

Thalassa-less

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Rev 21:1

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(NIV)

Καὶ εἶδον οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινήν.	Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”
ὁ γὰρ πρῶτος οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ πρώτη γῆ	for the first heaven and the first earth
ἀπῆλθαν	had passed away,
καὶ ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι.	and there was no longer any sea.

The planet Uranus is a Latinized rendition of the Greek *ouranos*, “heaven.” *Kainos* means “new,” as in the combining form *ceno-*, Cenozoic (new life). *Prōtos* for “first” hardly needs explanation. As for γῆ, think *gaia* or *ge-* as in geology. Thalassophobia is fear of the sea; thalassic deposits are found around islands. Pretty simple Greek, don’t you think?

We live in a time that romanticizes the sea. Remember Masefield’s, “I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky / And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by.” Ours is a National Geographic world, and we think in terms of bright coral, playful dolphins, lovable penguins, and strange deep sea life. I remember a wedding sermon that compared the bride and groom to whales who found each other by sound across hundreds of miles. We love the ocean. We love aquariums. My daughter wanted to be a marine biologist and I think that everyone wants to be an oceanographer at some point in their life. “The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever”—Jacques Cousteau.

We have power over the sea and so we worry about extinctions and pollution. But this was patently not the case in the ancient world. Although fishing provided a staple of life, and the merchant marine was alive and well, yet it was a frighteningly mysterious dead man’s land. Underwater housed the

dead and was home to demons (Job 26:5, Luke 8:22 – 37). In John's Apocalypse, the terrible seven-headed monster rose from the *thalassa* to dominate the world for evil (Rev 13:1). The *thalassa* parallels death and hades (20:13).

It is this "sea" that will not be in the new earth. No more death. No more demonic source of evil world powers (see Dan 7:3). It is a matter of symbolism and imagery. Actual whales are quite secure. Even in Revelation, aquatic creatures matter (5:13, 12:12). Jacques would be happy in the new world.

A woman once came up to me at my kid's soccer match and asked about the lack of a sea in the new earth. (This sort of thing happens to me frequently.) She just wasn't getting the concept. Coincidentally, about that time the second of Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies was released. So I put it this way. When apocalyptic literature says that in the perfect creation there is no more sea, it means that there is no more twisted, sickening Davey Jones to threaten the lives and immortal souls of honest men. No more shipload of damned souls, forsaken and headed for hell. No more monstrous kraken to haunt the waterways with sudden inexorable death. No more menacing evil bent on corrupting the world. No more Davey Jones' locker.

No more unemployment. No more accusation. No more cancer. No more fear and anxiety. No more war. No more death of loved ones. No more hand wringing. No more sleepless nights. No more Satan. No more evil. He will wipe every tear from our eyes.

The New Heavens and New Earth is part of the great hope of Christians, our beatific vision. Every good and wholesome thing will be there. Our

environment will be all things wonderful and beautiful. And best of all, we will see Jesus face to face.

So don't let this present world distract you. What is coming is made for new people like you and me. He said, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev 21:5). If you are in Christ you are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), being made fit for the new world. This is Jesus' work in your life.

But you are a work in progress. You still have some characteristics that belong to the old order. They won't be part of you in the new age. Right now, is there a behavior or habit or attitude that should be tossed into the ephemeral sea? Why don't you cast off those things now? Live like a citizen of the new world! Live like you love the new earth! Be "renewed in the spirit of your minds" and "put on the new self" (Eph 4:23 - 24). To do any less would be to prefer this unholy world of corruption and dismay, like the twisted mariners of the movie.

Something to think about.