

## View From The Wall

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Our study today takes us to the one time in history when all of the people who have ever lived are alive at once. What a sea of humanity! This will take place following the period the Bible calls the "thousand years," discussed in Revelation chapter 20. There are two compelling questions that we wish to address with respect to this event. We will get to those questions shortly.

Our gracious Lord desires that we understand His great plan for concluding the saga of sin. He must deal with sin. He cannot let it go for eternity. Sin is the sand in the gears of relationships that causes unhappiness, sorrow and death. It was invented by one of God's top angels, Lucifer, who indulged self-interest which erupted into envy. He wanted more. He wanted to be like God Himself. Though the Lord and other loyal angels tried to change his way of thinking, he stubbornly held onto his desires. Eventually he, along with the angels he had persuaded to join him, had to be evicted from heaven at which time he decided to engage the newly created beings, Adam and Eve, in his rebellion. When they sinned against God by eating from the fruit of the forbidden tree, it threw this planet into a tailspin. Six thousand years later and we are still eating the bitter fruit of sin.

As soon as sin entered the picture, Jesus, One with the Father, pledged Himself to be our Savior. When this earth was covered by a dark cloud of deception, two thousand years ago He came to this earth and showed the true character of God to mankind. He lived a perfect life and died on the cross to redeem us so that we could be restored to favor with God. He also promised that one day He would come back and take His children to a place that He has prepared for them. This is the Bible story in a nutshell.

God has opened to our minds, in Revelation 20, further details of how He plans to bring the story of sin to a close. The term "millennium" isn't in the Bible, but the phrase "thousand years" is, and appears 5 times in the first 6 verses of Revelation 20. Getting a grasp of when this period takes place and what happens before, during and after it is easy if you understand the truth of the two resurrections. Jesus declared that there would be two resurrections. He said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come

forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." John 5:28, 29. So there are two resurrections.

What we are told in Revelation 20 is that the first resurrection begins the period of the thousand years. What we will find is that the second resurrection closes the thousand years. With those two pillars forming the "bookends" of the period, putting the pieces in place is rather simple. The two resurrections are the "brackets" of the thousand years.

How do we know the resurrection of life, or the first resurrection, begins the thousand years? John wrote, "This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Revelation 20:5, 6. Previously, he referred to those who had been slain as martyrs for Jesus and said, "And they lived (or "came to life") and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." Verse 4. Who are in this "first resurrection? Without question this "first resurrection" brings back to life those who are the saved; the ones who have "done good" according to Jesus' comment; the ones who are "blessed and holy" according to John's vision. If you or I should pass away, that's the resurrection we want to be in!

According to the time scheme of Revelation 20, this great event marks the beginning of the thousand years. And, according to what we read in verse 5, the "second resurrection," or what Jesus called the "resurrection of condemnation" marks the close of the thousand years, for we read, "the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished." Don't be misled by the way the verses are divided! Verse divisions came in long after the Bible was written. The last part of verse 5 ("This is the first resurrection") should be understood as pertaining to the thought of verse 6 ("blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection").

The next question is, When does this "first resurrection" take place? The Bible tells us clearly that this happens when Jesus returns in glory to this earth. We are told that He will come back in the sky and will lift His people to meet Him in the air. Paul instructed, "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them

in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." I Thessalonians 4:15-18.

Jesus warned us to be aware of false christs who would appear on earth and do miracles to deceive. Here's a vital piece of information: mark this down indelibly in your mind. When the real Jesus comes back, the Bible tells us that we "meet Him in the air." Satan will attempt to stage a "coming" similar to what the Bible describes and mislead, but he cannot duplicate precisely the manner in which Scripture tells us Jesus comes back. None need be deceived. Jesus will not touch the earth at His second coming.

When He comes back, the righteous living are changed to immortality instantly (I Corinthians 15:51-55), and the dead are raised to immortality. No more effects of sin! Perfect in form and feature! No more tug by the pull of selfishness to contend with! With faces radiant with eternal youth, we will rise to meet our Lord. Since His coming is "in His glory," which outshines the sun, the wicked are slain by the "brightness of His coming." II Thessalonians 1:9; 2:8. The righteous go with their beloved Lord to the place He has prepared for them in heaven.

Thus we see that there are four "classes" of people. There are the righteous living and dead, and the wicked living and dead. The righteous living are "translated"; that is, they are changed while alive into immortality and go up to meet the Lord in the air. The righteous dead are brought from their graves in the "first resurrection" and also meet the Lord in the air at His coming. The wicked who are alive when Jesus comes back are slain by the brightness of His glory; the wicked who had already died remain in their graves.

What happens during the thousand years? We already read in Revelation 20 that the saints "reign" with Christ. Part of their responsibility will be to review the records of judgment that have been compiled by God and the angels and give their assent to the judgment made by God. The saints don't decide the destiny of the wicked; that's already been done and has been demonstrated by the fact that they weren't included in the group taken to heaven. But the saints review the records and become confirmed in the justice of each decision made.

John said, "I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them." Revelation 20:4. The word "judgment" in this text is particularly interesting. There are two words that come from the Greek root translated "judgment." One is *krisis*, which has the implication of "process of judgment." When Jesus said God "has committed all *judgment* to the Son" (John 5:22), He

used the word *krisis*. You can see our English word "crisis" in that word. The other word is *krima*, which has the connotation of "result of judgment." That is the word John used to describe what is given to the saints during the thousand years. They are given the responsibility to review the "result of judgment" as it pertains to the lost, both humans and angels. I Corinthians 6:2. God wants all the saved to be completely satisfied that justice has been done. All questions will be answered. Any potential for doubt will be removed. His is the ultimate "transparent" government. No seed of doubt will be left to spring up later into rebellion.

While this is an important aspect of the saints responsibility during the thousand years, there will also be time for worshiping and praising God; for renewing acquaintances made but interrupted on earth; for making new friends of other saints and angels as well as inhabitants of worlds which didn't fall into sin. It will be a time of "settling into" the eternity God has planned all along. We will grow up physically into the stature originally intended for the human race.

We have seen that all the wicked are dead during this time period, but what about Satan and his angels? They are left alone on this planet, to ponder the effects of their rebellion. Satan began by challenging God and His government, proposing a "better way." What have been the effects of his rebellion? Nothing but sorrow and devastation, everywhere the eye turns. Though the devil and his angels are incapable of true repentance, nevertheless the incontrovertible fact will stare them in the face that their course of insurrection against God has been a total failure.

Satan has made it his studied plan to deceive humans into doing his work and because there are no humans to deceive during this thousand year period, he is "bound." Circumstances prevent him from doing what has become his mission in life. However, we are told that the wicked are brought back to life in what Jesus' spoke of as the "resurrection of condemnation." John points to this when he said "the rest of the dead (that is, the wicked) did not live again until the thousand years were finished." This is the "second resurrection" which forms the boundary of thousand years.

Here's what will happen. When this period of a thousand years is over, Jesus and His saints, with the beautiful city, the New Jerusalem, come back to this earth. We could refer to this as the "third coming" of Christ. The city rests on a purified plain prepared for it. Said the prophet Zechariah, "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley." Zechariah 14:4. Then the wicked dead are called from their graves.

A careful reading of Revelation 20 makes this clear. Wrote John, "He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit." What does that mean? In the Old Testament, this phrase is used to refer to the condition of the earth before the improvements of creation. Genesis 1:2. It aptly describes the condition of the earth following the devastation of the earthquakes and hailstones at the end.

"He cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things, he must be released for a little while. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea." Revelation 20:2, 3, 7, 8. "Gog and Magog" were enemies of ancient Israel, and they are here used to represent the vast army of the wicked assembled against God's holy city.

Some might wonder why they are brought back to life at all. Why not just leave them in their graves? First of all, the Bible teaches us that the wages of sin is "death." Used in that sense, it does not refer to what the Bible calls the death of "sleep" that comes upon, with a few noted exceptions, all mortals. The death that is the "wages of sin" is called the "second death." Those who rise in the first resurrection are free from its power. Revelation 20:6. This death is eternal separation from God. It is death with a full consciousness of the sinfulness of sin and guilt. It is the death that is accompanied by weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is, by the way, the death that Jesus experienced on the cross so that we don't have to. The wicked did not receive the just reward for their sins when they died the first time. They did not drink from the unmitigated cup of guilt. It was tempered with mercy.

Secondly, because God wants to forever remove and banish doubts concerning His justice, He brings the wicked back to life for one last desperate demonstration of their corrupt minds. They reveal that they come from their graves unrepentant. They haven't changed in the least. The same sinful thoughts dominate their thinking. They are still under the control of the arch deceiver. Satan leads them in an attack against God, His saints and His city.

"They (the wicked) went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them." Revelation 20:9. The word "devour" in this verse means to "completely consume;" to leave nothing left. It accurately reflects the teaching of

the rest of the Scriptures that God will totally annihilate Satan and his followers. This will be the day of which the prophet spoke, "'For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that will leave them neither root nor branch.'" Malachi 4:1.

We know "hell" cannot be the never ending furnace as taught by many pulpits of today because the destruction of the wicked, as described by Revelation 20, takes place on the earth, which then becomes the eternal home of the saved. Does not the Scripture clearly teach that the "meek shall inherit the earth"? Matthew 5:5. It will not be the earth as we know it now, scarred by sin, but a "new heaven (atmosphere) and new earth" as foretold by Peter and John.

No, the wicked will not burn forever. The *effect* of the destruction is eternal, not the *process* of destruction. The punishment is eternal, not the punishing. The word of our God will come true when it says, "For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look diligently for his place, but it shall be no more." Psalm 37:10. Speaking of Satan (typified in prophecy as the prince of Tyre) we read, "You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more forever." Ezekiel 28:18, 19.

The day will come when even death is destroyed. Revelation 20:14. The day will come when "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:4. When would this prophecy ever be fulfilled if the wicked were tortured in flames throughout eternity?

Two great questions confront us today. Let's go back to that climactic moment when all humanity, for the first and only time, is alive at the close of the thousand years. There is the glorious city of God, the New Jerusalem, described as a bride adorned for her husband. She is garnished by a magnificent wall of jasper. The jasper we know today is opaque, but this wall of jasper is "clear as crystal," "like clear glass." Revelation 21:11, 18. This wall will divide the saved from the lost. On the inside of the wall will be those who will enjoy the reward of eternal life. They beam with the joy of immortality. They were sinners, but were washed in the blood of the Lamb. They allowed the Holy Spirit to reform their characters. They don't

deserve eternal life, but received it as a free gift from Jesus. Their sins were paid at the cross.

On the other side of that jasper wall are the lost. They await the final judgment and destruction. They bear the look of desperation that accompanies the knowledge that they could have been within the protective confines of that jasper wall. They know that Jesus paid for their sins on the cross, but they refused His offer of mercy. They know that the Spirit tried in a myriad ways to encourage them in the path of obedience and loyalty, but they stubbornly held on to their own desires. They see Jesus as He really is, the King of the universe, the benevolent Savior, the kindly Monarch. They see that they turned Him down and would not have Him as their Ruler. Oh, what a sad, sad moment for the wicked!

The first question we must address is simply this: on what side of that jasper wall will you be? Jesus said plainly that the fires of hell were prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41. It was never God's plan that humans die. The cross satisfied the debt of every sin, the sins of the whole world. It is up to us to choose. Choose today, my friend, that by God's grace you will be on the inside, and not the outside of that city wall.

But there's another question that needs to be addressed, even by those who will be found inside. And that question is, How will the choices of my life be evaluated from that perspective? What will the "view from the wall" reveal about the way I've spent my time, my money, my energy and my influence? Will I regret having supported the work of missions? Will I regret having spent time in worship, the study of the Word and in prayer? Will I regret having cooperated with Jesus in the great work of saving souls? Viewed from the perspective of the Jasper Wall, I don't believe so. Every deed done for the sake of Jesus will shine in glory.

What about other choices and decisions in my life? How will the frivolous spending of time and means appear then? What about the time wasted in filling my mind with worthless material? Everything will be seen in a different light at the Wall. Every choice, every decision I ever made will appear in its true significance and its true value.

Brother Harden was a leader in our Pathfinder club (similar to Boy and Girl Scouts) when I was young. Since he had a reputation for being a "rock hound," I asked him to evaluate a rock that we had found in the desert that I felt certainly had value. I asked him if he thought it might be worth \$25.00, and he responded, "Worth less." I asked him if he thought it might be worth \$15.00, and his response

was the same. "Worth less." I went down to \$10.00, \$5.00, \$1.00 and even all way down to a penny, but his answer never varied. It took me some time to figure out that what he was trying to tell me, in his kindly way, that was that the rock was worth less. It was worthless! How many things of this life, in which we've invested so much time, money and energy, will appear to be worthless on that day, as seen at the great Wall of Jasper!

So I challenge you today to live your life from that perspective. Every day re-commit yourself to His keeping. Make choices and decisions "with a view from the Wall." Live to honor God and exert every talent and influence for the building of His kingdom.