

**Revelation 21:1-3:** “*1 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. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*”

### **Meaning:**

***I saw a new heaven and a new earth:*** Before we deal with the exact context of this phrase, there is something very important which Bible students should know about the book of Revelation. The fact is that, the book of Revelation speaks of the past, present and future things (Rev 1:19): The **past events** were of the visions in the book of Daniel, the history of the New Testament Church of about 32 years later (i.e. A.D 65 - A.D 33; if the book was written probably between A.D 65 & 96), and the life of the remnant Jews in Jerusalem; The **present events** were of the current situations of the New Testament Church (the 7 Churches) in Asia Minor, even concerning their attacks by the Jews (Rev 3:9) and some wicked governors and citizens of Rome; The **future events** were of the foreknown destruction of Jerusalem in A.D 70 (Mat 24; Mrk 13; Lk 21:5-36), the state persecutions of the Church in Asia Minor by the Roman rule, the judgement of Rome which probably occurred in A.D 476, the glory and victory of the saints after the judgement of Rome, and the eternal presentation of the Lord's Church in Heaven as compared to the final judgment of the entire world (Rev 20:11-15; etc.).

Critical analysis proves that, the book speaks of the events of both the existing church and the Roman kingdom. And a careful study through Rev 6 - 20 proves that, whenever the church is persecuted, God in turn judges the enemies and gives hope and eternal glory to the faithful members of the church.

John, having finished a picture of the end result of evil in chapter 20, now

gives a picture in 21:1 - 22:5 of the redeemed state of the church on earth.

Therefore, the phrase "a new heaven and a new earth" would not be a reference to a different planet or dwelling place which was fixed into this earth for the righteous to have peaceful living in it. But it will indirectly refer to the world of the righteous or the redeemed church on the earth of the wicked. Remember that heaven the eternal home of the redeemed and saved, will not descend down into this temporal word which shall be destroyed with fire on the judgment day (2 Pet 3:7-13). That is, the figure used here is of the church that is garnished as the heavenly temple, for the purpose of John's vision here, which reveals "*...the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God*" (Rev 21:10).

Simply, what John views here is the Church's true future splendor as prepared through the cleansing blood of Jesus (Heb 12:22-24). This same event is however, used as clear example (Heb 9:9; 1 Co 10:11; Rom 15:4; James 5:10) of what will happen to all the redeemed on the judgement which is to come, the final judgment of the entire world (Matt 25:31-46).

***For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away:*** The presentation of the "first heaven and first earth" in the apocalyptic literature in reference to this context, does not literally refer to the same heaven and earth created by God in the beginning, as the whole universe (Gen 1:1; Jer. 23:24; Acts 17:24); but the purpose was to fulfill the figurative presentation of the Roman world given in Christ's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D 70 after which their world would pass away (Matt 24:35). In deed, the Roman world (which is all about the territories of Rome) passed away in A.D 476.

Thus, "the earth" (Rev 6:13,15) refers to the Roman empire/kingdom or the physical environment of Rome (Rev 8:7); "the fourth part of the earth" (Rev 6:8) refers to the limited areas of the whole world, as the Asia Minor; "them that dwell on earth" (Rev 6:10) just like "the inhabitants of the earth" (Rev 8:13) refers to the wicked who persecuted the church in Asia Minor; "the four corners of the earth" (Rev 7:1) refers to the entire world (Rev 20:8;

Isaiah 11:12, 24:16; Matt 24:31); and “all the world” (Rev 13:3) makes reference to the territories which were reigned by Rome in the 1st century. Bible students should understand that, Rome conquered about  $\frac{3}{4}$  part of this world and thus, all the given phrases and the like in the book of Revelation according to the exact contexts, make reference to “the third part of the world” (Rev 8:7-9, 12; 9:18) conquered by the Romans.

Even according to the six realms in Buddhism (from most to least pleasant), Buddhists believe that “Heaven is the home of the gods (devas): which is a realm of enjoyment inhabited by blissful, long-lived beings. And then subdivided by later sources into 26 levels of increasing happiness.” But this idea is false and unbiblical as we have one God (1 Co 12:6; Eph 4:5-6) who is in heaven (Psalm 115:3).

We should also understand that there are three heavens: **The firmament** (Gen 1:8) as "fowls of the heaven" (Gen. 2:19; 7:3, 23; Ps. 8:8, etc.), "the eagles of heaven" (Lam. 4:19); **The starry heavens** (Deut. 17:3; Jer. 8:2; Matt. 24:29); and "**The heaven of heavens,**" or "the third heaven" (Deut. 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 115:16; 148:4). Some demons live in the "high places" (Eph 6:12), but actually not in the third heaven, where God lives (2 Co 12:2). But according to John, the heaven is figuratively presented in his vision to depict the splendor of God's community.

All the related phrases given here are therefore, limited figures referring to the world of the Roman Empire. When this world of the wicked passes away, God would then establish His own community in peace. The meaning here is that the same people redeemed on earth as the church are the same people registered in heaven before God (Heb 12:22-23; Matt 16:19, 18:18).

***There was no more sea:*** “The earth and the sea” (Rev 7:2) used together would refer to the Roman empire (“sea”) as the subset of the entire world (“earth”). Though the apocalyptic symbol, sea (as a combination of many waters ... Eccl 1:7), makes reference to the entire world in some cases (Lk 5:10), the sea here is likened unto the arrogance and wickednesses of the

Roman rule which in this context of John's vision exists no more because God has judged her. Listen to the interpretation given by the angel about the sea/many waters according to **Revelation 17:15**; "*And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*" Even John himself was shocked of the vision but when it was interpreted by the angel, he understood it very well as that which was referring to the Roman kingdom (Rev 17:7; 13:1).

Thus, the sea in reference to the wickedness of mankind, even Rome, would no longer be seen in the kingdom of God (which is the church presented as the new heaven).

***The holy city, new Jerusalem:*** Spiritually, the new Jerusalem is heaven (Heb 12:22; Gal 4:25-26; Heb 11:16; Rev 21:10-27) but the context here gives another picture of the dwelling places of God (Eccl 5:2) giving rise to a holy city on the earth of mankind figuratively.

***Coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband:*** Now, John saw "the new heaven and the new earth" coming down from God's heaven, which has been prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The question is; if the new heaven and earth came down from an already existing heaven of God, how can this descended heaven be the original heaven of the Almighty God? ... John summarizes the exact meaning of the heaven under discussion here, which is prepared as a bride to be wedded by a bridegroom.

According to the Bible, Christ does not and will not marry a real city, even heaven His own dwelling place (Jn 17:5, 24), but the New Testament Church is His wife. Christ marries the Church at all time in every generation since A.D 33 (Eph 5:27-33), and will finally wed her in heaven after the judgement of the entire world (2 Co 11:2-3; Matt 25:1-13). Thus the church is the bride adorned in the context of John's vision here (Rev 21:9).

Students have debated as to whether this picture of the church here refers to the church on earth or to the church in her final place of rest in eternal

glory. But the fact is that, what John saw was of the present state of the church that existed in her glory on earth after the judgement of Rome in 476 C.E, and will also be the presentation of the same redeemed community as well as the saints in all times in the third heaven (2 Co 12:2) as our eternal home.

All these mean that the real heaven was still in existence while a new heaven and earth came down on the earth of the living. And this does not prove the eternal existence of the redeemed on earth. But it proves the presence of God's glory with the community of the righteous, the church (Exo 33:3-16; Isa. 7:14).

*I heard a great voice out of heaven:* God now gives His speech to honor the faithful members of the Church on earth.

*The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them:* God in heaven declares to set His temple or tabernacle in the Church ("men"). This is the exact prove that God lives in the bodies of the righteous (Acts 17:24; 1 Co 3:16-17).

*(The Lord will dwell with them) and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God:* This shows the existing covenant traced from prophecy between God and the Church of the New Testament (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:6-13). When God dwells in the temples of those willing to accept Him into eternity, He lives with them as their God.

**Note:** The splendor of the Church shown in Rev 21:1-3 is sometimes literally interpreted by some Bible students in reference to a heaven that sprouted out of the heaven; but they should not lose the context here. However, the context is what has been provided.

### The idea of "a big God living in a small man."

The general idea gained in this studies affirm that the Most High God lives in the bodies of the righteous in this Christian dispensation, but many

people suggest that this big God cannot dwell in the small bodies of mankind. The many assumptions though are mere carnal, we still need to examine them and correct certain areas where necessary with the Bible; because they are most at times tagged with some religious beliefs about God.

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Different religions have had different ideas of God as some view Him to be so big in size, very tall in height, and very heavy in weight. For example: Bahá'ís believe that God is too great to be ever understood by the finite human mind. Hindus believe that God is an impersonal energy; He is ultimately beyond language and anything that can be said about Him cannot capture the reality. According to Islam, Allah (Arabic word for God) knows everything that can be known; can do anything that can be done. They also believe that Allah has no shape or form i.e. Allah can't be seen; Allah can't be heard; Allah is neither male nor female. Just like the Sikhs (of Sikhism) who believe that God is without form, or gender. But the fact is that all these claims and the like do not match with the Bible. We should understand that God is not a man (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29); God is spirit (Jn 4:24), and spirit beings even those in heaven have their own forms and bodies (1 Co 15:40-41). So in this sense, God can occupy space and volume, even His temple (Isa. 6:1,3).

Amongst some Bible students, certain researchs have proven that, "The biblical portrait of God develops both transcendent and immanent aspects of His nature. The transcendent nature is not like people and infinitely above people. The immanent nature is intimately present with people and among people. God's transcendence places Him beyond the limits of time and space. His nature as uncreated and separate from His creation is a fundamental concept distinguishing a biblical understanding of God from other philosophical or religious theories, such as pantheism or monism."

It is not new to identify amongst certain Christians with this claim that God must be bigger, taller, and heavier than a mortal man. Though their assertions are sometimes backed by some alleged biblical proofs, they fail

to recognize amongst humanity the fact that there were/are saints even amongst men (Gen 6:4; Num 13:33; Deut 2:11, 20; 3:11,13; Joshua 12:4; 13:12; 18:16); So comparatively, what should be the supposed size of God?

Nevertheless, some people think God should be bigger than everyone based on the fact that, God is everywhere (Psalm 139:7-8); His hand can cover mankind (Ex 33:18-23) and hold people (Psalm 139:9-10) and their hearts (Prov 21:1); He fills heaven and earth (Jer 23:23-24); He has made heaven and Earth with His outstretched arm (Jer 32:17; Psalm 90:2); He laid the foundations of the earth, with measures as He stretched the line upon it (Job 38:1-5); etc. But deep studies proves that all these do not make God bigger in size; through His deepest wisdom (Isa. 55:8-9), His greatness becomes unsearchable (Psalm 145:3; Rom 11:33).

What does it actually mean when we say God lives in mankind? ... Do you personally think of that God literally coming down from heaven to live in billions of Christians on earth? ... This is mystery unveiled through the Church (Eph 1:7-12; 3:10-12). God living in the saints as His temporarily built temples on earth (1 Co 3:16-17) simply means that God's presence is with us through the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-18; 16:13-15) and that bears witness with our spirits (Rom 8:14-16). God's presence continually dwells amongst us when we seek Him (1 Chron 16:11) and He abides in us when we love (1 Jn 4:16); and He becomes greater in us (1 Jn 4:4). In this sense, Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20). Therefore, it does not matter the size of God, when He dwells in us and makes us increase in size spiritually (Eph 3:14-19), as His temples, as His Church (Rev 21:3).

## Differences between the Temple and the Church.

<b>The Temple</b>	<b>The Church</b>
1. The temple refers to the individual believers in the Church (2 Co 6:16).	The church is the combination of two or more temples (Eph 2:20-22).
2. The temple is the body of mankind which partakes in the church which is the body of Christ (1 Co 6:15-17)	The Church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23).
3. God or the Holy Spirit dwells in the temple of the righteous (1 Co 3:16-17).	God presents Himself amongst groups of people as a church when two or more of His temples meet in His name (Matt 18:20).
4. The body that possesses the Holy Spirit is the temple of Christ (1 Co 6:19-20).	The church that is purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and has all things being controlled and directed by the Christ the Head (Col 1:18; Eph 4:15-16) is the Church of Christ (Rom 16:16).
5. The Lord adds up a temple to a local church through baptism (Acts 19:1-7).	The Lord adds up a temple to the universal church (Acts 2:47).
6. The temple cannot be changed unless through backsliding.	One's membership in a local church can be changed.

Lesson prepared by: **Bro. Seth Nyarko**, Teacher of the Apocalyptic Literature.

*Contact: 0249289180 / ~~0504156724~~*