

XI. Eternity in Biblical Perspective

If I Should Die Before I Wake...

“The Unholy Trinity”

Revelation 13

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We will be looking at a couple of passages in this study. We will start by looking at Revelation 13. I have two more studies on this series, if I should die before I wake and then we'll be through. As I got into this series there were a lot of questions so this became a longer series than originally planned. To recap, when your body dies it goes to the grave and your soul goes to an intermediate state as some refer to it but if you're a Christian I prefer to say your soul goes to an immediate heaven whereby we are recognizable in a spiritual state. In that glorious residence with the Lord we also anticipate the coming of the Lord and when He comes then comes the Judgment Seat. Then comes for the believers, all whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, the new heavens and the new earth.

I know I've heard this many times, where someone who has greatly suffered, perhaps some physical maladies, and people say 'Oh I know they are just running around in heaven.' I'm not sure about the running around although I know what your picture is and that is what awaits us in the new heavens and the new earth. Are they enjoying the presence of the Lord? Is there communication? Is there worship and praise? Yes to all of that but it's not the final state for the body is yet to be glorified, raised and transformed into the everlasting state. At a graveside, as the body is consecrated, I like to say one of the reasons we do this reverently is not because they are here but the same God who caused our soul and spirit to be born again isn't through with this body.

We believe in the resurrection of the body as the Apostles' Creed says and that's why we got into this addendum. The resurrection of the body will take place when Jesus comes back. This led to a study of the signs of His coming and the end of the age. Then we did a study on what happens when He does come and a study on what happens at the Judgment Seat. We then studied the two eternal destinations – the unbeliever in eternal hell and the believer in the presence of the Lord for eternity in the new heavens and the new earth – both will have an eternal body. Hebrews 12:26, 27 says [26] *At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."* [27] *This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.* Then we will receive that which cannot be shaken. That is the anticipation.

As we looked at the second coming, the judgment, and the new heavens and new earth, it became obvious we needed to spend a little more time of His second coming so this study and the next one will give more information regarding this matter. I hear from people that they want me to pray for them due to going through some spiritual warfare and we seem to think that spiritual warfare is a periodic, special encounter in our lives. The Bible tells us that spiritual warfare is your life, not just a piece of your life and what is unusual are seasons of its absence.

For instance, you are always at war against the old man within you. You are always at war to take every thought captive unto the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). We are in spiritual warfare and it must be affirmed time and time again. This spiritual warfare isn't fought by us to see who wins for it's the battles we fight in light of what He has done to win the victory.

He has defeated all of our enemies – sin, Satan, hell and the grave – but He has not destroyed them. He has bound them from what they can and cannot do in this age but He has not set them aside, meaning they are still active. As a Christian personally, you are always at war. Jesus told us this in John 16:33 which says, [33] *I (Jesus) have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

This gives rise to the very words of the Apostle Paul who says in Romans 8:35–39, [35] *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

[37] **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him** who loved us. [38] *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Christ is the Victor who has already won the victory so then we are in this battle.

The best illustration I have of this is when they won that victory in WW II up on the cliffs of Normandy, Hitler was done. They still had to fight hedgerow to hedgerow, village to village, with battle after battle and there would be casualties but that was the strategic moment. When Jesus came out of that grave, we win, for the Lamb triumphs. The Lion of Judah is standing as the Lamb slain and that is the glorious truth that leads us into our personal battles.

Secondly, the church is in spiritual warfare. The church is the one that helps equip the Christian to fight the personal battles of spiritual warfare. Jesus told us in Matthew 16:13–17, [13] *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” [14] And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” [15] He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” [16] Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” [17] And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”*

Right after that we see Jesus telling them He has to go to Jerusalem in Matthew 16:21 which says [21] *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* This is where He does this great cataclysm battle for the salvation of souls by the grace of God for the glory of God. After Peter’s glorious affirmation of who Christ is and Jesus telling them about Jerusalem, Peter then says in Matthew 16:22–23, [22] *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” [23] But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

Did Peter really think he knew better than Jesus here? Yes. There are many times we think we know better than Jesus. Our grumbling reveals it continually. Our victory in this passage is what Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:18 which was, [18] *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Just as the Christian will have tribulation in this world, the church will also be assaulted and we see that here when He says ‘the gates of hell will not prevail against it’ so Satan and his kingdom will try and prevail against the church. The very picture of the scope of the battle against the church is right in Revelation 12 so before we get to Revelation 13 we will look at this battle against the church, but before that I want to say one more thing.

As we engage personally in spiritual warfare and in Christ's church, with our confidence fixed on Jesus, here is what we need to remember. Satan always uses three strategies and we're told in the Bible not to be ignorant of the snares and schemes of Satan. Satan loves to intimidate, imitate and infiltrate. He wants to intimidate so that we are silent, fearful and we retreat because fear paralyzes. He goes about like a roaring lion. This one is all growl because Jesus has already defeated him but Jesus is all victory. Then he wants to imitate, like the wheat and the tares with man-made religions, cults and he loves to adulterate and corrupt the professing church of Christ. He will imitate Biblical Christianity to pull people away. Then he loves to infiltrate churches with grumbling, complaining, gossip and slander to create divisions in the fellowship. He loves to infiltrate the leadership of the church as well. We see this when Paul addresses the elders at the church of Ephesus in Acts 20:29–30 by saying, *[29] I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

In your personal life you are always facing an unholy trinity – Satan, the flesh and the world. You do not fear Satan, you resist him and he will flee from you (James 4:7). You flee temptation but you don't flee Satan but we tend to get that backwards. Satan will flee you for two reasons. One is that Jesus has already bound the strong man at the cross and secondly, greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (I John 4:4). Not greater are you than Satan but greater is He that is in you and that's why Martin Luther in that great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God, affirmed that Satan was greater than him (Luther) but he did not fear because of the Christ who had won the victory, and the Spirit who is ours and one little word from God fells him. He only continues this defeated foe until the day Jesus destroys him.

Satan is your adversary. The world is the assault from the outside whom Satan used to intimidate. What is the worst thing the world can do to you in the sovereign providence of God? It is to kill you and if they do it only shortens your journey home. So we face the world and its insanity, absurdity, threats and we don't leave the world but we don't let the world in us. We are in the world but not of the world. We stay in the battle, the fight but we also don't let the world in us. The other part of the unholy trinity you fight is the flesh which is the old man that is still within you. The old man everyday has the audacity to get back on the throne of your new heart in Christ. You have to kill that old man every single day. That is the spiritual warfare we are in.

In this study, we will be looking at the unholy trinity that we fight as God's people in this church from the gates of hell that would come against us and it's the dragon – Satan – and the two beasts – the beast of the sea and the beast of the earth/land. They are also called the false prophet. This is what we will fight as a church. Everyday in your life you have a two front war happening. With your eyes fixed on Jesus, the armor of Christ, and the weapons of the Spirit, you have a war outside of you dealing with the world and you have a war inside of you killing the old man as you live unto Christ. Now we are about to look at the church and how it is always faced with a two front war. The dragon attacks us with the beast of the sea and the beast of the land/earth. Now, what are they?

Revelation 12 is a breaking point from Revelation 1 through 11 which is kind of like part one with Christ at war for us and the war against us from the kingdom of darkness. Then Revelation 12 through 22 is John peeling back so that we can see more of what is going on in this warfare against the Lamb and the church. Let's start by looking at Revelation 12. This is only going to be an overview.

Revelation 12:1–6 says *[1] And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. [2] She was*

pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. [3] And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. [4] His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. [5] She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, [6] and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

This great apocalyptic book with all of its symbols uses a number of symbols to describe the period of time between the ascension of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus and this is one of them. There is a period of time in which the church is in the wilderness, the body of Christ that is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ because of the redeeming work of Christ. This text is telling us something that has been in action since Genesis 4. The promise in Genesis 3 was that the woman would be given a seed and immediately we see the anticipation of the virgin birth because women don't have seed. The focus is not on the woman, individual, but the woman who God has established through which the Seed would come – the bride of God, His covenant bride, His church – old and new Testament. Through that church He will bring the individual woman and the One who is going to set us free, who will be bruised in His heel but will crush the head of the serpent.

Immediately Satan goes to work as Cain and Abel are born. Eve gives the name Cain to her son which comes the declaration 'I have received a man child from the Lord,' is this the One that was promised? We can already see the anticipation of Genesis 3. Soon we see that it isn't the One for the kingdom of God comes through Abel and then later through Seth. Cain will represent those who are the daughters of men. The warfare begins as Cain rises up to slay Abel. Satan is a murderer from the beginning and it is no accident that as God begins to move among His people in captivity in Egypt that there is a genocidal assault upon all the male children of the Hebrews. Satan wants to prevent the fulfillment of that prophecy in Genesis 3. The Old Testament is full of that where Satan stands before the woman to devour the child.

Who is this woman? This is a woman whom all of heaven puts its raiment upon. This is the woman that is clothed with the majesty of heaven. This is the bride of Christ. This is His church and through His covenant people Christ will come to save us from our sins. Satan is thwarted. He is not able and in fact what he may think is success with fiendish laughter at Calvary is actually the fulfillment and there while Jesus is bruised, He wins the victory and He defeats the serpent. Satan is cast down and He even says, 'I have seen the strong man bound, falling like lightning.' So here is the victory of Christ. Does that stop Satan? No, for he then brings warfare against the church. The Ascended Christ is untouchable but now he brings warfare against the body and bride of Christ. Christ Himself protects her, not from the battle but in the battle as she exists under the Divine protection of being nourished by the Spirit of God and the Word of God from the throne of God where Jesus sits. Let's continue in the text.

Revelation 12:7–12 says [7] *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, [8] but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. [9] And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. [10] And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who*

accuses them day and night before our God. [11] And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. [12] Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

You are in a battle. It is a death struggle, the death efforts of Satan will be directed against the very bride of Christ, against the church of Jesus Christ. Notice we celebrate our victory because the accuser has been thrown down but he has not yet been destroyed. While he wages war against the people of God they still look to Christ and sing the victory of the Lamb, yet it will cost the lives of many. The lives of many will be paid in faithfulness to Christ. Let's continue in the text.

Revelation 12:13–17 says *[13] And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. [14] But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. [15] The serpent poured water like a river (I believe the river referred to here that Satan wants to sweep the woman away with is the river of intimidation, the assault of infiltration and imitation using his schemes.) out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. [16] But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. [17] Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.* Remember in Hebrew cosmology the sea represents evil. Then what is seen?

Revelation 13:1–10 says *[1] And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. [2] And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. [3] One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. [4] And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"*

[5] And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. [6] It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming His name and His dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. [7] Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them (some will die under the assault of Satan). And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, [8] and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. [9] If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

*[10] If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes;
if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.*
Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

What is this beast? This beast that is rising up out of the sea very clearly in its reference back to the book of Daniel are the succession of tyrannical governments that raise themselves up in the place of God – governments that assume a messianic authority over all the people – that they are to be worshipped. They demand absolute allegiance.

One of the most frightening things I've heard recently coming out of Washington D.C. was the statement when the equality act was passed that Christians cannot appeal to the free practice of religion to maintain the sanctity of sex within marriage and marriage between a man and a woman. The state will now declare that as bigotry therefore if you want to claim the first amendment, the free practice of religion then you have to have a religion approved by the government. Now we will find out who we worship? Will we have the principle obedience to Christ, worship the Lamb and be willing for the prison and the sword or will we demonstrate that we actually don't know the Lamb as we give up the testimony of Jesus for the acceptance of a state that assumes authority over the worship of God's people? That is something that is always before us. While we're only on the verge of looking at something like this, this has been the rule throughout the years.

I wish you could have come with me the eight times I had the privilege to minister in Uganda and see the believers who existed under the satanic rule of Edi Amin and Obote. To see their faithfulness in such persecution was incredible. We see the rise of it as the Bible documents it for us and in the flow of history. We see Daniel affirming this. Here come the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medo-persians, the Greeks, the Romans, etc. and it has continued in succession with fascist governments, and communist governments throughout all of the ages. That is the second person of the unholy trinity against the church and that is the beast of the sea – tyrannical governments who claim the position of God and the allegiance of all over God. There is another beast which is what we will see next in the text.

Revelation 13:11–18 says *[11] Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb (Matthew 7:14, Jesus reference of lamb being ravenous wolf) and it spoke like a dragon. [12] It exercises all the authority of the first beast (In other words, it collaborates with the tyrannical governments) in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast (In other words, this is the apostate church, the nominal church that goes into league to support the first beast of assuming a messianic role in the lives of people), whose mortal wound was healed. (The second beast claims the support whereby the healing of the first beast takes place – false miracles that will be done to persuade others to serve the tyrannical government. [13] It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, [14] and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. [15] And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. (In other words, they will rat out their own and turn them over to the beast to be killed.) [16] Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, [17] so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. [18] This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.*

I know I don't have enough time to explain all this but you need to see the parallels in the book of Revelation. Here is the unholy trinity and here is the Triune God. Here is the result of Satan's work in the world – the harlot, the whore of Babylon – and here is the result of the Lamb, the bride of Christ. Here is the feast upon the martyrs. Here is the marriage supper of the Lamb. Here is the mark/seal among God's people on their forehead. Here is the mark on the forehead of those who are not in the book of Life. Once I say this people start discussing what this will look like but I don't enter into those discussions because I think the symbolism is clear. How

does Jesus seal you by the Spirit of God? He comes to dwell within you and renews your mind so that you think truth. What about those who follow the beast? They will be committed to futile thinking for their mind will be captivated by darkness – lies deceive – and the second beast works hard to religiously promote a false theology in their minds. This beast, from the preternatural powers of darkness will do signs and miracles that will draw people astray.

I will end by summing this up. I have given you this by the Spirit of God through John in the book of Revelation, so now I want to give it to you as Paul gives it in II Thessalonians 2. We will look at this passage again in the next study as we look at the dragon and the first and second beast as they are loosed for a while, right before Christ returns. Right now we have learned the unholy trinity is supported by the false prophet, the second beast, the beast of the land and tyrannical governments. The beast of the land – apostate religions – sells out to the first beast to do the work of the dragon in this world – to speak his words and to adulterate the minds of those who follow, while the people of God will be sealed with the truth by the power of the Spirit of God who renews their minds.

II Thessalonians 2:1– says *[1] Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,[2] not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. [3] Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,[4] who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. [5] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? [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. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, **because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.** [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

According to this there will be a religious movement of false signs and wonders and this is why as a pastor I get so concerned, not fearful, when I hear people say ‘I hear people are falling down laughing over here, I believe there are miracles over here’ and people start to flock to that yet no one is flocking to the preaching of the Word, but they are flocking to the show. That is playing right into the hands of the first and second beast, because Satan can put on a religious show of false miracles done with power. If you don’t believe it go see what the Egyptian magicians did during Moses’ day. It was not slight of hand. We don’t build our Christianity on experience. Instead of God’s Word being the foundation through which experience is evaluated and understood, they attempt to build a Christianity on experience. You have just hooked your life right to the second beast when you do that. God’s people love the truth and by the truth they love their Savior.

Paul uses the same language here as he uses in Romans – as God gave them over to their delusions. If you want a religious show it’s all out there. In Pilgrim’s Progress, I love when Apollyon says, ‘Ah Pilgrim, religion, I love it. I think everybody needs some.’ Please don’t use the phrase ‘Christianity is a relationship not a religion.’ No, Christianity is not a religion made

by man that says you get a relationship – Christianity is a relationship with Christ that gives you true religion and it's manifested. So what we love is Christ, revealed in His Word and we're empowered by His Spirit. We are not looking for the next show for we want to see Jesus by faith. We want to hear Jesus by faith. Romans 10:17 says *[17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You, O God, that Your Word tells us what to expect – how to prepare for it in and through Christ – and that we have battles personally and battles to serve You corporately as a church. God, keep us on mission, on message and in ministry and thank You Jesus that You use a faithful church to equip believers to remain faithful in their lives. Thank You Jesus that You take committed Christians as members of the body of Christ in order to maintain Your church faithful in the Spirit, led by the Word to the glory of the Father in the preeminence of Christ for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.