

The Fountain of Youth

Heaven on Earth – Part III

Revelation 21:5-8

Introduction

If we traveled to Mexico, Asia, China, the Caribbean, or throughout Europe during modern times or during the past of these ancient civilizations, we would discover legends of the Fountain of Youth. We could go back as far as the time of Herodotus, who lived five hundred years before the birth of Christ, and listen to him talk of special water in Africa that allowed a tribe of people to live a very long time.

One particular legend became ingrained in the western world through the travels of the first governor of Puerto Rico – a man named Juan Ponce de Leon. In 1513, he searched for the Fountain of Youth that he believed was in what is now the state of Florida. He believed reports from natives which promised that waters from the fountain could take a frail old man and restore his youth and strength so much so that he could take a new wife and raise another family.

One historian, writing in 1864, said that Ponce de Leon and his men searched every river, brook, lagoon, and pool, but never found the fountain. Never mind that they never found it – the city of St. Augustine in Florida, supposedly the place where he was said to have landed while on his search, keeps the tradition alive, mostly for tourist revenue. There is a bubbling fountain connected to city water, but the tourists cannot help but make sure they take a drink.

There *are* reports of a secret society in St. Augustine that is guarding the true location of the fountain, and they have been alive now for a really long time. You might say, “I know, I’ve seen some of them.”

However, according to the popular American magician David Copperfield, the waters are not in Florida, but are around his cluster of islands in the Bahamas that he paid fifty million dollars to develop. In 2006, he claimed to have found restoring, life-giving water. Copperfield told Reuters news service, “You can take dead leaves, they come in contact with the water, and they become full of life again. . . . Bugs or insects that are near death, come in

contact with the water, they’ll fly away. It’s an amazing thing, very, very exciting.”

Copperfield also said that he has hired scientists to conduct an examination of the water.

Keep in mind this is coming from the man who makes a living tricking people. He is known as the world’s most famous illusionist – and he is now peddling another illusion.¹

For centuries, this subject has remained a fascination to mankind. How to stay young; how to live longer; how to beat death – what is the secret? This is the fascination. Maybe there is some loophole in life so that people can escape death.

People who live into their hundreds are interviewed about their diets, habits, and perspectives on life. Their ways are then studied for the possibility that there will be a clue revealing the secret of longevity.

Christianity Today carried excerpts of interviews with some of these individuals who have lived into their hundreds. One woman was asked to give some of the benefits of living beyond one hundred years of age and, after thinking for a moment or two, she said, “Well, there’s no more peer pressure.”

Another woman who was interviewed at the age of 120 was asked to describe her vision for the future. She answered, “Very brief.”

I loved the determination of one lady who was more than one hundred years old when she informed her pastor that when she died she wanted no pallbearers from their home church to be involved in any way. When he asked her why, she responded, “They wouldn’t take me out when I was alive; they’re not going to take me out when I’m dead.” (This is really an old joke, isn’t it?)

In my research on this subject, I came across article after article and one interview after another. One reporter traveled to an Asian village where several people in their hundreds were living – he could find no clue, no secret, no unusual practice or diet. Nothing unusual surfaced; no secret emerged.

I will never forget driving one day when my twin boys were in elementary school. They were

evidently talking things over in the back seat, and then one of them piped up and asked, “Hey, Daddy, were you obedient to your mother and father?”

I responded, “Well, why do you ask?”

This was a stall technique, by the way.

They replied, “‘Cause we learned today the verse, ‘Honor your father and mother that you may live long on the earth.’”

In other words, they wanted to know if I was going to be around for very long. I remember thinking, “I hope I live a long time or they’re going to find out.”

However, obedient children can die too, right?

This verse is not a magic formula; it is a general principle. Children who obey their parents steer clear of trouble, danger, bad habits, and, in general, survive longer.

The truth is that the secret to eternal youth is not discovered in some exotic food, some discipline or exercise, some balmy climate or peaceful region, and it is not even guaranteed for minding your parents. It certainly is not in the water somewhere in Florida. The Fountain of Youth has never been discovered.

However, according to the Revelation of John the Apostle, the Fountain of Youth happens to be real, and it happens to be the inheritance of every believer.

The water of life is effectively the gospel of Christ. In fact, our future in heaven will reveal this stunning site as God personifies, in physical form, the Fountain of Youth flowing as a river from the throne of God and throughout the new earth.

Turn in your Bible to Revelation chapter 21, where heaven on earth is being described to John and, through John, to us.

We have already discovered some of the glory of heaven as the capital city of God descends in the golden city with all the redeemed from all time.

We learned in verse 4 that . . .

. . . [God] will wipe away every tear [of sorrow] . . . and there will no longer be any death . . .

In other words, as believers, in our glorified bodies and perfected spirits – as sinless and spotless as Jesus Christ – we will live forever.

John writes in verse 4 (paraphrased),

. . . there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain; the first things have passed away .

In other words, this first way of life on the old planet with its universal language of suffering, sorrow, pain, and death will pass away, and from that point on there will be a brand new way of life on a brand new earth, and we will live forever.

This seems too good to be true, and I am sure you know what they say about something that is “too good to be true”. It is not true.

It depends on who is doing the talking!

The Spirit anticipates this, and John writes in verse 5,

And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new. . . .”

The Grand Finale

We could call this the “grand finale”. God Himself is speaking in these words in verse 5 of Revelation 21. John continues in this verse,

. . . And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.”

In other words, “I, God, who cannot lie, am delivering to you the truth of the everlasting life and an everlasting new order for living. Just as I, Sovereign Lord, made everything to begin with, I have now made everything new.”

In other words, “Count on it! My promises are faithful, and they all come true.”

We read in verse 6,

Then He said . . . “It is done. . . .”

This could be rendered, “These things are finished.”

In the same way that the work of creation was finished in Genesis 2, and the work of redemption was finished in John 19, the work of a new creation for the redeemed is finished in Revelation 21.ⁱⁱ

The perfect active tense of this verb – “it is done” – means that these things have come to pass and the results will continue into the future.ⁱⁱⁱ

In case we are wondering if God can pull this off, He reminds the reader not only of His promise, but His sovereign power.

The Glorious Sovereign

John moves beyond the grand finale to reintroduce us to this glorious Sovereign. Note further in verse 6 of Revelation 21,

. . . I am the Alpha and the Omega . . .

The alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and omega is the last letter. In our language He would be saying, “I am A to Z”.

In other words, if human existence, human knowledge, and human history are an alphabet, God would have been around from the first letter to the last letter.

He is effectively saying, “Nothing was before Me and nothing is beyond Me.”

This same expression will be delivered by Jesus Christ later in Revelation chapter 22, verse 13, and we have already read it in Revelation chapter 1, verse 8. Now we read it in Revelation chapter 21, verse 6.

This expression is used descriptively of both God the Father and God the Son. They both claim to be without origin and without end. They both are called the Alpha and the Omega.

These are powerful texts that claim the full and equal deity of Jesus Christ with God the Father.^{iv}

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....

And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us . . .

(John 1:1 & 14a)

Note the words John adds in verse 6.

. . . I am . . . the beginning and the end. . . .

The word “beginning” does not mean that He was the first to be created. This Greek word “arche” (αρχη) does not mean the first in point of time, but first in the sense of source. He is the original source of all things.^v

From Him comes every beginning.

He is the beginning *and the end* – the word “end” (τελος) means that He is the completion of all things.

If God controls the past and He controls the future, then we have every reason to believe that He is in control of everything in between.^{vi}

Part of the solution to our anxiety is to reflect on how great God is and how small we are.

God alone is supreme. Our sense of confidence in Him only grows as we remember our grand finale is entirely based on the power of this great Sovereign.

Sometimes we need to come down a notch or two in order to get a better perspective.

This is perfectly illustrated by Clifton Fadiman in his book *Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes*. Fadiman

told the story of the then current reigning world heavy-weight champion boxer, Muhammad Ali, when he was at the height of his fame and world renowned. Ali was on an airplane one day that was preparing to take off and the flight attendant came by and told him to fasten his seat belt. He said to her, “Superman don’t need a seat belt.” She replied, “And Superman doesn’t need an airplane, either.”^{vii}

God never has to buckle up. There is no accident in His vocabulary. He is never at risk.

Keep this in mind when you buy popular books on the nature of God today. He is never in jeopardy. He never does anything dangerous. He never risks or takes a gamble on anything.

How can He when He knows the end from the beginning? God already knows every option and every alternative. He knows what could happen and what will happen, and everything that *does* happen will ultimately accomplish what He wants to see happen.

A. W. Tozer put it this way, “God cannot learn [anything]; He never at any time or in any manner received into His mind knowledge that He did not possess and had not possessed from eternity. Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no [one] thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything, He is never surprised, nor is He ever amazed.”^{viii}

Well said.

This is our glorious Sovereign. He was before the beginning of human history and has already seen the end of human history, along with every action, every thought, and every motive of every living thing throughout human history.

By the way, this is the reason God can promise His people then and now,

. . . I know the plans I have for you . . . to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

These are empty words unless He already knows the future, has planned it out, and, on top of that, can guarantee it will come to pass!

God has never once said, “Oops,” “Uh-oh,” or “Oh my!” Not even once.

He says, in verse 6, to John the Apostle standing on the threshold of the eternal heaven and earth,

. . . I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. . . .

This is the grand finale which can be guaranteed because of our glorious Sovereign.

The Great Inheritance

Now notice John reveals a great inheritance in verse 6b of Revelation 21.

. . . I [God] will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

Here it is – the Fountain of Youth.

Who gets to drink from these waters?

Notice the first part of verse 7.

He who overcomes will inherit these things...

This reference to “overcomers” is not to distinguish between victorious Christians and those who were not victorious.

The biblical definition of an “overcomer” is actually a genuine believer who has exercised saving faith in the Jesus Christ.^{ix}

The apostle John clarifies this in his first epistle when he writes,

For whatever is born of God [literally begotten or born again] overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.

Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

(I John 5:4-5)

Warren Wiersbe commented on this text when he wrote, “This inheritance isn’t for some sort of spiritually elite. Every child of God inherits all these things.”^x

Earlier in John’s gospel, he refers to those who come to faith in Christ as “thirsty,” and when they come to Christ, He gives them living water.

By the way, this book of Revelation, even though it is describing the events of the eternal state, still continues to restate the invitation of the gospel. Maybe today you will hear it!

If you are thirsty, come and drink. John repeats this invitation just across the page in Revelation chapter 22, verse 17.

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

The Fountain of Life is for free. The Fountain of perpetual Youth and eternal life has been paid for in full.

John adds the word “freely” or “without cost” at the end of this invitation for emphasis.

The verb “dorean” (δωρεαν) is used by John to mean just what it says in our English translation – “without cost” or “without payment.” The word “gratis” could be used.^{xi}

We get the Fountain of everlasting Youth “gratis”.

David Copperfield paid fifty million dollars for his beautiful island estate and his supposed Fountain of Youth. We are still waiting, after more than four years now, for the scientific confirmation. His estate is closed to the public, in case you wanted to sneak a sip.

You can have the *real thing* for free and be allowed access to the eternal estate of God. The invitation is open to the public.

We have only the slightest idea what this amazing inheritance involves.

I am convinced we will all be caught with our mouths open in utter disbelief as we see the glory of God, the city of God, and the new heavens and new earth with this river of the water of life cascading from the throne of God. All this is our inheritance!

I pulled from my files an article I had tucked in there a year ago. It is a news article entitled “From Cave to Castle”. The article tells the story of the flat broke and homeless Peladi brothers, who literally lived in a cave near Budapest for years. They left their damp home only to earn what money they could by selling scrap metal and candy. Theirs was an absolutely hopeless and desperate situation. But then everything changed [December, 2009]. One day, out of the blue, social workers tracked them down and informed the two brothers that they had just inherited most of their late maternal grandmother’s estate – valued at 6.6 billion dollars. And just like that, these destitute brothers could call a castle their home when all they had ever known was a cave.^{xii}

What right did they have? They were related to the benefactor.

You might ask the question, “How do we have the right to our eternal inheritance?”

The Gracious Union

John refers to this gracious union.

The metaphor of bride and groom that we have already studied is now dropped momentarily for the legal practice of adoption.

John writes at the end of verse 7 that God says,
. . . and I will be his God and he will be My son.

John speaks in the terminology of an adoption contract.

The Greeks typically divided their inheritance evenly among all their living sons.

The Romans had adopted the practice that the father could actually change his mind for as long as he wanted and decide as late as possible which child, if any, received an inheritance.

Many of the wealthy in John's day would use this to their advantage to keep their children in line for most of their adult lives – the grown children would be afraid of being disinherited.

This is kind of like the elderly gentleman I read about some time ago who was living with his son, daughter-in-law, and numerous grandchildren. His family was convinced that his health was failing and that he had lost his hearing. They finally convinced him that he needed medical help and took him to their family doctor. The doctor privately examined the man and said to him, "There's nothing at all wrong with you, and your hearing is fine too."

The old man said, "I know, but don't tell my family – I've already changed my will three times."

In John's day there was the practice of adoption, which, in legal terms, gave an heir the legal right to inherit the father's estate.

In the first century, a man could actually adopt any male citizen outside his own family as a son, and give him equal rights of inheritance. This would often take place when a man did not have an heir and wanted to bestow his wealth on someone he had come to appreciate and love.

There were clear laws to govern this adoption process. In fact, *after* the adoption contract was signed, it became unlawful for the adoptive father to ever disinherit his adopted son. It lasted for life; it could never be disannulled.^{xiii}

This is the idea in this verse when God references an inheritance of sons.

The Bible employs the best of both the Grecian and Roman customs of adoption to describe the inheritance of the believer.

Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers,

In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

which He lavished on us. . . .

(Ephesians 1:5-8)

The apostle Peter wrote,

Blessed be the God and Father our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you

(I Peter 1:3-4)

All of God's children will get an equal inheritance of the Father's estate, and the contract between God and His adopted children will never be broken.

We have this grand finale, guaranteed by our glorious Sovereign, who will deliver to us a great inheritance by virtue of our gracious union with God through Christ.

It would be great to put a period at this point, but in the face of all of this glory and joy, John goes on to reveal what we will call a grievous distinction.

The Grievous Distinction

Notice verse 8 of Revelation 21.

But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death [second separation].

The believer inherits all that is good and glorious, and the unbeliever inherits all that is painful and horrifying. While the believer is promised an inheritance that will never again include sorrow or mourning or crying or pain, the unbeliever will go to a place where crying and pain and sorrow and guilt and sin will never cease.

What a distinction in a word – "but". Everything from verse 1 through verse 7 is glorious, and then there is the little conjunction, "but".

This word usually signals something negative does it not? It is a word that makes a world of difference.

You might have heard it used in ways like this:

- We appreciate your resume and all your past experience, but . . .
- Everything looked good on the x-ray, but . . .
- For the most part the surgery was successful, but . . .
- I know we have been dating for six months and have had some wonderful times, but . . .
- I have been looking over your retirement portfolio and there are some positive things happening, but . . .
- We received your application to graduate school and you were in the final tier of candidates under consideration, but . . .
- I know I promised to love you ‘til death do us part, but . . .

None of these compare to this eternal distinction. Heaven or hell forever, captured in one conjunction – “but”.

But . . . the following will not get in.

- **The cowardly.**

This refers to those who may have claimed to know Christ, but were too ashamed to accept the claims of Christ and live for Him publically.

I can personally remember struggling with this as a teenager, before giving my life to Christ. Questions flooded my mind like, “If I accept Christ, what will happen to all my friends? What will happen to my life as I now know it?” As if any of it was worth keeping.

This is the coward who refuses to accept Christ for fear of the world’s rejection.

- **The unbeliever.**

John mentions unbelievers, which is simply another term for those who reject Christ outright; those who do not even make a claim to be interested at all.

- **The abominable.**

These are literally the polluted. This word refers to people who have become saturated with the abominations they practice through life.^{xiv}

- **The murderer.**

This is a word that refers to those who take the life of another with premeditation. This would include the abortionist.

- **The immoral.**

This term is from the Greek word “ pornos ” (πορνος), which gives us our English word “ pornography ”.

The New Testament uses this word to refer to those who not only practice, but also promote and encourage any type of sexual activity outside of marriage.

This would include not only the adulterer, the homosexual, the rapist, and the pedophile, but the movie producer who illustrates adultery and fornication, as well as the politician who defends homosexuality.

- **The sorcerer.**

John goes on to list those who practice sorcery. This is from the Greek word “ pharmakeus ” (φαρμακικια), which refers to drugs that induced pseudo-religious fantasies and occult experiences.^{xv}

This word referred to not only the illicit use of drugs, but drugs used in the worship of false idols and the casting of spells under the name of favorite gods.

Ephesus was filled with this practice. After the Apostle Paul preached the gospel to the Ephesians, those who repented brought out their books of magic, their drugs, and all their scraps of incantations and burned them in the streets (Acts 19:19).

- **The idolater.**

John refers next to these who placed someone or something over and against the one true and living God.

- **The liar.**

Finally, John finishes the list with liars. This is pretty self-explanatory.

You are probably thinking, “ Stephen has just condemned an awful lot of people to hell. ”

No, John did. I am just repeating and explaining what God said through him.

However, understand that this list includes everyone. *Everyone*. This includes you and me.

This list includes all of us who are placing someone or something before God in our affections, who are indulging in the hidden lust of adultery, who

murder by hatred in our hearts, and who are practicing cowardice, unbelief, and lying.

The point of this passage is not to imply that all the good people get to go to heaven and all bad people end up going to hell. The point is that everyone is guilty and everyone is going to hell.

... There is none righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

Notice that this list does not say that anyone who has ever committed any of these sins will be excluded from heaven.^{xvi}

It does not say this. If it did, we would all be excluded from heaven.

This list refers to those who choose their sin over the Savior; those who effectively say, "I don't want the kingdom of heaven if this is what I've got to give up. I'll take my kingdom of sin instead!"

This is like Mark Twain, who in his proud unbelief once said, "I'll take heaven for its climate, but hell for its company."^{xvii}

No, my friend, you will not enjoy either one. You are in for an eternal disappointment and an everlasting thirst for satisfaction.

However, those who have been adopted, who have said, "Yes, I'm thirsty for the water of life through Christ," are the ones who have left the family of death and the father of lies for the family of life and the Father of truth; they will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians these wonderful words,

... do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,

nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Such were some of you; but you were washed [there is that word again – but – which Paul will repeat several times]; but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

(I Corinthians 6:9-11)

But such were some of you!

One author retold an incident shared with him by a friend named Joy who taught a Bible class for girls in a rough neighborhood. In her class there was a rather fearful, sad girl named Barbara. Barbara's home life had made her afraid – there was no telling what she had had to endure. Barbara never spoke – never once. While the other girls talked, she sat. While the others sang, she just looked down in silence. While the others laughed, she was unmoved. She was always in class, and she always listened. This was all true until the day Joy gave a lesson to her class on the subject of heaven. She talked about the beauty of heaven and the glory of God; the tearless eyes and lives that never sorrowed or experienced pain of any sort. Barbara was fascinated. In fact, she never looked away from Joy as the lesson was taught. She listened, Joy said, with hunger – and thirst. She then raised her hand, "Mrs. Joy?"

Joy was stunned – Barbara had never before asked a question. "Yes, Barbara?"

"Is heaven for girls like me?"

"Oh yes, it's made for girls just like you."^{xviii}

Heaven is made for sinners saved. It has been created for people who have made a mess of their lives, drinking from the muddy waters the world made seem so appealing. It is made for sinners who come and drink from the fountain that flows from Christ – living water that satisfies.

Heaven is made for sinners who now by faith in Christ are adopted sons and daughters; who stand to inherit the new heavens and the new earth and the eternal city of God.

We, as adopted sons and daughters, inherit it all. We are cavemen who inherit a castle.

This is the grand finale guaranteed by our glorious sovereign Lord, who will deliver as promised this great inheritance on the basis of this gracious union that has placed us into the family of God forever!

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fountain_of_Youth.

ⁱⁱ Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Tyndale House, 1986), p. 442.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 859.

^{iv} John MacArthur, *Revelation: Volume 2* (Moody Press, 2000), p. 271.

^v William Barclay, *The Revelation of John: Volume 2* (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 204.

^{vi} Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Baker Academic, 2002), p. 738.

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- ^{vii} Charles Swindoll, Shedding Light on Our Dark Side (Insight for Living, 1993), p. 85.
- ^{viii} James Boice, Romans: Volume 3 (Baker Books, 1993), p. 1419.
- ^{ix} MacArthur, p. 272.
- ^x Warren W. Wiersbe, Revelation: Be Victorious (Victor Books, 1987), p. 147.
- ^{xi} Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Baker Book House, 1974), p. 472.
- ^{xii} “Zsolt and Geza Peladi, Cavemen Brothers, to Inherit Billions,” The Huffington Post (Dec. 3, 2009).
- ^{xiii} Mark W. Wilson, Revelation: Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary (Zondervan, 2002), p. 123.
- ^{xiv} Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 451.
- ^{xv} Morris, p. 444.
- ^{xvi} Stephen J. Lawson, Heaven Help Us (Navpress, 1995), p. 113.
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} Craig Brian Larson, 750 Engaging Illustrations (Baker, 2002), p. 237.