

DOES THE SUN AND MOON CEASE TO EXIST AS JOHN INTIMATES IN REVELATION 21:23?

This study was taken from my larger study regarding the Cherubim and Seraphim, which is in the process of being published into a book. The following excerpt is taken from my working manuscript for this book.

Many people believe that Revelation 21:23 intimates that the sun and moon cease to exist in the age to come as it relates to new heavens and a new earth.

Revelation 21:23 ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb.

The following excerpt from my larger study, that addresses this issue of the sun and moon ceasing to exist, picks up here.

The city that is mentioned in Revelation 21 is described with walls, foundations and gates that are made with precious materials. But, does this mean that there will be a city on the new earth that resembles what is described in Revelation where streets are paved with gold?

Keep in mind, that what God is communicating to John is a picture of a sanctuary in a vision setting. This means that he is describing, in symbolic language, a reality that will exist in the future. This takes into account that some of what he is shown is meant to symbolically represent the bigger picture of what God's eternal city/sanctuary actually is. And it could not be clearer that what John is shown is bigger than any one particular "city", even a city that is described as 1,500 miles cubed. We're told that this "city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb."

So, is John saying, for example, that the sun and the moon do not exist for the illumination of this city in the future new earth? Not at all. This vision is a picture of a sanctuary, not just a localized city. The word city is meant to explain this sanctuary where God dwells among His people in a Kingdom that expands well beyond the borders of planet earth.

As Beale noted: *"God never intended that Israel's little localized temple last forever, since, like the Eden temple, Israel's temple was a small model of something much bigger: God and His universal presence, which could never eternally be contained by any localized earthly structure."* (A New Testament Biblical Theology, pg. 627)

THE HOLY CITY IS A HOLY PEOPLE

Revelation 21:2 ² And *I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.* (emphasis added)

In what sense is any city adorned as a bride for her husband? How about a city that is not actually composed of brick and mortar, or for that matter gold, silver or costly stones, but a Kingdom made up of a community of people (Christ's bride) made ready for the bridegroom?

^{NAU} **Isaiah 61:10** I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, *And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.* (emphasis added)

^{NAU} **Revelation 19:7** "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

Matthew 25:1 ^{NAU} "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

And who is the bridegroom in this kingdom? Well, that is precisely what God's Revelation given to John is describing. We have this awesome picture of a city that is adorned with all these precious jewels in Rev. 21:15-23. This city is adorned by the Lamb with jewels and gold. This is reminiscent of how God adorned Adam in the garden on day six.

People have gone to great lengths to try and give us a picture of a city that is 1,500 miles cubed and then speculate how such a city could be situated on an earth (albeit a new earth) where the top of this city extends well beyond our present atmosphere. I'm not arguing that there won't be a city or multiple cities on the new earth, with one particular city that is designated, New Jerusalem, where people will dwell with their God. My argument is that when we don't see the symbolic language, particularly in this case where John clearly articulates it in Revelation, then we miss the most important aspects of what God is trying to convey as it relates to what this city actually is.

Of course, there are those who say that you can't have it both ways; claiming there will be a literal new earth and literal new heavens, as Revelation 21 describes, but in that same context conclude that the new Jerusalem, or holy city that comes down out of heaven to earth, is mere symbolism. Drew, you seem to be picking and choosing what is literal and what is symbol.

Fair enough, but keep in mind that all symbolic language in a book like Revelation still speaks to literal realities. But those realities must be constrained to what Scripture has already clearly revealed. In the case of a new earth, it is not first introduced in Revelation. It is inferred as far back as Genesis 3:17 where Lamech, the father of Noah, yearns for that eschatological day when the cursed ground (earth) will be replaced with an earth without the curse; new earth.

But the new earth is explicitly revealed by the prophet Isaiah who gives Israel the hope of

being delivered from God's wrath into a new world. Isaiah describes God creating a new Jerusalem for rejoicing along with a grateful people in that new world. He exposes this new world as a place, where "there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying." (Isaiah 65:19)

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

Isaiah 66:22 ²² "For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "So your offspring and your name will endure.

Both of these passages are wrapped in prophetic language that speaks to the future blessed Israel in contrast to that Israel that is being judged by God for her unrighteousness. This is a reference to the remnant or true Israel that follows the Lord in faith and obedience. Isaiah points this out in the immediate context of announcing new heavens and a new earth.

Isaiah 65:11-13 ¹¹ "***But you who forsake the LORD, Who forget My holy mountain, Who set a table for Fortune, And who fill cups with mixed wine for Destiny,*** ¹² ***I will destine you for the sword, And all of you will bow down to the slaughter.*** Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight." ¹³ ***Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, My servants will eat, but you will be hungry. Behold, My servants will drink, but you will be thirsty. Behold, My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame.*** (emphasis added)

It is in this context where God's servants, His remnant, in verse 13 above (as opposed to those "who forsake the Lord, who forget [His] holy mountain" in verse 11) are being shown favor as they will be blessed with new heavens and a new earth where they will eat, drink and rejoice. This speaks to that table in Christ's consummated Kingdom at the end of the age.

Luke 22:29-30 ²⁹ and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you ³⁰ that ***you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom***, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (emphasis added)

But is Isaiah addressing actual new heavens and a new earth amidst prophetic language? There are those who debate that issue, but there is one person who declares that all debate is over regarding actual new heavens and a new earth and that would be the apostle, Peter.

2 Peter 3:10-13 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which ***the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.*** ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ ***But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*** (emphasis added)

It is clear that Peter is juxtaposing two different phenomena; that of a present earth and heavens being destroyed, with a future new heavens and new earth replacing the one that God shattered in judgment. In this case God brings the new directly from the ashes of the old. And so, when we come to Revelation 21, it has already been established that the designation new heavens and new earth is for a literal event to take place on the last day. This last day is also known as the day of the Lord, as Peter confirms that this is not mere symbolism being described.

By the way, when Peter addresses the new heavens and a new earth, he associates this with a previous promise found in the word of God, which would necessarily be the Old Testament. Here he references Isaiah 65 and 66 quoted above, thus taking Isaiah's prophetic word and confirming that it is not mere symbolism.

When the apostle John sees new heavens and a new earth in Revelation 21:1, though it is in the context of a vision, we know that the vision ultimately gives way to the reality it represents, as Isaiah and Peter make clear. It is in this immediate context in Revelation that John then introduces the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

Certainly, this must also be speaking to the reality of an actual city coming down from heaven to earth. Again, let me be clear, I'm not arguing that a literal city cannot come down out of heaven to earth from God. I'm simply saying that the context of this entire chapter defines what that literal city is. Keep in mind what I shared earlier; defining these realities must be constrained to what Scripture has already clearly revealed elsewhere; in this case, the revelation exposed in the immediate context of Revelation 21 itself. And the immediate context tells us that this city coming down from heaven, new Jerusalem, is a literal people as the vision makes clear.

Revelation 21:9 ⁹ Then *one of the seven angels* who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and *spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."* (emphasis added)

And what does the angel immediately show John in this vision as it relates to the bride, the wife of the lamb?

Revelation 21:10-11 ¹⁰ And *he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and [he] showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,* ¹¹ *having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.* (emphasis added)

John could not make this any clearer. The angel states, "I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And then the angel shows John "the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, [where] *her* brilliance was like a very costly stone." In this context the two designations, that of a person (bride) and that of a city (New Jerusalem) are identical. The bride, God's people, is the city.

I am not saying that there will not be literal cities on the new earth, one which could certainly be identified as the new Jerusalem. But in this particular case of Revelation 21, John defines the city as the "Bride" as "she" is illumined by her Savior, having the glory of God where *"her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper."* (Revelation 21:11b)

This city/temple now encompasses a kingdom defined by Jesus Christ, where the "Bride" needs nothing else in this world to define her. This is why this city, this bride, shines with the glory of her Savior. Thus, no lamp of this world is needed, not even the sun or moon's glory to define them, because Christ is her lamp.

Matthew 5:12-16 ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for ***your reward in heaven is great***; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ¹³ "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. ¹⁴ "***You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*** (emphasis added)

We who are in Christ have no need for any of the glory of such things of this created universe when we have Christ Himself who is the light of the world. The prophet Malachi points this truth out when equating the light, from the rising of the sun, with the Name of the Lord.

Malachi 1:11 ¹¹ "For ***from the rising of the sun*** even to its setting, ***My name will be*** great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to ***My name***, and a grain offering *that is pure*; for ***My name will be*** great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts. (emphasis added)

God is the light among the nations and will continue to be the light on the new earth through His people who are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. But not even a new earth can contain the presence of God. The entire creation is part of the sanctuary that God has described in His word as being the Kingdom to which His people will one day have an inheritance, as they rule with God for eternity.

1 Kings 8:27 ²⁷ "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!

From his book, *God Dwells Among Us*, that he co-authored with Mitchell Kim, Beale notes: *The consummate form of the new temple will appear at the end of time in the new creation, when the heavenly dimension of God's Holy of Holies fully breaks in and replaces the old earth that has been destroyed (Rev 21:1-3). At this time only one section of the temple will remain, which is the Holy of Holies covering the whole cosmos. Heaven will come down and fill every part of the new creation. The church will no longer serve as a lampstand, since their role of witnessing to God's light will be finished. They will no longer need to shine God's light in a dark world since that world will be gone; instead in the new*

creation, "the glory of God" will have "illuminated it, and its lamp [will be] the Lamb.

SUN AND MOON DESTROYED?

But what about a number of those passages that allegedly reveal that the sun and moon are destroyed at some future time and will not be a part of the new heavens and new earth experience as we dwell with our Savior forever?

Psalm 72:5-7 ⁵ Let them fear You while the sun *endures*, And as long as the moon, throughout all generations. ⁶ May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, Like showers that water the earth. ⁷ In his days may the righteous flourish, ***And abundance of peace till the moon is no more.*** (emphasis added)

Isaiah 13:9-11 ⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. ¹⁰ ***For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light.*** ¹¹ Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. (emphasis added)

Isaiah 24:21-23 ²¹ So it will happen in that day, That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high, And the kings of the earth on earth. ²² They will be gathered together Like prisoners in the dungeon, And will be confined in prison; And after many days they will be punished. ²³ ***Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed,*** For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And *His* glory will be before His elders. (emphasis added)

Isaiah 60:19-20 ¹⁹ ***"No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light;*** But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory. ²⁰ ***"Your sun will no longer set, Nor will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be over.*** (emphasis added)

Joel 2:10-11 ¹⁰ Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, ***The sun and the moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness.*** ¹¹ The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it? (emphasis added)

Since this study is not about the sun and the moon, I'll try to be brief. But, it's important, in light of cherubim and seraphim being a part of God's creation, to note that the sun and moon are also part of this creation as God has designed them for His glory. With this in mind let's address these passages in the order I gave above.

Psalm 72 is a psalm of Solomon that essentially acknowledges the righteous and holy judgments of God, even toward His own people, along with the hope that He will not ultimately abandon His people.

And so, Solomon utilizes the sun and moon in a way that shows how God stands eternally above all His creation. And though the creation in its present cursed state will come to an end, God's peace will endure to the end for His people.

Of course, though the present creation comes to an end, it is not annihilated since the Scriptures are clear that there will be new heavens and a new earth. But if one wants to suggest that Solomon is indicating that the moon and the sun will in fact cease to exist, those who make this claim should read down to the end of his psalm.

Psalm 72:17 ¹⁷ *May his name endure forever; May his name increase as long as the sun shines*; And let *men* bless themselves by him; Let all nations call him blessed. (emphasis added)

God's name will not cease to increase if the sun ceases to shine because like His name enduring forever, so will the sun.

Isaiah 13:10 ¹⁰ For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light.

Here again, context is very important for explaining how the stars of heaven and the sun and moon cease to shed their light, even as the sun rises. But, like Rev.21:23, where we're told that the sun and moon are not needed to shine their light on the city (which is the bride of the Lamb, not a literal city) so too, Isaiah makes no mention of the sun and moon ceasing to exist. And, of course this, must include all the stars of heaven. Rather, he simply points out that all creation outside of the earth will cease to shine, despite the sun's rising. But remember, the context is describing the great day of God's wrath.

Isaiah 13:9 ⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will **exterminate its sinners** from it. (emphasis added)

^{NET} **Isaiah 13:9** Look, the LORD's day of judgment is coming; it is a day of cruelty and savage, raging anger, destroying the earth and **annihilating its sinners**.

By the way, you'll note in the above verse that sinners will be exterminated, or, according to the NET, annihilated, even as the land is made a desolation. But the Scriptures are clear. All men, the just and the unjust, will be bodily raised on the last day.

John 5:28-29 ²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which **all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,** ²⁹ **and will come forth**; those who did the good *deeds to a resurrection of life*, those who committed the evil *deeds to a resurrection of judgment*. (emphasis added)

We know that on the last day Christ will return for His people to raise them from the dead.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose

nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

If the just are resurrected on the last day, and we know that there is an hour coming when *all people* who are in the tombs will hear Christ's voice to be raised up, then the resurrection of all people will take place on the last day. Both the just and the unjust will be raised unto an eternal physical condition that suits their spiritual condition.

^{ESV} **Daniel 12:2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, ***some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*** (emphasis added)

Therefore, the idea of extermination in Isaiah 13:9 is directly related to the context which says that the land will become a desolation. It is from the land that these sinners will be exterminated, or destroyed, not that their actual existence is exterminated.

Jesus makes this clear in his parable of the wedding feast when he concludes with this statement of how those not adorned in wedding clothes (an allusion to being clothed in Christ's righteousness) will be thrown, exterminated if you will, from His presence.

Matthew 22:11-14 ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king said to the servants, '***Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***' ¹⁴ "For many are called, but few *are* chosen." (emphasis added)

And so, Isaiah 13:9 is describing the final judgment which is the same scene that Jesus describes when He comes to gather the nations for judgment.

Matthew 24:30-31 ³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then ***all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.*** ³¹ "***And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.*** (emphasis added)

Jesus is utilizing apocalyptic language that paints a very sober and dark picture of that Day of Judgment. This is the same scene Isaiah reveals later with the same result where judgment is equated with darkness.

Isaiah 24:21-23 ²¹ So it will happen in that day, That ***the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high, And the kings of the earth on earth.*** ²² They will be gathered together *Like* prisoners in the dungeon, And will be confined in prison; And ***after many days they will be punished.*** ²³ ***Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed,*** (emphasis added)

As Isaiah moves toward the end of his writings, he approaches the culmination of what God's judgment actually accomplishes as He finally eliminates all wickedness, but brings in the everlasting city.

Isaiah 60:18-19 ¹⁸ "Violence will not be heard again in your land, Nor devastation or destruction within your borders; But ***you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise.*** ¹⁹ "***No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory.*** (emphasis added)

Isaiah equates the walls and gates of a city with the salvation of God's people. He obviously is not identifying a literal walled city, but the equivalent of complete security in a mighty fortress where God's people take refuge.

2 Samuel 22:2-3 "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; ³ My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence.

What Isaiah is describing is the identical picture we have in Rev. 21:23. Isaiah is speaking prophetically to Israel and their future place of habitation. This includes a city with walls and gates, where they no longer need the sun or moon to provide light for them. The apostle John makes clear what this city is (the bride of the Lamb) and what light that city will be lit with; the Lamb, whom Isaiah identifies as "the LORD....an everlasting light....your God..," (Isaiah 60:19b).

Keep in mind, as Isaiah is writing to the nation of Israel, he clearly says that the people of God (the eschatological true Israel of God found in both Jew and Gentile) have a special name that God attaches to them in the context of a coming new heavens and new earth.

Isaiah 60:14-15 ¹⁴ "The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; And ***they will call you [Israel] the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*** ¹⁵ "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated With no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting pride, A joy from generation to generation. (emphasis added)

Isaiah then continues by describing how the sun and moon, which moments ago were apparently not needed, are reintroduced with the new heavens and new earth.

Isaiah 66:22-23 ²² "For just as ***the new heavens and the new earth Which I make*** will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "So your offspring and your name will endure. ²³ "***And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me,***" says the LORD. (emphasis added)

Notice that in the new heavens and new earth, which God makes to endure, we continue to experience new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath as God's people bow down before Him on the new earth. From one new moon to the next, the moon continues to shine from sabbath to sabbath. This indicates that the earth continues to rotate on its axis as one day flows to the next as the sun illumines both the moon and the earth.

And of course, we know that the present creation, which would include the sun, the moon, the stars, planet earth and every other created thing, continues to fall under the curse. But we are also told that the present creation yearns for that final day when Christ returns to judge the world and subsequently to set up His kingdom forever when all men are raised. This is when He establishes the new heavens and new earth, which will include a new sun and a new moon, as all are recreated by God from the old.

Romans 8:20-22 ²⁰ For *the creation was subjected to futility*, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that *the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ²² For we know that *the whole creation groans* and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (emphasis added)

One last verse that some use to justify that the sun and moon will one day cease to exist is found in Joel.

Joel 2:10-11 ¹⁰ Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, *The sun and the moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness.* ¹¹ The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. *The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?* (emphasis added)

Again, the prophet is not suggesting that the sun and moon will cease to exist, only that their brightness will turn to darkness. And as was pointed out earlier, this is in the context of the great and terrible dark day of the Lord in His final judgment, which Joel addresses above at the end of verse 11.

Does this mean that the sun and the moon will be remade from the old and continue to exist after God's great judgment on the last day? Of course, why wouldn't it? Unless you take Rev.21:23 out of its context, it is clear that it is not addressing a physical city without the sun and moon. David had an understanding of God's decree to create a universe that would accommodate His people forever in a Kingdom that magnified the name of the Lord.

Psalm 89:36-37 ³⁶ "*His descendants shall endure forever And his throne as the sun before Me.* ³⁷ "*It shall be established forever like the moon,* And the witness in the sky is faithful." Selah. (emphasis added)

Psalm 104:19 ¹⁹ He made the moon for the seasons; The sun knows the place of its setting.

Psalm 148:2-6 ² Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! ³ *Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light!* ⁴ Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens! ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created. ⁶ *He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away.* (emphasis added)

Of course, if God's created order is established forever and ever, does this mean that all heavenly bodies exist in time? Will the new earth continue to rotate on its axis, distinguishing morning and evening, one day? This then begs an additional question, do we live forever, in time?

This question is answered in my upcoming book "Cherubim and Seraphim: Heaven's beasts and other assorted beings, events and places associated with them."