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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 7—Chapter 7

**OF THE NEW HEAVENS AND
EARTH,
AND THE INHABITANTS OF THEM.**

We have seen the world laid in ashes; and now we shall take a view of it as rising out of them. The eastern people had a tale, or fable, concerning a bird, called the "phoenix;" which many writers, both Heathen, Jewish, and Christian, have taken notice of; concerning which they say, there is but one of them in the world at a time; that it is very long lived, according to some it lives a thousand years; and when its end draws near, it makes itself a bed of spices, and seats itself on it, and by some means or other fire takes it, and it is burnt to ashes in it; from whence springs a worm, or egg, and from thence another "phoenix": this some take to be an emblem of the resurrection; but it rather seems to be a fable, devised by the Indians, or Arabians, to transmit to posterity their traditional doctrine of the conflagration, and renovation of the world. The heathens had some notion of good men dwelling in pure and beautiful habitations on earth; so Plato says, it was the opinion of the Stoics, that at a certain determined time the whole world would be burnt; so that it would immediately be beautified and adorned again, and exist as it was before, perfectly beautiful. This is more clearly revealed in the sacred scriptures; and as the apostle Peter fully expresses the former, as we have seen, so he strongly asserts the latter, and his faith, hope, and expectation of it: nevertheless, though the heavens and the earth shall be burnt up, we believers, we Christians, favored with a divine revelation, "look for," believe and expect, "new heavens and a new earth," in the room of the former, consumed by fire, "wherein dwelleth righteousness," righteous persons, and they only (2 Pet. 3:13). The promise of this referred to, is in Isaiah 65:17 which is introduced with a "Behold," as being something extraordinary and

wonderful, and worthy of attention; "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth," &c. which being obscure in itself, is explained by the apostle: and what makes prophecies respecting the last times, so difficult of interpretation, is, their being mixed; some things in the context belonging to the spiritual, and others to the personal reign of Christ, which is the case here: however, the passage itself, most certainly belongs to a perfect state, in which righteousness will dwell, as Peter says; and entirely agrees with John's account of the inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth; who represents the new Jerusalem as coming down from heaven, to dwell on the new earth, where the tabernacle of God will be with men; and he will show himself to be their God, and them to be his people; and so it will be a time of great joy and gladness; and in Isaiah it is said, "Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy!" John says, in this state "there shall be no more sorrow nor crying": which entirely agrees with the prophet, who says, "The voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying!" which cannot be said of any state of the church in the present earth; and is only true of its perfect state in the new heavens and the new earth. The things to be inquired into are, what these new heavens and earth be, and who the inhabitants of them.

1. What are meant by the new heavens and the new earth in the above passages? these are to be understood not in a figurative, but in a literal sense.

1a. First, not in a figurative sense;

1a1. Not of the gospel church state, or the gospel dispensation, in which indeed old things passed away, and all things became new; the former covenant waxed old and vanished away; the old Jewish church state was abolished, and a new church state set up; the ordinances of the former dispensation were removed, and new ones appointed: but then, as observed in the preceding chapter, this state had taken place before the apostle Peter wrote his epistle; and therefore he could never speak of the new heavens and new earth in this sense as future; nor say, that he and others were looking for them when they were already in being; and so likewise before the apostle John had his vision of them. John the Baptist and Christ began their ministry with saying, "the kingdom of heaven" was "at hand," the gospel dispensation was just ushering in; yea our Lord afterwards says, the kingdom of God was among the Jews, though it came not with observation, and was weak and obscure; but after his death and resurrection, when he gave his disciples a commission to preach the gospel to all the world, and furnished them with gifts and abilities for it, and they accordingly preached it everywhere with success; then it plainly appeared that the gospel church state had commenced: besides, the gospel church state, even in the first and purest ages of it, was not so perfect as the state of things will be in the new heavens and new earth, in which none but righteous persons, and such as are perfectly righteous, will dwell; for into the new Jerusalem, the seat of which will be the new heavens and new earth, none shall enter that defiles or makes an abomination or a lie; whereas in the gospel church state, there always was, is, and will be, a mixture of true believers and carnal professors; look into the first churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, Galatia, Corinth, &c. and you will find persons

either of bad principles or of bad practices complained of. Moreover, in the new Jerusalem state, which will have its seat in the new heavens and new earth, there will be no temple, no worship, in the manner that now is in the gospel church state; no ministry of the word, nor administration of ordinances; the Lamb will be the temple and the light thereof; to which may be added, that in that state there will be no more death, sorrow, and crying: but death did not cease when the gospel church state took place, it has continued ever since, and is the last enemy that shall be destroyed; the putting men to death for the sake of Christ and his gospel began very early, in the first times of the gospel, both in Judea and in the Gentile world; and continued under Rome pagan and papal, and more or less to this day. Other things might be observed which show that the new heavens and the new earth cannot be understood of this state; and for the same reasons they cannot be understood of the times of Constantine and following ones, at least for some of the above reasons.

1a2. Nor of the state of the Jews at the time of their conversion; for though there will be a new face of things then with respect to them; they will quit their old notions of the Messiah, and relinquish their old laws, customs, and modes of worship; and embrace the gospel, and submit to the ordinances of it, and join themselves to gospel churches, or be formed upon the same plan with them; and be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. But then this will be before the new heavens and the new earth are formed; the conversion of the Jews is designed in Revelation 19:7,8 and is what will introduce, or be a part of the spiritual reign; but the vision of the new heavens and the new earth is in Revelation 21:1-27 which respects a more glorious state of the church, and the personal reign of Christ in it.

1a3. Nor of the spiritual reign of Christ, which will be in the present earth and not in the new one; and in which will be the ministry of the word and ordinances; the everlasting gospel will be preached to all nations, by means of which the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and gospel churches be planted everywhere, and gospel worship be carried on as now, only with greater purity; but in the new Jerusalem state, the seat of which will be the new heavens and the new earth, there will be nothing of this kind, as before observed; and though there will be then a great degree of spirituality and holiness, yet it will not be so perfect a state as that will be in the new heavens and the new earth; in which there will be only righteous persons, nothing that defileth, only the holy city, having the glory of God upon her, will dwell in them. But in the spiritual reign, the church will not be quite clear of hypocrites and nominal professors, and will sink into lukewarmness and indifference, into spiritual pride and carnality, even into a Laodicean state.

1a4. Nor of the heavenly state, or the ultimate glory; for these new heavens and earth are distinct from the third heaven, the seat of that. The new Jerusalem, the inhabitants of it, are said to come down out of heaven to reside upon the new earth; where the tabernacle of God will be with them, which denotes a moveable state, as a tabernacle is a moveable thing, and so distinct from the fixed state of the saints in the ultimate glory. The camp of the saints, and the holy and beloved city, are represented as on earth, even at the end of the thousand years (Rev. 20:9). But,

1b. Secondly, the new heavens and new earth are to be understood in a literal sense of the natural heavens and earth. It is a rule to be observed, that a literal sense is not to be departed from without necessity. Now there is no necessity, nothing that obliges to depart from such a sense here; it does not contradict any other passage of scripture; it is not contrary to the perfections of God, his wisdom, power, and goodness, yea these are displayed therein; nor is it to the disadvantage but to the advantage of his people, to have such new heavens and earth made for them to dwell in their raised state; and as there is no necessity to depart from the literal sense, there seems to be a necessity to abide by it; since the phrase, "heaven and earth," are used by the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:1-18 frequently, and always literally of the sublunary world, the natural heavens and earth; as when he says, the heavens and the earth that were of old, that were created in the beginning, are that world that was overflowed with a flood and perished; and that the same heavens and earth are reserved to fire against the day of judgment, when the one will pass away and be dissolved, and the other be burnt up; now as these can be understood in no other than in a literal sense, so the new heavens and the earth he speaks of in the room of these, can be meant of no other, to keep up the sense of the apostle uniform and of a piece; only these renewed, not as to their substance, or made entirely new, but as to their qualities.

1b1. First then, the "new heavens" must be interpreted of the airy heavens, and of a new air in them: we have seen that the heavens that shall be set on fire, and be liquefied and dissolved by it, are not the starry heavens, but the airy heavens only; which will be purged, purified, and refined by fire, and become a new air; and Aben Ezra interprets the new heavens in Isaiah 65:17 of a good air, an healthful and salubrious one; and such will the new heavens be when purged by fire; they will be clear of all noxious vapors and exhalations, be free from all unhealthful fogs, mists and meteors, watery and fiery, such as are enumerated in Psalm 148:8. God has his treasures of hail, snow, &c. in the air (Job 38:22,23), but the new heavens will be clear of all these; no storms of hail, no stores of snow, no blustering storms and tempests, no coruscation and flashes of lightning, nor peals of thunder; nothing of this kind will be heard or seen, but a pure, serene, and tranquil air, quite suited to the bodies of raised saints; for none else will inhabit the new earth, whose bodies will be incorruptible and spiritual. Moreover the air will now be cleared of devils, which have their residence in it: the devil is called "the prince of the power of the air," of the posse of devils which dwell in the air; and he and his principalities and powers are "spiritual wickednesses in high or heavenly places" in the air above us (Eph. 2:2; 6:12), and it has been the sentiment both of Jews and heathens, that the air is full of demons; and which is not at all improbable; for when they were cast out of the third heaven, their first habitation, they fell into the air; where they are, at least at times, until their full torment; and here they are hovering over our heads, watching all opportunities to tempt, disturb, and distress the sons of men: but when Christ shall come in the clouds, and be met by his saints in the air, he will clear the air of all the devils in it; he will lay hold of Satan, the prince of them, and of the whole body of them under him, and bind them, and cast them into the abyss, the bottomless pit; so that they shall not be able to stir, nor give the least molestation to

the saints for the space of a thousand years; and then, instead of being over their heads, they will be bruised under their feet.

1b2. Secondly, The "new earth" will be an earth refined and renewed, and restored to its paradisiacal estate; or as it was before the fall, free from the curse which came upon it on that account. But now the curse will be removed, and it shall no more bring forth thorns and thistles, nor require labour and pains to cultivate it; nor will there be any difficulty about a livelihood from it, which will not be wanted; it shall be as before the fall, when the whole of it was a paradise, and one part of it more especially so: and hence in that state, of which the new heavens and new earth will be the seat, figures are taken from thence to describe that; as a river of water of life proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb; and a tree of life in the midst of the new Jerusalem, bearing all manner of fruit every month, and its leaves for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:1,2), and as the earth, before the fall, was subject to the first man, and all things in it (Ps. 8:6-8), so this new earth will be to the second Adam; at his first coming, though Lord of all, yet in the present earth he had not where to lay his head; and now he is crowned with glory and honour, yet we see not all things put under him; but "the world to come," or "the habitable earth," which is future, and is not put in subjection to angels, will be put in subjection to him; so that where he was once in the form of a servant, and suffered much, he will now reign, as a King, and a triumphant Conqueror. And it must be but reasonable, that since he hath redeemed his people from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them, that every degree of that curse should be removed, which, as yet is not, from the earth: and particularly, it is but reasonable, that when the second Adam, and his seed, come to enjoy the earth alone, that it should be free from the curse, the redemption from which he is the author of, and that for them; and accordingly so it will be in that state; there shall be no more curse (Rev. 22:3).

2. The inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth are next to be considered. When God had made the first earth, and which was made by him to be inhabited, there were at first but "two" whom he created to dwell upon it; and when it was destroyed by the flood, and recovered from that deluge, there were but "eight" persons preserved in the ark to repeople it. But when the new heavens and new earth are formed there will be enough to stock them at once. It may be asked from whence will they be had, since the air will be cleared of devils, and all wicked men will be burnt up with the earth; so that there will not be a devil in the air, nor a wicked man upon the earth; and who shall then inhabit them? Let it be observed, that Christ will bring with him the souls of all his saints, of all the chosen people that have been from the beginning of the world, whose bodies he will then raise, and reunite them to their souls; and the living saints that will be found on earth when he shall come, will be changed, and caught up with the raised ones, to meet the Lord in the air, where they will abide till the earth is fit for them; and then they will be let down, millions and millions of them, even the whole general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, and will fill the earth at once. And these are described,

2a. First, by the name of "righteousness" itself; "wherein," in the new heavens and earth, "dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13), that is, righteous persons, the abstract for the concrete; a like phrase see in Isaiah 1:21 and designs such to whom Christ is made righteousness, and they are made the righteousness of God in him; as Christ, the husband of the church, is called, "the Lord our Righteousness;" so she, by virtue of a marriage union to him, is called by the same name (Jer. 23:6; 33:16), and this denotes such persons as are truly righteous; not in appearance only, but really; and not in the sight of men, but in the sight of God; and who are thoroughly righteous in every sense; who have the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and are created in righteousness and true holiness; are inherently holy and righteous, and that perfectly: and it designs such only; not a sinner, not a wicked man, nor an hypocrite, will be among them; and this is confirmed by other scriptures; particularly Isaiah 60:21. "Thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever;" and though the former part of this prophecy respects the spiritual reign of Christ in the present earth; yet the latter part of it belongs to the perfect state of the church, the new Jerusalem state, in the new earth; as appears by comparing Isaiah 60:19 with Revelation 21:23. Again in Psalm 37:29. "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever;" not the present earth which the saints have not by inheritance, and much less for ever; and it is but a small part of it they enjoy in any sense. Besides, this respects something future; it is not said they "do," but "shall" inherit it. There are other characters in the same Psalm, descriptive of the inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth, as in Psalm 37:9. "Those that wait upon the Lord shall inherit the earth," when the wicked will be cut off, as they will be at the general conflagration; and those who wait on the Lord, are the same with the apostle Peter, and others, who looked for new heavens and a new earth, and waited on the Lord for the fulfillment of his promise; and in Psalm 37:11. "The meek shall inherit the earth": the same is asserted by Christ (Matthew 5:5), these are opposed to proud and haughty sinners, and design the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, who have but a very small share in the present earth: it is your proud, bold, blustering sort of men who share the earth among them; as for the meek spirited saints, it is as much as they can do to get a livelihood in it; but they shall inherit the new heavens and the new earth.

2b. Secondly, the inhabitants of which are the palm bearing company in Revelation 7:9 for this vision is synchronal, or contemporary, with that of the new heavens and the new earth, the seat of the new Jerusalem, the church of God, consisting of all the elect, and respects the same time and things; as appears by comparing Revelation 7:15 of that chapter with Revelation 21:3; 22:3; 22:16,17 with Revelation 21:4 the same persons are described by their number (Rev. 21:9), "which no man could number;" who, though but a few, in comparison of others, are a great number considered by themselves; and though numbered by God and Christ, cannot be numbered by men: and by their origin and descent, being "of all nations, kindreds, people, and tongues;" chosen, redeemed, and called out of all; and will be collected together at the coming of Christ: and by their position, standing "before the throne, and before the Lamb;" the throne of the Lamb, placed in the new Jerusalem, before which they will stand without fault, behold his glory, and enjoy his presence: and by

their habit and gesture, "clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;" appearing now as kings and priests; who, as such, shall reign with Christ on the new earth, being now not only clothed with the robe of his righteousness, but with the shining robes of immortality and bliss: and the "palms" in their hands is not so much expressive of their past uprightness and integrity, and of their having bore up under all their pressures and afflictions; but chiefly of their now victory over all their enemies: also they are described by their ascription of salvation to God and the Lamb, even their temporal salvation, and especially their spiritual and eternal salvation; to God, as the contriver of it, and to Christ the Lamb, as the procuring cause and author of it; in which they will be joined by all the angels around them, as guardians of them, ministering spirits to them, and fellow worshippers with them; who will then ascribe a sevenfold praise to God (Rev. 7:10-12). And some discourse passing between one of the elders about the throne and John, occasioned a further description of the same persons (Rev. 7:13,14), by their being "come out of great tribulation;" which may signify, not only the afflictions of every individual of this great number; but more especially the public troubles of the saints, as a body, in the various periods of time; both of the Old Testament saints, and particularly of the New Testament saints, under Rome pagan and papal, to the end of the reign of antichrist; and may have special respect to the last struggle of the beast, and the slaying of the witnesses. But now all will be at an end, and their "robes washed, and made white in the blood of the Lamb," and so pure, without spot or blemish: and they are further described, by their constant service of God, "day and night," that is continually; for there will be no night in this state; and their service will lie, not in an attendance on the word and ordinances; but in praising God, adoring his perfections, admiring his works of providence and grace, and ascribing the glory of salvation to him: "And he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them," the tabernacle of God being now with men on earth; "and they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;" neither in a literal sense, which is sometimes the case now; nor in a mystical sense, after the word and ordinances, they will have no need of; nor have any uneasy desires after spiritual things, which will now be enjoyed in plenty; "nor shall the sun light on them, nor any heat;" neither the sun of persecution, nor the heat of Satan's fiery darts, nor of any fiery affliction: the reason of all this happiness is, "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them;" not by his ministers, word, and ordinances, as now; but with the discoveries of his love, will feast them at his table, and cause them to drink new wine in his kingdom; "and shall lead them to living fountains of water," to the river of the water of life, the everlasting love of the three Persons; "and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;" and there shall be no more tears on account of indwelling sin, Satan's temptations, divine desertions, and any trouble and affliction; but being come to the new Jerusalem, everlasting joy shall be upon them, sorrow and sighing shall flee away. These are the persons, and this will be the happy case of the inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth.

2c. Thirdly, a further account is given of those inhabitants in Revelation 21:1,2 &c. after John had a vision of the new heavens and the new earth, the former being passed away; he had a sight of those that were to dwell in them; and by the account,

they appear to be persons not in a mortal and sinful state, but in an immortal and perfect one. They are called "the holy city, and new Jerusalem," by which the church is meant; but not as in any state on this present earth, and in the present circumstances of things; a state so glorious, pure, and holy, as this is represented, can never be expected here. Mortal men, dwelling in houses of clay, would never be able to bear such a glory as the church is said to have on her (Rev. 21:11), and following; nor be so pure and holy as this new Jerusalem, so as to have nothing defiling, nor that commits iniquity in it (Rev. 21:27), and yet it cannot be meant of it as in heaven; since it is said to descend from thence (Rev. 21:2,10), nor can the kings of the earth, in any sense, be said to bring their honour and glory, and that of the nations, into heaven (Rev. 21:24,26). But it designs a state in the new earth, and under the new heavens, where the tabernacle of God will be (Rev. 21:1-3), and we find the camp of the saints, the beloved city, the same with the holy city here upon the earth, that is, the new earth (Rev. 20:9), even after the first resurrection, and even after the millennium. Now this church, called the holy city, is no other than the church of the firstborn, the whole body of the elect, and the same with the palm bearing company, and the church consisting of them.

The inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth are here described under the names of "the holy city" and "new Jerusalem;" a "city," as consisting of the whole family of God, who are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; a "holy" one, as made up of persons perfectly holy, in spirit, soul, and body, and entirely free from sin; called Jerusalem, though in a state superior to the church under the gospel dispensation, called by that name; and even to it in the Philadelphian state, in the spiritual reign; since it is promised to the overcomer in that state, as something greater, and yet to come, that he should be a pillar, and have the name of the new Jerusalem written on him (Rev. 3:12), which signifies the vision of peace, and fitly expresses that state, in which peace of every kind, in its utmost perfection, shall be enjoyed, the Prince of peace, Christ, being with his people; and called new, because the seat of this church will be the new heavens and new earth; all which shows, that the inhabitants will be in a perfect state of holiness and peace. And they are further described by their "descent from heaven;" which designs, not their original, as regenerate persons; but their local descent with Christ; when he comes, the souls of all his saints will come with him; their bodies will be raised and united to them; anti with the living saints, be caught up to meet him in the air, from whence they will descend with him on the new earth, and dwell on it with him, their head and husband; hence said to be "the bride, the Lamb's wife;" which intend not individuals, nor particular churches of Jews or Gentiles; but the whole body of the elect, given to Christ, and espoused by him; who will now be "prepared and adorned for her husband," being all gathered in, and their number completed; and adorned, not only with the grace of God, and righteousness of Christ, but with the glorious robes of immortality and bliss; and so fit for Christ their head. And it will be the church and her members, thus prepared and ornamented, who will, with Christ, inhabit the new earth; for now "the tabernacle of God will be with men" on the new earth; which being for a determinate time, a thousand years, his being with them is signified by a tabernacle, which is moveable;

which is further explained; "he will dwell with them, in person," for the space of time mentioned. "God himself shall be with them; Immanuel," God with us, God in our nature; "and they shall be his people," owned by him as such; and he "be their God": which covenant interest may be claimed, as being out of all question. The inhabitants of the new earth are moreover described by their freedom from all evils (Rev. 3:4). "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;" which is said of the palm bearing company (Rev. 7:17), which show them to be the same with those; the words are taken from Isaiah 25:8 and refer to the resurrection state, when "death shall be swallowed up in victory; and there shall be no more death," not even corporal death; for this is said of risen saints; "neither sorrow nor crying," on account of disorders and diseases of body, loss of friends, &c. which will all be at an end; "neither shall there be any more pain; of body," or mind; "for the former things are past away;" the old world, its lusts, temptations, and snares; all troubles from within and from without; from persecutors and false friends; which shows that those inhabitants will not be in a sinful and mortal state: yea, they are described, as "having the glory of God upon them" (Rev. 21:11), upon their bodies being raised, and fashioned like to the glorious body of Christ, and upon their souls being perfect in grace, righteousness, and holiness; and the light, glory, lustre, and splendour of this church and her members, the inhabitants of the new earth, are expressed in such language in the following part of the chapter, that no adequate ideas can be formed thereof; and describe such a state as can never be imagined will be in the present world: and those inhabitants are again described by their holiness and purity (Rev. 21:27), in such a manner, as show them to be in a sinless state. To which may be added, the provision to regale those inhabitants, suitable to their state, is described in Revelation 22:1,2 as in the earthly paradise, particularly in that spot of it, the garden of Eden, there was a river for delight and use, and a tree of life in the midst of it, for the preservation of health, and the continuance of life; so in this city, in the new earth, will be a river and tree of life, and, for ought I see to the contrary, in a literal sense; only, they will be emblematic, as the other might be in Eden; for here will be no need of corporal food, only of entertainment for the mind. Here will be a river, an emblem of the everlasting love of God, clear and free from all motives and conditions in men, arising purely from the sovereignty of God; which, for its abundance, will be a river to swim in, and not to be passed over; and will yield inexpressible pleasure to this city and its inhabitants: and there will be a tree of life in the midst of the street of this city, bearing monthly all kind of fruit, and its leaves of an healing nature; an emblem of Christ, the tree of life (Prov. 3:18; Rev. 2:7), and of all spiritual blessings to be continually enjoyed from him, in great variety, and with great pleasure. And though there will be no diseases of body and mind in that state; yet as the tree of life in Eden was for the preservation of the life and health of Adam, had he continued in his state of innocence; so the healing leaves of this tree may denote that everything in Christ will contribute to the comfort, health, and happiness of the saints. Moreover, the happiness of those inhabitants is expressed by a variety, which shows it to be an accumulated happiness, a perfect one; "there shall be no more curse;" none upon the new earth, and its inhabitants; nor any accursed person or thing in it; "but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it," the seat of his glorious majesty, who will reign as King here; "and his

servants shall serve him;" both the ministering angels and his saints, especially the latter; "and his name shall be in their foreheads;" by which it will appear they are his people and servants, as if his name was written there; "and there shall be no more night;" either in a literal sense, or rather figurative, meaning no night of ignorance and error, of darkness and desertion, and of affliction of any kind; "and they need no candle, neither light of the sun;" neither artificial nor natural light; "for the Lord God giveth them light," what vastly exceeds either; "and they shall reign for ever and ever;" first with Christ on the new earth, for a thousand years, next to be considered, and then in heaven to all eternity.