



Conducted by
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Could you please comment on Christ's promise in Matt. 5:5 that the "meek shall inherit the earth" in the context of "Jehovah's Witnesses" teaching on the passage.

In the beatitudes (or beautiful attitudes) Jesus says that those with such beautiful attitudes in life will receive certain blessings thereby. "Blessed are they." It is notable that none of these blessings are material things. Not only are the blessings not earthly but these beautiful attitudes themselves are the very antithesis of the normal characteristics associated with material success in a worldly world. For example, Christ is not saying that the physically strong are blessed, or the clever, or the person attractive in appearance, or the witty or the talented. There is no merit in such things. Rather, God blesses those who strive at *overcoming* physical weaknesses and superimposing the spiritual graces and adornments—*i.e.* "the poor in spirit"; "those that mourn" (for sins); "the meek"; those that covet—but covet righteousness; "the merciful"; "the pure in heart"; "the peacemakers"; "those persecuted for righteousness' sake"—spiritual attributes all of them, physical faculties none of them. The blessings are likewise not physical and material, but spiritual. This should provide us with our first hint: "the earth" as promised to the meek is not the physical earth but rather a blessing of a spiritual nature. Briefly, "Jehovah's Witnesses" teach that only "the 144,000 will enjoy eternal life in heaven—the rest to have an abiding place here on earth. They quote the present passage in support of their contention, and also, amongst others, Eccl. 1:4 ". . . the earth abideth for ever."

Before considering Matt. 5:5 perhaps a short comment on Eccl. 1:4 is necessary. Solomon, was of course ruminating over the transiency of man's short existence in life, and is comparing it with the relatively more lasting qualities of the earth upon which man lives. Actually the full quotation of the verse is "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever." The phrase "for ever" must be handled very carefully, because it does not necessarily mean "eternal," but merely indicates an extremely long period of time. One quotation will illustrate the point—Exodus 12:14, 17—the feast of unleavened bread was to be kept as an ordinance "for ever."

What the Psalmist and Peter say

Jesus was not the first to make the point that the meek would inherit the earth. The Psalmist made this pronouncement many hundreds of years before, and in fact did not limit such inheritance to the meek. Psalm 37:9: "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord they shall inherit the earth"—this surely includes all God's servants. The same Psalm, verse 11, says "But the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace," and verse 22 reads, "For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth, and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off." It seems to me that the inheriting of the earth will take place when the cursed of God will be "cut off." In Psalm 25:12, 13 we further learn that he that fears the Lord will inherit the earth.

Jesus, like the Psalmist, used the future tense—the meek *shall* inherit the earth. It is crucial to ponder the "earth" to which the Psalmist and Jesus alluded. Were they referring to this literal ball on which we stand, or did they mean the "new earth" mentioned elsewhere in New Testament scriptures? Had no mention been made in the New Testament of the sure fact that this literal earth will some day be unquestionably destroyed, or the further fact that God is going to make a *new* heaven and a new earth, then we could be excused for believing that Jesus meant that the meek would inherit this physical ball. Indeed no other construction could possibly be placed upon his words. However the apostle Peter supplies us with these staggering truths—listen again to what Peter says, in his second epistle, chap. 3:9-13: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and Godliness? Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise (what promise? Matt. 5:5, I suggest, J.G.) look for new heavens and a new earth; wherein dwelleth righteousness." Peter, then, tells us what will befall this literal orb—it will be burned up and no one, surely, would charge Jesus with the infamy of promising the meek a dwelling place which any day is likely to disintegrate into hot soot. That this earth shall come to such an end seems to be implied in its very construction and physical constitution and I am given to understand that if its chemical constituent parts were merely to be rearranged in a certain order the earth would explode and destroy itself. Certainly if the heavens fail (sun and moon) the earth cannot remain. Peter says that first of all the heavens would pass away amidst great noises. Three heavens are spoken of in the bible (2 Cor. 12:1-4)—the dwelling place of birds, the dwelling place of planets and thirdly the dwelling place of God. The first two are in the material universe and, with the earth, will liquify and pass away—the third will remain.

What is "The Earth"?

But "Jehovah's Witnesses" would reply that when Peter said that the earth would be burned up he was meaning not the literal sphere but the earthly works and the evil, in the same way in which Peter in chap. 1:6 says that "*the world*" perished in the flood. The literal world obviously did not perish, only the worldly works on it. Also in Gen. 6:13 God said to Noah ". . . behold I will destroy them (the wicked) *with* the earth," yet God did not in fact destroy the physical earth. Therefore, according to "Jehovah's Witnesses," Peter is talking in a similar vein and means that God will cleanse the earth with fire and that is all. It is true the term "earth" and "world" should not always be taken literally, and that "earth" sometimes means the people on it, e.g. Gen. 11:1 "And the whole earth was of one language and one speech." However a closer examination of Gen. 6:13 shows a marginal note which informs us that God was not saying to Noah that he would destroy the wicked *with* the earth but "*from off* the earth" and this is something entirely different. It should also be obvious to all reasonable readers

of the N.T. that Peter *did not* mean the wicked works of the world when he said "the earth" would be burned, because in fact Peter says that the earth "and the works that are therein" shall be burned up. Two separate and distinct components: the earth itself, and the works that are in the earth. With reference to their argument on chap. 1:6 ("the world" perishing in the flood and still remaining intact) it is vital to note that the word "world" in this verse comes from the Greek "cosmos" and means the world's arrangements and beauty, which things did, of course, perish in the deluge. In contradistinction, the "earth" which Peter talks about in chap. 3 is from the Greek "ge" and means "earth or land," the same word as in Matt. 5:5 and the one used most commonly for "the earth" in the N.T. (Young's *Analytical Concordance*). It is interesting also to note that when Solomon in Eccl. 1:4 (mentioned earlier) was reflecting upon man's short life-span he was contrasting it with solid-enduring qualities of the earth, but when the Psalmist (Psalm 102:24-27) is talking about the eternal nature of God he contrasts this eternal quality of God with the relatively short life-span allotted to the earth and shows, in fact, that the earth's days are indeed numbered. "Thy (God's) years are throughout all generations. Of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old as doth a garment; as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But *thou* art the same, and *thy* years shall have no end."

Similarly, Jesus speaking of the eternal nature of His words could say (Luke 21:33) "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away."

"The meek shall inherit the earth": but when, and what earth? Peter and his Christian contemporaries were doubtless meek; they feared the Lord; they waited upon the Lord; therefore they surely qualified to receive the predictions of the Psalmist and the blessings of the Saviour; they will therefore inherit the earth (as will all such) yet Peter had no impression of his inheriting this earth. "But we, according to His promise, look for *new* heavens and a *new* earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

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"IN HEAVENLY PLACES"

PAUL'S Epistle to the Ephesians has a distinctiveness from his other epistles. This lies in the fact that it deals mainly with the status of converts to Christ, "to the intent that they might walk worthy" of it (chap. 4:1). He had told the Corinthians that "if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature: the old things have passed away: behold all things have become new."

Now it is the position of this "new creature" that Paul calls attention to in this epistle. Consider such terms as "formerly afar off now become near"; from "strangers and foreigners" to "fellow citizens"; from "dead in offences" to "alive in Christ." Even in his epistle to the Colossians he reminds them that they have been translated from under one authority to that of another.

This new position of believers is described by the apostle as being "in heavenly places" and this is said to be "in Christ." According to him in chaps. 1:3 and 2:6 it is indeed a very gracious position to which believers have been raised. This testimony included at that period Jewish and Gentile converts. The exalted nature of this position is seen when we read that this term "heavenly places" is applied by Paul to a position to which Christ has been raised and invested with all authority (chap. 1:20). The church of Christ is upon the earth, but not of it. Neither is it in heaven, yet it is of it. It appears that Paul uses the term "in the heavnies" to denote the very exalted position the church is called upon to occupy in the world. Again, according to Paul this position of believers in Christ is strictly in accordance with Divine purpose and intention (chap. 1:9, 14 and 3:11).