

men and women is confined, for the time, within certain narrow limits. Now is not the time for human beings to experience unlimited strength. Nevertheless, where there is true consciousness of God, there is for human experience a strength from God which is always adequate to the need. It was God's assurance to the Apostle Paul, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Precisely in what ways God's strength is exerted on behalf of men and women it is not possible to describe. It is a truth to be received and valued by all who trust God's promise. There are, however, certain things that can be affirmed with confidence. If our object in life is to serve God according to His Word, then His strength will be with us as we pursue that object in all the circumstances that may arise. Equally certain it is that God's strength does not compel, in the sense of making us godly against our will. True, in His love and mercy, God may bring circumstances to bear upon our life to help us to recognise Him and retrace our steps if need be. God asks our heart, and, in so far as we give it to Him, He supports us and strengthens us in the way. As our trust in God's strength grows, so our reliance upon self

diminishes and human strength ceases to be of first moment.

The great Apostle Paul once counselled a young man: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). It is presented as a personal duty to grow strong, in grace. There is indicated a strength which is God-given, and our personal duty consists in seeking it from Him Who is the great source. That strength will be cultivated by meditation upon God's Word, receiving cheer from the friendship and sympathy of Jesus, inspiration from his example and encouragement in anticipation of the coming day.

We have said that God's strength for men and women is confined for the present within comparatively narrow limits. It will not always be so. The psalmist says, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the high ways to Zion . . . They go from strength to strength, every one of them appeareth before God in Zion" (Ps. 84:5,7, RV). When the Redeemer comes to Zion, God's strength will be imparted to His children in fullest measure, for "the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (v. 11).

New series

An exposition of Revelation 21

1. A new heaven and a new earth

Mark Allfree

In this series we examine in detail the vision of the "new heaven and a new earth" that the Apostle John saw in Revelation 21. We shall see that this chapter speaks of great blessings that God has in store for those that love Him and keep His commandments. It is hoped that our consideration of this vision that John saw will encourage us in our discipleship as we seek to overcome, so that ultimately, in the grace of God, we may "inherit all things", and be invited to drink "of the fountain of the water of life freely" (vv. 6,7).

REVELATION 21 falls readily into two unequal parts, each of which will be dealt with in two articles:

- verses 1-8, where John sees "a new heaven and a new earth"
- verses 9-27, where John sees a vision of "holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God". John gives to us a very dramatic description of this apocalyptic city.

A new heaven and a new earth

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (v. 1). In seeking to understand the significance of what John saw, we must begin at first principles, and establish what the prophetic scriptures signify when they speak of heaven and earth.

It is well established that, in symbolic terms, the heaven represents rulership and the earth

represents those who are ruled over. This principle emerges as early as Genesis 1, where we have the account of the creation of the literal heaven and earth: "And God made two great lights; the greater light to *rule* the day, and the lesser light to *rule* the night: He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to *rule* over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good" (vv. 16-18).

In the physical system of things, the heavens bear rule over the earth. What takes place on the earth is governed by the movements of the heavenly bodies. Applying this principle to the political sphere we can therefore conclude that the heavens represent ruling powers and the earth represents those who are ruled over. We thus find, for example, that on a number of occasions the nation of Israel, with its government and its subjects, is described as consisting of heavens and an earth:

- 1 **Deuteronomy 31:30–32:1.** Moses here in his speech to the whole congregation of Israel addressed his audience as "O ye heavens" and "O earth": "And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended. Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth".
- 2 **Daniel 8:10.** In Daniel's prophecy of the ram and the he-goat we learn how the little horn of the goat, representing Rome, would destroy the Jewish political administration, fulfilled in A.D. 70: "And it [the little horn] waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them".
- 3 **Joel 2:30,31.** Joel similarly described the events of A.D. 70 and the destruction of the nation of Israel in terms of the shaking of heavens and earth: "And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come". That Joel's prophecy does indeed refer to the destruction of Israel's body politic in A.D. 70 is confirmed by Peter's quotation of this passage on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21).
- 4 **Luke 21:25,26.** Jesus picked up this same theme in his great Mount Olivet Prophecy when he predicted the downfall of the commonwealth of Israel at the hands of the Romans because of their rejection of him: "And

there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken".

We can now apply this principle to Revelation 21. When John saw "a new heaven and a new earth", this signified the development of a new political arrangement of things. The question is, which?

Peter's great heavens and earth prophecy

2 Peter 3 is a key passage that will help us, because in that chapter we have this very phrase which was used by John: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for *new heavens and a new earth*, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (v. 13).

In this well-known prophecy, Peter describes three distinct political arrangements, each of which he describes as consisting of heavens and an earth:

- 1 **The world before the Flood.** "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God *the heavens* were of old, and *the earth* standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (vv. 5,6). Note that this is not talking about the literal heavens and earth, but a political system of things. The literal heavens and earth were not destroyed by the waters of the Flood.
- 2 **The Jewish commonwealth in the first century.** ". . . but *the heavens and the earth*, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (v. 7). Peter is making the point that, as surely as the world was destroyed by the Flood because the wickedness of man was great in the earth, so the Israelitish heavens and earth that existed in his days would not escape God's judgements because of ungodliness, manifested by their crucifixion of the Son of God. This part of the prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70.
- 3 **The Kingdom age.** "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for *new heavens and a new earth*, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (v. 13). Peter here is speaking, not of the post-millennial period, but of the Millennium itself, the Kingdom of God for which we all hope and pray. This is clearly the case, because he is making a quotation from Isaiah 65, which

is all about the Kingdom of God. We need to look at this now in detail.

Isaiah 65

Isaiah in this chapter is clearly describing the world as it will be in the millennial age:

- “the child shall die an hundred years old” (v. 20); death will be restrained, but still exist;
- “they shall build houses, and inhabit them” (v. 21);
- “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (v. 25);
- “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain” (v. 25).

Concerning this glorious age that God will bring into existence, Isaiah says, “For, behold, I create *new heavens and a new earth*: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create *Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy*” (vv. 17,18).

Note that Isaiah interprets for us what the new heavens and the new earth represent. The new heavens stand for “Jerusalem”, that is, the political government of Christ and the saints who will rule from Jerusalem. The new earth represents “her people”, that is, the restored, regathered nation of Israel. This is the situation that will prevail in the millennial period. So, when John saw the new heaven and new earth, what he actually saw was “the holy city, *new Jerusalem*, coming down from God out of heaven” (Rev. 21:2).

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|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| New heavens | “Jerusalem” | Government of Jesus and the saints |
| New earth | “Her people” | Israel in the Kingdom of God |

When we look a little closer at Isaiah 65, it becomes clear that there are other links with John’s vision of the new heaven and new earth, which support our conclusion that John is seeing a vision of the millennial age.

| Isaiah 65 | Revelation 21 |
|---|--|
| “The voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (v. 19) | “Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying” (v. 4, RV) |
| “The former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (v. 17, RV) | “The former things are passed away” (v. 4) |

The language of the covenants

The next thing that should be observed is that the context of Isaiah’s description of the new heavens and new earth is that of the covenant that God made with Abraham. This is crucial to our understanding of Revelation 21, as we shall see in subsequent studies. Essentially what Isaiah is saying is that the Abrahamic promise will be fulfilled when the new heavens and new earth are created: “he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because *the former troubles are forgotten*, and because they are hid from Mine eyes. For, behold, I create *new heavens and a new earth*” (65:16,17).

A cursory reading of this might miss the fact that this is quite definitely the language of the covenant:

- “sweareth”
- “he who blesseth himself”; compare this with Genesis 22:18: “in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed [mg. bless themselves]”
- “the God of truth [Heb. *amen*, a covenant word]”.

Regarding the word *amen*, whenever we come across this word in the Hebrew, or transliterated into the Greek, we must think of the covenants. Here are two examples which illustrate the point:

2 Corinthians 1:20. “All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen”.

Psalms 72:17-19. “His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed [mg. bless themselves] in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen”.

Isaiah’s new heavens and new earth thus have to do with the covenants of promise. The two things are intertwined. This should not really surprise us, because this was precisely what God promised to Abraham in Genesis 22:17,18: “in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as *the stars of the heaven*, and as *the sand which is upon the sea shore*; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed [mg. bless themselves]; because thou hast obeyed My voice”.

Abraham was thus promised two seeds:

- 1 A seed as numerous as the stars of heaven; the new heavens, that is, the saints in Christ, heirs according to the promise.
- 2 A seed as numerous as the sand on the sea shore; the new earth, that is, Abraham's fleshly descendants, the people of Israel.

In the next study we shall see that, as we look further into Revelation 21, it becomes clear that this vision of a new heaven and a new earth that John sees is also based upon the covenant made with the fathers of old. The two cannot be separated.

(To be continued)

Understanding Revelation 12

3. The interpretation of Revelation 12:5-17

David Green

THE VERSE-BY-VERSE interpretation of Revelation chapter 12 in tabulated form is completed in this article, but a detailed consideration of important links with other parts of the Bible will be left to the fourth and final part of this study.

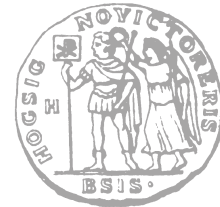
Christian support for Constantine

The apostate church regarded Constantine as being the servant of Christ who was fighting the battles of the Lord. After his conversion, the 'Chi-Rho' monogram, signifying the title 'Christ', was prominently displayed on his soldiers' shields and standards. It also appears on all Constantine's coins from A.D. 315. This monogram usually consisted of X, with P superimposed, but there is some evidence that the form used at Milvian Bridge in 312 was the letter X with the right hand top bent over.¹ The Christians saw Constantine's victories as evidence that he was inspired and led by the Lord of hosts, but the opposing pagans saw them as proof that their gods had fallen before the power of God and His Christ (12:10).

The downfall of the dragon (v. 9)

In one of his coins Constantine pictured his defeat of the pagan Roman power as a dragon being trodden under his foot, and in another pinned down by the Christian 'Chi-Rho' standard (see picture). This suggests that the Christians of those days considered that the vision of the man-child and Michael was fulfilled in the person of Constantine.

It is interesting to note the language used by Constantine when writing to the Church historian Eusebius, a bishop who lived through those times. He referred to his victories as being due to the providence of God: "that dragon having been



Above: Coin depicting a woman placing the coronal wreath of victory on Constantine, who is holding a standard with the Christian 'Chi-Rho' monogram.

Below: Constantine's victory over paganism depicted as a dragon being pinned down by the 'Chi-Rho' standard.



Pictures of coins taken from *The Revelation: Which Interpretation?* by Brother Graham Pearce. Used by permission of the Christadelphian Scripture Study Service.

deposed from the governance of affairs, by God's providence"; and, "that dragon driven from the administration of public affairs by the providence of the great God, and by my ministry". We are also informed by Eusebius that a picture of Constantine was set up over the palace gate, with the cross over his head, and under his feet a dragon

1. Lactantius, tutor to Constantine's son Crispus, from about 317.