

REV 20:7-15—THE FINAL JUDGMENT

INTRO: Many people today, especially in the West, think that the idea of God’s final judgment and eternal consequences for our actions is incredibly narrow, parochial, intolerant, and, if I may say, judgmental. We think, “Judge not,” and we “celebrate diversity,” and all of that.

Of course there is wisdom in that. America is a pluralistic society. People of both sexes and every ethnic, religious, and socio-economic group make this nation—and make the world—a better place. And people look at the Nazis or at real evil done in the name of religion—the Inquisition; modern day Islamic jihadists—and say, “Enough! Can’t we all just get along? After all, there is no absolute truth; values are cultural and relative; so don’t impose your views on me.”

But there is a huge problem with that. The statement, “there is no absolute truth” is itself a statement of absolute truth. If there is no absolute truth, then no one can say that anything done by the Nazis was wrong. A Nazi would say: “Where do you get this notion of ‘right and wrong’? That’s just our Nazi culture. You say, ‘Don’t impose your views on me,’ but what you’re really saying is, ‘Your views as a Nazi are wrong’—and you want to prohibit me from acting on them. Where did you get that narrow-minded, judgmental attitude?”

If there is no final judgment, no eternal consequences for our actions, then that would mean that the Nazis, the Inquisitors, the jihadists, would have gotten away with it. They would never be held to account. That means it doesn’t matter whether you help someone or rob him. There would be no *moral difference* between the two because the whole idea of “morals” would then be just what’s called a “social construct”—IOW, something made up by people to try to make society function on a practical level, but is not “true” in any ultimate sense of the word.

But everyone knows in his heart of hearts that there is right and wrong. And everyone—whether they are liberal or conservative, Christian or atheist—acts on the basis that there *is* truth, that there *is* an overarching standard of values, a right and wrong that transcends culture and individuals. If you don’t think so, just try cutting someone off in traffic or butting in line sometime.

The only viable ground or basis for truth, for transcendent values, for right and wrong, can only come from God. He is the creator. He is the only one “big enough,” so to say, to ground values that transcend cultures. And since God is the only one with perfect knowledge, he is the only one who can be trusted to judge justly.

Today’s passage—Rev 20:7-15—deals with this very issue. It tells us that:

PROP: There is a final judgment, and it is perfect. God’s final judgment gets to the root of matters because it not only deals with people but with the one “behind the scenes,” Satan himself.

O/S: Today’s passage is in two sections: **vv.7-10** deal primarily with the judgment of Satan, and **vv. 11-15** deal primarily with the judgment of people. So I will read and discuss them separately.

But we need to understand that the judgment of Satan and the judgment of people both occur as a part of the 2nd coming of Christ. The 2nd coming is a complex of events. It entails resurrection of all, judgment of all, and the renewal of the earth.

Also, in both the OT and the NT, when God or Christ comes to the earth in judgment, that judgment is described using two different images or metaphors. Sometimes God’s judgment is described as a battle or war, and sometimes it is described as a courtroom proceeding. In fact, **Rev 19:11** says both. In describing the 2nd coming of Christ, it says, “**He judges and wages war.**” Now, in today’s passage, **vv.9-10** describe the judgment at the 2nd coming as a battle or war; **vv. 11-15** describe that same judgment as a courtroom proceeding.

I. vv.7-10—The judgment of Satan. [READ]

Notice how v.7 picks up where v.3 left off: v. 3—Satan was bound “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer until the 1000 years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.” v.7-8—“When the 1000 years are completed Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth.”

Satan has always been a deceiver—he deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. But this is a specific type of deception. He will be given a short time to deceive in a unique way, namely—as **vv. 8-9** tell us—to unite the nations to destroy the church. While there has always been persecution of the church, it has never before been organized and on a worldwide basis, with Satan free to do whatever he wants. That may be, in part, why Christ said in **Luke 18:8**, “**When the SOM comes, will he find faith on the earth?**”

In connection with **vv.7-10** there are three things we need to understand.

First, the battle or war described here was previously described at the end of **Rev 16** and the end of **Rev 19**. This is all in keeping with Revelation's progressive parallel structure where different sections of the book repeat each other but add different details. Here in **Rev 20** the detail being added is the focus on the ultimate *leader* of the anti-Christian forces—Satan himself.

Second, in **v.9** when it says “**they surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city,**” don't think of a literal camp like an army camp or an individual city like Jerusalem. Like the many other images we have seen in Revelation, the “*camp of the saints*” and the “*beloved city*” are different metaphors for the same thing—the worldwide church. **Rev 3:12**, for example, identifies *all believers* as “**the city of My God.**” The “**beloved city**” in **v.9** contrasts with the “**great city**” of **Rev 16, 17, and 18**, namely, Babylon the great. When we were in **Rev 17 and 18** you may recall we pointed out that Babylon the great is a worldwide anti-Christian, religious-cultural entity.

Likewise, the context here tells us that the “**camp of the saints**”—the “**beloved city**”—must be the worldwide as well. In **v.9** the NASB and ESV say that the anti-Christian forces (called “Gog and Magog”) came up on “**the broad plain of the earth.**” The phrase literally is “**the breadth of the earth,**” which is how NKJV and NIV translate it. IOW, the anti-Christian forces spread out “**over the breadth of the earth,**” IOW, “**over the whole earth.**” So the camp of the saints, the beloved city, is not confined to one *spot* on the earth but is *the saints themselves, wherever* they live on the earth.

Third, **v.10** talks about the devil being thrown into the lake of fire “**where the beast and the false prophet are also**” (or, as the ESV says, “**where the beast and the false prophet were**”). Some people take that and say that “since **Rev 19:20** says that the beast and false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire, but there was no mention there of Satan, then this throwing of Satan into the lake of fire must occur 1000 years after the throwing of the beast and false prophet.” That is not correct. The judgment of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are simultaneous, not sequential.

Remember: as we discussed last week **Rev 20** does not follow chronologically from where **Rev 19** left off. Instead, it goes back and repeats events of **ch.19**. The judgment in **Rev 20:10** is a recapitulation of the judgment in **Rev 19:20**, but the *focus* here is different—the focus is on *Satan* because he is the “power behind the throne.” He's the one who empowered the beast and false prophet and has been the instigator of evil since the Garden of Eden. So it only makes sense that, at the end of the Bible, his demise is given special attention.

Our translations of **v.10** that talk about Satan being thrown into the lake of fire also tend to mislead us. In the Greek it actually says, that Satan was thrown into the lake of fire “**where the beast and the false prophet**” but then it is simply blank—it doesn't have a verb. So the actual sentence in the Greek is: “**where the beast and the false prophet . . . and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**”

The omission of a verb is called an “ellipsis.” As one writer points out, “**The ellipsis of a verb governing ‘beast’ and ‘false prophet’ requires the translator to supply one in English. Most translators supply ‘where the beast and the false prophet were/are’—as if the two judgments are sequential, not synonymous.**” But the usual and typical way to supply an omitted verb is to make it the same as the preceding verb, IOW the verb should be “*thrown*” not “*are*” or “*were.*” So, the most natural translation of **20:10** would be “**And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are thrown or were thrown**”—IOW, they are all thrown together at the same time.

I hope that is not too much of a grammar lesson. But anything other than that would go against all the other passages of the NT that tell us the 2nd coming of Christ is the climactic event of history when all issues will be fully and finally resolved. So at his coming, Christ positively and permanently judges, sentences, and disposes of with Satan, the beast, and the false prophet. What about people?

II. vv. 11-15—The judgment of people. [READ]

As with the destruction of Satan, there are three things that we need to consider regarding the judgment described in **vv.11-15**: When does this judgment take place? Who is being judged? and What is the nature or basis of the judgment?

When does the judgment take place? The judgment takes place in connection with the 2nd coming of Christ. **2 Pet 3** tells us that at the DOL—which is the 2nd coming— “**the heavens will pass away and the earth will be burned up.**” Now here in **v.11** it says, “**heaven and earth fled away, and there was no place for them.**” These are parallel descriptions that describe the same event: the cleansing of the earth at the 2nd coming.

Likewise, **v.14** says “**then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.**” That corresponds to Paul's statement in **1 Cor 15** that “**The last enemy that will be abolished is death.**” Paul's argument in **1 Cor 15** is that the abolition of death occurs at Christ's “coming.” So what we're seeing here is that part of Christ's 2nd coming involves the final judgment which includes everything: Satan; the beast and false prophet; people;

the earth; and even death itself. But as **chs. 21-22** will go on to tell us, his coming also inaugurates the age to come of perfect righteousness, eternal life, and the *new* heaven and *new* earth.

Who is being judged? Some people say that there are multiple judgments—they separate this judgment from the **“judgment seat of Christ”** mentioned in **2 Cor 5**. They say that only the unrighteous are being judged here. I think that’s wrong. Christ’s **“great white throne”** in **v.11** is his **“judgment seat.”** All across the NT it says that there will be a great general judgment of believers and unbelievers alike. Jesus himself said that the judgment is when the wheat will be separated from the tares, and the sheep will be separated from the goats—not separate judgments, one only for sheep and one only for goats.

What is the nature and basis of the judgment? **vv.12** and **13** both say that those standing before the throne are judged **“according to their deeds.”** But wait a minute—I thought we couldn’t earn our way to heaven by doing good deeds. What’s going on here? That is true. *We cannot* earn our way to heaven by doing enough good deeds. But as African scholar Onesimus Ngundu says, **“Works are an index of the spiritual condition of a person’s heart. . . . The judgment will reveal whether or not people’s loyalties have been with God and the Lamb or with God’s enemies.”**

What we do reveals what our real beliefs are. In particular, because all of us have been made in the “image of God,” how we treat God’s image shows what we really think of *him*. The judgment will not take anybody by surprise—because everything we do is an outward, visible sign that should be revealing to us now—as it will be revealed at the judgment—where our primary loyalties are: either with Jesus or with something else.

Jesus made this abundantly clear when he described the final judgment in Matt 25. He said **“When the SOM comes in his glory”**—that’s at the 2nd coming—then everyone will be before him like sheep or goats. And he will separate them. How? Will he ask them, “Did you accept me into your heart as your personal savior?” or “Did you say the sinner’s prayer?” No.

Instead, he will say to the goats. **“When I was hungry you gave me nothing to eat; when I was naked you gave me nothing to wear; when I was sick and in prison you didn’t visit me; and when I was a stranger you didn’t take me in.”** And the goats will say, “When? When did we see you? If we’d have seen you, Jesus, we’d have done these things.” But Jesus will reply, “What you didn’t do to the least of these, you didn’t do to me—go to hell.”

Then he will say to the sheep. **“When I was hungry you fed me; when I was naked you clothed me; when I was sick and in prison you visited me; and when I was a stranger you took me in.”** What will the sheep say? They say the same thing the goats said, “When? When did we see you?” And Jesus will reply, “What you *did* do to the least of these, you did do to me. Enter into the joy of your master.”

The goats could mouth the words that Jesus was the Lord. But the difference between the sheep and the goats was that the “faith” of the goats never penetrated deep within their lives. It didn’t change their thoughts, their feelings, their actions. But the faith of the sheep did penetrate down to the core of their lives. Their faith changed them. They started thinking like Jesus thought, feeling like Jesus felt, and doing like Jesus did—and *they didn’t even realize it*—because their new nature, Christ’s nature, had become “second nature” to them. They became transformed. Their faith was *real*.

Is our faith real? That’s the question that the end of this chapter leaves us with. We began today by talking about why final judgment is important. When all is said and done, there *will* be an end to this life and to this earth. But the end of this life really is not the end. There is an accounting. That accounting means our lives here are more important than we realize. They are more important than we realize because the consequences of everything we do are not limited to this life. Rather, everything we do here has everlasting consequences.

As C. S. Lewis said in his essay “The Weight of Glory”: **“The dullest most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—These are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.”**

CONCL: As we end this series of sermons on Revelation let me make an announcement: The announcement is that I know in this series there has been a lot of new information presented. But all of the audios and the written sermons are posted on the sermons page of the ECLEA website: **www.eclea.net**. So if you want to revisit any of them, they are all available for you. I also discuss all of the issues we have dealt with in more detail in my book, *Biblical Eschatology*.

So, let me conclude by saying this: The book of Revelation can and should put our theology and our lives in proper perspective. Keep the end in mind. If we have an eternal perspective on things, it is bound to affect how we treat people, what we do with our money, and what consumes our minds and our time. Having this perspective can help us become more like Jesus. And that is the difference between heaven and hell, between the new earth and the lake of fire.

But whatever eternal destiny we have will not come to anyone as a surprise. Instead, our eternal destiny will simply confirm where our real citizenship has been all along—IOW, where our values and priorities, our hearts and minds are *now*. So assess yourself, and listen to the wise counsel of others. What and who is most important to you? Is it Jesus, or is it anything or anyone else? If it is not Jesus, you need to make some changes in your life. Whatever changes you need to make, make them.

But if you can honestly say, “I love Jesus; he is my life; he is my Lord,” then you don’t have to fear the judgment. Instead, you can look forward to it, because as Jesus said at the end of **John 3**, **“Whoever does what is true comes to the Light so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”** If you are in Christ then God is working in you and through you. People will see that, and it will be revealed at the judgment.