

What Will Eternity Be Like

Revelation 21:1-8

Introduction: 1) One of the most wonderful promises in all of the Bible is that persons who have put their faith in Jesus Christ will spend all of eternity with God in a place called heaven. Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:20, “our citizenship is in heaven.” Hebrews 12:22 affirms, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” This is our future home and our future hope, and how that ought to make a difference in our lives today.

Throughout my life I have often heard the statement: “Well he is so heavenly minded he is no earthly good.” There is only one thing wrong with that statement. It is not true. The fact is those who are the most heavenly minded are the most earthly good! That is why Colossians 3:1-2 teaches us, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

2) C.S. Lewis beautifully echoes the truth of Scripture when he writes, “A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world

were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth “thrown in:” aim at earth and you will get neither.” (*Mere Christianity*, p. 134).

3) Revelation 21-22 brings us to the end of the Apocalypse and to the end of the Bible. It is a fitting conclusion to the historical drama of redemption that began in Genesis 1-3. In fact it is interesting to compare the beginning of Genesis with the end of Revelation. Parallels and differences are too important to ignore.

Genesis	Revelation
1) Heaven and earth created, 1:1	1) New heavens and earth recreated, 21:1
2) Sun created, 1:16	2) No need of sun, 21:23
3) The night established, 1:5	3) No night there, 22:5
4) The seas created, 1:10	4) No more seas, 21:1
5) The curse announced, 3:14–17	5) No more curse, 22:3
6) Death enters history, 3:19	6) Death exits history, 21:4
7) Man driven from paradise, 3:24	7) Man restored to paradise, 22:14
8) Sorrow and pain begin, 3:17	8) Sorrow, tears, and pain end, 21:4
9) The devil appears, 3:1	9) The devil disappears, 20:10

Indeed, one of the most wonderful things about the Bible is that in its first two chapters the devil is not there and in its last two chapters the devil is not there. Examine Genesis 1 and 2 and you will find no mention of the ancient serpent. Examine Revelation 21 and 22 and you will likewise find no mention of Satan. He is not there. He is in the Lake of Fire (20:10), where he will be imprisoned for all eternity.

4) These final two chapters unfold clearly in a 3-fold division: 1) 21:1-8; 2) 21:9-22:5; and 3) 22:6-21. They logically and theologically follow the second coming (19:11-21), the millennium (20:1-6), the final rebellion (20:7-10) and the great white throne judgment (20:11-15). The eternal destiny of the redeemed is so radically different than the eternal destiny of the lost. Only new and wonderful things are in the future for those who love God and trust in His Son. A new day is coming! As the song says, “when we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!” What, then, is in store for those who live under the reign of this king? What will eternity be like?

I. We will enjoy a new heaven and a new earth 21:1-2

1) John sees “a new heaven and a new earth.” Why? Because “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” Duvall notes, “This final “and I saw” passage (cf. 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1) serves as the “high point of

the whole letter”” (280). John draws on the language of Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. Heaven is mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible and right at 50 times in Revelation (MacArthur, vol. 2, 262). We should note that there are three heavens mentioned in the Bible (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2-4). They are: 1) the earth’s atmosphere where the clouds are and the birds fly; 2) the stellar heavens where the planets, sun and stars reside; and 3) the unique dwelling place of God where good angels and saints will live forever and ever. That heaven has not yet been created, and no one is there right now. Believers who die do immediately go to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), but that is an intermediate place of blessing, not our final heavenly home. Revelation 21-22 describes our eternal abode, the 3rd heaven. John also says there is no sea. Greg Beale notes there are five uses of the “sea” in the Apocalypse. They are: “1) the origin of cosmic evil (especially in light of the OT background; so 4:6, 12:18; 13:1; 15:2), 2) the unbelieving, rebellious nations who cause tribulation for God’s people (12:18; 13:1; Isa. 57:20; cf. Rev. 17:2, 6), 3) the place of the dead (20:13), 4) the primary location of the world’s idolatrous trade activity (18:10-19), 5) a literal body of water, sometimes mentioned together with “the earth,”...in which the sea as a part of the old creation represents the totality of it (5:13; 7:1-3; 8:8-9; 10:2, 5-6, 8; 14:7; 16:3 [?]).” (1042).

He believes all five are probably in view here though I am not sure about #5. As beautiful bodies of water were a part of God's original creation, I believe they will also be a part of the new creation.

2) Verse two sees the descent of "the holy city, new Jerusalem." She is pure, spotless and without blemish in character. She comes down as a wonderful gift of grace. And she is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," the Lamb, the Lord Jesus. She will be described in greater detail in 21:9-22:5. It is important to note that she is both a place and a people. God's people, as Scripture reveals, have long awaited this day and moment (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:8-10; 12:22; 13:14).

3) Now, we should address an important question about the new creation. Will God renovate the old creation as Romans 8:19-22 seems to teach or will He completely recreate a new creation as 2 Peter 3:10-13 appears to affirm? This is not an easy question to answer. Might it be that there is something of a transformation of the old order through the destruction of the old order? I think we are on good ground to affirm some type of continuity between the old order and the new order though the new will be radically better and superior. Perhaps the judgment of 2 Peter 3 is one of cleansing rather than total destruction (Osborne, f.n. 4, 730). What we can say for certain is, "There will be a whole new reality, a new kind of existence in which all the

negatives of the “first” (Gen. 1) world will be removed, all the discoloration by sin will be gone” (Osborne, 730).

II. We will live in intimate and personal communion with our God 21:3

- This is one of the most wonderful promises in the Bible. In a real sense this is what the Bible has been pointing toward throughout its 66 books. Again, John hears “a loud voice” something we hear 20 plus times in Revelation. This voice comes with divine authority and power for it comes from God’s throne. The announcement? God’s dwelling place or tabernacle is with man! God will permanently and forever pitch His tent (cf. John 1:14) among His redeemed people. His “shekinah glory” will make its home in and among His peoples (“peoples” is preferred here). Heaven will be a kingdom diversity home for all the *ethnes*. It will be wonderfully multicultural and multiethnic. There will be no segregated subdivisions in the New Jerusalem!
- God’s tabernacle is His people. He tabernacles among His peoples. “They will be His peoples (see Levt. 26:11-13).” And the great promise of this verse gets only better, “God himself will be with them as their God.” God himself is emphatic. Our great God will be with us, in our midst, as our God. As Mounce beautifully puts it, “It is with the redeemed peoples of all

races and nationalities that God will dwell in glory.” (383). Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” That great promise is now fulfilled. It becomes reality in the fullest measure. Often I am asked, “In heaven, will we see God?” Revelation 21:3 says absolutely! Revelation 22:4 seals the deal!

III. We will no longer experience the horrible effects of sin 21:4

- I have often referred to this verse as one of the most precious in all of Scripture, and with good reason. I almost always read it at funeral services because it is filled with so much hope and assurance. This sinful, fallen world has left so many people beaten and broken. The pain it inflicts often overwhelms us, almost crushing us. This verse promises us that in eternity all that causes pain and sorrow will forever be taken away!
- Verse four identifies five things that will be absent in eternity: 1) tears, 2) death, 3) mourning, 4) crying and 5) pain. Wiped out forever are the horrible consequences and effects of sin! Revelation 7:17 previously promised, “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” And hear also the words of Isaiah 25:8-9, “He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,

for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”” Scott Duvall says, “Like a compassionate parent caring for a suffering child, God will wipe away our tears” (282). Adrian Rogers adds, “Death is only a comma to a Christian – not a period!” Yes, in eternity, all the former things associated with the fallen world “has passed away” and they are never coming back.

IV. We will rest in the sure promises of God

21:5-6

The one “seated on the throne” speaks again (v. 3) and once more His words bless, comfort, excite and bring joy to His peoples. “Behold” signals a special announcement is about to follow. The declaration: “I am making all things new.” The promises of verse four are just an inkling of all that I am going to do for my people, my bride. A quick survey of chapters 21-22 identifies at least 12 sure promises we can rest in:

1. God makes a new heaven, earth, and Jerusalem. Rev. 21:1-2
2. Chaos and disorder are no more. 21:1
3. God will live with His people personally. 21:3; 22:4
4. The effects of sin are eradicated and done away with. 21:4, 8, 27; 22:3
5. All the legitimate desires of our heart will be satisfied. 21:6
6. Our inheritance of heavenly blessings will be plentiful and permanent. 21:7
7. The splendor of the New Jerusalem will be magnificent. 21:9-21

8. The glory of God will permeate our dwelling place. 21:22-23
9. Nations will be guided by God. 21:24, 26
10. Protections and peace are perfectly present. 21:25; 22:4-5
11. Productivity will be incredible. 22:1-2
12. Perpetual, perfect service will be our calling. 22:3

These promises are not conditional, potentially true or tentative. John is told, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true” (cf. 19:9; 22:6).

Just as the Living Word is “Faithful and True” (19:11) so the written word is “trustworthy and true.”

- The new creation has come. The Word of God is trustworthy and true.

Verse six affirms, “It is done.” It is finished. It is complete. And, who can say this? The sovereign God and ruler of the universe who declares Himself to be “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” (cf. 1:8, 17; 22:13; also Isa. 44:6; 48:12). He is the A & Z. He is the Lord over both ends of history and all that is in between. David Platt says, “He had the first word in history, and He will have the last word in history” (Sermon, 10-28-12).

- Because He is Himself eternal life, He can give eternal life to others. This is what He has done for all who have trusted in His Son (John 3:16) and that is what is intended by the beautiful image of the “the spring of the water of life without payment.” In John 7:37-38 The Bible says, “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,

‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” If you are thirsty come to Christ and be satisfied. It will cost you nothing. Jesus has already paid it all. Satisfied forever and it cost you not a thing! What an incredible picture of God’s amazing grace. Charles Spurgeon said, “What does a thirsty man do to get rid of his thirst? He drinks. Perhaps there is no better representation of faith in all the Word of God than that...So, dear Soul, whatever your state may be, you can surely receive Christ, for He comes to you like a cup of cold water!” (“Good News For Thirsty Souls,” #1549).

V. We will live as God’s adopted children with no fear of the second death
21:7-8

This introduction to the New Creation of eternity concludes with a word of blessing in verse seven and a word of warning in verse eight. The blessing is for the overcomers who trust in Christ. The warning is for sinners who are headed to the lake of fire without Christ. The one who conquers or overcomes is a popular theme in the writings of John. In 1 John 5:4-5 he writes, “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

And, in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 our Lord makes a promise to “the conquerors” in each church:

1) Ephesus → 2:7 → the tree of life.

- 2) Smyrna → 2:11 → you will not be hurt by the second death.
- 3) Pergamum → 2:17 → you will be given hidden manna, a white stone and a new name.
- 4) Thyatira → 2:26-27 → I will give you authority over the nations and the morning star.
- 5) Sardis → 3:5 → clothed in white garments, your name never blotted out of the book of life and I (Christ) will confess you before my Father and before His angels.
- 6) Philadelphia → 3:12 → I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God, I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the New Jerusalem, and my own new name.
- 7) Laodicea → 3:21 → you will sit with me on my throne.

To those incredible promises our Lord has added the promise of eternal life via the springs of water in verse six. Now he adds the promise of a gracious heritage: “I will be his God and he will be my son” (my child). Throughout all of eternity we will be the adopted children of a perfect heavenly Father (cf. Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7). Patterson notes, “While God has but one ontological Son...he has many children by adoption (Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5). And the children who by faith has been adopted into the family of God

are just as much the heirs and joint heirs as the supernatural Son of God” (366).

- Tragically, this is not the destiny of those who never trust in Christ for salvation. An irreversible judgment and justice is all that they can expect. God provides a selective, not exhaustive, list of persons who will not be in heaven in verse 8. Eight specific sins are noted that characterize the lives of those who will spend eternity separated from God in the Lake of Fire, who experience the second death. The “cowardly” are individuals who, because of fear, will not confess Christ openly when confronted with persecution (see Heb. 10:38-39). The “faithless” or “unbelieving” are those who deny Christ by their conduct and speech. The “abominable” or “detestable” are those polluted by gross acts of idolatry. “Murderers” are malicious, savage killers (especially those who kill the Tribulation saints). “Sexually immoral” are those who lived sexual lifestyles contrary to God’s plan and purpose. “Sorcerers” are those who mix drugs with the practices of spirit worship, witchcraft, and magic. “Idolaters” are worshipers of idols and images (this practice will be prevalent when the world bows to the Antichrist’s image). “All liars” are those who habitually deceive others. None of these people will have access to the New Jerusalem. They will spend eternity “in the lake that

burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death.” (Keener, 489-90, provides a helpful treatment of these eight vices).

Conclusion: So many wonderful things can be said about eternity one hardly knows where to start and end. Chuck Swindoll is helpful and interestingly, uses negation to highlight 12 things that will not be present in eternity, things we will not miss! His list:

- 1) No more sea – because chaos and calamity will be eradicated (21:1).
- 2) No more tears – because hurtful memories will be replaced (21:4).
- 3) No more death – because mortality will be swallowed up by life (21:4).
- 4) No more mourning – because sorrow will be completely comforted (21:4).
- 5) No more crying – because the sounds of weeping will be soothed (21:4).
- 6) No more pain – because all human suffering will be cured (21:4).
- 7) No more thirst – because God will graciously quench all desires (21:6).
- 8) No more wickedness – because all evil will be banished (21:8, 27).
- 9) No more temple – because the Father and Son are personally present (21:22).
- 10) No more night – because God’s glory will give eternal light (21:23-25; 22:5).
- 11) No more closed gates – because God’s doors will always be open (21:25).
- 12) No more curse – because Christ’s blood has forever lifted that curse (22:3).

- Swindoll, p. 273

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God “has planted eternity in the human heart.” It is great to know that what God has planted in our hearts, this longing in our souls, will be fully and completely satisfied in the New Heaven and New Earth. We all have a longing for eternity in our soul that only God can fill. Come and taste the Lord. You will find He is better and more wonderful than you ever hoped or imagined. He is that good.