

## The law fulfilled; heaven and earth passed away

Matthew 5:17-20 – Christ fulfills the law

<sup>17</sup>"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

<sup>18</sup>For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

<sup>19</sup>Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>20</sup>For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

In v. 18, "heaven and earth", when cross referenced with the same phrase in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24):

<sup>34</sup>"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>35</sup>**Heaven and earth will pass away**, but My words will by no means pass away."

...and when considered in its historical context, refers to the old covenant and its temple (the house left desolate).

The reference to the passing away of "heaven and earth" must be considered in light of the establishment of that same "heaven and earth" in **Isaiah 51**:

<sup>15</sup>"I am the LORD your God, Who divided the sea whose waves roared --- The LORD of hosts is His name. <sup>16</sup>And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, That I may plant the **heavens**, Lay the foundations of the **earth**, And say to Zion, 'You are My people.'"

The LORD was not depicting the original physical creation 3,000 years previously, but rather the establishment of the old (Mosaic) covenant upon bringing His people out of Egypt. cf. Jeremiah 31:32.

This is clearly metaphorical. The same is true of **Isaiah 65:17**, and **Isaiah 66:22**, for the context in all these places confines the reference to Jerusalem and the people of God.

[Milton S. Terry, footnote in [Biblical Hermeneutics](#), p. 489]:

**Isa 65:17** "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

**Isa 66:22** "For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain.

Interpreting "heaven and earth passing away" in Matthew 5:18 as the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple fits with the rest of the New Testament prophecy paradigm, which is the transition of the ages from the Old to the New Covenant.

Our Lord spoke of Israel (the "heavens and earth" of Isaiah 51:16) passing away, as the old covenant would become a thing of the past.

And while to some it may seem a stretch to refer to Jerusalem as "heaven and earth," Jesus will more explicitly make this application in Luke 21:32–33: after describing the coming destruction of Jerusalem vividly, Jesus adds, "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. **Heaven and earth will pass away**, but my words will not pass away." This is a clear reference to Jerusalem that *would in fact* ("will") pass away, and would do so within Jesus' generation. The meaning is certainly the same in Luke 16:17. [and Matthew 24:35 -GG]. The Law itself was eternal, and would stand as the bar by which Jesus would sue that generation's adulterous expression of the Law.

[Joel McDurmon, Jesus Vs Jerusalem, pdf p. 108]

While the coming of Christ, and especially His death, made possible this new era of things, yet the manifestation of it was not possible until the Temple itself and all its rituals were completely abolished. As is written in Hebrews 9:8, "The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing."

In the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, after it was no longer standing, it was manifested that the old covenant had vanished away, and the new heaven and new earth (in an already/not yet sense) of this gospel dispensation was then in effect.

In all of this we see that from Christ until A.D. 70 there was a gradual transition from the old age to the new. He came in the end of the age (Hebrews 9:26). The old was ready to vanish away. The new was manifested after the Temple was destroyed (Hebrews 9:8).

[John L. Bray, Heaven and Earth Shall Pass Away, pdf p. 4-5]

The book of Hebrews spells it out clearly, describing the Old Covenant as "obsolete" and "about to disappear." The once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God in 30AD ended it, but it wasn't wiped out completely until people could no longer return to the Temple for sacrifices.

In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. -Hebrews 8:13

Indeed, the Jews were about to witness the passing away of their "heaven and earth," Jerusalem. And the passing away of Jerusalem would come as a result of judgment according to the very Law they had for so long ignored and abused.

Certainly the literal heaven and earth have not passed away, but **"heaven and earth" did indeed pass away** with the termination of the old covenant economy, in those "days of vengeance" (cf. Luke 21:22). If the reference is to the literal, physical world, then every jot and title of the Pentateuch's 613 ordinances would remain in force and still be obligatory...

...and we'd have a backlog of Jubilee years to celebrate, "cities of refuge" to resurrect, and lot of bleeding lambs to burn on an altar, etc., etc., etc., etc. (a yoke even our fathers were unable to bear cf. Acts 15:10)...

...we'd have to switch our Sabbath back to Saturday, throw out all our clothes that mix linen and cotton (no more 50/50 t-shirts), and perhaps worst of all: stop eating bacon & shrimp... :-]

Thankfully, with all praise and thanksgiving, we are in a new and better covenant, as "heaven and earth" in Matthew 5:18 is a reference to Jerusalem and the temple-centered cosmology of old covenant Israel, which would indeed pass away in 70AD, as judgment came down on the world of the Jews.

Interestingly, the Jerusalem Temple had been built to look like a microcosm of the universe. We typically overlook how literally true the Temple hymn preserved in **Psalm 78:69** is: *"He built His sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which He has founded forever."*



Where Heaven and Earth Was for First-Century Jews

The actual holy place and most holy place inside the Temple building were constructed like earth and heaven. The courts outside represented the sea.

[Paul Penley, When Heaven and Earth Passed Away, pdf p.2]

The destruction of the temple gave way to the new Jerusalem, the "new heavens and earth": living stones in the new living temple: the body of Christ, the church.

~

### **Related notes:**

- That the literal/physical heaven and earth shall pass away is not taught anywhere in Scripture, unless the prophetic imagery of 2 Peter 3:10 is likewise misinterpreted to be taken literalistically.

The literal earth is predicted to *not* pass away. In **Psalm 104:5** David said that God "laid the foundation of the earth, that it shall not be removed forever." And in **Ecclesiastes 1:4** Solomon said, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever."

"And He built His sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which He hath established forever." (**Psalm 78:69**).

"Praise Him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens...  
"He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: He hath made a decree which shall not pass" (**Psalms 148:4,6**).

And God promised after the flood that He would nevermore destroy all of mankind again. "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done." (**Genesis 8:21**).

With the phrase "as I have done" the LORD attests to His power and majesty in His manner of declaration. It is not a "loophole" for Him to smite everything living again but in a different manner, which might be a laughable consideration if not so irreverently preposterous. It would be a blatant contradiction if God was to burn up the elements, meaning atoms & molecules according to the modern scientific misinterpretation of prophetic language in 2 Peter 3.

So some may say that God made a covenant with Noah, and that the rainbow would be a reminder of that covenant between Noah and the world, that "the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh" (**Genesis 9:15**). And this, some say, does not rule out God's destruction of the entire world by fire someday - that He will not do it with a flood, but He will do it with fire. They feel that II Peter 3 teaches this. But no, in **Genesis 8:21** God plainly declared that He would never "again smite any more everything living, as I have done."

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 references a former example of a prophesied judgment which came to pass - the flood. It is written that "the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (vs. 6). The word "world" is from the Greek word "kosmos" which means the world in its orderly arrangement, including the inhabitants. It was this "world" which perished - not the earth itself. In Noah's day, the literal heavens were not destroyed by the flood. The literal earth was not destroyed by the flood. It was the PEOPLE, the society that was destroyed.

In Matthew 24:37 Jesus likewise compares His coming in judgment on Israel "as the days of Noah were."

#### Additional Biblical analysis/commentary by KG2:

Remembering that the original wilderness tabernacle was rectangular as were both the first and second temples, pick up on these passages (all NKJV):

"He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." (Isaiah 11:12)

"And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel: 'An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land\*.'" (Ezekiel 7:2)

\*Hebrew ARETZ can be translated as earth (in the broader sense).

"After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree." (Revelation 7:1)

"and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea." (Revelation 20:8)

In other words, the old covenant place of worship had four corners as the physical earth has four compass points; the Israelite camps around the tabernacle were on the east, south, west, and north.

And those who hold that the physical cosmos will be destroyed should consider this:

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because THE CREATION ITSELF ALSO WILL BE DELIVERED from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with BIRTH PANGS together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance."

— Romans 8:18-25

Is the creation groaning with birth pangs only to be divinely ABORTED at the last minute? Or does it indicate:

**A.** A sudden transformation of the lower creation into a glorified state contemporaneous with and analogous to the [resurrection/transformation] of the [physically dead in Christ/then living in the flesh] saints? OR

**B.** That the resurrected and glorified saints will once again have the task of "subduing" not only the earth, but the entire cosmos, being the agency by which it is set free - not from sin, which will have been utterly eradicated - but from the consequences of it.

In other words, holding that the curse extended to the entire physical cosmos, might one new labor/delight of the saints (now incapable of weariness, and always filled with boundless energy) be to continually make the entire physical universe more and more suitable for worshiping God and loving one another?

Again, it would not include battling against sin in self or others. I suggest it will be an eternal calling; one like unfallen Adam's, whose activity was (for however short a time) simultaneously fruitful and meaningful labor, beautiful artistic expression, and godly, joyful play...naming beasts, inventing stuff, getting loose on all kinds of hannonns, lol.

Could Star Trek be the dimmest little providential foreshadowing of how we will seek out who knows what might be "out there," (or IN there, my E.R. Burroughs Pellucidar reader...or at hand, but not detectable to the naked eye, my microscope-ier) and boldly go where no man has gone before?

And since we're talking infinite duration (which I reckon to be an elementary aspect of "eternal life") could the time come after a few billion trillion eons that Father says something like,

"Ah-ite my dear peeps, you've busted THIS universe out pretty well. Let me hook you up with a new, greater, more challenging and wonderful one. Get busy with that glorious freedom I've given you in the Beloved...use it to glorify the thrice holy One, and come up with new ways to shower one another with love."

And on and on forever and ever amen. That's my Keeeng!

--

### **The Day of the Lord (2 Peter 3)**

<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which **the heavens will pass away with a great noise**, and **the elements will melt with fervent heat**; **both the earth and the works [that are] in it will be burned up**.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, since **all these things will be dissolved**, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

<sup>12</sup> looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which **the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire**, and **the elements will melt with fervent heat**?

<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless **we**, according to His promise, look for **new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells**.

The Greek word for "heavenly bodies/elements" (which were to be "burned up") is **STOICHEION**. Everywhere else in the New Testament that this word is used it is about the "elements" of the OLD COVENANT, not strictly physical things (Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20-22; Hebrews 5:12-13):

**Gal, 4:3** Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the **elements of the world**.

**Gal. 4:9** But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and **beggarly elements**, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

**Col. 2:8** Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the **basic principles** of the world, and not according to Christ.

**Col. 2:20** Therefore, if you died with Christ from the **basic principles** of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – <sup>21</sup>“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” <sup>22</sup>which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

**Heb. 5:12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the **first principles** of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

The Greek word for “burned up” is **KATAKAIÖ**, which is otherwise translated as “exposed,” “found to deserve judgment,” or “laid bare.” This is appropriate language for what happened in 70AD to the old covenant order.

For an in-depth analysis of 2 Peter 3:3-18 see  
**What Does Peter Mean by the Passing Away of Heaven and Earth?**

...and here is a helpful postscript comment from Milton Terry:

"That [apocalyptic language] texts may intimate or dimly foreshadow some such ultimate reconstruction of the physical creation [Gentry calls it a “distant adumbration”], need not be denied, for we know not the possibilities of the future, nor the purposes of God respecting all things which He has created... **but the contexts of these several passages do not authorize such a doctrine.**”

--

### **Prophetic Language / Apocalyptic Imagery**

The collapsing universe is a very common example of this symbolism. We find its use in Isa.13:9-11, 19; 24:19-23; 34:4-5; and Ezek.32:7-8, 11-12. The prophecies relate to judgment upon these nations. The collapsing universe is a picture of the fall of governmental authorities – rulers and nations zcp.Gen.1:16). **It is a picture of the disintegration of the normal order of things.** When judgment came upon these nations, did those signs appear in the heavens? Of course not.

**Isa 13:9-11** Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it.  
For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine.  
“I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.  
And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.



**Isa 24:19-23** The earth is violently broken, The earth is split open, The earth is shaken exceedingly.

The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, And shall totter like a hut; Its transgression shall be heavy upon it, And it will fall, and not rise again.

It shall come to pass in that day That the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, And on the earth the kings of the earth.

They will be gathered together, As prisoners are gathered in the pit, And will be shut up in the prison; After many days they will be punished.

Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously.

**Isa 34:4** All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down As the leaf falls from the vine, And as fruit falling from a fig tree.

Isa 34:5 "For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; Indeed it shall come down on Edom, And on the people of My curse, for judgment.

**Ezek 32:7-8** When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give her light.

All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, And bring darkness upon your land,' Says the Lord GOD.

**Ezek 32:11-12** "For thus says the Lord GOD: 'The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you.

'By the swords of the mighty warriors, all of them the most terrible of the nations, I will cause your multitude to fall. 'They shall plunder the pomp of Egypt, And all its multitude shall be destroyed.

**Gen 1:16** Then 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.

Scripture is replete with prophetic imagery depicting the fall of nations/rulers. Here are additional such references, by no means exhaustive:

**Joel 2:10** The earth quakes before them, The heavens tremble; The sun and moon grow dark, And the stars diminish their brightness.

**Joel 2:28** And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. <sup>29</sup>And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. <sup>30</sup>"And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. <sup>31</sup>The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. <sup>32</sup>And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall



be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.

**Acts 2:16** "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup>And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. <sup>21</sup>And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.'

[Compiled in David Chilton, [The Great Tribulation](#)]

--

Here's an insightful exegesis of the parallel passage in the gospel of Luke:

### **All Things New**

by Mark Horne

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and they were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then, the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. *But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the law to fail.* Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and he who marries her who is divorced from a husband commits adultery. (**Luke 16:14-16**; NASB)

Virtually all Bible commentators and theologians agree that verse 17 is a disclaimer to the radical discontinuity Christ has been proclaiming in Luke 16. They argue that, after declaring that the Gospel had replaced the Law and the Prophets, Jesus said, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail"(NASB) in order to prevent anyone from thinking that the Old Testament was no longer binding.

Their reasoning is rather straightforward: Since "heaven and earth" have not passed away, every "stroke of a letter of the Law" must still be binding.

### **Second Thoughts**

There are two problems with this interpretation, however, which should cause us to consider other possibilities. First of all, while every stroke of the Law is undoubtedly "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good

work" (1 Tim. 3:17), nevertheless, we are no longer to obey many of the direct commands contained in the Old Testament.

The Mosaic dietary laws were done away with by Jesus (Mark 7:19) and the Apostle Paul rebukes with strong language those who would continue to enforce them (Col. 2:16-22). Paul also explicitly rejects the binding authority of the Old Testament calendar (Gal. 4:8-11). Christ's sacrifice once and for all ends the need for animal sacrifices (Heb. 10:1-14).

Whereas the people of the Old Covenant worshipped God in Jerusalem, Christians worship God in heaven (Gal. 4:24-26; Heb. 12:18-25). Given these New Testament alterations, it is hard to see how the traditional understanding of Luke 16:17 does not contradict the clear message of Jesus and the Apostles that **"when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place of change of law also" (Heb. 7:12).**

The other major problem with the popular understanding of Luke 16:17 is that it doesn't seem to fit the situation. To show how this is the case, we must try to do justice to the overall context of the passage.

In Luke 15:1-2, the situation that provokes Jesus to tell a number of parables is established:

Now all the tax-gatherers and sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (NASB).

Jesus launches into a series of parables to rebuke the Pharisees and exhort them to repent. The parable of the one lost sheep out of the flock of ninety-nine (15:4-7) and the parable of the woman who lost one coin out of ten (15:8-10) are both quite simple to understand. Jesus wishes to demonstrate that His ministry to "sinners" is justified. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is more pointed than the others. The Pharisees are compared to the jealous older brothers (vv. 25-32).

At this point chapter 16 begins, "Now he was also saying to the disciples . . ." perhaps indicating a change of subject. In 16:14, however, we are told that the Pharisees "were listening to all these things," so we can be pretty certain that Christ is still referring to the Pharisees. Furthermore, This parable of the unrighteous steward (16:1-13) only makes sense if understood to be referring to the Pharisees – the "stewards" of the Old Covenant who were about to lose their position.

Jesus exhorts them to reduce the burdens they are placing on those who were going to inherit the Kingdom so that they could find a place in it. After the passage in question, the subject of judgment on the Pharisees climaxes in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Once again the Pharisees are contrasted with the downtrodden who inherit the blessing of the Kingdom while they are consigned to eternal fire. This parable is especially pointed since Jesus used the name of His friend, whom He had raised from the dead and whom the Pharisees were conspiring to kill (John 12:10-11). The point of all this is that judgment on the Pharisees and salvation for others is a theme running through Luke 15-16, and readers should expect the theme to be carried on through 16:14-18. (For an

extended discussion of the Parable of the Unjust Steward, see James B. Jordan's essay in Biblical Horizons No. 17.)

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their scoffing (v. 14), telling them that they are "detestable in the sight of God" (v. 15; NASB). Then He warns them in verse 16 that they should not allow their pride to prevent them from entering the Kingdom of Heaven along with all those – that is, the multitude of "sinners and tax-gatherers" mentioned in Luke 15:1 – who are "forcing" their way into it. Since John, he tells them, "the gospel of the kingdom of God" is preached, as opposed to the Law and the Prophets which came before. In light of the parable of the unrighteous steward which has just been told, Jesus is obviously exhorting the Pharisees to throw in their lot with everyone they see taking advantage of the Gospel before it is too late.

Skipping to verse 18: Seemingly out of the blue, Jesus lectures the Pharisees on divorce and remarriage—telling them that to do so is adultery. In context, it is probable Jesus was referring to the fact that the Pharisees, by attempting to serve two masters, had in fact abandoned God for Mammon. Thus, **they were guilty of covenantal adultery**. Furthermore, by focusing on the husband who divorces his wife and marries another, Jesus emphasizes the Pharisees' infidelity to Israel. Israel was the bride and the teachers of the Law were to represent the Bridegroom. Because of their infidelity, the Pharisees will not be His representatives to His new Bride, the Church.

To put verse 17 in context, then, the entire passage emphasizes a discontinuity between Israel and the Church and, in verse 16, a discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New. This discontinuity involves a transfer of the Kingdom and judgment on the unfaithful stewards of the Old Covenant – the Pharisees.

Yet virtually all commentators think that verse 17 taught that every "jot and tittle" of the law is still in force. The readers of Luke 16:17 assume that "heaven and earth" refers to the physical universe (Gen. 1:1) which will not pass away until the second coming (Gen. 8:22). They argue that, after declaring that the Gospel had replaced the Law and the Prophets, Jesus said, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (NASB) in order to prevent anyone from believing that the Old Testament was no longer binding. Is this really what Jesus meant?

### **Covenants and Creations**

While there are several ways to demonstrate the faultiness of this interpretation, perhaps the simplest case comes from the prophecies of Isaiah:

For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea and its waves roar (the Lord of Hosts 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 to say to Zion, "You are my people" (51:15-16; NASB).

Here, God describes the covenant He made with Israel as the creation of the world. A few chapters later in Isaiah, He promises that He will bring about a new creation:

For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. . . No longer will there be in it [Jerusalem] an infant who lives but a few days; For the youth will die at the age of one

hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed (65:17, 20; NASB).

This passing of the old creation and the bringing in of the new cannot refer to the return of Christ because the resurrection of the dead has not yet taken place. People live a long time, but they are not yet immortal.

The most obvious interpretation is that **Isaiah is prophesying the New Covenant which was instituted by Jesus Christ.**

Interestingly, the Greek word at the beginning of Luke 16:17 which the NASB translates as "But" can just as easily be interpreted as "And." Thus, there is nothing in the verse that must be interpreted as a contrast to the rest of the passage.

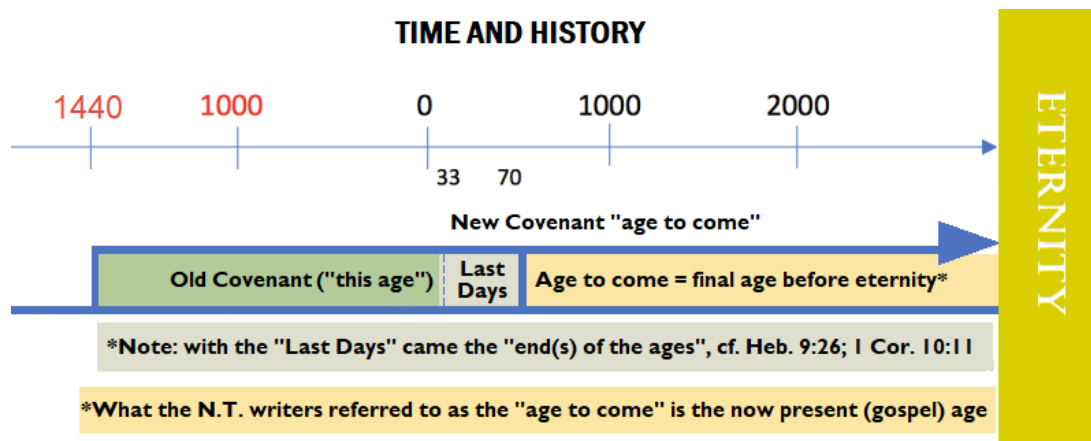
In verse 17, **then, Jesus tells them what the preaching of the Gospel, as opposed to the Law and Prophets portends: The old creation is passing away with the old covenant**, the Pharisees need to switch to the new if they wish to avoid passing away with it.

For these reasons, it seems that **Luke 16:14-18 indicates, not the continuing binding validity of the Law and the Prophets, but the imminent passing away of the old creation** in the death of Christ. Jesus is warning the Pharisees: because they have annulled the Law and the Prophets and so taught others (see Matt. 5:17-20), they are in danger of becoming least in the kingdom of heaven which Christ was soon to inaugurate through His death and resurrection – bringing the old creation to an end and ushering in a new heavens and a new earth.

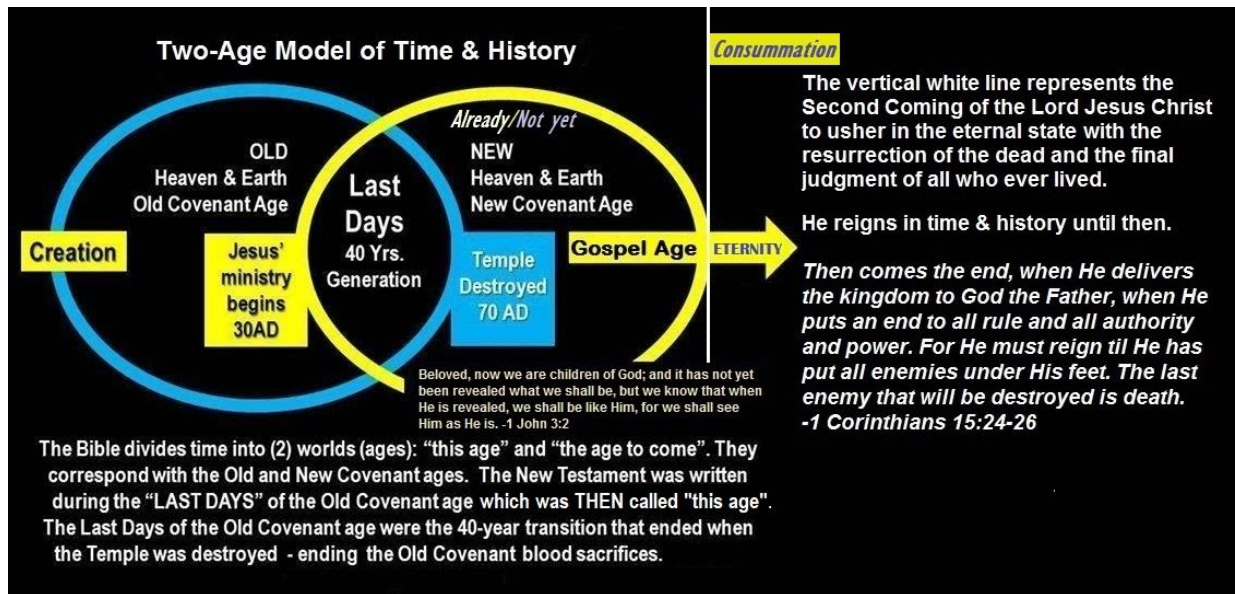
[source:](#)

**Biblical Horizons Newsletter**  
**No. 38: All Things New**  
June, 1992

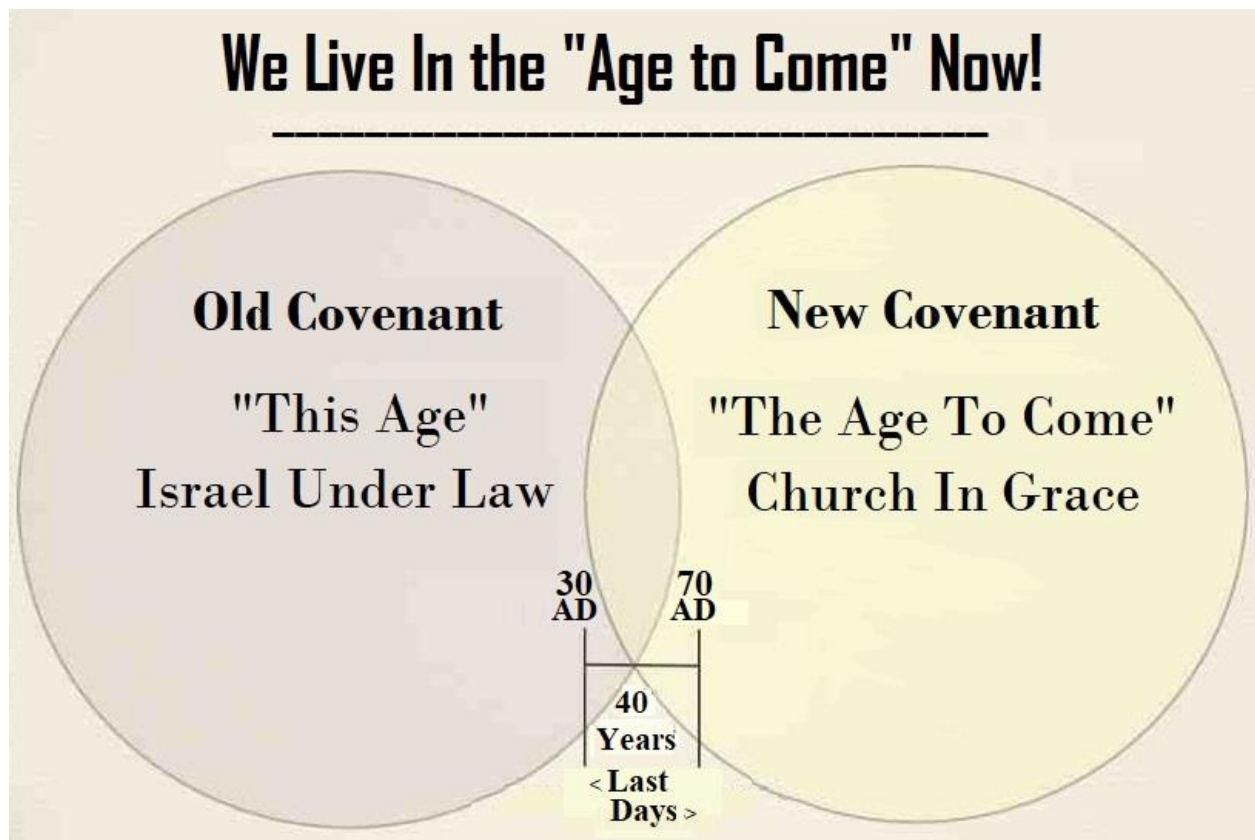
--



---

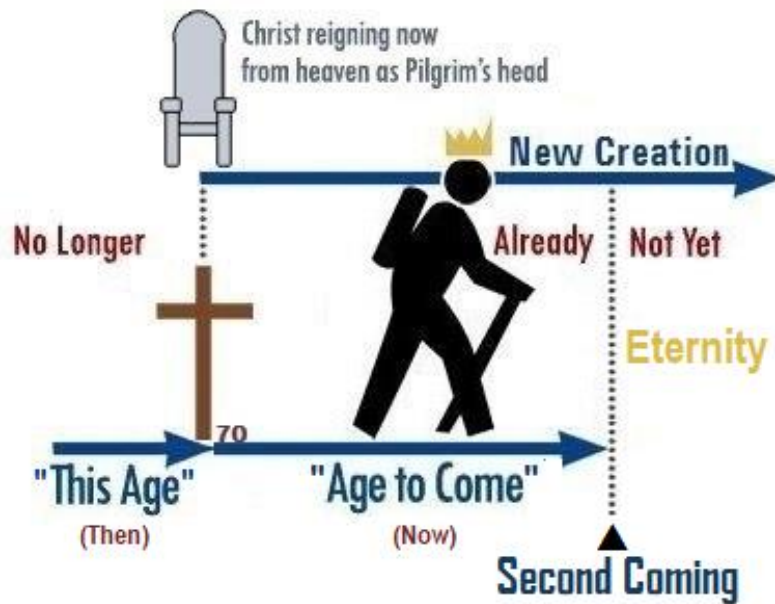


---



---

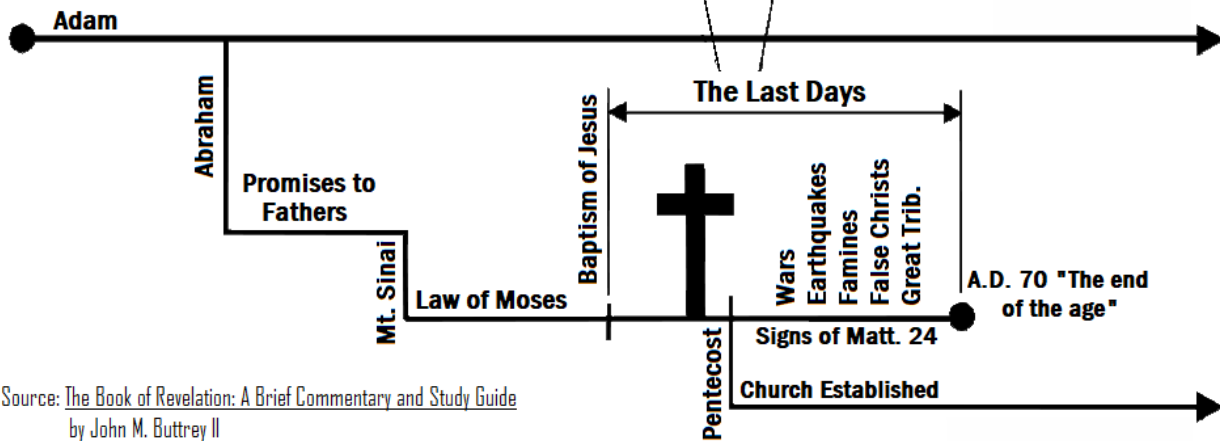




## The "Last Days" of the New Testament

In the last days the House of the Lord will be established (Isa. 2:2)  
 In the last days I will pour forth My Spirit (Acts 2:17)  
 In the last days difficult times will come (2 Tim. 3:1)  
 In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son (Heb. 1:2)  
 It is in the last days you have stored up treasures (Js. 5:3)  
 In the last days mockers will come (2 Pet. 3:3)

The end of all things is near (1 Pet. 4:7)  
 It is the last hour (1 Jn. 2:18)  
 The coming of the Lord is near (Js. 5:8)  
 Growing old / ready to disappear (Heb. 8:13)



Source: *The Book of Revelation: A Brief Commentary and Study Guide*  
 by John M. Buttrey II



[[Glory to God!](#)]