

Dr. John Owen
The "New Heavens and Earth"
(2 Peter 3:10, 13)

The apostle makes a distribution of the world into *heaven* and *earth*, and saith they were destroyed with water, and perished. We know that neither the fabric nor substance of the one or other was destroyed, but only men that liveth on the earth; and the apostle tells us (ver. 7) of *the heaven and earth that were then, and were destroyed by water*, distinct from *the heavens and the earth that were now, and were to be consumed by fire*; and yet as to the visible fabric of heaven and earth they were the same both before the flood and in the apostle's time, and continue so to this day; when yet it is certain that the heavens and earth, whereof he spake, were to be destroyed and consumed by fire in that generation. We must, then, for the clearing of our foundation a little, consider what the apostle intends by the heavens and the earth in these two places.

1. It is certain that what the apostle intends by the world, with its heaven, and earth (vers. 5, 6), which was destroyed ; the same, or some-what of that kind, he intends by the heavens and the earth that were to be consumed and destroyed by fire (ver. 7) ; otherwise there would be no coherence in the apostle's discourse, nor any kind of argument, but a mere fallacy of words.

2. It is certain that by the flood, the world, or the fabric of heaven and earth, was not destroyed, but only the inhabitants of the world; and therefore the destruction intimated to succeed by fire is not of the substance of the heavens and the earth, which shall not be consumed until the last day, but of person or men living in the world.

3. Then we must consider in what sense men living in the world are said to be the world, and the heavens and earth of it. I shall only insist on one instance to this purpose among many that may be produced: Isa. li. 15, 16. The time when the work here mentioned, of planting the heavens and laying the foundation of the earth, was performed by God was when He *divided the sea* (ver. 15) and *gave the law* (ver. 16), and said to Zion, *Thou art my people*; that is, when He took the children of Israel out of Egypt, and formed them in the wilderness into a church and state; then He planted the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth: that is, brought forth order, and government, and beauty from the confusion wherein before they were. This is the planting of the heavens and laying the foundation of the earth in the world. And since it is that when mention is made of the destruction of a state and government, it is in that language which seems to set forth the end of the world. So Isa. xxxiv. 4, which is yet but the destruction of the state of Edom. The like also is affirmed of the *Roman* Empire (Rev. vi. 14), which the Jews constantly affirm to be intended by *Edom* in the prophets. And in our Saviour Christ's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. xxiv.) He sets it out by expressions of the same importance. It is evident, then, that in the prophetic idiom and manner of speech, by heavens and earth, the civil and religious state and combination of men in the world, and the men of them, were often understood. So were the heavens and earth that world which then was destroyed by the flood.

4. On this foundation I affirm that the heavens and earth here intended in this prophecy of Peter, the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men, mentioned in the destruction of that heaven and earth, do all of them relate, not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state; for which I shall offer these two reasons, of many that might be insisted on from the text:

(1.) Because whatever is here mentioned was to have its peculiar influence on the men of that generation. He speaks of that wherein both the profane scoffers and those scoffed at were concerned, and that as *Jews*, some of them believing, others opposing, the faith. Now there was no particular concernment of that generation, nor in that sin, nor in that scoffing, as to the day of judgment in general ; but there was a peculiar relief for the one and a peculiar dread for the other at hand, in the destruction of the Jewish nation ; and, besides, an ample testimony both to the one and the other of the power and dominion of tile Lord Jesus Christ, which was the thing in question between them.

(2.) Peter tells them, that after the destruction and judgment that he speaks of (vers. 7-13), " We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,' etc. They had this expectation. But what is that promise? Where may we find it? Why, we have it in the very words and letter, Isa. lxxv. 17. Now, when shall this be that God shall create these new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness? Saith Peter, " It shall be after the coming of the Lord, after that judgment and destruction of ungodly men, who obey not the gospel, that I foretell." But now it is evident from this place of Isaiah, with chap. lxxvi. 21, 22, that this is a prophecy of Gospel times only; and that the planting of these new heavens is nothing but the creation of Gospel ordinances to endure for ever. The same thing is so expressed Heb. xii. 26-28.

This being the design of the place, I shall not insist longer on the context, but briefly open the words proposed, and fix upon the truth continued in them.

First, There is the foundation of the apostle's inference and exhortation, seeing that all these things, however precious they seem, or what value soever any put upon them, shall be dissolved, that is, destroyed; and that in that dreadful and fearful manner before mentioned, in a day of judgment, wrath, and vengeance, by fire and sword; let others mock at the threats of Christ's coming: He will come- He will not tarry; and then the heavens and earth that God Himself planted, -the sun, moon, and stars of the Judaical polity and church, -the whole old world of worship and worshippers, that stand out in their obstinacy against the Lord Christ, shall be sensibly dissolved and destroyed: this we know shall be the end of these things, and that shortly.

'There is no outward constitution nor frame of things in government or nations, but it is subject to a dissolution, and may receive it, and that in a way of judgment. If any might plead exemption, that, on many accounts, of which the apostle was discoursing in prophetic terms (for it was not yet time to speak it openly to all) might interpose for its share.'