

252 *Why do we need a new earth?*

One thought that has kept coming back to me is: why were the first Christians so excited; why were they willing to *die* for what they believed? Like many of you, probably, I was excited when I first came to faith, and while that excitement has returned on occasion, would I *really* be willing to go through all that my namesake went through? Honestly?!

Today's trickle of excitement started when the vicar asked (vis-à-vis Nicodemus), 'What question would *you* like to ask Jesus?', and one chap in our group asked, 'Why do we need a new earth?' Interesting! He explained: his home group are studying Acts: Jesus was taken *up* to heaven (ch. 1) and then fire came *down* from heaven (ch. 2). (At least we now know *where* heaven is – up there, 'away beyond the blue'. Sure?) Somehow, he said, the discussion got to Revelation 21: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...'

His perfectly logical thinking went: as heaven is going to be so wonderful (Rev 22), why do we need a new *earth*? (And by my logic, would it be big enough for the billions of believers?) His honest expression is what many of us may well feel; and to be fair, his wife has died recently.

What then do we, as Christians, have to offer people 'out there'? If we believe in Jesus, although this life is pretty crap at times, at least we know that we'll get away from it to a better life *up* in heaven: 'There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

Wrong, wrong, wrong! Totally unbiblical! Is that *really* all we have to offer to those around us who are suffering in so many awful ways? No it's not – read your Bible and you'll soon see.

I'm a words man, so I opened my electronic Bible and looked through from Matthew to Revelation for the word 'heaven'. It was a real eyeopener. Try it.

[Warning: word count limit approaching!] OK, but I can give you a feel: (1) 'heaven-and-earth' is a very strong theme – almost an entity. (2) It's all very much NOW. They were excited because heaven had come to earth NOW, in the present. The idea of 'Tolerate this crap now because it'll be OK in heaven!' would have been total anathema to the early Christians. (3) Even *before* Jesus had died and risen, he was saying about the kingdom of heaven being *near* you, *in* you; and 'Thy kingdom come ... on earth...'

(If you want to get ahead of me, I talked about these biblical ideas in Dec 2020,^[136] having heard a sermon by John Walton, an OT scholar who reckons that any sermon based on the OT **must** include Revelation.)

OK, I'm not quite ready for martyrdom yet, but I *am* excited!

[To be continued...]