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Revelation 2020 - Lesson 20A

Chapter 20:1-5, Dan. 9
& 12, Is. 26

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- We've spent fourteen lessons and nearly 20 weeks studying the seven years of Tribulation
 - In fact, our study of tribulation required about 5.5% of the time that Tribulation will actually last!
 - And we started our study of Tribulation in Daniel 2 & 7
 - Because in those chapters Daniel gave us the roadmap for this seven year period
 - That roadmap told us that Christ's return to Earth would be the event that brings the Tribulation to an end
 - And last week we studied through that roadmap ending with Jesus on the earth, the world is quiet and the enemy vanquished
 - The world has anticipated the moment of the Lord's arrival on Earth since it was first promised in Genesis 3:15
 - The ancient world, the patriarchs, Israel's prophets and kings, the apostles and the Church eagerly anticipated this coming day
 - And we too look forward to that moment, when the Lord will keep His promises to establish His kingdom on earth
 - We'll join Jesus on an earth free of war, injustice and pandemics, so we can enjoy our inheritance
- So tonight you might expect we would begin our study of the period of the kingdom but you would be wrong
 - We'll study the kingdom soon enough, but first we must spend time on things that precede the start of the kingdom
 - Specifically, we need to learn about a brief interval of time sandwiched between Tribulation and the Kingdom
 - This period of time is neither part of Tribulation nor is it part of the Kingdom time
 - Instead, it bridges one to the other, and accommodates certain events that must take place in preparation for the Kingdom
 - By way of introduction tonight, let's revisit Daniel's broad outline for the seven-year Tribulation timeline taken from a single verse in Daniel 9

Dan. 9:27 “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

- Daniel is told that a week (shabbat) or seven-year period would end our current age
 - And the event that kicks off that seven-year period will be the signing of a covenant between the Antichrist and Israel
 - This covenant will allow the Jews to restart sacrifice in a newly constructed temple on the temple mount

- Then the angel told Daniel that the midpoint of the week (3.5 years) would be a pivotal moment during the seven years
 - At that moment the sacrifice in the temple would end, and the Antichrist would assume a new and dangerous place in the world
 - This would continue until a complete destruction would be poured out on the Antichrist at the end of the seven years
- So Daniel tells us the time anchors of the Tribulation are the beginning, the middle and the end of the seven years
 - Earlier in Revelation, we learned that half of the Tribulation is equal to 1,260 days, which is 3½ years using the Jewish calendar year of 360 days
 - So the Tribulation consists of two periods of 1,260 days
 - And now that we've finished examining those two parts, it's time to return to Daniel for our next timeline
 - In Daniel we're given a new way to count the time surrounding the end of Tribulation

Dan. 12:11 “From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

Dan. 12:12 “How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days!

- In v.11 Daniel refers back to one of our three familiar Tribulation anchors again
 - He mentions the moment the regular sacrifice is abolished, which we know is the midpoint anchor of Tribulation
 - And we also know that from that midpoint anchor until the end of Tribulation there will be 1,260 days or 3½ years
- But notice in this case Daniel gives us a different number of days to count from the midpoint anchor
 - Beginning at the midpoint of Tribulation, Daniel tells us to count 1,290 days until the abomination of desolation is ended
 - The abomination is that image of the Antichrist that the false prophet set up in the temple and made the world worship
 - After Jesus returns, it remains standing for a while until it's taken down
 - And the time required to remove it is 30 days after Jesus' second coming (1,290 days after mid-Tribulation)
- Then in v.12, Daniel's timeline extends a step further, and it gets even more intriguing
 - Daniel says that those who are “blessed of the Lord” will be those who wait and attain to 1,335 days
 - That's another 45 days after the abomination of desolation is removed from the temple
 - Who are these who are waiting and what are they attaining?
 - These additional 45 days will be a period for identifying those who may enter the Kingdom and giving them eternal bodies

- Those who are blessed are those who have been waiting for the resurrection and now that time has come
 - At the end of the 45 days, they will finally attain what they have waited for
 - Who are these still waiting for resurrection? The Church saints have already attained resurrection, so this passage is about other saints
 - Principally two groups of saints will still be awaiting resurrection at the end of Tribulation
 - Old Testament saints (the invited guests) have yet to be resurrected
 - And the souls of Tribulation saints martyred and under the altar are without bodies
 - So altogether, there will be 75 days sandwiched between the end of Tribulation and the start of the Kingdom
 - The first 30 days are to clean the temple from the abomination and presumably to cleanse the entire world of the destruction
 - While the remaining 45 days will be a period to resurrect and reward those blessed to enter the Kingdom
- Let's look at the first period of 30 days for repairing and cleaning the temple and by logical extension the earth
 - Simply put, the earth has become the greatest fixer-upper project ever known
 - The judgments of Tribulation have resulted in a global natural disaster of biblical proportions (literally)
 - Yet this same earth is the earth of the Kingdom
 - So if we are to enjoy the world with Christ during the Kingdom, this disaster must be cleaned up

Is. 65:17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.

Is. 65:18 “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing
And her people for gladness.

Is. 65:19 “I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people;
And there will no longer be heard in her
The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.

- This passage is speaking about the 1,000-year Kingdom period, and Isaiah says it will be created new
 - Isaiah mentions clearly a recreation of the earth for this time
 - Our English translation is unhelpful because it sounds as if the Lord is making a new earth, but that's not the sense
 - The better sense would be to say “creating Heavens anew and earth anew”
- But for students of Revelation, it's easy to confuse Isaiah's description with a similar phrase John uses in Revelation 21

- When we reach Revelation 21, we'll see John is describing an entirely different world unlike the one we know now
- Even the shape and dimensions of the future world are radically different from the one we have now
- But the world that Isaiah is talking about here is very much the same one we know now, just renewed and made better in some ways
 - More importantly, the world Isaiah describes is a world that still has sin and death, as later verses in this chapter will show
 - That detail tells us definitively Isaiah is talking about a recreation of the present earth rather than the earth of Revelation 21
- So the earth and heavens (Universe) will be renewed to make earth livable again for the Kingdom time
 - In fact, Ezekiel tells us that the earth will be renewed in ways that make it different in some key ways, especially around Jerusalem
 - And a new and majestic temple will be built for the opening of the Kingdom as Daniel said in Chapter 12
 - And Ezekiel also describes new mountains and rivers around Jerusalem and other details we'll cover later
 - And Ezekiel also tells us that the new temple will become the centerpiece of life in the Kingdom

Is. 2:2 Now it will come about that

In the last days

The mountain of the house of the LORD

Will be established as the chief of the mountains,

And will be raised above the hills;

And all the nations will stream to it.

Is. 2:3 And many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

To the house of the God of Jacob;

That He may teach us concerning His ways

And that we may walk in His paths.”

For the law will go forth from Zion

And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

- We'll study more about the temple in the Kingdom in a future week
 - For now simply note that the house of the Lord (i.e., the temple) will be the dwelling place of Jesus during this time
- All this repair and reconstruction will be done in the first 30 days as the world prepares for the Kingdom
 - But obviously, the world can't be fixed in just 30 days without God's supernatural intervention and that's to be expected
 - After all, it was destroyed as a result of His supernatural judgments so it's up to the Lord to fix it

- But the fact that the Lord takes 30 days to accomplish this work (when He could do it instantly) tells us He has a purpose in the time spent
 - And the numbers 3 and 10 ($30 = 3 \times 10$) guide our understanding of his purpose in the delay
 - The number 3 is the number of the Godhead, which reminds us that God is at the center of this work and the world to come
 - And the number 10 is the number of testimony, so this moment and all the Kingdom itself is a testimony to Jesus
 - So the Lord takes 30 days for us to observe and learn from what we see, understanding God's character, power and purpose
 - Besides repairing the world and cleansing the temple, what else will be going on during those thirty days?
 - Well, we've already heard of a few things that must happen already
 - First, there was the dispatching of the Antichrist and false prophet
 - They will first go into Hell as they die at Jesus' second coming, and they will remain there for at least these 30 days
 - And then Revelation 19 told us they will eventually be deposited into the Lake of Fire
 - That judgment along with Satan's binding takes place in the 45 period that follows this 30 day period
 - We'll wait to learn more about that place until then
 - Secondly, we learned that the armies were killed at Jesus' return
 - Their bodies must be removed with the help of the birds and that takes some time
 - So that also happens during the 30 days after the Tribulation
- Next, we turn to the 45 days, the balance of the 75-day interval
 - The first 30 days were for rectifying the disaster of the earth and preparing it for the kingdom
 - And the next 45 days are for identifying and preparing those who may enter the Kingdom
 - Daniel 12 told us that the second part of this interval would be for judgment and blessing
 - And the numbers 9 and 5 ($9 \times 5 = 45$) reinforce that meaning
 - The number 9 is the number of judgment, and this period is a time of judging hearts to determine who enters the Kingdom
 - And the number 5 is the number of grace, because in the midst of the judgment there will be grace for some
 - And Revelation 20 tells us that this period of judgment begins with a partial judgment of the #1 Enemy: Satan

Rev. 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the

abyss and a great chain in his hand.

Rev. 20:2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

Rev. 20:3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

- After Jesus and the armies of angels and saints arrive on Earth, John says there are yet still angels serving in the throne room of heaven
 - They are attending to the Father on His throne and this reminds us that the Father remains in the heavenly realm now
 - Throughout the entire 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth He remains outside the reach of the Creation as He does now
 - Only by His Son may someone approach the Father, because there will still be sin on the earth
 - And sin may not enter into the presence of the Father
 - But eventually He joins the Son and we will study the reunion of the Godhead later in Chapter 21
 - So this angel comes to earth with a single mission: to bind Satan
 - He binds the dragon, Satan, and places him in the pit for 1,000 years, which defines the time of peace in the Kingdom
 - Later in v.7 Satan is released at the end of the kingdom to remove peace from the earth for a short time
 - Descriptions like this guide us into a literal interpretation of the 1,000 year kingdom of Christ ruling on earth
 - The holding place for the enemy during the thousand years will be the abyss
 - The abyss is the place we saw mentioned at various times during the judgments of Tribulation
 - This abyss is not Hell (or Sheol) though it is similar
 - It is a place located in the depths of the earth where God is holding demons' spirits until the day of their judgment
 - At a future point, the abyss will be emptied and all demons will receive their final judgment in the Lake of Fire
 - Similarly, Hell is a holding place for sinful humans in the depths of the earth
 - And like the Abyss, Hell is not the final state for anyone
 - It will be followed by a final judgment and a permanent home in the Lake of Fire as well
 - We cover this process at the end of Chapter 20
- Next, we need to consider the citizens of the kingdom
 - More specifically, we need to understand who will enter the kingdom and the physical nature of these citizens

- For example, we remember the Church saints, including you and me, return with Jesus in resurrected bodies
- We also heard that the Old Testament and martyred Tribulation saints were invited guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb
- They returned too but they are still in soul form only, so they need new bodies before they can enter the Kingdom
- The Kingdom is a physical place on a real earth, so those who live there must possess physical bodies
- So both the OT saints and Tribulation saints that died must be given new physical bodies during the 45 days so they can enter the kingdom
 - The Old Testament saints have been with Christ in spirit form since He removed them from Sheol at His resurrection
 - And the Tribulation saints have been in soul form since they died (we saw them under the altar in Chapter 6)
- So let's see where each group is resurrected beginning with the Old Testament saints as Daniel gives us a description of them in chapter 12:

Dan. 12:1 “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

Dan. 12:2 “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

- Daniel 12:1 sets the context of this passage coming out of Chapter 11
 - At the end of Chapter 11 Daniel tells how the Antichrist would come to his end at the conclusion of Tribulation
 - And then in Chapter 12, the text says “at that time” meaning at the last moment of Tribulation
 - “At that time” Daniel’s people, the Jewish nation, will be saved and rescued by Jesus’ return
- Then the angel says at that same time many of those who “sleep” in the ground will awake to everlasting life
 - The terms sleep and wake in this context are euphemisms for death and resurrection
 - So the resurrection of Daniel’s people (i.e., the OT saints) will happen at the moment of Israel’s saving
 - This will take place in the 45-day period of the 75-day interval
- Also notice that the unbelieving Jews are promised disgrace, though their resurrection doesn’t take place here
 - The resurrection moment for all unbelievers doesn’t take place until after the Kingdom
 - Isaiah confirms this:

Is. 26:13 O LORD our God, other masters besides You have ruled us;
But through You alone we confess Your name.

Is. 26:14 The dead will not live, the departed spirits will not rise;
Therefore You have punished and destroyed them,
And You have wiped out all remembrance of them.

Is. 26:15 You have increased the nation, O LORD,
You have increased the nation, You are glorified;
You have extended all the borders of the land.

Is. 26:16 O LORD, they sought You in distress;
They could only whisper a prayer,
Your chastening was upon them.

Is. 26:17 As the pregnant woman approaches the time to give birth,
She writhes and cries out in her labor pains,
Thus were we before You, O LORD.

Is. 26:18 We were pregnant, we writhed in labor,
We gave birth, as it seems, only to wind.
We could not accomplish deliverance for the earth,
Nor were inhabitants of the world born.

Is. 26:19 Your dead will live;
Their corpses will rise.
You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,
And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.

- The first part of this passage describes the end of Tribulation and then it goes forward from that point
 - In v.13, Isaiah says that Israel will confess the Lord's name by God's power, which is a reference to Israel's saving at the end of Tribulation
 - Then in v.14 Isaiah says the unbelievers of Israel will not live
 - Nor will they even rise at this point he says, confirming that they are not resurrected yet
 - Then in v.19 Isaiah says that the dead of Israel will live and corpses will rise and shout for joy as the earth gives birth to departed spirits
 - This is a description of the resurrection of all the OT saints
 - That's the moment Daniel is describing in Chapter 12
 - So the Old Testament saints are given new bodies during the 75-day interval, probably in the 45-day period
 - And now for the first time we will see Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and even John the Baptist in the flesh
 - It will be an amazing time for us, to walk with and interact with men and women who lived the stories we've studied in the Bible
 - And though we will all know God fully at that time, I'm sure we will still be able to learn more things

- I can't wait to learn about what life was like for people in those early days
 - And I have a few questions I want to ask Adam in particular
- The other group that must be resurrected in preparation for their lives in the Kingdom are the Tribulation saints
 - And that takes us back to Revelation 20

Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

- After Satan's binding, John next sees thrones set up for ruling
 - This tells us that these events are part of the 45-day period of judging and blessing
 - Then John mentions seeing the souls that he saw earlier under the altar in Revelation 6
 - These are the Tribulation saints martyred for their faith, and until now they have lived in Heaven in soul form only
- Now John says these souls "came to life", and obviously these saints were never "dead" since souls don't cease to exist
 - But they were dead in the sense that they lacked physical bodies
 - So the phrase "came to life" is a description of resurrection
 - This is their "rapture" in the sense that this is when they enter into the new body
- Next, we consider the Jews who were alive on earth at the point of Jesus' return
 - They haven't died so they are still in their natural bodies
 - Natural bodies are just like the body we have now: sinful, incomplete in their knowledge of God
 - Moreover, they could marry and reproduce just like we do now, and those offspring would be sinful like our children are
 - So what form will they take as they join Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the rest of the OT saints in the land of Israel?
 - Will they remain in their natural state and bring their sin nature into the Kingdom?
 - Or will they be resurrected as we will be and occupy a new eternal sinless body?
 - Let's consult a few passages of the Old Testament to get our answer

Jer. 31:31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,
Jer. 31:32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took

them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Jer. 31:33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Jer. 31:34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- This passage is well known to most Christians because it provides the name of the covenant created in Christ’s blood, the New Covenant
 - But notice this covenant was made with Israel, not with Gentiles
 - We are grafted into this covenant, Paul says but it was intended for Israel
 - And the covenant promise is that all Israel will be perfect in their obedience and knowledge of the Lord
 - Notice in v.34 that when this covenant is in effect for Israel, no one in Israel will need to teach another to know the Lord
 - Evangelism in Israel will be unknown because all Israel will already know and follow the Lord with perfectly obedient hearts
 - In an earlier chapter Jeremiah says concerning the Israel of the Kingdom

Jer. 24:7 ‘I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.

- Again, all Israel will have a heart to know the Lord, but now we hear that they will return to the Lord with their whole heart
 - Israel won’t be partially obedient as they had been in the past
 - Instead, 100% of the nation will be 100% obedient and that suggests something about the nature of Israel in the Kingdom
- Next, Jeremiah describes Israel in the Kingdom again in Chapter 50

Jer. 50:19 ‘And I will bring Israel back to his pasture and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan, and his desire will be satisfied in the hill country of Ephraim and Gilead.

Jer. 50:20 ‘In those days and at that time,’ declares the LORD, ‘search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.’

- Jeremiah says that even if one searches for sin in Israel, none will be found

- And Ezekiel says something similar

Ezek. 11:19 “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

Ezek. 11:20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

- Ezekiel says that in the Kingdom God gives Israel a heart capable of keeping all His statutes and ordinances perfectly
- As one final reference, let’s go to Zephaniah:

Zeph. 3:9 “For then I will give to the peoples purified lips,
That all of them may call on the name of the LORD,
To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.

Zeph. 3:10 “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
My worshipers, My dispersed ones,
Will bring My offerings.

Zeph. 3:11 “In that day you will feel no shame
Because of all your deeds
By which you have rebelled against Me;
For then I will remove from your midst
Your proud, exulting ones,
And you will never again be haughty
On My holy mountain.

Zeph. 3:12 “But I will leave among you
A humble and lowly people,
And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.

Zeph. 3:13 “The remnant of Israel will do no wrong
And tell no lies,
Nor will a deceitful tongue
Be found in their mouths;
For they will feed and lie down
With no one to make them tremble.”

- This prophet also describes all Israel in the Kingdom with no sin, telling no lies, etc.
 - The only way these statements concerning Israel can be true would be if the nation is sinless, glorified
 - So all these passages and others like them indicate that all Israel must be 100% resurrected as they enter the Kingdom
- But there is a problem with this view, because after a person is resurrected, then they will not marry or produce children, Jesus says

Mark 12:24 Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that

you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?

Mark 12:25 “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

- Those who are resurrected become like angels in the sense that we exist in a form that has no need nor possibility of reproducing
 - Therefore, we are not married and have no need for marriage
 - And certainly, once we are resurrected we are like Jesus in that we never die again, the Bible says
- So what’s the problem? Well, there are passages in the Bible that seem to describe the Israel of the Kingdom sinning, marrying and even dying
 - For example, those Jews who will serve as priests in the new Kingdom Temple must follow certain rules
 - We find these rules described in Ezekiel, and among the rules for the priests of Israel, we find these instructions

Ezek. 44:21 “Nor shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter the inner court.

Ezek. 44:22 “And they shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman but shall take virgins from the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest.

Ezek. 44:23 “Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Ezek. 44:24 “In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My sabbaths.

- Notice these priests are told who they can and cannot marry, which means marriage is possible
 - And they are also teaching fellow Jews the difference between right and wrong, clean and unclean
 - And they are judging in disputes between the Jewish people
 - These observations are inconsistent the earlier statements that Israel is sinless and without the need to be taught
- But it gets even more confusing, because Ezekiel also tells us there is death in Israel

Ezek. 44:25 “They shall not go to a dead person to defile themselves; however, for father, for mother, for son, for daughter, for brother, or for a sister who has not had a husband, they may defile themselves.

Ezek. 44:26 “After he is cleansed, seven days shall elapse for him.

- First, notice the priest of Israel will be the offspring of a father and mother and have

siblings

- Moreover, these priests are also told they can't visit a dead body unless it's a member of their own family
- The fact that someone in their family is dead means that death happens in Israel, so these Jews can't be glorified
- So which is it? Is Israel resurrected, sinless and glorified or natural, sinful and more? I think the best answer is yes to both
 - Some Jews will be glorified in the Kingdom; those Old Testament saints that are resurrected at the end of the Tribulation
 - But other Jews will enter the Kingdom in natural form and these will marry, have offspring and possess sin
 - That doesn't fully reconcile the passages though, but that's the best answer I have at this time
- Now our attention shifts to the Gentiles, but first let's return to Revelation 20 to conclude our discussion of the resurrection of the saints

Rev. 20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

- In v.4 John described the resurrection of the Tribulation saints, and now in v.5 John says the rest of the dead don't come to life until after the thousand years
 - By process of elimination, the "rest of the dead" can only refer to unbelievers
 - So the resurrection of all believers is called the first resurrection to distinguish it from a second resurrection of unbelievers
 - The terms first and second do not reference the moment of resurrection but the moment of judgment
 - There is a judgment for believers and a judgment for unbelievers
 - These two judgments happen at different times, hence first and second
 - There is a resurrection that leads to the first judgment and a resurrection that leads to the second judgment
 - So the first resurrection is the resurrection leading to the first judgment which is the judgment for believers
 - The judgment for believers comes first, the Bible says

1Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

1Pet. 4:18 AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?

- So the first resurrection is the Bible's term for the resurrection of all believers who are then judged

- The judgment for believers is a judgment of our work for the purpose of assigning eternal reward

2Cor. 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

2Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- This judgment moment is the first judgment for reward and it's only for believers
 - But for a believer to receive their reward in the Kingdom, they must get their heavenly report card before the Kingdom starts
 - So the first judgment must be preceded by the resurrection of all saints
- And John says we are blessed if we have a part in this first resurrection, because it means we are blessed to be included in God's family
 - To have a part reflects the fact that the first resurrection takes place in parts over time
 - The first part of the first resurrection was Christ's own resurrection
- Paul told us that Christ was the first fruits of the resurrection, the first to receive a new body

1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

- Following Christ, the Church saints are the next to receive new bodies at the Rapture
 - After us, the Two Witnesses are resurrected at the middle of Tribulation
 - Finally, the Tribulation saints are resurrected after the Tribulation
 - Collectively, these resurrections are all part of the first resurrection
- Which leads to the implication that the second resurrection is not a blessed event, which is what John describes in v.5
 - All unbelievers will be resurrected in a second event at the end of the 1,000 years
 - And that resurrection precedes their judgment moment
 - We'll study this event more later at the end of Chapter 20
 - That leaves us with one group unaccounted for in the 75-day interval: the living Gentiles
 - At the end of the Tribulation, there were Gentiles living on the earth like the Jews
 - We know that all living Jews were saved and enter into the Kingdom
 - The Lord promised that if a Jew lived to the end of the Tribulation, they all would be saved
 - But there was no such promise for the Gentiles

- When Jesus returns, the Bible says that some Gentiles on earth will be believers while most will be unbelievers
 - The Gentiles who were participating in the armies fighting Christ and were killed upon Christ's return will be unbelieving of course
 - But there will also be unbelieving Gentiles on earth who were not in the army fighting
- And there will also be believing Gentiles hiding from the Antichrist and waiting eagerly for the Lord's return
 - We don't know where they are hiding, but it doesn't matter, because in the end the Lord will gather them all together

Matt. 25:31 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Matt. 25:32 “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

Matt. 25:33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

- After Jesus' return, Jesus uses His angels to gather all nations before Him
 - The word in Greek is *ethnos* which is the word commonly used for Gentiles, so the Lord is gathering Gentiles
 - And that makes sense because we know where the Jews are...with Jesus
- And then the judgment will happen for these living Gentiles, and Jesus will sit on His throne
 - We don't know if the throne will be visible or if it's on the earth or perhaps it's entirely metaphoric
 - Perhaps the throne will be in the new temple built during the first 30 days
- And if so that explains why judgment waits until Day 45
 - Jesus waits 30 days for the Temple to be cleansed and rebuilt before He enters and conducts the judgment
 - If so, that's why Daniel says that those who wait and attain to the 75th day are blessed
 - So if you reach the end of that time, it will be because you have been found worthy to enter the kingdom
- Obviously, the judgment for whether you are worthy to enter the Kingdom will be on the basis of faith, not on the basis of works
 - As Habakkuk 4 says, the righteous will live by faith
 - So as Jesus begins to judge, He separates the sheep from the goats He says
 - The sheep are placed on His righthand side while the goats are on the left
 - In the eastern culture, the right was the place of honor while left was dishonor or lesser honor
 - So the sheep are believers while the goats are the unbelievers

- To the sheep, the believers, Jesus says enter my Kingdom

Matt. 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

- Like all believers, these believers will be known by their fruit, but what kind of fruit can a believer exhibit during a difficult time like Tribulation?
 - You can’t hold church services or else the Antichrist would come and behead you
 - You can’t send out missionaries or stream worship albums on the internet
 - So much of what counts as normal spiritual fruit will be impossible in that difficult time
- But fruit will still be visible, and Jesus explains what that fruit will look like:

Matt. 25:35 ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; **Matt. 25:36** naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’

Matt. 25:37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?’

Matt. 25:38 ‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?’

Matt. 25:39 ‘When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

Matt. 25:40 “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

- People have taken Jesus’ statement in this passage and gone in many different directions, but unfortunately the main point is often missed altogether
 - Jesus seems to be suggesting that good works were responsible for the sheep entering into the Kingdom, but he’s speaking about the fruit
 - First, Jesus describes a series of works of mercy done during the Tribulation
 - Remember, we’re talking about believers that came to faith during the Tribulation
 - If they had come to faith before the Tribulation, they would have been raptured and already glorified
 - So these statements are only relevant to Tribulation saints, because they describe the unique spiritual fruit of believers during that time
 - And who were these works of mercy done for? Jesus says for “these brothers of Mine” in v.40
 - Who are Jesus’ brothers in Tribulation that Gentile believers supported with acts of mercy?

- By process of elimination, the only other group possible are the unbelieving Jews of Tribulation
 - Jesus can't be describing the Gentiles since they are the ones doing the works for others
 - And it can't be the believing Jews, because they are in protection and under the Lord's care
 - The only group remaining are the unbelieving Jews being persecuted in Tribulation, and they certainly needed mercy
- Therefore, the sheep were Gentiles who cared for the needs of unbelieving Jews during the time of Tribulation
 - They cared for the sick, gave up valuable water when supply was short, clothing when none existed and visited the persecuted Jews in prison
 - Such acts of mercy would have been incredibly dangerous and potentially suicidal during the Antichrist's reign of terror
 - Yet these Gentiles took it upon themselves to support the Jews when no one else would
 - And as such they became the instrument of God to support His people from a distance to preserve them until the end
 - Why would a Gentile take such risks to protect Jews during a time when Satan is actively trying to destroy this people group?
 - Because their faith in Jesus led them to support God's people in that desperate time
 - A Gentile with faith in Christ would be motivated to help the Jews under these circumstances, based on the word of God
- But interestingly, these sheep will be so absent discipleship during the Tribulation that they are actually surprised to learn they are to be rewarded
 - Is it possible for a believer to come to faith and yet not understand what they believe?
 - Yes, and the book of Acts is full of stories of such people
 - The Spirit brings life, and faith doesn't depend on spiritual maturity thankfully
 - When mature believers are rare and persecution is common, it's typical for new believers to fail to get proper instruction
 - And even in normal circumstances it takes time to mature in understanding how to follow and please Christ
 - But these believers have neither instruction nor time, so they simply live in the Spirit and do what they feel led to do and it bears fruit
 - But they don't realize they are serving Jesus in these things until this moment when Jesus tells them they were serving Him
 - Every act of mercy was an act of service to Jesus
- So these sheep came to faith by the Spirit but lacked someone to explain their faith clearly

- Nevertheless, they were motivated to protect Israel and help God's people, which is the fruit of the Spirit
 - Lastly, Jesus attends to the unbelieving Gentiles

Matt. 25:41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

Matt. 25:42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;

Matt. 25:43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’

Matt. 25:44 “Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’

Matt. 25:45 “Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’

Matt. 25:46 “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- In contrast to the first group, these Gentiles lack the fruit of the Spirit, since they didn't have faith
 - They are called goats, the non-sheep, and they go away into eternal punishment
 - These Gentiles are instantly killed and enter the first eternal destination, Hell
 - Later they will enter the Lake of Fire
- So the believing Gentiles are going to live and be welcomed into the Kingdom
 - While the unbelieving Gentiles are to die immediately and enter Hell to await the Second Resurrection
 - This gives rise to an interesting fact concerning the Kingdom
- In the Kingdom there will be natural born men and women entering the Kingdom
 - We said earlier that there may be natural bodied Jews, and now we see for certain that there will be natural bodied Gentiles
 - As natural human beings, they still carry sin in their bodies, and they will be capable of marriage and producing children
 - And when they reproduce, they will produce children like those we produce: sinful unbelievers
- On the other hand, all resurrected saints occupy eternal bodies and cannot sin nor marry nor have children
 - And we are called to rule over the natural world of sinners and the sin offering they produce
 - That dichotomy leads to some fascinating consequences for the nature of life in the Kingdom
 - Next week, we move into the Kingdom period proper, beginning with a discussion

of the Kingdom's purposes