

Heaven & Earth and the Law Have Passed Away

[Matthew 5:18](#)

[Matthew 5:17-18](#) (NKJV) *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 "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.*

We began looking at these verses in our last study. And we saw that these verses pose a real problem; we see here that the Law and Heaven and Earth are connected - when one passes, they both pass.

Jesus said, *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but fulfill"* - The use of the terms "the law" and "the prophets" indicates that what the Lord is speaking of in these verses is **the whole of the Old Testament**. If you trace these terms through your Bible, you will find that wherever this expression is used it includes the entire Old Testament:

[Luke 24:44](#) (NKJV) *Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."*

The "law of Moses", "the prophets", and "the psalms" speak of the entirety of the Old Testament.

The phrase "**until heaven and earth pass away**" refers to the duration of the whole Old Testament's authority. So, Jesus is saying that not a single item of the Law - the Old Testament - will ever be changed until heaven and earth pass away. Is that what Jesus said? I think it is!

Let's look at verse 18 in several other translations to make sure that we understand what is being said:

[Matthew 5:18](#) (NIV) *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

Jesus says here that until heaven and earth disappear, not one bit of the law will disappear until it is all accomplished. Is that what it says?

[Matthew 5:18](#) (DNT) *For verily I say unto you, Until the heaven and the earth pass away, one iota or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all come to pass.*

[Matthew 5:18](#) (GWT) *I can guarantee this truth: Until the earth and the heavens disappear, neither a period nor a comma will disappear from Moses' Teachings before everything has come true.*

[Matthew 5:18](#) (NCV) *I tell you the truth, nothing will disappear from the law until heaven and earth are gone. Not even the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will be lost until everything has happened.*

Jesus said that he didn't come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. What does it mean to fulfill the law? The word "fulfill" is from the Greek word *pleroo*. Matthew uses this word seventeen times, and in fifteen of them it clearly refers to prophecy being fulfilled or **coming to pass**. The law, which we read in the Old Testament and everything that has been said by the prophets, was going to "come to pass" down to the minutest detail. And until it was all fulfilled, it was binding on the people of God.

Matthew 5:18 (NASB) *"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished."*

None of the law was to pass away until it was ALL accomplished. All of the law being accomplished would include all of the Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled. Would it not? All of the prophetic scriptures had to be fulfilled. This included the prophecies of the New Heaven and Earth. The New Covenant is always associated with a New Age. This new age would not come about until all that the prophets had spoken was fulfilled.

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

This prophecy had to be fulfilled before the law could pass away. Until God created a new heaven and earth, the old covenant remained in tack, every bit of it. So, if we are not living in the New Heaven and Earth today, then we are under the law, every bit of it. But I know of no Christian who would say that ALL the Old Testament Scriptures are binding on us. If they did, they would have to be keeping the Sabbath, and the feasts, and they would have to be sacrificing animals. Are we bound by the Old Covenant Law today? No! Hopefully, we learned in our last study that we are not under the law. And if we are not under the law, then heaven and earth must have passed away.

Jesus said that "all" the law had to be fulfilled. This would not only include all prophecy but it would include all the legal mandates of the law. The penal aspects of the law would have to be fulfilled before it could pass away.

Zechariah 11:10-11 (NKJV) *And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples. ¹¹ So it was broken on that day. Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD.*

"On that Day" God would break the covenant that he had made with physical Israel (Romans 9:6 teaches that there are two Israel's - physical and spiritual). "On that Day" - is the eschatological day of the Lord. Zechariah uses this phrase 15 times. God was going to judge physical Israel because they had broken His covenant:

Isaiah 24:5 (NKJV) *The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant.*

Jeremiah 22:8-9 (NKJV) *"And many nations will pass by this city; and everyone will say to his neighbor, 'Why has the LORD done so to this great city?' ² "Then they will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.'"*

Psalms 78:10 (NKJV) *They did not keep the covenant of God; They refused to walk in His law,*

Because of Israel's violation of the covenant, Jehovah (the God who keeps covenant) determined to annul the old covenant and make a new covenant with a new people. "On that Day" God would break the covenant, take his flock who had broken the covenant, and bring them to slaughter:

[Zechariah 11:6](#) (NKJV) *"For I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land," says the LORD. "But indeed I will give everyone into his neighbor's hand and into the hand of his king. They shall attack the land, and I will not deliver them from their hand."*

Before the law could pass, all of the legal or punitive elements of that old covenant had to be inflicted because of the violation of that Covenant:

[Malachi 3:1-3](#) (NKJV) *"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts. ² "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.*

[Malachi 4:1](#) (NKJV) *"For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.*

Malachi is talking about Jesus coming as the enforcer of the punitive elements of the Old Covenant.

[Malachi 3:5](#) (NKJV) *And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien; Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts.*

In Deut. 28-30 we have the law of blessings and cursing. IF you obey, life will be good. If you break my covenant, I will judge you. Israel broke the covenant as we have seen; and because they broke the covenant, God was going to judge them:

[Leviticus 26:25](#) (NKJV) *And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant; when you are gathered together within your cities I will send pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.*

There were punitive elements of the Old Covenant which were said to take place at the coming of the Lord in Malachi 3. These punitive aspects of the "Law" had to come to pass before the law or heaven and earth could pass away. If a law passes away, then the punitive elements of the law are no longer binding. If there are no speeding laws, then you can't get a speeding ticket.

Speaking to physical Israel God said:

[Isaiah 65:13-17](#) (NKJV) *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, My servants shall eat, But you shall be hungry; Behold, My servants shall drink, But you shall be thirsty; Behold, My servants shall rejoice, But you shall be ashamed; ¹⁴ Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, But you shall cry for sorrow of heart, And wail for grief of spirit. ¹⁵ You shall leave your name as a curse to My chosen; For the Lord GOD will slay you, And call His servants by another name; ¹⁶ So that he who blesses himself in*

the earth Shall bless himself in the God of truth; And he who swears in the earth Shall swear by the God of truth; Because the former troubles are forgotten, And because they are hidden from My eyes. ¹⁷ "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Isaiah said that in order to inaugurate the New Heaven and Earth, God was going to slay his old people. If the Church is currently the people of God who are waiting for the new heaven and earth, who is God going to have to slay to bring in that new Heaven and Earth? Isn't the church an everlasting kingdom that will never be destroyed?

[Daniel 2:44](#) (NKJV) *"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.*

The people that God was going to destroy could not be the church, it had to be Israel. That would make sense, wouldn't it? The law, the Old Covenant, would pass away along with physical Israel and the heaven and earth, because physical Israel was heaven and earth!

[Luke 21:20-24](#) (NKJV) *"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²² "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.*

Luke tells us here that ALL things which are written will be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. What does he mean by that? "All things which are written," refers to the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was to be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem which was heaven and earth passing away. Daniel tells us this very same thing in:

[Daniel 9:24](#) (NKJV) *"Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy."*

Daniel was told that 70 weeks had been determined on his people Israel, and city Jerusalem. By the end of this prophetic time period, God promised that six things would be accomplished. One of the things that Daniel was told would happen by the end of that period was that God would "seal up vision and prophecy". The Hebrew commentaries are in agreement on the meaning of to "seal up vision and prophecy" -- they say it means the end and complete fulfillment of all prophecy.

Daniel's prophecy, then, tells of the time when all prophecy would **cease** to be given, and what had been given would be **fulfilled**. When would this be? Daniel's vision ends with the destruction of Jerusalem which we know occurred in 70 AD:

[Daniel 9:26](#) (NKJV) *"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.*

So Luke is saying the same thing that Daniel said, which is that at the time Jerusalem is destroyed **all prophecy** will be fulfilled. What does that include? That would include the prophecy of the Second coming, the resurrection, the new heavens and earth, everything prophesied to Israel would be fulfilled at the time of Jerusalem's destruction.

Let's stop here to ask a question, "Could 'heaven and earth' that Jesus is referring to possibly be a different 'heaven and earth' than the physical creation of the world?" If it is not, then we are all under the Old Covenant law, every bit of it, until the physical creation ends.

Let's look at the use of "heaven and earth" in Scripture and see if they have some other meaning besides the literal physical heavens and earth. If you want to know what a term means in the New Testament, you need to go back to the Old Testament and see what it meant there. If it was used a certain way in the Old Testament, wouldn't it make sense that Jesus and the New Testament writer would use those expressions in the same way? We must get our understanding of "heaven and earth" from the Old Testament:

[Deuteronomy 31:30](#) (NKJV) *Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song until they were ended: [32:1](#) "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.*

Who is God talking to here? In the song of Moses, God is speaking to Israel. He calls them, "O heavens," and, "O earth." He is clearly not speaking to the physical heavens and earth, but to Israel. Notice what he says to them in:

[Deuteronomy 32:22](#) (NKJV) *For a fire is kindled by my anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains.*

God is not talking here about burning up the physical earth. God is using apocalyptic and symbolic language to warn Israel of judgment that He will bring upon them. When Israel is finally destroyed, it is as though heaven and earth are burned up.

In biblical apocalyptic language, "heavens" refers to governments and rulers, and "earth" refers to the nation of people. This can be seen in the book of Isaiah:

[Isaiah 1:1-2](#) (NKJV) *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. ² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me;*

[Isaiah 1:10](#) (NKJV) *Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:*

God is still talking to Israel, and He calls them "Sodom and Gomorrah." The literal Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed for some time. Here we see "rulers" used for "heavens" in verse 2, and "people" used for "earth." So the terms "heaven and earth" are used to speak of rulers and people of a nation. This idea is seen more clearly as we look at other passages where mention is made of the destruction of a state and government using language which seems to set forth "the end of the world" as the collapse of heaven and earth.

[Isaiah 13:1](#) (NKJV) *The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.*

In this chapter, God is talking about the judgment that is to fall upon Babylon. The word "burden" is the Hebrew word *massa'* an utterance, chiefly a doom. This introduction sets the stage for the subject matter in this chapter, and if we forget this, our interpretations of Isaiah 13 can go just about anywhere our imagination wants to go. This is not an oracle against the universe or **world** but against the nation of Babylon:

*Isaiah 13:6 (NKJV) **Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.***

*Isaiah 13:9-13 (NKJV) **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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ "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. ¹² I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger.***

Now remember, he is speaking about the destruction of Babylon, but it sounds like world wide destruction. The terminology of a context cannot be expanded beyond the scope of the subject under discussion. The spectrum of language surely cannot go outside the land of Babylon. If you were a Babylonian and Babylon was destroyed, would it seem like the world was destroyed? Let me put it this way: If America were destroyed, would it seem to you like the world ended? Yes! Your world would have ended.

*Isaiah 13:17 (NKJV) **"Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, Who will not regard silver; And as for gold, they will not delight in it.***

This is a historical event that took place in 539 BC. When the Medes destroyed Babylon, the Babylonian world came to an end. This destruction is said, in verse 6, to be from the Almighty, and the Medes constitute the means that God uses to accomplish this task. The physical heaven and earth were still in tact, but for Babylon, they had collapsed. **This is apocalyptic language**. This is the way the Bible discusses the fall of a nation. This is obviously figurative language.

In Isaiah 24-27, we see the invasion of Israel by Nebuchadnezzar. He carries them away to captivity. Notice the language that he uses:

*Isaiah 24:3-6 (NKJV) **The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, For the LORD has spoken this word. ⁴ The earth mourns and fades away, The world languishes and fades away; The haughty people of the earth languish. ⁵ The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, And those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, And few men are left.***

*Isaiah 24:19-20 (NKJV) **The earth is violently broken, The earth is split open, The earth is shaken exceedingly. ²⁰ 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.***

What I want you to see in these verses is how God refers to Israel as the earth. He says, *"The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly.*" Notice how many times God referred to Israel as the "earth." This is apocalyptic language speaking of the destruction of the people of Israel.

In Isaiah 34, we have a description of the fall of Edom. Notice the language that is used:

Isaiah 34:4-5 (NKJV) 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. 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.

This is Biblical language to describe the fall of a nation. It should be clear that it is not to be taken literally. God says, *"His sword will be bathed in heaven,"* then explains what He means by saying, *"It shall come down on Edom."* The NIV puts it this way, *"My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed."* So, God speaks of His sword being bathed in heaven, meaning the nation Edom, not the literal heaven. Edom shall be rolled up like a scroll.

Let's look at one other Old Testament use of this language:

Nahum 1:1-5 (NKJV) The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. ² God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies; ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked. The LORD has His way In the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds are the dust of His feet. ⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, And dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, And the flower of Lebanon wilts. ⁵ The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, And the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it.

The subject of this judgment is Nineveh, not the physical world. This is the way God describes the fall of a nation. If this language describes the judgment of God on nations, why, when we come to the New Testament, do we make it be the destruction of the **universe**? It is only because we do not understand how the Bible uses this apocalyptic language. If the destruction of heaven and earth were to be taken literally in all of the Old Testament passages, it would mean that heaven and earth were destroyed a bunch of times. This language is clearly not literal but figurative and apocalyptic.

The passing away of heaven and earth is another way to speak of the end of the Old Covenant. To prove this from the Scripture, look with me at:

Hebrews 1:10-12 (NKJV) And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; ¹² Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail."

These verses are a word for word quotation from [Psalm 102](#). If all we had was the prophecy of David in Psalms 102, we might think that this is referring to the physical earth. But, the New Testament gives us insight and illumination to the Old Testament.

How is the world or the heavens and earth of old going to perish? David said, in Psalm 102:26, "They shall *grow old like a garment*," and then they would be "*changed*." Is it just a coincidence that the Bible speaks of the passing away of the old covenant using the same language?

Hebrews 8:13 (NKJV) 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.

The same Greek word *palaios* which means: "to make worn out, or declare obsolete" is used in Hebrews 1:11 of the heavens and earth and 8:13 of the Old Covenant. The writer of Hebrews teaches us that the "Old Covenant" and the "Heavens and earth" are synonymous.

John Brown said, " 'Heaven and earth passing,' understood literally, is the dissolution of the present system of the universe, and the period when that is to take place, is called the 'end of the world.' But a person at all familiar with the phraseology of the Old Testament Scriptures, knows that the dissolution of the Mosaic economy, and the establishment of the Christian, is often spoken of as the removing of the old earth and heavens, and the creation of a new earth and new heavens" (vol. 1, p. 170)

Believers, if we don't understand the biblical use of "heaven and earth", we will not understand Jesus' words in:

Matthew 5:18 (NKJV) "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.

And if we don't understand these words of Jesus, we will end up in confusion like the Commentator who, commenting on this verse, said, "In saying 'till heaven and earth pass away' - the most stable of all created objects - Christ affirmed the unchangeableness of the Law." That is not at all what Christ meant!

Another commentator writes:

In other words, the whole Old Testament is authoritative until the age to come. In verse 18b the words 'one jot or one tittle' refer to the extent of the Old Testament's authority. By that Matthew means the whole Old Testament is authoritative between the two advents of Christ down to its minute details. According to [Matthew 5:17, 18](#), the Law and the Prophets (the whole Old Testament) have their place under the administration of Christ under the New Covenant.

Let's dissect what he says here. He said, "In other words, the whole Old Testament is authoritative until the age to come." This is exactly what Jesus was saying! But what this commentator doesn't understand is that the "age to come" came in [AD 70](#). Jesus lived in what the Bible calls "this age". We today live in what the Bible calls the "age to come". He goes on to say, "Matthew means the whole Old Testament is authoritative between the two advents of Christ down to its minute details." - This is absolutely correct! But what he doesn't understand is that the second advent took place in AD 70 at the end of the Jewish age. So, when the Jewish age ended with the destruction of the temple, so did the law.

He goes on to say this: "According to Matthew 5:17, 18, the Law and the Prophets (the whole Old Testament) have their place under the administration of Christ under the New Covenant." Is that true? NO! The Old Covenant has NO place in the New Covenant! Why is that so hard to understand? The New Covenant replaced the Old. And believers today live under the New, not the Old Covenant:

Hebrews 8:13 (NKJV) *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.*

In AD 65, when this epistle was written, the old covenant was "ready to vanish away". The Greek word for "vanish" is *aphanismos* which means: "disappearance or abrogation".

Matthew 5:18 (NKJV) *"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.*

The law remains in tack, every bit of it, until it is all fulfilled and heaven and earth pass away. That's what Jesus said, isn't it? Now compare that to what Jesus says in:

Matthew 24:35 (NKJV) *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*

Jesus uses the same Greek word (*parerchomai*) here for "pass away" as he did in Matthew 5:18. So, in Matthew 5:18 he says that heaven and earth will pass away when the law is fulfilled, and in 24:35 he says that heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will not pass away. So, Jesus' words would last forever, but the "Law" and the "heavens and earth" would pass away.

Believers, we are to live by the words of Jesus Christ, which will never pass away. Jesus brought in the New Covenant, which is an everlasting covenant. The old is passed away, and we live in the New Covenant age.

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on September 29, 2002. [Tape #255b](#).
