

*Back to School*  
**Revelation 21:1-8**  
**"Eternity 101"**

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1. The Cathedral of Milan features three large, marble gates that lead into it. Atop the first gate is a carving of a beautiful bouquet of flowers, with an inscription that says, "The things that please us are temporary."
2. Over the second gate there is a cross. The inscription below it reads, "The things that disturb us are temporary."
3. The third and final gate simply says, "The important things are eternal."
4. If we really understand how fleeting this life is when compared to the forever that follows it, then we can see how truly important the matters of eternity are.
5. Thankfully, the Word of God has not left us completely in the dark as to what follows this present day. Much of the Bible, especially its closing book, reveals what it is to come when this time has gone.
6. Revelation 21 is both the end and the beginning. It is the end of this world and this time, and it is the beginning of the world that is to come, and a time that will never end.
7. Every one of us will have a part in this eternity; some gladly and some grimly. Therefore, the matter of eternity should matter to every one of us.
8. From His eternal throne the Lord instructed the Apostle John in verse 5, saying, "...*Write: for these words are true and faithful.*"
9. What we read here is no mere human prophecy. This passage is no spiritual speculation or glorified guess. This is the revelation of God regarding the final, eternal future.

10. With that in mind, let us consider what is revealed here about what is to come in eternity. First of all, we see here that:

## **I. ETERNITY INVOLVES THE REVERSAL OF HISTORY**

1. The Bible began with a creation, and it ends with one as well. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 21, we've come full circle. As one writer puts it, "...the opening of the Bible connects with the very closing of the Bible."<sup>i</sup>

2. Look at verse 1. John says, "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*"

3. This is another creation, and we are specifically told that it is a *new* creation. Again, in verse 5, we read, "*...he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new...*"

4. This new creation is very different from the old creation. In many ways it is a reversal of what happened in that original creation.

5. Let me explain what I mean. As we look with John at this "new heaven and new earth", consider with me:

### **A. The story of the first creation**

1. Genesis 1:1 tells us that, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*"

2. While this creation was originally perfect, it did not stay that way for very long. In only the third chapter of the Bible, we read about a satanic snake and a sinful fall.

3. Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, and paradise was lost. In chapter 1, God saw His creation as completely good. By chapter 6, we read, "*And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth...*"

4. Romans chapter 8, verse 20, indicates that not only was man impacted by sin, but that the whole creation was "subjected" to a curse because of the fall.

5. In verse 21 of that chapter, we are told that the creation is now in the "bondage of corruption." In other words, the first creation was corrupted by the sin of humanity.

6. In 1968, Louis Armstrong released his most popular song, "What a Wonderful World". He sang:

*I see trees of green, red roses too,  
I see them bloom, for me and you  
And I think to myself,*

*What a wonderful world,  
What a wonderful world*

7. In many ways, this creation is a wonderful world. However, it is not as wonderful as it once was. Genesis 3:17 says that the ground has been cursed for man's sake.

8. The story of the first creation is that of a world ruined by sin. As we look back to Revelation 21, however, we are pointed not only to *the story of the first creation*, but we are told also about:

### **B. The state of the final creation**

1. Again, in verse 1, John said, "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*"

2. In this vision of the coming eternity John says that the first creation has "passed away", and in its place has come "a new heaven and a new earth."

3. In verse 5, we hear the Lord saying, "*Behold, I make all things new...*" Then in the very next verse, He says, "*It is done.*"

4. In the beginning He spoke and the world came into being. In the end, He will but speak, and the new creation will begin.

5. In the first creation, Satan was cast out of heaven to the earth. In the final creation, it is God Himself that comes down.

6. In the first creation, sin entered into the world. Of the final creation we read, "*And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth (21:27)...*"

7. In the first creation, the Lamb of God came and died on a cross. In the final creation, the Lamb sits upon the throne forever.

8. In the first creation, the garden was closed off to sinful men. In the new creation, the gates of the heavenly city are never closed again.

9. What sin ruined in the first creation, the Savior will right in the final creation! Paradise lost will be paradise regained!

10. The whole cosmos will be redeemed and re-created, and a sinful history will be replaced with a sinless eternity! Our Lord Jesus will make all things new!

11. As the Word of God describes for us the future that is to come, we see that *eternity involves the reversal of history*. Looking further at this text, we see also secondly that:

## **II. ETERNITY INSURES THE REWARD OF HEAVEN**

1. Whenever a Christian dies, we say that they have “gone to heaven.” While there is some truth to that, what the Bible actually says is that those who die in the faith are “with the Lord.”
2. Many of the things we think of when we think of “heaven” are more specifically applied to the eternal place described for us in this chapter.
3. The full reward of heaven is revealed and insured for us in this final work of the new heaven and new earth that John saw in Revelation 21.
4. Consider what the apostle says to us here about the reward of the place we call heaven. First of all, John tells us of:

### **A. The presence that will make heaven**

1. Later on in this chapter, John describes for us the streets of pure gold, the walls of jasper, and the gates of pearl.
2. However, long before John says anything about the décor of heaven, he tells us what will be the true delight of heaven.
3. Look at verse 3. John says, *“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”*
4. Make no mistake about it; the real glory of heaven is not *what* is there, but *who* is there! In heaven, we will be with our Lord Jesus, and He will be with us forever!
5. For true believers, it is not the riches of heaven that makes us want to go. It is the Redeemer in heaven that really appeals to our hearts.
6. On a couple of occasions I have visited the Biltmore Mansion in Asheville, NC. It is one of the largest private homes ever built in the United States.
7. It has over 4 acres of floor space, 250 rooms, 34 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms, and 65 fireplaces. The home is situated on a 125,000 acre estate.<sup>ii</sup>
8. Every year thousands of visitors come to the Biltmore Estate to tour its grounds and see the home. Most of them know very little and care very little about George Vanderbilt, the man who originally built the home.

9. Heaven will not be like the Biltmore Mansion. Those who enter heaven will come, not so much to see the home, but to see the One who built it!

10. It is the presence of Jesus that will make heaven truly heaven for the people of God. John points us here to the presence that will make heaven.

11. Notice further that John also describes for us:

### **B. The absence that will mark heaven**

1. Along with the glory of who *will* be there, John also describes heaven in terms of what *will not* be there.

2. If the presence of Jesus will make heaven for us, it is the absence of some other things that will distinguish heaven from the life we've known on this earth.

3. Look at the wonderful list of "no mores" we find in verse 4. John said, *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."*

4. In heaven, the Lord will take His nail-pierced hand and wipe away all tears, and they will never flow again, for all the causes of tears will be completely absent from that place.

5. There will be no more hospital beds or death beds. No more nursing homes or funeral homes. No more sickness or weakness.

6. The undertaker will be unemployed. The physician will have no patients. There will be no cemeteries or crematories; no hospice or home health.

7. No more aging or Alzheimer's. No more pills and no more pain. Misery will be history, and suffering will be stopped.

8. All things will be new, and the former things will pass away! The reward of heaven is the presence of God and the absence of grief!

9. Recently, the songwriter said, "I can only imagine." Truth be told, however, *"...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."*

10. Your imagination is not big enough to conceive the full reward of heaven! Though we cannot fully imagine it, it is nonetheless insured for those who have trusted Christ!

11. With that being said, we cannot leave this passage on eternity without acknowledging a final truth regarding that coming day.

12. We see here not only that *eternity involves the reversal of history*, and *eternity insures the reward of heaven*, but we must also recognize that:

### **III. ETERNITY INCLUDES THE REALITY OF HELL**

1. Not everything the Word of God says about eternity is joyful to hear. While in verse 7 those who overcome shall inherit all things, verse 8 reveals the other side of eternity.

2. It says, "*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*"

3. Recently there has been some buzz in the evangelical world over a new book by a man named Rob Bell.

4. Bell is the founder and pastor of the Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, MI. His most recent book is entitled, "Love Wins".

5. In the book, Rob Bell essentially denies the Biblical doctrine of hell, calling traditional Christian teaching on the subject "misguided and toxic".<sup>iii</sup>

6. Though many like Rob Bell have found the doctrine of hell repulsive and unacceptable, they have never succeeded in removing it from the pages of Scripture.

7. Hell is as real as heaven is, and the record of it is clearly given to us as a part of eternity. Consider what we read about hell in this text. First of all, we see that:

#### **A. It is a place for the unrepentant**

1. Look again at the list of those who are said to have their part in the lake of fire. They include the unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars.

2. Look carefully at this list. Notice that it describes for us not so much a set of acts and deeds as it does a type of person. These people are not in hell simply because of what they did, but because of who they are.

3. In other words, these are people who saw no need to turn from their sin. They were quite happy to continue to be what they were, in spite of any judgment they might face.

4. Writer D.A. Carson says something important about these people. He writes, "Hell is not going to be filled with people who say, 'All right, all right, you win. I'm so sorry. I repent...'"

5. He goes on to say, "Hell is full of people who do not want to be there but who still do not want to bend the knee. For all eternity they still hate God. They still despise the cross. They still nurture sin; they still hate others in this endless cycle of self-chosen sin, iniquity, thanklessness, idolatry, and their consequences."<sup>iv</sup>

6. In other words, these people will hate the fire of hell, but they will also hate the Father in heaven. They are eternally unrepentant.

7. I recently heard the noted atheist, Christopher Hitchens, when asked about the possibility of heaven say that, "...an eternity of praise, and groveling, and thanksgiving would be my idea of hell."<sup>v</sup>

8. Those who have their part in the lake of fire in eternity are those who love their sin more than they would ever love a God who was willing to save them from it. They are unrepentant.

9. With that in mind, we must understand that when the Bible describes the reality of hell, it is not only a place for the unrepentant, but furthermore:

#### **B. It is a place for the unregenerate**

1. The term "unregenerate" is a big, theological word for those who have never been born again. It describes the people who have not received the new life that Jesus Christ has offered.

2. We find a clue to this truth in the verse that immediately precedes this chapter. In Revelation 20, there is a description of the final judgment.

3. In that chapter, all humanity stands before the throne of Jesus, and two books are brought out from which those people are judged.

4. One book apparently contains all the works of men and the deeds they have done. The other book is called, "the book of life."

5. In the end, the judgment is determined by one thing. Verse 15 says, "*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*"

6. In chapter 21, verse 27, it's called "the Lamb's book of life." It is the book of life that belongs to and comes from the Lamb.

7. The Lamb is none other than Jesus Christ. Only those whose names are written in His book of life have any hope of escaping hell.

8. You see; all eternity is based upon what we do with Jesus. He is the hinge of eternity. Where we go when we die depends upon how we respond to Him.

9. In our text, in chapter 21, Jesus says in verse 6, "*I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*"

10. Those who come to Him, in faith, turning from their sins, and believing upon Him as their Savior and Lord, are freely given the water of life, and their names are recorded in the book of life.

11. Those who do not; who refuse to believe upon Him and turn to Him, must face in eternity a life apart from Him in a place called the lake of fire.

12. Though modern sensibilities would prefer to deny the doctrine of hell, ignoring it does not remove it from the Bible. Eternity includes the reality of hell.

1. Though the Bible is an ancient book, recording events and facts rooted in the distant past, it is still a book that aims toward eternity.

2. From before the fall of the first creation, God has been planning for the beginning of the new creation.

3. Though we live in this present world, we must be mindful that it is a passing world. Eternity is coming, and sooner than most of us realize.

4. With that being said, the prospect of eternity will either strengthen our faith, or it will stir up our fears.

5. For those who know Christ Jesus, eternity is our blessed hope! It is also the reason we preach Christ; so that others may be ready when eternity becomes reality.

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<sup>i</sup> Carson, D.A., *The God Who Is There*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010), *Amazon Kindle Edition*

<sup>ii</sup> "The History of America's Largest Home", [www.biltmore.com](http://www.biltmore.com), accessed 9/1/11, [http://www.biltmore.com/our\\_story/our\\_history/](http://www.biltmore.com/our_story/our_history/)

<sup>iii</sup> Mohler, R. Albert, "We Have Seen All This Before...", 3/16/11, [www.albertmohler.com](http://www.albertmohler.com), accessed 9/1/11, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/03/16/we-have-seen-all-this-before-rob-bell-and-the-reemergence-of-liberal-theology/>

<sup>iv</sup> Carson, D.A., *Amazon Kindle Edition*

<sup>v</sup> “Todd Friel interviews Christopher Hitchens...”, 4/10/09, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZB0ILcXIA), accessed 9/1/11,  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZB0ILcXIA>