

## **A WHOLE NEW WORLD--ETERNITY BEGINS!**

(Revelation 21:1-27)

(To listen to the audio message, click this link - New World.)

Philip Yancey writes, “A strange fact about modern American life: although 71% of us believe in an afterlife, no one much talks about it.” He’s right, of course! According to a survey in US Catholic magazine, 97% of the respondents said they believe in heaven. 83% added that they were confident they would go there when they die. But how many think about heaven on a daily basis or talk about it with their family and friends? The unfortunate answer is: not very many!

One example is the [Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature](#). Did you know that four past volumes record a grand total of zero articles on heaven? Many articles deal with death, aging, and even out-of-body experiences, but none address the topic of heaven. Even more surprising is the [Religion Index to Periodicals](#). It includes only a handful of articles on heaven. I know that percentages don’t apply when it comes to eternity. But for the sake of argument, let’s say that 99.9% of our existence may take place in heaven. Is it not strange, then, that we should ignore it as if it really doesn’t matter? Even in Christian circles, the topic usually only comes up at funerals or in special studies like this.

Why? Yancey gives three reasons: 1) Our modern affluence. We have so much that we don’t really feel we need heaven. 2) Another reason is the influence of paganism which tells us that death is the end of our existence. “Eat, drink and be merry. Tomorrow we die!” 3) The traditional image of heaven – a place where we do nothing but strum a harp and sing hymns all day long sounds as exciting to us as it did to Huckleberry Finn.

But whatever the reason, we are about to see that heaven is a real place – the only place capable of satisfying the heart of man. Certainly, there’s a degree of happiness in this life, thanks to God’s grace. But there is also much suffering – death, disease, disappointment. Whatever pleasures we enjoy in this life are marred

by the curse of sin. But one day that curse will be removed! Heaven will come to earth and “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.” (Rev. 21:4) That is the message of Revelation chapter 21.

To recap what we have learned so far in this great book, the apostle John was given the final prophecy of the events leading up to the Return of Christ. First, he saw a vision of the glorified Jesus correcting and commending seven churches in Asia Minor, each one representing a type of church in the Church Age to come. Next, the apostle John was caught up to heaven – a symbol of the Rapture and end of the Church Age. For from this point on, the Church is safe in heaven worshipping our Lord and pleading with Him to reclaim the earth for man. To do that, He opens a scroll, representing the title deed to the earth, with seven seals that unleash a host of ever-greater plagues on the unbelieving world – seal judgments, trumpet judgments, and bowl judgments. Together these make up the Great Tribulation. However, there is a silver lining in all of this. While most earth-dwellers refuse to repent, there is a huge multitude from every tribe, tongue, and nation who recognize their guilt, turn to Christ in repentance, and are saved.

Following these plagues, Jesus returns to earth, crushes His enemies arrayed against Him at the Battle of Armageddon, casts the Beast and False Prophet into the Lake of Fire, locks Lucifer and his devils in the Bottomless Pit, so they can no longer tempt the nations for one thousand years, and sets up His Kingdom with His throne in Jerusalem. However, after the thousand years are completed, Satan and his demons are released from prison to test a final generation of mankind, a vast number of whom revolt against Christ. This reveals who truly loves Jesus and who has been hiding rebellion in their hearts. But the mutiny does not get off the ground. God sends fire from heaven to consume His enemies, at which point the Great White Throne is set up, the former heavens and earth fleeing away at His glorious presence, and the final condemnation of sinners takes place.

That is where the action of Revelation 21 picks up, if you will turn in your Bibles there now. First, we notice three facts about the new earth.

## 1. THE GLORY OF THE NEW EARTH

### A. ITS NEWNESS

Verse 1 begins: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”

Four times in five verses John uses the word “new.” That’s important because the word he uses means *new with respect to quality* rather than substance or time. It could be translated, I saw “a fresh heaven and fresh earth.” Some Bible teachers say it’s a brand-new world God will create, that the elements of the present universe will vanish and God will start all over again using new materials. That is possible, but it is not what the word suggests. It suggests that God will purge the present elements of sin and, using the same subatomic particles, will make a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. After all, every part of God’s original creation was said to be good. All it needs is a thorough cleaning. How will this massive clean-up be accomplished? Peter says God will pull apart the building blocks of creation and purge them with fire: “the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” (2 Pet. 3:10)

By the way, this gives us a pretty good idea of *how God feels about materialism*. All this “stuff” we’ve been relying on for our security and happiness will suddenly be blown away. So, Peter adds, “Since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.” (2 Pet. 3:11) Furthermore, John says there will be “no more sea.” Why not? One reason is that the sea will no longer be needed. Right now, the oceans serve as the reservoir for the hydrologic cycle which sends rain on the earth to provide the life-giving water that plants and animals need. But in the New World, we will live in glorified bodies and will have no need for rain. The second reason is to make room for the immense population of the new earth. Right now, 70% of our planet is covered with water. But the most important reason is where all this water came from. It

came from the Flood. The seas are a reminder of sin and judgment so they too will be done away.

## **B. ITS COMFORT**

John continues in verse 3: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live among them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.’”

The Bible, in a sense, is a record of God seeking fellowship with man. In the Garden, He walked with Adam and Eve. In the Tabernacle and Temple, He revealed Himself in His Shekinah glory. Finally, in Bethlehem, He entered the world in the person of His Son. John says in his gospel: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) Yet each time God draws near to man, our fellowship with Him is broken because of sin: the forbidden fruit in the Garden, idolatry in Israel, the rejection and crucifixion of His Son on a cross. But one day sin will be eradicated, and God will make His home among us. When that happens, there will be perfect peace on earth and joy to the world.

It is difficult to add anything to what is written, except to say that no longer will anything be allowed to creep into this world to hurt us – the gnarling pain of arthritis, the heartache of a broken romance, the discouragement of a failed business. Even dying itself will come to an end. You see, death isn’t the worst thing a Christian can face, but dying may be. Just think of the pain and humiliation of a lingering bout with cancer! But in that day, even the memory of those sorrows will be wiped away. For John assures us, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

That fact is something we need to remind each other every day. When, as a teenager, I worked in a grocery store, I was low man on the totem pole, which

means I was the one to clean the restrooms and perform the other tasks no one else wanted to do. So, what kept me going by day was the thought of what I was going to do that night. And if the plans were good enough, sometimes I actually found myself singing as I worked. The same is true of our trials in this life. One of the best ways to help someone who's hurting is to remind them of what is ahead. Remember Paul's advice following his description of the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4. He ends by saying, "Therefore, comfort one another with these words." Do that for someone this week. Find someone who is hurting, weep with those who weep, and remind them: "Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

### **C. ITS RESIDENTS**

The residents of this New World are said to be two things. First, they are said to be those who "drink of the water of life freely." This is a reference to the Holy Spirit who gives eternal life to everyone who trusts in Jesus. Second, they are said to be those who "will inherit all things."

Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist, trusted in this truth. Following the great Chicago fire of 1871, his house was burned to the ground. As he inspected the damage, a friend happened by and said to him, "I heard you lost everything in the fire." "No, you heard wrong," Moody corrected him. "I have a much more than this." "What do you mean?" his friend asked. "I didn't know who you were so rich." At which point, Moody opened his Bible and read to him Revelation 21:7, "He who overcomes will inherit all things."

Even better than that, the verse adds, "I will be his God, and he shall be My son." Some of us never had the father-son or father-daughter relationship God intends for His children. Dad was rarely around when we needed him. Or when he was there, it was to our hurt, rather than our blessing. I have a friend who never knew his real father. When his mother remarried, it was to a man who physically abused him and made him watch as he sexually abused his two sisters. Today my friend is a Christian and has, by the grace of God, forgiven his stepfather. But does that

remove the pain of his memories? No, the pain may linger as long as he lives, and then end forever. For in heaven all our tears will be wiped away. He will have the privilege of climbing onto his Heavenly Father's lap and calling him, "Daddy," and God will call him, "My son." You see, no matter what we miss out on in this life will be more than made up for in the life to come

And yet, this comfort is not without a word of warning. Verse 8 adds, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur." John isn't saying that those who commit the sins can never be forgiven. If that were the case, no one would ever be forgiven. "For whoever keeps the whole law yet offends in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10). Instead, it is a warning to those who persist in sin without turning to Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. They will not be allowed into God's heaven, no matter how "good" they appear to others.

The story is told of the nobleman who died very suddenly. Immediately, his jester ran to tell his fellow servants what it happened. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he cried, "Oh, where has he gone? Where has he gone?" "To heaven, of course!" the other servants replied. "No," the jester answered. "I know he has not gone to heaven." "Why?" the others asked, somewhat surprised. The jester explained, "Because heaven is a long way off, and my master has never taken a long trip without talking about it beforehand and making careful preparations. And since I have never heard him say one word about heaven or seen him do anything to prepare for it, I know he has not gone to heaven."

What about you? Are you preparing for heaven? Have you recognized your complete unworthiness to enter God's kingdom, and are you therefore trusting in Jesus to save you? Heaven is a long way off. But even that is not reason enough to prepare for it. The most serious reason is that it lasts forever. You and I will either be with Christ or without Him forever. Which will be true of you?

## 2. THE GLORY OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

What is heaven like? That was a question asked of third-graders in Union City, Tennessee. One little boy diplomatically said, “Heaven is where some very nice teachers will be found.” Another wrote, “Heaven is where you get everything you want. But if you want too much, you may not get to go there.” But my favorite answer was from the little girl who said, “Heaven will be the happiest part of my dead life.” Naïve? Maybe. But adults don’t do much better. One lady said she was hoping for an unlimited charge card. Another lady said, “There will be all the chocolate I can eat.” A gentleman added, “I’ll be able to play golf every day.” And they are right! Heaven will be a wonderful place. But it is going to be so wonderful that all present attempts to imagine it fall far short. To help us out, John pulls back the veil and describes five certain things we can know about it.

### A. ITS GLORY

Verse 9 says, “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, the experience was *like that of a precious jewel*, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”

This used to confuse me. I wondered how both the Church and this city could be called the Bride of Christ. Then I realized, a city is not only streets and buildings; it is also the people who live in them. In fact, this has been the hope of God’s people from the very beginning. Of Abraham, it is written:

*“He went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:8-10, 15)*

It is definitely worth waiting for. For when John sees it, the sight is so breathtaking he can only describe it as having the glory of God. Unlike our modern cities with smoggy skies, polluted waters, and gray concrete, this city is like “a jasper clear as crystal.”

## **B. ITS WALLS**

Its wall is the first thing John describes in detail. He says it has a great, high wall with 12 gates. Unlike earthly cities, this wall is not a defense against enemy armies, for we will no longer have any enemies. Instead, it is a reminder of God’s strength and our security in Him. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear.” (Psalm 46:1) The gates, on the other hand, symbolize our free access to God. Earthly cities like the old city of Jerusalem have gates that lock at night. But because God dwells in this city and Jesus paid our way into His presence by the shedding of His blood, verse 25 says its gates will never be shut forever. Why are there angelic sentries at each of the gates? Since there are no enemies to keep out, they are there continuing to serve as “ministering spirits to those who have inherited salvation.” (Heb. 1:14)

## **C. ITS SIZE**

Verse 15 adds, “The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city . . . The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with a rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.”

The most impressive things about the city is its size. A stadium (plural = stadia) was about 600 feet long, which means the city will be 1400 square miles.

Comparing it to our own United States, this will encompass an area stretching from the Canadian border in the north to the Mexican border in the South, and from the

Atlantic Ocean in the east to Denver in the west. In fact, John says it will be “as high as it is long,” making the city a giant cube – 1400 miles long, 1400 miles wide, and 1400 miles high – all of it composed of beautiful transparent jasper, 216 feet thick. No wonder John describes it as a giant jewel! Imagine flying into such a city today or hovering over it in your brand new glorified body! It will be the most beautiful sight human eyes have ever seen.

Its dimensions also make it easier to understand how the redeemed of all the ages can fit inside. Dr. Henry Morris did some calculating and estimated that about 60 billion people have been born since Adam. If 20 billion of those 60 billion have been saved, will there be enough room for them in the new Jerusalem? He answers:

*“Assume that 25% of the city is used for the mansions of the redeemed with the rest allocated to streets, parks and public buildings. Then the average size of each person’s property would be a little over one-third of a mile in each direction. Some, no doubt, would have larger allotments, some smaller, but this would be the average size. Obviously, there is enough room in the Holy City for all who will be there.”*

Does that make you feel better about your cramped quarters down here? I have to be honest. Sometimes when I visit the beautiful homes of my friends, I am envious. Oh, if we could only afford to decorate or landscape our home like that! But then the words of the song writer come back to me –

*When you look at others with their lands and gold, think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold; Count your many blessings – money cannot buy Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.*

#### **D. ITS FOUNDATION**

Verse 14 says, “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

Foundations speak of permanence, and are in sharp contrast to the temporary shelters in which we live today. In this life nothing is for certain. Health fails. Relationships falter. Jobs force us to pull up stakes and move away from family and friends. Earthquakes, floods, and windstorms can destroy all our hard work in a matter of moments. But in heaven our foundations will be secure. Paul promised, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17)

Why are the apostles' names written on the foundation stones? To remind us how the church was built. Ephesians 2:20 tells us that we have been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. It was due to the faithfulness of men like Peter and James and John that we have the truth in our hands today. So, it is only fitting that they should be honored throughout eternity.

Furthermore, verse 19 adds, “The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper (transparent green), the second sapphire (deep blue), the third chalcedony (blue-gray), the fourth emerald (sparkling green), the fifth sardonyx (white with red stripes), the sixth carnelian (blood red), the seventh chrysolite (golden-yellow), the eighth beryl (sea-green), the ninth topaz (yellow-green), the tenth chrysoprase (pale purple), the eleventh jacinth (reddish-orange), and the twelfth amethyst (flashing violet). The 12 gates were 12 pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.”

By the way, somewhere along the line the story got started that St. Peter is the doorkeeper of heaven, and that he stands at the pearly gates deciding who gets in and who does not. That is only partly true. St. Peter does not stand at the gates of heaven. The angels do. But the gates are made of pearl. As a matter of fact, each gate is made of one giant pearl. Imagine the oyster that made that! Someone has said that a pearl is the perfect jewel to symbolize our way into God's presence, for it so beautifully pictures what Jesus did to make us fit for heaven. Just as a pearl

begins from a small irritating piece of sand in an oyster, and is wrapped in layer after layer of pearl until it becomes beautiful, so every Christian is an unfit vessel until he is wrapped in the beauty and righteousness of Christ.

### **E. ITS UNIQUENESS**

John's description ends with a list of things that will be missing from the New Jerusalem. But rather than detracting from its glory, their absence makes it all the more glorious. The first item missing is a temple. He says in verse 22, "I did not see a temple in the city." Why not? Because he explains, "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are Its Temple."

Second, he says there will no longer be a need for the sun or moon, "for the glory of God gives It light, and the Lamb is Its lamp." This fulfills Isaiah 60:19, which says: "The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory." Whether or not the sun and moon are destroyed at this point is not clear; but what is clear is that their light will no longer be necessary.

Third, there will be no more night. Night was given for two reasons: to rest our weary bodies and to help us calibrate time. But neither will be necessary in the New Jerusalem. For one thing, our bodies will never grow tired. We will be more alive and awake than a three-year-old first thing in the morning. For another thing, time will be no more. Eternity will be one glorious day without interruption.

Fourth, there will be no impurity in the city. Verse 27 says, "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." The Fatherhood of God will finally lead to the brotherhood of man. Everyone who enters the new Jerusalem will have one thing in common: they will love the Lord Jesus with all their hearts and seek to honor one another in everything they do. What a glorious day that will be!

So, what do you think? Having read what the Bible says about heaven, do you think it's real? Freud said it was a fantasy born of man's instinct for self-preservation. Harvard philosopher Alfred North Whitehead asked, "Can you imagine anything more appallingly idiotic than the Christian idea of heaven?" Most liberal ministers and agnostics agree. But what do you say? Is heaven fact or fantasy? Is it the great hope and longing of your heart? Or is it the silly imaginings of a religious few?

Personally, I am absolutely convinced of heaven's reality. Not only does the Bible mention it over 700 times, and not only did Jesus Himself refer to it throughout His ministry, but here is the testimony of someone who visited it: "I, John, saw the Holy City." In fact, he not only saw it, he participated in its measurement.

No, heaven is not a fantasy. It is the only real thing worth living for. One day earth will be destroyed and replaced by a new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells. Will you be there? If there is any doubt in your mind, I urge you to bow your heart right now, confess your sins, and call upon Jesus as your Savior. Heaven may seem a long way off, but not for some of us. Life could end in just weeks or hours. So, start thinking and talking about it! Be so heavenly minded that you're of some earthly good!

**Study questions**  
Revelation 21:1-27

1. A) A friend says to you, “I believe in life after death, but I don’t believe in a literal heaven or hell.” Do you agree with him? Why or why not? B) Now read Revelation 21 1 to 27. What evidence do you find that heaven is a literal place?
2. Read Revelation 21:1-8. A) contrast the description of the city here with the city you studied in chapter 17 and 18. What major differences do you see? B) In what sense will everything be “new” in the city? (See 21:4-5.) C) How will God’s place differ in the New Jerusalem from His place in most cities today? (See 21:3, 7.) D) Does the warning in verse 8 mean that someone engaged in these practices will never be forgiven? Explain.
3. Read Revelation 21:9–21. A) How large will New Jerusalem be? (See 21:16-17.) B) How will its foundation be especially impressive? (See 21:14, 19-20.) What do you think this illustrates? (See Ephesians 2:19–21.) C) what does the origin of the city indicate about its Maker? (21:9-10) How does John 14:2-3 relate to this? D) Share anything else that’s striking in John’s description.
4. Read Revelation 21:22-27. A) Why is there no need for a temple in the New Jerusalem? How does this explain Jesus words in John 4:22-24? B) Tell how absence of the sun and moon literally fulfills His statement in John 8:12. C) What other wonderful facts are illustrated by the gates that never close?
5. Now think back on all you’ve written this passage. A) What excites you most about living in the New Jerusalem? B) How is this picture of life with Christ in the future changing your life today? Be specific?