

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 48 – THE FULL EXTENT OF EVIL]

We have been looking at the question as to why this period between Jesus' resurrection and His second return is also the prophesied millennium.

- ◆ The first principle we looked at as to why this is the case is we need to view events from the spiritual perspective of Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished.
- ◆ The course of humanity has been set on a whole trajectory as a result of Jesus life, death and resurrection.
- ◆ It is the age of the new creation; a human has crossed from mortality to immortality. There is no going back to the old, decaying structure of the fallen creation.
- ◆ To try as we did in the past to view the 1000-year earthly reign of Christ within the old decaying structure of chronos time fails to recognize what transpired when Jesus rose from the dead.
- ◆ When Jesus returns it will be in the glory and honor of the new kingdom.
- ◆ So if we want to understand the workings of the kingdom of God we need to look at it from the perspective of Jesus Christ and what He achieved.

The second point we looked at is, the kingdom of God is a kingdom that grows over time.

- ◆ We saw this principle explained in Jesus' parables of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast.
- ◆ The element of time is involved.

A third principle we looked at addresses the question of evil.

- ◆ We saw how from the very beginning, the devil has been allowed to exert his evil influence on mankind.
- ◆ Although the devil was comprehensibly defeated at the cross and delivered a fatal blow, he, along with the other difficulties of life in this old corrupt world are there to serve God's purpose of developing a holy people who reflect the righteousness of their elder brother, Jesus Christ.

There is another reason the devil has been allowed to exert his evil influence on mankind and that is, humanity needs to realise the true and full extent of the evil that resides in the human heart.

- ◆ Up to this point we have identified three stages humanity has experienced throughout its history.
- ◆ We witnessed the age of anarchy which resulted in God having to destroy all mankind with a flood except for the eight in Noah's ark.
- ◆ Such was the depravity of mankind God had to step in and wipe out this evil before they annihilated themselves.
- ◆ We get a taste of what this world might have looked like with what we see happening in Iraq and Syria today with the likes of ISIS.
- ◆ The second age occurred with the introduction of a written code of law.
- ◆ The first written code we are aware of can be traced back to Mesopotamia and was introduced by Hammurabi, a Babylonian king about 1760BC.
- ◆ Much of the common law we use today can be traced back to the code of Hammurabi.
- ◆ The Law of Moses followed this at the time of the exodus about 1446BC.
- ◆ What is unique about the Law of Moses is it included offenses against a deity as well as against society.
- ◆ The age of the Law was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand it put a restraint on human behavior so that the world did not fall back into anarchy, but on the other hand it pointed to the failure of humans to live up to its ideals.
- ◆ There is this vast gap between the "is" and the "ought."
- ◆ This of course is why it was necessary for Jesus to come and live up to the requirements of the law on mankind's behalf so His righteousness could be attributed to us.
- ◆ This introduced the third age, the age of grace that began with Jesus' death and resurrection and the start of the new creation.

However, there are those in our society who naively think that given enough time, enough education, more laws and better forms of government, that humanity will reach a golden age all by itself.

- ◆ It's a noble ideal of course. Unfortunately, each generation goes to its grave with dashed expectations and the world about the same as it has always been.
- ◆ But scripture tells us, just so mankind gets the point that life without God is hell, that just before Christ's second coming, the restraints holding back the full extent of evil will be removed so no one is left with any doubt that we are deeply flawed creatures in desperate need of help.

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And again, the following scenario is subject to interpretation, as we are not given a blow-by-blow account as to how events unfold, but we have the basis outline.

- ◆ In 2 Thessalonians, Paul is responding to the false claim by some that Christ had already returned.
- ◆ **2 Thessalonians 2:5-9** *Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works.*
- ◆ This passage of scripture confirms what we saw revealed in the book of Job, that Satan's hand is restricted by God in what he is allowed to do.
- ◆ Actually there are three restrictions God has put in place to restrict evil.
- ◆ We just mentioned one of them, the law, second, human governments (Romans 13:1-7), and third, most importantly, God Himself.
- ◆ God is the one mentioned here in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 who puts the restraints on Satan's evil activities in the same way he was restricted when dealing with Job.
- ◆ But what we see revealed here in the book of Thessalonians is Paul making reference to these restrictions being removed just before the return of Christ and Satan being unleashed and allowed to go forth to deceive the nations.
- ◆ John in Revelation 20 picks up this scenario.
- ◆ **Revelation 20:1-3** *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.*
- ◆ This binding of Satan occurred at Jesus' resurrection. The devil and his evil spiritual forces were defeated and his activity restricted as we have discussed.
- ◆ If you like, he was put on a chain like a wild dog that restricts his ability to create havoc.
- ◆ But notice what occurs shortly before Christ's second coming.
- ◆ **V.3** *After that, he must be set free for a short time.*
- ◆ The chain restricting his activities is removed and he is allowed to go forth and deceive the nations once more.
- ◆ This initiates the final confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this age, between the Lamb of God representing the new creation and the beastly and brutal apocalyptic images of the old age led by Satan himself.
- ◆ One could make a good argument that we are already in this period of a "short time."
- ◆ Over the last 2000 years, many have died from wars and other unnatural causes as a result of Satan's and man's evil actions.
- ◆ However, no other century comes close to the number of unnecessary violent deaths as the 20th century.
- ◆ This century also produced four of the most evil men in recorded history, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot.
- ◆ Estimates of those who died from war and the ensuing collateral damage in the last century range from 170-200 million, half of which can be attributed to the two major communist dictators, Stalin and Mao Zedong.
- ◆ I would hazard a guess the vast majority of those 200 million would agree, "Man's heart is evil indeed and life without God is hell!"
- ◆ **Revelation 20:7-10** *When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.*
- ◆ Again we see who is in charge. God, not Satan, is the all-powerful one who rains fire down from heaven.
- ◆ **V.10** *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

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- ◆ At last, the devil and those who aid and abet his evil ways are removed forever.
- ◆ Again we see God allowing the devil to exert his evil influence on mankind so humanity realizes the full and true extent of the evil that resides in the human heart.
- ◆ ***Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?***
- ◆ So the devil, along with sin and death, are used by God to reinforce the point that “the human heart is evil and life without God is hell.”

Bear in mind that all this occurs prior to the general resurrection when the small and great will stand before the One seated on the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-12).

- ◆ It's important to consider evil in the context of this resurrection.
- ◆ The devil is no longer around to exert his evil influence on mankind.
- ◆ All have experienced the hell of what life is like without God.
- ◆ Is God going to allow all this accumulated pain, suffering and death experienced over the millennia by all peoples to count for nothing?
- ◆ We will come back to these questions when we take up the subject of the judgment in the future.
- ◆ But for now we need to address another subject surrounding Jesus' resurrection, and that is, what kind of body did the resurrected Jesus have?