

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 3 THE FINAL CURTAIN

STUDY THIRTEEN

Heaven's Magnificent Negatives

Revelation 21:21–22:5

To communicate what it will be like to soar across the glories of heaven, God must adjust His language to our limitations.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IMAGINE traveling back in time and explaining modern technology to people living in the dark ages. Concepts like electric light bulbs, jet planes, television, and smartphones would boggle their minds. Or imagine if you lived your entire life in the Arctic and visitors arrived from the Amazon with tales of lush jungles, monkeys, and parrots. You wouldn't have the faintest idea what they were talking about.

How do we begin to communicate to people who have never experienced what we're describing? One way is through negatives. In other words, pick something they know and describe how it's different. To our dark ages friend, we might describe cars as carts without horses. Or, to an Arctic dweller, we might explain the Amazon climate as warmth without a fire.

Imagine God's challenge of trying to describe heaven! It's impossible for humans to conceive of an existence outside time and space. The vastness of the new creation and the glory of the new Jerusalem stretches beyond our wildest imagination. So, John used negatives to describe heaven. What will life with God be like? "No more death or sorrow or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). He told us what heaven won't be to help us conceive of what it will be.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God gave Paul a glimpse of heaven, and he was at a loss for words to describe what he experienced. He exclaimed:

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined
what God has prepared
for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)*



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Who can help us conceive the inconceivable? Ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind to understand what we can know about heaven through His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Think about what we normally experience in our limited world. We drive on asphalt roads at speeds measured by distance and time. Roofs and walls shield us from the elements. Locks secure our doors. Bank vaults protect our treasures. Lights chase away the darkness—streetlights, headlights, spotlights, flashlights, porchlights. When we want to worship, we go to a sanctuary or, perhaps, a cathedral ornately decorated with images of heaven. But it isn't even close to what heaven is really like.

Revelation 21:21–22:5 is a description of heaven for earthbound minds. Read the passage and note the “negatives”—words like *no*, *nothing*, and *nor*. Write down what you find, and in the next section, we'll explore the passage in more detail.



Observation: Six Magnificent Negatives in Heaven

Previously, we learned that, in God's new creation, there will be no more sea, no more tears, no more death or mourning or crying (Revelation 21:1–4). There will be neither pain nor spiritual thirst nor wickedness (21:4–8). But that's not all. Use your observation skills to answer the questions below.¹

In *Revelation 21:21*, what makes the gates and main street of the new Jerusalem unlike anything we know?

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We might assume that a majestic temple will occupy the center of the new Jerusalem like it was in the earthly Jerusalem, but no. Instead, what will be the city's focal point in [Revelation 21:22](#)?

There will be no need of what else in our heavenly home, according to [21:23–24](#)? How is this feature of the new creation different than God's original creation ([Genesis 1:14–18](#))?

What is the significance of the gates remaining open in [Revelation 21:25](#)? What will there be no need for?

What else is absent, according to [21:26–27](#)?

In [22:1–2](#), John takes us back to the original paradise. A river will flow through the celestial city and trees of life will adorn its banks, similar to the garden of Eden. How did John describe this river and these trees? What makes this city different than cities we know?

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Best of all, what did John say will not be present, in *Revelation 22:3–5*? How did John describe our close connection to our heavenly Father?

We long for an eternity where there is a face-to-face relationship with the One who got you there. Where there's no darkness, no disease, no threat of death. An eternity in which there will be protection and security and safety for you and your loved ones. An eternity that you can finally call home.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: No Night There

Throughout Revelation, darkness has been a recurring theme. When the Lamb broke the sixth seal, “the sun became as dark as black cloth” (Revelation 6:12). The fourth trumpet judgment caused a third of the sun, moon, and stars to “become dark” (8:12). The kingdom of the beast “was plunged into darkness” when the fifth angel poured out his bowl of judgment (16:10).

When God makes all things new, His glory will eradicate all darkness. In the new Jerusalem, “there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them” (22:5).

What does darkness symbolize? What does the end of darkness mean?

Why do the gates never close in the new Jerusalem, according to 21:25? What is the meaning of open gates to John's readers, who lived in walled cities?

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Why is it significant that God will be the source of light, not lamps or a sun?

No terror by night in the new creation. We will worship God and “reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5). We will know pleasures without end. This will be a reality, not a nice dream, not an idyllic setting that will stop. This will go on forever and ever. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Reverse the Curse

The roots of the curse go back to the fall. In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains what happened when Adam and Eve sinned.

In the beginning, God created the earth to be perfectly suited for human life: security without locks, food without famine, work without toil, crops without weeds, relationships without conflict. All of that changed when the first man and woman introduced sin into the world (Gen. 3:14–19). . . . From that moment on, humanity began to decline into disharmony, disease, and eventual death.²

What do these verses say about the consequences of original sin?

Genesis 3:22–23 _____

Romans 5:12 _____

Romans 8:20–21 _____

How does Christ's death and resurrection give hope to those living under sin's curse, according to these verses?

Romans 5:21 _____

Romans 6:23 _____

1 Corinthians 15:54–57 _____

Galatians 3:13 _____

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In His new creation, God will finalize Christ's redemptive work. He will reverse the curse! What features of the new Jerusalem indicate the end of the curse and the return to paradise, according to [Revelation 22:1–5](#)? How is the new creation better than God's original creation?

What a magnificent hope God's people have! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Hopeful Anticipation

What “negative” of the new creation gives you the most hope? What are you looking forward to *not* experiencing?

What are you looking forward to experiencing?

As a young missionary trying reach a primitive tribe in Ecuador, Jim Elliot was killed along with four other missionaries. On a hilltop once, he seemed to get a glimpse of God's splendor, which he attempted to put into words in his diary:

“I walked out to the hill just now. It is exalting, delicious, to stand embraced by the shadows of a friendly tree with the wind tugging at your coattail and the heavens hailing your heart, to gaze and glory and give oneself again to God—what more could a man ask? Oh, the fullness, pleasure, sheer excitement of knowing God on earth! I care not if I may never raise my voice again for Him, if only I may love Him, please Him.”³

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Jim Elliot wrote the following prayer in response. Let his prayer inspire you to write your own worshipful longing for heaven in the Final Prayer section below.

“O Jesus, Master and Center and End of all, how long before that Glory is Thine which has so long waited Thee? Now there is no thought of Thee among men; then there shall be thought for nothing else. Now other men are praised; then none shall care for any other's merits. Hasten, hasten, Glory of Heaven, take Thy crown, subdue Thy Kingdom, enthrall Thy creatures.”⁴



A FINAL PRAYER

Write your prayer here.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the article, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 316.
3. Jim Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1981), 251.
4. Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*, 251.

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2004, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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