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Jerusalem old & new



Old Jerusalem not fit for purpose

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Introduction

***Inclusio!** Sounds like some sort of food, doesn't it, but is a literary device to end a text where it starts. It's also known as a bracket, an envelope, or a bookend. I prefer to call them, colloquially, sandwiches. To a text, sandwiches provide structure, the association between ideas, highlighting one big idea or theme. In between, is an appetising filling. In this series, **Sandwich** papers deal with Bible books, or slabs of Bible texts.*

This second **Sandwich** paper deals with a subject similar to **Sandwich** paper one. Notice that in the two texts below, Isaiah has sandwiched his message in between two references to the heavens and the earth, the first in the opening verses of Isaiah 1, and the last in the closing verses of chapter 66.

*Hear, O **heavens**, and listen, O **earth**; for the LORD has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me (Isaiah 1:2).*

*For as the **new heavens and the new earth**, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain (Isaiah 66:22).*

Moreover, Isaiah has more references to the heavens and the earth than any other Bible book. This makes 'the heavens and the earth' highly significant for Isaiah.

Rebel or remain

The remarkable contrast between these two words points up the differences between the people in each text, but why there must be a new heaven and earth. 'Rebelled' (*pasha*⁶) has the idea of 'spreading the legs' as in 'to stride, and 'to break away'. In contrast, 'remain' means to stand. The former refers to God's people striding away from God, while the latter means standing with God. The rebellion is the reason why the present heavens and earth must be replaced with new heavens and earth, populated by people who are for God, not against Him.

Listen and hear

The parallel between Isaiah 1:2, and Deuteronomy 32:1 is striking.

Listen (azan), O heavens, and I will speak; hear (shama), O earth, the words of my mouth (Deuteronomy 32:1).

Listen (shama), O heavens, hear (azan), O earth! For the Lord speaks (Isaiah 1:2).

Notice how *azan* (open out the ear) and *shama* are reversed in the two texts. '*Shama*' means to hear intelligently implying to obey. Notably, *Adam and Eve heard (shama) the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden* (Genesis 3:7), after they had disobeyed His command.

Deuteronomy 32:1 introduces the Song of Moses, given to the people before Moses died, warning about their rebellion. God wants for them to serve Him alone, for they were want to be idolatrous. He reminded them of how special they were: *When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided up humankind, he set the boundaries of the peoples, according to the number of the sons of God. For the Lord's allotment is his people, Jacob is his special possession.*

"Sons of God" refers to the angelic heavenly assembly (Psalms 29:1; 89:6), because the Lord delegated jurisdiction over the nations to his angelic host (Daniel 10:13-21), while reserving for himself Israel, over whom he rules directly ([Net Bible](#)).

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Some 700 years after Moses, Isaiah warns Israel again about their rebellion. Just as Moses warned his generation that God would judge their waywardness, so too Isaiah. If the Psalmist raised his voice to God and He heard (*azan*) him (Psalm 77:1), how much should Israel, and should we? If the heavens and the earth hear Him, how much should His people?

As [Skip Moen](#) puts it (May 7 2005), giving ear to God is serious business. Didn't Jesus say the same thing? "He who has ears, let him hear." Indeed, the Gospels record it six times during His earthly ministry, and seven times to churches after His ascension (Matthew 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, Mark 4:9, Luke 8:8, 14:35, Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22).

The Ears of the Universe

[Skip Moen](#) (May 6, 2005) has an interesting take on the universe listening to God. He says:

Have you ever listened to the sound of the heavens? Scientists discovered years ago that there is a deep, residual sound carried in the fabric of the universe. They call it the left over noise of the Big Bang. But maybe, just maybe, there is another source of that sound. What if it is the answer of the universe to the call of its Creator? Shama is not a word for simply listening. It is a word for hearing and responding. It is the call of the Creator into every part of His creation. Go out on a starry night, away from the sound of Man, away from the flickering lights of men trying to make their own suns, away from the noises that fill our ears with reminders of considerably lesser gods. And hear what God is saying in the breathing of the universe.

Years ago I spent some time on a small island in the South Pacific. It was hundreds of miles from any industrialized civilization. There were no electric lights, no cars, no airplanes. Night was night, filled only with the lights God provided. I remember lying on the beach, seeing the southern sky so clearly. Billions upon billions of suns, God's display of optical dust spread out on a canvas of black. And I listened. I heard the universe breathing the rhythm of God's breath, alive, stable, confident. So deep was the sound that it moved my soul. "My God, You are too wonderful for me."

We have been cheated by "progress". Even in the midst of the night, it is nearly impossible to escape the cacophony of human interference with the melodic harmony of God's symphony in the heavens. But if you ever hear it, just once, you will know that this sound does not belong to us. God calls the heavens – and they answer.

Sandwich within sandwich

*Shout, O **heavens**, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the **earth**; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord protects Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel (Isaiah 44:23).*

*Shout for joy, O **heavens**, and exult, O **earth**; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted (Isaiah 49:13).*

The Lord calls on the heavens and earth to shout and sing for joy that He is the Protector of His people, and that He has looked on their affliction with compassion and comforted them. He knows that His creation will listen and do what He asks.

But what about His people? Sandwiched in between these two texts are the Lord's eight calls for people to **listen** to God. Six of these are for Israel (stark flashback to how Isaiah opened his book (1:2), and two for Gentiles (Babylon and far off lands).

Let's look briefly at these intervening texts, the sandwich filling.

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Listen to me

***Listen to me**, O family of Jacob, all you who are left from the family of Israel, you who have been carried from birth, you who have been supported from the time you left the womb. Even when you are old, I will take care of you, even when you have gray hair, I will carry you. I made you and I will support you; I will carry you and rescue you (Isaiah 46:3).*

***Listen to me**, you stubborn people, you who distance yourselves from doing what is right. I am bringing my deliverance near, it is not far away; I am bringing my salvation near, it does not wait. I will save Zion; I will adorn Israel with my splendor (Isaiah 46:12-13).*

*So now, **listen** to this, O one who lives so lavishly, who lives securely, who says to herself, 'I am unique! No one can compare to me!' (Babylon) (Isaiah 47:8).*

***Listen to this**, O family of Jacob, you who are called by the name 'Israel,' and are descended from Judah, who take oaths in the name of the Lord, and invoke the God of Israel— but not in an honest and just manner (Isaiah 48:1).*

***Listen to me**, O Jacob, Israel, whom I summoned. I am the one; I am present at the very beginning and at the very end (Isaiah 48:12).*

*All of you, gather together and **listen**! Who among them announced these things? The Lord's ally will carry out his desire against Babylon; he will exert his power against the Babylonians (Isaiah 48:14).*

*Approach me— **listen** to this! From the very first I have not spoken in secret; when it happens, I am there." So now, the Sovereign Lord has sent me, accompanied by his Spirit (Isaiah 48:16).*

This is what the Lord, your Protector, says, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God...The Lord protects his servant Jacob (Isaiah 48:20).

***Listen to me**, you coastlands! Pay attention, you people who live far away! (Isaiah 49:1).*

The Lord, the Protector of Israel, their Holy One, says...I will protect you (Isaiah 49:7-8).

At the beginning of this sandwich, the Lord called on the heavens and earth to shout and sing for joy because He is the Protector of His people. The filling in between calls on Israel, and the Gentiles to '**Listen to me**' because He is the Protector of His people. The sandwich is complete with this:

*Shout for joy, O **heavens**, and exult, O **earth**; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted (Isaiah 49:13).*

New heavens and earth

In the last two chapters of Isaiah there are two references to the new heavens and earth. Let's consider both of them.

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind (Isaiah 65:17).

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain (Isaiah 66:22).

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Old things forgotten

*For behold, I am ready to create **new heavens and a new earth**, for the former distresses will be forgotten, and they will be hidden from my eyes (Isaiah 65:17).*

The Lord laments that He spread out His hands all day long to His rebellious people, who lived in a way that is morally unacceptable, and who walked the way that is after their own thoughts (65:2). For these who abandoned the Lord and His holy mountain, who held festivals for the god called ‘Fortune,’ and the god called ‘Destiny’, the Lord predestined them to die by the sword. For, the Lord called to them, and they did not respond; He spoke and they did not listen. They did evil before me Him, and they chose to do what displeased Him (65:11-12).

In contrast, for His servants, past problems will be forgotten, for the Lord will no longer think about them, for He is *ready to create new heavens and a new earth, for the former distresses will be forgotten, and they will be hidden from His eyes* (Isaiah 65:17).

New things remain

*For as the **new heavens and the new earth**, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain* (Isaiah 66:22).

To correctly interpret these last two verses, I’ve made the table below to show the comparison. It highlights both the things to be seen and those not seen.

Firstly, the heavens and earth are ‘new’ (*chadash*), which doesn’t mean ‘brand new’ as we would imagine, but it means rebuild, renew, repair, or a fresh thing, indicating that God will renew, or refurbish things according to their original purpose ([Moskala](#)).

The new heavens and the new earth		
Text	Text Things to be seen	Things not to be seen
Isaiah 65:17 Look! I am creating entirely a new heavens and a new earth .	• Jerusalem will be a joy. • Each will live their full lifespan. • People will build their own houses; they will not be taken over. • The wolf and the lamb will graze side by side, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.	• No one will think about the old ones anymore. • No longer hear the sound of weeping or cries of distress. • No baby will die in infancy there. • There will be no violence on the holy mountain of Zion
Context	Zion is a wasteland; Jerusalem sits in ruins (64:10). Here is what Yahweh says: I will raise up offspring from Jacob and from my chosen ones of Judah to possess my mountains, and my servants will settle there. But you who forsake Yahweh and ignore my holy mountain...I will destine you for the sword! (Isaiah 65:8-11).	
Isaiah 66:22 For as the new heavens and the new earth , which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord... so shall your name remain (Isaiah 66:22).	• The descendants and name of Israel’s remnant to remain. • All humanity will worship the Lord in Jerusalem. • Some of the Gentiles to be priests.	The saved will go out of the city and see the dead bodies of those who rebelled against God. Their worm will not die and their fire never go out. They will be abhorrent to humanity.
Context	The end is near for those who ‘consecrate’ and ‘purify’ themselves to engage in idolatrous worship. The time is coming for the Lord to gather people together from all over the world, and they will come and gaze on His radiance. He will send some of the remnant to other nations that have never heard of His fame nor gazed on His glory. They will declare His glory among the gentiles! And they will bring back from the nations your own people to His holy mountain Jerusalem (Isaiah 66:17-24).	

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A new heaven and earth continued

Secondly, notice the Passion Translation of Isaiah 65:17:

Look! I am creating entirely new heavens and a new earth.

This indicates a process, God's continuous activity, as He gradually renews those things affected by sin, such as human personal and family life, human society, and the natural world ([Moskala](#)).

Peter and John in the NT also refer to the new heavens and earth. Here is the table of comparisons.

The new heavens and the new earth		
Text	Text Things to be seen	Things not to be seen
2 Peter 2:13 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth.	• The coming heavens and earth will be new in quality. • Righteousness will be at home. • The Lord rescues the godly.	• The atmosphere will be set on fire and vanish with a roar. • The heavenly bodies will melt away. • The earth and every activity of man will be laid bare. • The Lord will reserve the ungodly for punishment.
Context	Peter encouraged his readers to devote themselves to lavishly supplement their faith with a range of virtues so that their entrance into the eternal kingdom of their Lord and Saviour will be open wide to them. Further, Peter warned his readers to never forget the teaching of the prophets of old, nor the teaching of the Lord spoken by the apostles, because in the last days false teachers will mock the Lord's promise of His coming. Contrary to man's perspective, the Lord is not late with His promise to return, as some measure lateness. The day of the Lord will come and take everyone by surprise; as unexpected as a home invasion. (2 Peter 2).	
Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.	• Holy City, the New Jerusalem, infused with the glory of God. • God dwells with human beings. • Everything to be new and fresh. • Its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb. • The glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. • People will bring the glory and wealth of the nations into the city. • The water and tree of life. • Throne of God and of the Lamb. • God's servants will serve Him, and they will reign as kings forever.	• The first heaven and earth had passed • No more sea, or tears, or death, or pain • No evil, and no curse. • No sun or moon, and no night.
Context	The Lord brings an end to every other ruler, authority, and power. Satan is thrown out of heaven, all hostility is subdued and placed under His feet. The kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever. The last enemy to be subdued and eliminated is death.	

Like Isaiah, Peter also describes the process of forming the new creation, but John sees it complete. However, both see 'new' (*kainos*) expressing qualitative newness ([Abarim Publications](#)). So, it seems that God will not obliterate this existing creation but refurbish it.

Also, what Isaiah and Peter see is imperfect. Isaiah, for example refers to old age and death; Peter of a vanishing atmosphere, everything laid bare, and punishment. Isaiah has in view a restored Jerusalem, people and land, with all of humanity coming to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. His view of the *new heavens and a new earth* stops short of John's vision.

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A new heaven and earth continued

John's view of the *new heavens and a new earth* is significantly different. The current atmospheric and astronomic heavens will have no sun, no moon, and no night, and our current earth will be replaced with one that has no sea. It will get an extreme makeover.

An earth with no sea and no darkness (Revelation 22:5) will be a totally different world to the one we have now. For example, the ocean now produces over half of the world's oxygen but the engine of our spiritual bodies will not need it. Moreover, while the sea provides ingredients for medicinal products that help fight cancer, arthritis, Alzheimer's, and heart disease, and the darkness of night is necessary to make our immune systems work producing melatonin, which fights diseases, God's new world has none of these illnesses or their consequences - no death, mourning, crying, pain (21:4), so the benefits of the sea and darkness will not be needed.

Conclusion

The first and last texts of Isaiah reminded Israel, and us too, that giving ear to God is a serious business. If the heavens and the earth hear and obey Him, how much should His people?

So tainting is rebellion that a new heavens and the earth must be made. The current one is no longer fit for purpose. Only a new one will satisfy God's holiness, and only His obedient people will populate it.

The Lord Jesus said the same thing. **He who has ears, let him hear.** So important were these words, the Gospels record it six times during His earthly ministry, and seven times to churches after His ascension (Matthew 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, Mark 4:9, Luke 8:8, 14:35, Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22).

If listening to God is important to Him, it must become important to us.

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