

XII. Eternity in Biblical Perspective

If I Should Die Before I Wake...

“Satan Loosed for a Season”

Revelation 20

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We will be looking at all of Revelation 20 but I will start out only reading the first six verses which gives us two visions, of the heavens and the earth triumphant in light of the ascended Savior. The first vision is in Revelation 20:1–3. Revelation 20:1–6 says [1] *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. [2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, [3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.* Now the vision shifts.

[4] *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. [6] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We have been in this study titled *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and those who taught you that prayer were right for your body will go to a grave and your soul will go to be with the Lord – *I pray the Lord my soul to take*. When your soul goes to be with the Lord you will be as what is identified in the Bible as the immediate heaven. Some theologians call this the intermediate state and I believe I understand why they call it this because it's not the final state, but I prefer to call it the immediate heaven. This is not a holding place and I certainly don't want to get it confused with the superstitious and manipulating doctrine of purgatory that has no foundation at all in Scripture. Here the soul is perfected and there is a recognizable communication among those who are there with the Lord, knowing the joy of His presence and with one another, but it is not the final state. This immediate heaven is also known as Abraham's bosom and paradise. The unbeliever who has died before the Lord returns is in torment, not the final torment of Gehenna but the immediate torment of the abyss or hades or the place of torment.

When Jesus returns we will be ushered into our final state into the new heavens and the new earth and we saw this when we studied the signs of the close of the age, His coming and His presence as He brings all things to consummation, in an earlier study. When He comes then comes the Judgment Seat and we have also studied this in an earlier study but will read about it again in a moment. The unbelievers who have rejected the truth, glory and majesty of God as they have embraced sin in life in rebellion against God, come under the righteous judgment of God and are cast into eternal condemnation.

In our culture today based on the Romans 1 text we see God's wrath as He is basically giving us over to our sins if we stand in rebellion against Him as we suppress the truth and the

emptiness of idolatry, but the eternal wrath isn't stated as God gives them over, but it says that God sends, throws, hurls them into the lake of fire, with Satan, death, hell and the grave. God's wrath now says 'you don't want Me, then I'll give you the consequences' and people hungrily embrace it. In the day of judgment they will not hungrily embrace Gehenna but there will be the gnashing of teeth which will be a temper tantrum against God. It will be given as it is required which is God's sovereign power sending, hurling and throwing as justice is given under eternal condemnation. This is what will take place at the Judgment.

So what happens before the second coming? This is what we looked at in the last study which is supported throughout history through Daniel, Zechariah and in Revelation that there is the beast of the sea that rises up and the rising of tyrannical governments will be seen throughout the age as doing the work of Satan as they seek authoritarian and tyranny over humanity by taking the place of God, when in reality they are doing the bidding of Satan. To further that is the beast of the land/earth which is apostate government. It does the work of the serpent but with the two horns has the appearance of the lamb. It is the wolves in sheep's clothing. This is the apostate church which does the work in concert with the tyrannical beast of the sea and governments of the day with their messianic enterprise of 'we will be your savior.'

We are right in the midst of all this right now as we see all the social and political instruments that are being used to create the vision, polarization, chaos and violence in the streets, piggy backing on valid issues such as, partiality, discrimination, racism, but bringing, not solutions but things that exacerbate those issues, why? It is because the goal of those who use such instruments in this world is not to bring a solution, a reconciliation but to create more polarization so if you have been oppressed there comes the promise that they will make you the new oppressors. It's really racism reversed. There is no solution that is wanted. The solution is out of chaos and despair, you turn everything over to someone who will promise to bring order and that's tyrannical government. That is what is being offered in those moments. This has been with us throughout the ages and it started with Babel and continued since then. All throughout the ages there were these pretenders as governments would say we want to be your gods.

I'm not anti-government for I think government is a gift from God. It is a gift, not of redeeming grace for that's the church's mission and message but it has the gift of common grace to restrain sin and honor that which is righteousness. That's what we need in a fallen world. So government post fall is given for that purpose but like so many things that purpose is then perverted by the sinfulness of men who would then take it as an opportunity to cease power over people. Instead of a government protecting God-given rights, it becomes a government that assumes the place of God to give and takeaway rights. So that is what we see throughout history and it will come to a crescendo at the end right before Christ comes.

To give some context, the book of Revelation is like a parchment that would unfold. After it gives the message to the seven churches and the dilemma of who is worthy to open the seven seals, the book unrolls with seven seals. Then a seventh seal is unfolded with seven trumpets, then a seventh trumpet is unfolded with seven bowls of wrath. In it the book has two parts. It has from the Incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the history of humanity until His coming from Revelation 12 to 19 which has just been ended. Then in Revelation 20 through the end of the book, to chapter 22 it is a recycling of Revelation 12 through 19. So Revelation 20 brings us back to the triumph, Incarnate ministry of Christ, His crucifixion, His resurrection and what happens.

Revelation 20 opens with two visions in light of the ascended, victorious Christ – there is a vision of the implications of that on the earth, then a vision of the implications of that in the heavens. So what are the implications of this on the earth? There is one more piece of background we need to understand and that is as the Old Testament unfolds there is a promise, but no experience of it except periodically a taste of it. When God gave the promise of the covenant of grace to Abraham that would unfold from him to the covenant with Moses, then David, then with the Prophets and then fulfilled in the New Covenant with Christ. It is like a staircase that keeps building until you get to the fulfillment in Christ. Now we see this magnificent statement to the glory of God and in those promises are constant promises that when God sends the Messiah – His redeeming work comes to victory – it will be from the rising to the setting sun, for it will be to all the nations. God told Abraham He would give Him a seed and make him a blessing to all the nations.

Psalm 2 talks about the nations being in an uproar, for the Lord King will be the Ruler over all the nations, kiss the Son lest He be angry. Psalm 72 declares that the rule of God's covenant grace will be from the rising to the setting of the sun, as far as the waters cover the sea so will this work of grace be established. We find little tastes of this in the Old Testament but by in large in the Old Testament you see God working to redeem the recalcitrant people within one nation – a theocracy – and that is Israel – God's covenanted people. I don't want to unsell anyone's books but there has only been one covenanted nation with God and that's Israel. America is not a covenanted nation. America is a providentially blessed nation. It takes absolute idiocy to deny that the hand of God has been gracious even in our imperfections.

I believe God's hand has not only been set upon us because of God's sovereignty but also God honoring His promises. God tells His covenant people that He will bless the nations that bless you and I will make you a blessing to the nations. We have resided in a nation that was highly impacted by the Reformation and the Great Awakening and with that salt and light if effected how we saw government and the purpose of government under God. We are not a theocracy as Israel was, but we are constitutionally. Our three major documents are the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. The Declaration declares our freedom, the Constitution ordered our freedom and the Bill of Rights with its existence helps us maintain and mature our freedoms. All three of them reference they exist under the authority of God, but as a nation we don't have a covenanted relationship with God, for that would be only Israel.

Therefore, you see God constantly working and the Bible says the whole world is under the power of the evil one. This is not because Satan is more powerful than God. This was by a sovereign decision of how God is going to work. God says 'I have a family. There is a Seed I have promised and I will have a woman, a bride, a covenanted people through which that Seed is going to come. That woman will come through a Gentile named Abraham. He will be converted, circumcised and the father of My covenanted people, Israel.' So He established a man and his family and then the family is established as a nation and matured, multiplied and mobilized under bondage. Then they are set free through the wilderness to come to the Promised Land. He then gives them a king because they rebelled against the theocracy and that was their desire. At the time they were ruled by judges and the King was God Himself – they were a theocracy. God gives them what they want but that is in God's sovereign plan and as He gives them what they want He sets up the scepter, the tribe of Judah, the family of Jesse and the order of David through which He will bring the King of Kings – the Prophet, Priest and Messiah.

God has sovereignly so ordained this work and that's why Paul will say that the nations in times past were dwelling in ignorance while the promises had been given to God's covenant people. They aren't totally ignorant for they have the witness of creation but they are ignorant of the promises of redemption in Christ because those promises were given to the people of Israel and God was working within the nations as He allowed (gave over) the sins of the nation under Satan, the prince and the power of the air as he was ruling over the nations under God's sovereign appointment as God is accomplishing His purposes. Then comes Jesus who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords who defeats all of His enemies, wins the victory and when He ascends into heaven He leads captive a host of captives, His redeemed, His elect, from every tribe and nation.

At the cross, Jesus didn't make the elect savable, He saved them – I lose not one. Romans 8:33 says *[33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* He doesn't make us justifiable if we do something but He has justified us and now brings us by faith and that not of ourselves but it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8–9). Now God's purpose is to fulfill the purpose to Abraham and the Psalmist, to go and make disciples of all the nations. Here is this glorious truth, so come on and participate in it and see it. What has Christ done in His initial defeat of Satan? Remember He has defeated His enemies (sin, death, hell, the grave and Satan) but hasn't destroyed them for He will destroy them in His Second Coming in the lake of fire. In the meantime, He has circumscribed them according to His purposes.

In Luke, Jesus sends out the seventy to evangelize two by two and when they get back it says in Luke 10:17–20, *[17] The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" [18] And He (Jesus) said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. [19] Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. [20] Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

Preach the Gospel to all the nations. His previous position allowed by a sovereign God to blind, not just individuals but whole nations has now been stopped so that we can go and proclaim the Gospel to all the nations. It will cost us but what Satan can't do is stop us, if we're willing to die for Jesus. Jesus also makes another reference in the Gospels about the 'strong man' being bound and this means Satan has been bound and then He says 'go plunder his house' (Matthew 12, Luke 11). Bring the elect from every tribe and nation and now we get the vision in the apocalyptic picturesque language. Let's look at our text for this study.

Revelation 20:1–3 says *[1] Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit (the abyss) and a great chain. [2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, [3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.*

The bottomless pit mentioned here is not Gehenna, but it's the prison room for Satan. I confess that when I was five years old I had a great fear of dogs, due to almost being eaten up by one then, that I had to overcome by going face to one when I was 12. When I was 10 I had to walk by this house to and from school that had a pit bull that was chained to a stake in the ground and after I tested whether that chain and stake worked a couple of times, boy did I get brave walking by that house and Jesus is telling us this as well – that greater is He that is in you,

than he that is in the world (I John 4:4). Jesus has already dealt with he that is in the world. Don't free him or flee him, but resist him and he will flee from you (James 4:7). Jesus has him on a chain. Satan cannot do what God does not allow him to do and God does not allow him to do anything that is not ultimately for His glory and our good as difficult as it might be.

Remember Satan is a fallen angel and in this text we see a heavenly angel seizing the dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil, the fallen angel Satan, the adversary so we are given at least four references to Satan here. Then the big question comes from the phrase 'he bound him for a thousand years.' What is that thousand years? I was raised pre-millennial where there is a second coming of Christ, then there was the thousands years and then there was another second coming of Christ. If you look at Revelation 12 through 19 and 20 through 22 as consecutive and not repetitive then I think I understand why people become pre-millennialists.

As I read the Bible, I just can't find two second comings. In terms of dispensationalist pre-millennialism I can't find two and half second comings. When I read the Bible I only find one Second Coming. I see the careful description of the church of Jesus Christ, His New Covenant people from His ascension, having defeated Satan, until He comes again in judgment, that is a perfect span of time to gather all the elect from all the nations. How do you do that? Like every other number in the book of Genesis – it has a symbolic meaning. It's ten to the third power (10x10x10), 1,000 and that's the term of fullness. It is the fulfillment description of the years from the ascension of Jesus to His Second Coming. In that period of time, Satan will be restricted, bound, meaning he will no longer be able to deceive the nations in this time period, until the elect have been brought through evangelism and discipleship into the family of God – until the Great Commission has been fulfilled. The thousand years is the period between the two comings of Christ and Satan cannot stop it. According to the text, after that thousand years Satan will be released for a little while.

Now we go back to a second vision in light of the victorious ascension of Christ but this vision is not looking at the implication of Christ's victory on the earth with Satan bound in a chain, it now shifts to a vision in the heavens. What does it look like in the heavens right now? Let's read further to find out. Here we are looking at the immediate heaven, not the final heaven.

Revelation 20:4–6 says *[4] Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. [6] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

The reason this is referring to the immediate heavens is because there are no bodies there. We are told in Revelation 6 they are temporary souls in white linen here which include the martyrs and the rank and file of the Christians who have been converted and die. The mark they are referring to I don't think is a chip or tattoo but I think it's a reflection. The elect of God are said to be sealed with a mark on their head and it is the renewed mind in the Word of God. What is the mark of those who serve the beast instead of Christ? It is the debased mind, the futile mind that ends up displayed in life on the hand of life as well. The Christians being talked about here are right now reigning and ruling with Christ, joint heirs with Him, these departed souls. The rest of the dead referred to in Revelation 20:5 are unbelievers, those with the mark and debased

thinking who continue in death in the abyss with a debased soul, not a perfected soul, thus they are not in life in the immediate hades.

You know you are in the heavens here because there are no thrones on the earth for the throne is in the heaven. The souls are not in the earth, they are in the heaven. As the church on the earth is getting its job done by the power of the Holy Spirit and the sovereign hand of God that has bound the strong man, we now go plunder his house – at the same time, those who died during this time are with the Lord, ruling and reigning with Him and have experienced the first resurrection which is absent from the body, present with the Lord. So those who die in the Lord in the first resurrection have no fear of the second death as Christ has been with them in the first death as He has brought them into His presence with the first resurrection. So those are the pictures given to us in these two visions from Revelation 20:1–6. Now let's continue in Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:7–15 says [7] *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison [8] and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. [9] And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, [10] and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

[11] Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. [12] And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

When all of God's people from the Gospel movement of the Great Commission to all the nations reaches its end, then Satan will be released from his prison. Revelation 20:8 is a reference back to Ezekiel which is speaking of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Seleucid Empire, where Magog is the place and Gog is the ruler. So, the picture from the Old Testament becomes the picture of the beast that is ruling, that is tyrannical governments that are ruling throughout the nations. Then it says at the end of time as the elect have been gathered then Satan will be loosed for a while and now he is back in business – not isolated, persecuted of individual movements upon Christians, but a concerted effort of all the nations of the world that will come together in order to exterminate.

Because Satan was not able to devour the Child, he now spends his time trying to devour the woman. Now, seemingly, he will have the sovereign hand of God that allows it as the chain, lock and seal are removed that kept him from deceiving the nations. This won't be isolated as it has been from time to time in history but this is a concerted, surrounding of the camp. Notice there were two phrases in this passage for God's people – the camp and the people of God – the church. Satan will surround it and seemingly win the victory but then he will be slain as the hand of God comes. We see what God will do to him in II Thessalonians 2.

II Thessalonians 2:6–8 says [6] *And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. [7] For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He who now*

restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. [8] And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of His coming.

I don't mean to trivialize this but this is better than any calvary trumpeted charge of John Wayne that ever could be considered. At that moment when we seemingly have fulfilled the Great Commission, the culture of the Great Commandment of the church at work, Satan is loosed but we're told for just a little while, where he then summons the nations of the earth and the picture is given of the biggest apocalyptic battlefield in history – Napoleon fought there, the Crusaders fought there, WWI was fought there, Debra (the judge) fought there, Elijah fought there and the plains of Armageddon become the picture of that battlefield.

Do I think it will be a physical battle? It may or may not be but I do know Satan will look like Satan through this beast of the land supported by the beast of the sea and will have surrounded the camp of the army of the Lord as with a multitude that cannot be numbered., as if it will overcome. But then, the battle is the Lord's and He shall slay them with the breath of His coming as He comes with a flaming sword. His sword now is a double-edged sword – convicting and consoling – bringing us to salvation. In that day His sword will send all of His enemies to the Judgment Seat and the lake of fire as He delivers His people. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the time we could be together with this anticipation of the amassing of the nations from the four corners – what amazing picturesque language that John is using here in Revelation. This season where Satan is seemingly yet going to win a victory and how many times have we seen this in the Old Testament where it looks like the evil empire doesn't just strike back but looks like they will win. But then the Lord intervenes. Can we see a more glorious time than in the first advent of Christ for we can almost hear the fiendish, demonic, satanic laughter and mocking of God's Kingdom and of our Christ at the cross, yet it was there He won the victory. At the coming of Christ in these last days Satan again will seem like he has the victory but the people of God will willingly die for their Savior as they stand their ground in order to take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ and the Lord will deliver us in His coming. Lord, we experience that everyday for how many times have we been in the courts of men, both formal and informal, and You give us what to say and how to say it. How many times have You delivered us from the evil one whom You have bound and how gloriously You will deliver us on that day. So Jesus, we pray as Satan would do his worst, You not only have the victory but You will manifest the victory and at that moment slay the evil one and then O God, bring us to glory, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.