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MINISTRIES

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Have Heaven and Earth Already Passed Away? (Matthew 5:18)

Has the Law of Moses passed away and become irrelevant to Christians? Not according to the Messiah. Jesus—or Yeshua, as he is called in Hebrew—not only forbade us from thinking that he came to abolish the Law but also declared that even its smallest details would remain in effect for as long as heaven and earth exist:

Matthew 5:17-18

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

So, nothing from the Torah will pass away until heaven and earth pass away. But when will heaven and earth pass away? Some argue that this event has already taken place. They claim that Yeshua was referring to an event that occurred about forty years after his ministry—the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

We will explore this idea shortly to determine whether it aligns with Scripture. However, before doing so, let us share our perspective on this passage. When Yeshua stated that nothing would pass from the Law of Moses “until heaven and earth pass away” and “until all is accomplished,” he meant that nothing would pass from the Law until the end of the world as we know it. As the scholar David Turner writes:

The two phrases “until heaven and earth pass away” and “until all things are accomplished” are essentially synonymous references to the end of the present world and the beginning of the eschaton. Until that time the law is valid.

—David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 163

So, heaven and earth passing away and all being accomplished refer to the same event. All will be accomplished when heaven and earth pass away, which refers to the end of the present world. Scripture elsewhere describes what the passing away of heaven and earth will look like and when it will take place. Peter connects the passing away of heaven and earth to a future time when the wicked will be

destroyed after Yeshua returns. According to Peter, the present heaven and earth will be replaced by a new heaven and earth in the future:

2 Peter 3:7, 10, 13

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly...But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed...But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The apostle John echoes this teaching from Peter. In his vision of the future New Jerusalem, John states that the present heaven and earth will pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth:

Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

John goes on to associate this future time with the complete removal of death and pain (Revelation 21:4). Unlike our present world, which is still filled with death and pain, when heaven and earth pass away and are replaced by a new heaven and earth, death and pain will cease to exist.

As we've seen, Scripture clearly explains the meaning of heaven and earth passing away and when this event will occur. It is linked to the time after Yeshua returns, when the wicked are destroyed, and when death and pain are brought to an end. So, according to Matthew 5:18, nothing from the Law of Moses will pass away until that future time when heaven and earth pass away. To put it another way, since the present heaven and earth are still here, the whole Law of Moses remains in effect.

For more on this, see our teachings "[Heaven and Earth and the Law of God](#)" and "[Did Jesus Do Away with the Old Testament Law?](#)"

Now, you might have heard it said that the Torah—in whole or in part—passed away when Yeshua died on the cross. This is a popular doctrine in modern Christianity. However, this verse directly refutes that doctrine. Yeshua was very clear in Matthew 5:18. Heaven and earth have not passed away yet, so neither has the Torah.

Heaven and Earth Passing Away = The Temple's Destruction?

As we've seen, according to Matthew 5:18, the popular doctrine that Yeshua's death and resurrection caused the Law of Moses to pass away is impossible. But that has not stopped some people from trying to force this passage to conform to their belief that the Torah has already passed away. Recently, some have resorted to seeking an "escape clause" in the phrase "heaven and earth." As we mentioned at the beginning of this teaching, some argue that when Yeshua spoke of heaven and earth passing away, he was referring to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. The idea is that "heaven and earth" is a type of idiom for the temple, so the passing away of heaven and earth alludes to the destruction of the temple. That is to say, all was accomplished when heaven and earth—that is the temple—"passed away" in 70 AD. Preterist author Don Preston articulates this idea:

Now, Jesus said "until heaven and earth pass" the law would not pass...We have seen that the passing of the Old World of Israel in the destruction of her city and temple in 70 AD is spoken of

as the passing of heaven and earth...Since Israel's heaven and earth would pass when Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed, and since all things would be fulfilled when Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed, we conclude that is the time when the Old Law would completely pass.

—Jon Preston, *Have Heaven & Earth Passed Away? A Study of Matthew 5:17-28 & the Passing of the Law of Moses* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon, 2015), n.p.

So, Don Preston reinterprets “heaven and earth” to mean the temple in Jerusalem. He imagines that when Yeshua spoke about heaven and earth passing away, he was alluding to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. According to Preston, the destruction of the temple represented the end of the “Old World of Israel” and the establishment of a new world of the Church—a new heaven and earth. Preston continues:

In Matthew 24 Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This Temple was the very center of the Jewish world. This is where the sacrifices for sin were offered by the genealogically confirmed Levitical priests. For Jesus to predict the utter desolation of this temple was the same as saying their world was about to come crashing down around their ears!

—Jon Preston, *Have Heaven & Earth Passed Away? A Study of Matthew 5:17-28 & the Passing of the Law of Moses* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon, 2015), n.p.

Now, a person could certainly *imagine* that the passing away of heaven and earth is some sort of code-phrase for the destruction of the temple. Don Preston does not mention this point, but other preterist interpreters have noted that some first-century Jewish writers used cosmic imagery in reference to the temple. For instance, Philo describes how the temple curtain was crafted from materials representing the four elements that God used to create the universe:

Moreover, he chose the materials of this embroidery, selecting with great care what was most excellent out of an infinite quantity, choosing materials equal in number to the elements of which the world was made, and having a direct relation to them; the elements being the earth and the water, and the air and the fire. For the fine flax is produced from the earth, and the purple from the water, and the hyacinth colour is compared to the air (for, by nature, it is black), and the scarlet is likened to fire, because each is of a red colour; for it followed of necessity that those who were preparing a temple made by hands for the Father and Ruler of the universe must take essences similar to those of which he made the universe itself.

—Philo, *Life of Moses* 2:88 (Translated by C.D. Yonge)

Given the cosmic symbolism that some early Jews associated with the temple, a person could certainly fantasize that the statement about heaven and earth passing away should be understood as a type of idiom for the destruction of the Second Temple.

But does this interpretation actually work for Matthew 5:18? Did Yeshua or Matthew intend for the statement about heaven and earth passing away to refer to the destruction of the temple, resulting in the passing away of the Torah? The answer is no. And frankly, this interpretation reeks of desperation. We will mention six problems with it.

1) It is fanciful.

We mentioned that sometimes Jewish writers, like Philo, applied cosmic symbolism to aspects of the temple. Based on such symbolism, why can't we say that references to heaven and earth passing away in Matthew's Gospel allude to the temple passing away? Because there is nothing in the biblical text itself that lends support to such an allegorical interpretation of the phrase.

Using this interpretive method, we could force the Bible to say all sorts of wild things. For example, in Luke 13:32, Yeshua calls Herod a "fox." Therefore, we could claim that other mentions of a fox in Scripture are actually references to Herod. So, when Judges 15:4-5 describes Samson catching 300 foxes, tying their tails together with torches, and releasing them to burn the Philistines' grain fields and olive orchards, this must be a prophecy about Herod's dynasty. The tied fox tails symbolize Herod's political entanglements with Rome, and the fire could represent how his reign ultimately led to destruction. Pretty neat, huh? While some people might think this creative interpretation is neat, hopefully everyone can agree it is nonsense. We can't just import whatever meaning we want into the text. That is not how responsible biblical interpretation works.

2) It does not account for biblical prophecies about the passing away of heaven and earth.

In his second epistle, Peter connects the passing away of heaven and earth to the time following Yeshua's return. He explains that this event will mark the beginning of a new era—a new heaven and a new earth—where only righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:7-13). Likewise, John links the passing away of heaven and earth to the time after Yeshua's return and after Satan and all the wicked are judged and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15). He describes this future time as one free from death and pain (Revelation 21:4).

This description does not match the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Yeshua did not return at that time—if he had, surely someone would have noticed and written about it. It strains credulity to believe that the Messiah's second coming has been kept a secret from everyone until preterists cracked the code 2,000 years later.

Moreover, we are not living in an era where only righteousness dwells. One needs only to log in to X and follow political news to see that there is still much corruption and wickedness in the world. Also, have you ever gotten sick? Lost a loved one? Stubbed your toe? Death and pain are still here. You are not living in the new heavens and new earth that John describes.

3) Scripture clearly describes heaven and earth passing away as cosmic destruction.

In his second epistle, Peter says that, following Yeshua's return, heaven and earth will pass away and the "heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved." Just a few verses earlier, Peter uses the words "heaven" and "earth" in reference to God creating the universe in the beginning (1 Peter 3:5; cf. Genesis 1-2). Peter goes on to mention that this "world"—the earth—was destroyed by Noah's flood (1 Peter 3:6; cf. Genesis 6), again clearly referring to the physical creation. There is no indication in the text that these are secret references to the temple. Peter is not saying that Noah built his ark in the temple and that God flooded the temple. He is using the words "heaven" and "earth" to refer to all that God created—the physical universe. It is this physical creation—this "heaven and earth"—which is then described as passing away in the future.

Additionally, Peter uses the word στοιχεῖον in 2 Peter 3:10, translated as "heavenly bodies." This word could be used to refer to planets and stars, or it could simply refer to the "basic stuff" or "building

blocks” of which things are made—in this context, the physical universe (Thomas Schreiner, *1-2 Peter and Jude*, NAC (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 384). As we mentioned earlier, while writers like Philo spoke about certain parts of the temple symbolizing the fundamental elements of the universe, there is no reason to impose that symbolism onto 2 Peter. In the context of 2 Peter 3, Peter clearly refers to the creation of the physical universe in Genesis, and it would be very strange for him to suddenly shift the meaning of these words to represent the temple. The passing away of heaven and earth in this passage describes a cosmic-level destruction, not merely the temple’s destruction.

4) It results in absurd readings of other passages.

When Yeshua uses the phrase “heaven and earth,” he always means the physical creation (Matthew 6:10; 11:25; 16:19; 18:19; 23:9; 24:30, 35), in line with how the Tanakh itself consistently uses this phrase (Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 30:19). In fact, if we were to interpret “heaven and earth” as the temple in certain other passages, we would come up with some pretty absurd interpretations. For example, in Matthew 28:18, Yeshua declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” If the preterist interpretation were correct, this would mean that Yeshua’s authority was tied to the temple, which was still standing when he said that. It was still considered “heaven and the earth.” This would also mean that when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, heaven and earth ceased to exist, and therefore, Yeshua’s authority was nullified. He is, after all, only with us “until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), which for the preterist is a reference to 70 AD. If preterists applied their interpretation consistently, they would have to conclude that Yeshua lost his authority when the temple was destroyed and that believers have been without his presence since 70 AD.

5) It doesn’t fit the immediate context

When it comes to the immediate context, the preterist interpretation of Matthew 5:18 suffers from the same problem as the popular doctrine that Yeshua’s death and resurrection caused the Torah to pass away. In the very next verse, Yeshua states that one’s status in the kingdom—whether one will be “great” or “least”—is determined by whether or not one obeys the Torah!

Matthew 5:19

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

In Matthew’s Gospel, being “great” or “least” in the kingdom is understood as relating to heavenly rewards, or lack thereof (Matthew 5:12; 10:41-42; 11:11; 18:1-4; 20:16, 26). So, in Matthew 5:19, Yeshua directly ties obedience to the Torah to these heavenly rewards—your obedience or lack thereof has heavenly consequences. If the Torah were about to pass away—whether at Yeshua’s resurrection or the temple’s destruction in 70 AD—this warning makes no sense. Why would Yeshua warn about the importance of obeying the Torah and its effect on one’s status in the kingdom if it was just going to pass away in 70 AD?

6) The conclusion does not logically follow.

Yeshua said that nothing would pass from the Law of Moses until “heaven and earth pass away,” which preterists take as referring to the destruction of the temple. Therefore, they argue that the Torah passed away when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. But why would the destruction of Herod’s temple indicate the passing away of the Torah? Apart from the fevered imaginations of preterists, there is no

reason to believe it would.

For instance, nobody believed that the Torah passed away when the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple. During the Babylonian exile, the Prophets anticipated returning to the land, rebuilding the temple, and continuing to follow the Torah. When Moses predicted that Israel would be exiled in the future, which happened at the same time as the destruction of the temple, he never suggested that the Torah would disappear. Instead, he admonished his people *to keep* the Torah, promising that obedience would lead to their restoration to the land (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).

Here is a simple question to demonstrate this point: if the temple in Jerusalem were rebuilt tomorrow, would preterists then claim that the Law of Moses was in effect again? Of course not. This indicates that no logical relationship exists between the temple's destruction and the Torah passing away. Preterists are simply using the temple's destruction as a pretext for reinterpreting Matthew 5:18 to argue that the Torah is no longer relevant. The truth is that they just don't want to be obligated to obey the Torah, so they have to come up with a creative way to make Matthew 5:18 say something it doesn't say.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the idea that heaven and earth passing away in Matthew 5:18 refers to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD is fanciful and fails exegetically, contextually, and logically. Both Peter and John associate the passing away of heaven and earth with prophecies that did not come to pass in 70 AD, such as the return of the Messiah and the end of wickedness, pain, and death. Scripture also describes the passing away of heaven and earth as cosmic destruction—the end of the created universe, not merely the fall of Jerusalem and the temple. Finally, nowhere does Scripture associate the destruction of the temple with the end of the Torah but rather affirms that the Torah remains in effect even in the absence of a temple. Therefore, the preterist interpretation of Matthew 5:18 should be discarded. Since the present heaven and earth remain, so does the Torah.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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