinners but for all of creation. But redemption purchases our sins. Nature was cursed, but in what sense does nature sin?

John Stonestreet, president of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, focuses on bringing a Christian worldview to the cultures of this earth. In 2015, he co-authored a book called, "Restoring All Things." "Stonestreet insists that the Bible is not merely about getting individuals saved or escaping the world. Rather it's about God making *all things new*—the redemption of people and the renewal of creation." [ChatGPT summary] He also preaches this view on Moody Radio.

A few years ago, I was in the audience listening to a John Stonestreet, who was promoting this heaven-on-earth view. His emphasis was on changing the culture. When he opened the meeting for questions, I asked, “What about 2 Peter 3:10, where Peter said, ...*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 burned up.* Stonestreet said, “Well, there are different interpretations of that passage.” I did not ask a follow-up question, but I should have asked, “What about the interpretation that says ‘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 burned up’?”

What Does the Bible Say about Heaven and Earth?

We Are Aliens and Strangers On Earth, Not Citizens

- **1 Peter 1:1 & 4**, *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who **reside as aliens**...to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in **heaven** for you.*
- **1 Peter 2:11**, *Beloved, I urge you as **aliens and strangers** to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.*
- **Philippians 3:20**, *For our **citizenship is in heaven**, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*
- **John 18:36**, *Jesus answered, “My kingdom is **not of this world**. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”*
- **John 14:2-3**, [Jesus told His disciples] *“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to Myself**, that where I am, there you may be also.”*
- **Hebrews 11:13**, *All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were **strangers and exiles on the earth**.*

The Apostle Peter addressed the believers living in Asia Minor as those who are aliens and strangers on this earth. Aliens living in a foreign land should not try to impose their culture on that land. We are aliens on this earth and strangers to its culture. We should follow the Bible. We should not mistreat the earth or its inhabitants. But neither should we see ourselves as part of it or try to change its culture, as if without the Holy Spirit the unbelieving world could adapt a Christian culture. The Apostle Paul told the Philippian believers their citizenship was in heaven, not on a redeemed, fixed-up earth. This emphasizes Jesus’ promise to prepare a place for His disciples, and that He would come to receive them (Rapture them), to be where He is. The author of Hebrews says even the Old Testament believers understood *that they were strangers and exiles on the earth*.

Our Eternal Destiny Is On a New Earth, Not a Renewal Of This Earth

- **2 Peter 3:13**, *But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a **new earth**, in which righteousness dwells.*
- **Revelation 21:1**, *Then I saw a new heaven and a **new earth***
- **Revelation 21:5**, *And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making **all things new**.”*

The word for “new” occurs 44 times in the KJV Bible. The Greek word in the phrase *a new heaven and a new earth* is the common Greek word for *new*. This word always means new, **not** renew or restore. There is a Greek word for “renew” (Hebrews 6:6), there is also a Greek word for “restore” (Acts 15:16), neither of which are used here. The point is, if the authors (the Apostles Peter and John) wanted to

communicate that this earth is renewed or restored, there is a Greek word for that. But the authors use the word which can only mean “new.” [Strong’s Greek Dictionary defines this word as “new (especially in freshness).” Again fresh, not refresh.]

Let’s take a closer look at Revelation 21:1

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.

Wittmer quotes the verse this way.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... and He will dwell with them.”

Notice Wittmer just leaves out the statement, *for the first heaven and the first earth passed away*. That is totally dishonest. There is no textual problem here, it is not an interpreter’s note, it is part of the original text that the Apostle John wrote. It is certainly okay to omit a part of a passage that does not address your point, but it is not legitimate to omit a part of a passage that disagrees with your point, without addressing it.

Jesus said,

- **Matthew 24:35**, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*”
- **Mark 13:31**, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*”
- **Luke 21:33**, “*Heaven and earth will pass away...*”

The Mind of the Believer Should Be Focused on Heaven Not This Earth

- **Colossians 3:2**, *Set your mind on the things above, **not** on the things that are **on earth**.*
- **Hebrews 11:10**, *for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*
- **Hebrews 11:16**, *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a **heavenly** one.*
- **Hebrews 12:22**, *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly Jerusalem**.*
- **Revelation 3:12**, *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God...the **new Jerusalem**, which comes down out of heaven from My God.*

The New Jerusalem Could Not Possibly Fit On This Earth

- **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, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them...”*
- **Revelation 21:10**, *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me **the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**.*

John’s revelation continued as he observed a new heaven and a new earth. The only geographic description we have of the new earth is that it no longer has any sea (either meaning no large body of water or no salt water).

The new heaven and new earth is also a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.

- **Isaiah 65:17**, *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.*
- **Isaiah 66:22**, “...the new heavens and the **new earth** which I make will endure before Me,” declares the LORD...

The Dimensions of the New Jerusalem

[The top two pictures from bibleinfo.com/en/questions/new-jerusalem]

- **Revelation 21:16**, *The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles [lit. 12,000 stadia, one of which is approximately 600 ft, therefore, a total of 7,200,000 ft]; its length and width and height are equal.*

The city is laid out as a square, but it is given with three dimensions. So it is a cube or a pyramid, or possibly a mountain, with all 3 dimensions being approximately 1,380 miles (2,220 km). Each of the three dimensions is further than where I work in Grand Rapids, Michigan to the Mexican border on the southern tip of Texas. It is from London, England, all the way across Europe to the Black Sea.

But it is also that high. Commercial airliners fly at or below 40,000 ft. There are 5,280 ft in a mile. So, 1,380 miles x 5,280 feet = 7,286,400 ft. That divided by 40,000 (the maximum height of airliners) = 182.16 miles. That means the height of the New Jerusalem is 182 times higher than you will ever fly in a commercial airplane. If you fly with the airlines on a long flight, where they are at their highest allowed altitude, look down and imagine that the New Jerusalem is 182 times higher than that. Satellites low-orbit the earth between 100 and 1243 miles (160 km and 2,000 km). So the top of the New Jerusalem is higher than the highest satellite circling the earth. It is absurd to think this massive city could fit on this earth. It would take a planet the size of Saturn to accommodate such a city.

[The top picture shows the size of the base of the city. The next picture is an artist conception of the city. The next picture shows the satellites around the earth in 2025. The bottom two pictures, taken from satellites, show something of what the earth looks like from about 100 miles up.]

Conclusion

If the Bible is understood by the author’s intended meaning (literally), then there is no evidence that “Heaven is a place on earth.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*

