

The Millennium

There are several different views Christians hold regarding the millennium. Many believe that during the millennium this earth will enjoy a time of peace, when people will live in a world where there is no bloodshed, stealing, lying, etc., and where Christ Himself will be the visible King on the earth. Others believe that during the thousand years there will not be anyone alive upon this earth and God's people will be in heaven.

There are also several different views about the events that lead up to the millennium. Many believe there will be a seven-year period of persecution just prior to the millennium. Some of these Christians believe that all Christians will be secretly raptured out of the world at the beginning of this seven-year period, while others believe that Christians will be secretly raptured in the middle of this seven-year period. There are still others who believe that Christians will be raptured at the *end* of this seven-year period—not secretly, but openly for every eye to see.

With so many different ideas about the millennium how can we know for sure which one is true? We need only to look at the plain Bible evidence to find the answer. The purpose of this tract is to examine what the Bible says about these subjects.

The word "millennium" is used in reference to a time period of one thousand years. This word is not found in the Bible; however the Bible does use the term "thousand years" in nine separate verses. They are as follows: Psalm 90:4; Ecclesiastes 6:6; 2 Peter 3:8; & Revelation 20:2-7. The first three verses have nothing to do with an actual time period that will occur. The only place in the entire Bible where we can find reference to a thousand-year time period that will actually occur is in Revelation chapter twenty.

If we wish to find out what events take place just prior to the millennium, during the millennium, and at the close of the millennium, we must look at the twentieth chapter of Revelation. This truly is the only place where we can come to a Biblical understanding of this millennium. There are other verses in the Bible which describe events that will occur during, just prior to, and after the millennium, but none of these verses lay out the consecutive events surrounding the millennium as well as Revelation chapter twenty. Let us look at this chapter and find out for sure what the Bible says about the millennium.

Verses 1-3 read as follows: *"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season."* (Revelation 20:1-3) It is quite unlikely that these verses refer to a literal chain for a couple of reasons. As we all know, the book of Revelation uses more symbols than any other book in the Bible. Also, it is not possible to use a literal chain to bind a spiritual being who is capable of walking through walls. For these reasons, and the context, I understand this chain to refer to a chain of circumstances binding Satan for a thousand years, keeping him from deceiving anyone.

Notice that these verses demonstrate that during the thousand years Satan is not able to deceive anyone, but after the thousand years are over he will be able to deceive people again for a short time. Keep this in mind as we examine the remaining verses.

Verse 4 reads: *“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”* This verse is obviously referring to righteous people. It says very clearly that they will live during the thousand year period. It also states that judgment was given unto them. What type of judgment?

Judgment of the Wicked

Paul wrote, *“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?”* (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3) Paul tells us that the saints will judge the world and the evil angels. It is obvious that the saints will not judge the righteous, for the righteous will already have been judged by the time the Lord comes to take His children to heaven. During the thousand years the righteous will be alive, judging the wicked and the fallen angels.

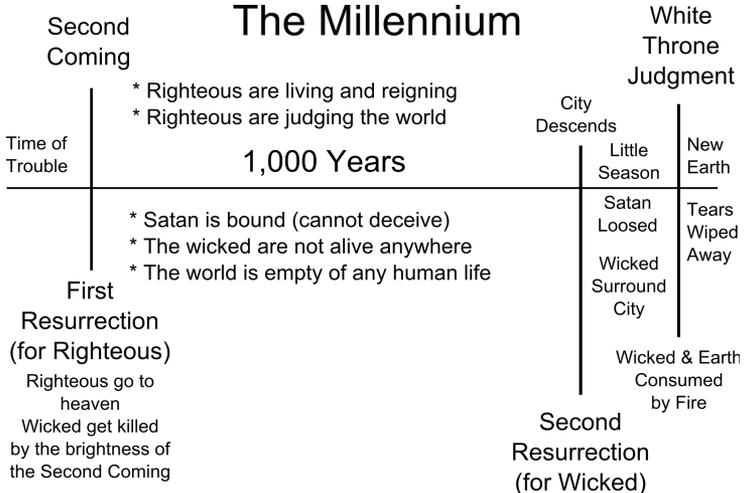
John continues, *“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished...”* (Revelation 20:5) The phrase, *“the rest of the dead”* obviously refers to the wicked, for the righteous are said to be alive during this time. During the thousand years the righteous will be alive, but the wicked will be dead. Let me take a moment to clarify here. Accord-

ing to the Bible *“the dead know not anything.”* (Ecclesiastes 9:5) They are completely unconscious of the things going on around them. (For a thorough Bible study on this subject please contact us and request the tract entitled *“What Happens After Death?”*)

Two Resurrections

John continues, *“...This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”* (Revelation 20:5, 6) According to the Bible there will be two resurrections. Paul said, *“there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”* (Acts 24:15) And Jesus said, *“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”* (John 5:28, 29)

In Revelation 20:5, 6 God informs us that the first resurrection will be the resurrection of the righteous, for these are said to be *“blessed and holy.”* It is also clear from these verses that the resurrection of



the righteous takes place before the thousand years, for those who have part in it will live and reign with Christ during this time, and that the resurrection of the righteous marks the beginning of the millennium. Let us pinpoint exactly when the resurrection of the righteous will take place.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17) At the second coming of Christ those who have died in Christ will rise first—this is the first resurrection—then we which are alive and remain will be caught up with them in the clouds to be with the Lord.

Let us quickly summarize what we have learned so far. When Christ returns all those who have died in Christ will be raised from the dead commencing the thousand year millennium. During the millennium the righteous will be living and reigning with Christ. They will be given judgment to judge the wicked and the fallen angels during this time. All the wicked will be dead during the millennium and Satan will be bound; unable to deceive anyone. At the end of the millennium the wicked will be resurrected from the dead. (See Revelation 20:5.) At this time Satan will be loosed for a little season.

Isaiah wrote concerning the wicked, *“And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited.”* (Isaiah 24:21, 22) During the thousand years Satan will be unable to deceive anyone, but after the wicked are raised from the dead he is loosed to deceive people again. Who will he deceive? Obviously not the righteous for they are eternally secure, having already obtained immortality at Christ’s second coming. (See 1 Corinthians

15:51-53.) Satan will deceive the wicked who have just been raised from the dead.

Before we look at the rest of the events that will occur after the millennium we need to look at a few verses about the New Jerusalem which will help us understand these events.

The New Jerusalem

John wrote, *“And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”* (Revelation 21:10) John saw the New Jerusalem descend from God to the earth. Who was in the city? John wrote, *“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”* (Revelation 22:14, 15) Only the righteous will be allowed to enter into the city, but there will be some who must remain outside. John wrote concerning them: *“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”* (Revelation 21:8) Here we see that those who cannot enter the city due to their sinfulness, will suffer the second death.

Continuing with Revelation 20, John wrote, *“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog [land of the wicked, see Ezekiel 38:1-3], to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down*

from God out of heaven, and devoured them.” (Revelation 20:7)

Satan will convince the wicked that they can take the beloved city, the New Jerusalem. They will surround the city in a vain attempt to overthrow it, but God will overrule and send fire down to devour them.

Zechariah recorded a similar account of this event. Referring to the Lord he wrote, *“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.... And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.”* (Zechariah 14:4, 5, 9)

Here Zechariah saw the Lord descending on the Mount of Olives, and it divided in two and spread out to make a great valley. Then he saw the Lord come with *all* His saints. Please notice that this cannot be referring to the second coming of Christ, for at that time the dead in Christ will rise from the dead and the righteous living will be caught up with them in the air. *All* the saints cannot possibly be with the Lord until after they are raised from the dead and redeemed from this earth. Therefore this must have reference to another coming of our Lord. This is when the New Jerusalem descends from God out of heaven. The mount of Olives, spreading out to make a great valley, is the preparing of a place for the New Jerusalem. This does not occur until after the millennium.

We already learned from the Bible what occurs next: the wicked are raised from the dead and they surround the city attempting to overthrow it. Then the Lord rains down fire from heaven that devours the wicked. Zechariah goes on to describe this scene. He wrote, *“And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth.”* (Zechariah 14:12)

Destruction of the Wicked

When the Bible speaks of the second death and fire devouring the wicked, is it referring to a continual fire that tortures the wicked for billions and billions of years with no end? Please take a moment to consider a few thoughts before we continue.

Suppose a fifteen-year-old boy gets drunk one night, steals his father’s car and wrecks it. If the father of that boy would torment him with fire for one week we would say that man is cruel. Suppose the father tormented him for one year. Surely we would say this punishment is far too severe for the acts committed. Now suppose the same young boy did the same thing but, instead of living through it, he died in the accident. Do you suppose God will take that young boy and torment him for billions and billions of years? This would be downright cruel—more cruel than the worst criminal who has ever lived—not to mention it is completely contrary to Scripture.

Is it fair to torture someone for millions of years for sins that may have taken only fifteen years to commit? This surely sounds unfair to me. With this perception of God we see Him as unfair and accordingly, we feel justified in being unfair as well. The Scripture tells us that God is just and merciful and He treats us better than we deserve.

“Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.” (Job 11:6) God gives us less than our iniquities deserve. This surely would not be the case if God would torture the wicked for billions of years.

The punishment of the wicked will be according to the things done during their lifetime. Jesus said, *“And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”* (Luke 12:47-48) Some will receive a punishment of longer duration than others, but none will be punished more severely than they deserve. The prophet Obadiah wrote concerning the wicked: *“...they shall be as though they had not been.”* (Obadiah 1:16) David wrote, *“For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.... But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.”* (Psalms 37:10, 20)

The idea that God takes pleasure in watching the wicked burn continually is a false teaching that has caused many people to look upon God as an unkind tyrant—even worse than Hitler. This false doctrine has its origin with Satan who first said, “Ye shall not surely die.” Man does not naturally have an immortal soul for he never ate of the tree of life after sinning, which would have allowed him to have eternal life in a sinful state.

We are becoming like the God whom we behold. If we are beholding a God who is pleased to see the creatures whom He has made suffer without end, then we will acquire the same type of character. But

this is far from the true character of God, for the Bible clearly states, *“As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”* (Ezekiel 33:11) Truly God is merciful and kind, even in his dealings with those who finally reject Him. (For a thorough Bible study on this subject please contact us and request the tract entitled “God’s Love Revealed in Hell.”)

We have seen quite clearly the events that mark the beginning of the millennium, the end of the millennium, and some facts about what happens during the millennium. Yet there are a few details we have not examined.

During the Millennium

Among Christians there are several ideas about what will happen during the millennium. The Bible makes it clear that all the wicked will be dead during the millennium. It is evident that they will be on this earth during that time for their resurrection from their graves will not have occurred yet, and their graves are on this earth. What about the righteous; where are they during the millennium? The Bible tells us that they are with Christ. Does the Bible tell us where Christ is during this time?

In Paul’s account of the second coming of Christ he does not indicate that He ever sets foot upon this earth. He wrote, *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17) At the second coming of Christ the righteous will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord and be with him there.

There are several reasons why I do not believe that Christ and the righteous will be on this earth during the thousand years.

1) There is no record in the Bible stating that Christ or His people will be on this earth during the millennium.

2) Just prior to the second coming of Christ there will be a great earthquake causing every island to flee away and every mountain to be cast down. *“And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.... And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.”* (Revelation 16:18-20)

3) The landscape of the earth will be in a very chaotic condition during this time. *“Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.... The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word.... The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.”* (Isaiah 24:1-5) Isaiah continued, *“...the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.”* (Isaiah 24:18-20)

4) The surface of the earth will be littered with many dead bodies during this time. *“For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.”* (Isaiah 26:21)

5) The Bible describes a time when there are no inhabitants on this earth. *“I*

have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant.... Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” (Zephaniah 3:6-8)

6) This old earth is said to be destroyed by fire, after which there will be a new heaven and a new earth. *“Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”* (2 Peter 3:12, 13)

7) The new earth will not be in existence until after the thousand years are completed. (See Revelation 21.)

This is very conclusive evidence that Christ and His righteous people will not be on this earth during the millennium. So where will they be? We are told that they will live and reign with Christ and that judgment will be given to them. This evidently will be in heaven in the city which God has prepared for His people, for the New Jerusalem is said to have come down from heaven after the thousand years.

The biblical evidence is clear that during the thousand years the righteous will be in heaven with Christ, and the wicked will be dead in their graves awaiting their resurrection at the end of the millennium.

What About the Secret Rapture?

Many Christians honestly believe that Christ will return secretly to rapture His people prior to the great tribulation which occurs just before the millennium. If this is true, there is no need to prepare for such

a tribulation. If this is not true, many will be caught in the tribulation without making the necessary preparations. Paul wrote concerning this time; *“For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:3) As you can see, it is very important to understand the truth about this subject. Let us take a few minutes to examine what the Bible says about it.

A few well-known verses used to support the idea of a secret rapture are found in Matthew 24. *“Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”* (Matthew 24:40, 41) Many assume that those who are taken are the righteous being secretly raptured, leaving the wicked to wonder what had happened to those missing. However, if one would just read the preceding three verses it would be very clear what is spoken of here. Here are the verses in their context:

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” (Matthew 24:37-41)

Jesus made a parallel here and said that it would be the same when Christ returns as it was in the days of Noah. In the days of Noah those who were taken were the wicked, taken in death by the flood. So shall it be when the Lord returns. Those who will be taken will be the wicked who are taken in death at the brightness of the

Lord's return. Let us look at a few other verses which mention the same event.

When the Lord returns there will be two classes of people upon this earth, one of which will cry out, *“...this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us.”* (Isaiah 25:9) The other class of people will hide *“themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains,”* and say *“to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 6:15, 16) Regarding the coming of the Lord, Malachi wrote, *“But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap.”* (Malachi 3:2) John wrote, *“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”* (Revelation 6:17) The obvious answer to who will be able to stand is the righteous—those who have prepared themselves to meet the Lord.

Paul wrote about the destruction of the Antichrist power in this way; *“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:8) When the Lord returns, only the righteous will be able to stand the *“brightness of his coming.”* Isaiah wrote concerning the coming of the Lord: *“Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.”* (Isaiah 24:6) Who will be left? Certainly! It will be the righteous.

Answering Some Objections

There are some who believe in the secret rapture who like to quote Christ's words to the church of Philadelphia as proof of this theory. Christ said, *“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temp-*

tation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” (Revelation 3:10) Please notice that this is spoken to one of the seven churches. It is not the last of the seven, for one more church comes after it. If the churches are in chronological order as many believe, then this could not be referring to the great tribulation.

Also, how does God keep people from evil that comes upon the earth? *“The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”* (Isaiah 57:1) As we can see, God will keep some of His people from going through the great tribulation, not by secretly rapturing them out of the world, but by allowing them to die before this hour comes.

The Bible demonstrates that there will be a great tribulation just prior to the second coming of Christ for which we must prepare. Amos wrote, *“prepare to meet thy God.”* (Amos 4:12) We have been warned of those who cry out *“peace and safety.”* Paul wrote, *“For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:3)

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” (Matthew 24:4-8)

Jesus described the condition of the world in the last days. Right after doing this would have been the perfect opportunity for Jesus to tell his disciples that they

would then be raptured but notice what He said next: *“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”* (Matthew 24:9-13)

Jesus said that if we endure to the end we will be saved. Friends, there are events that will come upon this earth which we must endure before the end comes. Please take every opportunity given you to make the necessary preparations to meet the Lord when He comes.

Preparing to Meet the Lord

We know we must prepare to meet the Lord, but what preparations are necessary for us to be ready for that day? The Bible speaks of two groups of people in the last days—those who receive the mark of the beast and those who receive the seal of God. We read concerning the seal of God:

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.” (Revelation 7:1-4)

John wrote concerning those who receive the seal of God: *“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and*

with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads.... And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." (Revelation 14:1, 5)

Just prior to the coming of our Lord in the clouds of heaven, there will be a group of people that have the Father's name (character) written in their foreheads. They will reflect the character of God in their lives. These will receive the seal of God rather than the mark of the beast. The Bible tells us that this group of people will be without fault before God. They will not sin nor teach falsehoods, for *"The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."* (Zephaniah 3:13)

This group of people are prepared to meet their God. When the Lord comes they will say, *"this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us."* (Isaiah 25:9) The proclamation in Revelation 22:11 will have already been given. *"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."* (Revelation 22:11) Each person's case will have been settled at this point, whether for eternal life or for destruction.

One group of people will have overcome sin, for Jesus said, *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne."* (Revelation 3:21) Another group of people will have chosen to cling to their sins and they will be destroyed at the brightness of His coming. *"Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it."* (Isaiah 13:9) According to the Bible, if you are still sinning when the Lord returns, you will be destroyed.

With this brief illustration of the necessity of overcoming sin before the Lord returns, we can now look at some Bible principles of how to overcome sin.

How to Overcome Sin

Paul wrote, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* (1 Corinthians 10:12, 13) God knows how much temptation we are able to bear and promises that He will never allow us to be tempted above what we can bear. He will always make a way of escape.

Can Satan force us to sin? No. Satan cannot force us to sin. We have to make the choice to yield ourselves to Satan before we sin. Rather than yielding to Satan we must learn to yield ourselves to God and allow Him to give us the strength to overcome temptation.

What is temptation? Let's look at a plain Bible definition of temptation. *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:14, 15) Is it a sin to be tempted? No. It only becomes a sin when you allow verse 15 to take effect. To be tempted is to be drawn away of your own lust and enticed.

For example, suppose a man is walking through the checkout line in a grocery store. Inevitably there are several magazines in the racks that have half-naked women on the cover. The man glances around and notices one of these magazines. There is something in him that is drawn to continue looking at this picture, however he understands that it is wrong to continue looking at the picture and immediately turns away. Realizing his own weakness, and the danger he is in, he

calls upon the Lord to deliver him from this temptation. Immediately the Lord gives him the victory he so longs for and draws his mind to focus on eternal things.

Was it a sin for the man to have glanced at the picture to begin with (in this case we will say he did it innocently), and have some longing to continue looking at it? No. He was tempted by being drawn to do that which was wrong to do, but this temptation was not a sin. It would have become a sin had he stared at the picture and/or allowed his mind to wonder and dwell on forbidden territory. This is *“when lust hath conceived, [and] it bringeth forth sin.”* (James 1:15)

Understanding how temptation works is necessary for us in order to know how to overcome when we are tempted. There are three basic responses that the man in the previous example could have had.

1) He could have stared at the picture and allowed his mind to wonder on forbidden territory this plainly becoming a sin. Jesus said, *“But I say to you, that every one who is looking on a woman to desire her, did already commit adultery with her in his heart.”* (Matthew 5:28 *Young’s Literal Translation*) It is not the looking at a woman that is a sin, or even the drawing that a man has within him toward a woman that is a sin, but when a man looks upon a woman for the purpose of lusting after her, this is a sin.

2) He could have decided that it was wrong to continue looking at the picture and chose to look away, trying to force himself to think about something else, thus striving in his own strength.

3) He could have recognized the sin in continuing to look at the picture and immediately turned away. Realizing his own weakness and the danger he is in, he could have called upon the Lord to deliver him from this temptation.

Which of these responses would have been the correct response? Obviously number 3. When we are being tempted we must call upon the Lord and He will be right there to give us the help we so des-

perately need. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of calling upon the Lord for strength immediately when we are being tempted.

Calling Upon the Lord

Christ is well able to help us when we are tempted, *“For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to **succour** [to run to the cry of those in danger, to help—Thayer’s Greek Lexicon] them that are tempted.”* (Hebrews 2:18) When we are being tempted we must call upon the Lord for deliverance, and He will come and help us. Jesus said, *“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”* (John 14:18) Jesus Himself has suffered being tempted, therefore He knows exactly how to help us when we are being tempted, and will come when we cry unto Him. For *“greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.”* (1 John 4:4)

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15, 16) Christ was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of God when we are being tempted and He will quickly come to our aid.

God said, *“call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”* (Psalm 50:15) *“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.”* (Psalm 91:15) David wrote, *“Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.”* (Psalm 94:17, 18) The Lord will help us when we are being tempted if we call upon Him and do not rely on our own strength. How can we expect to be victorious if we do not call upon the Lord?

We are powerless before Satan's attacks without God's help.

Paul admonished, *"(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."* (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5) We do not fight against Satan's temptations with swords and spears. These are useless in our battle with sin. Our weapons are mighty only through God. If we do not call upon Him when we are tempted we will not overcome. It would be as pointless as facing an entire army alone with a sword made of paper.

Put on the Armour of God

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might [not the power of your own might]. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness." (Ephesians 6:10-14)

Notice the first piece of armour we are to put on. Paul said we are to have to our *"loins girt about with truth."* Does this mean we are to put a belt on that has truth written on it? No. We are to have our minds filled and surrounded with truth. Jesus prayed to His Father, *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."* (John 17:17) Study the word of God so you know of a certainty the words of truth. *"Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I*

might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?" (Proverbs 22:20, 21)

Examine yourself to see if you are calling upon the Lord when you are tempted. When the Lord sees you call upon Him when you are being tempted, He sees that you do not want to yield to that sin and He will honor your cry and give you the victory. If you do not call upon Him when you are being tempted, the Lord can see that you still have some desire to hang on to that sin. He will not give you the victory.

We need to despise sin so much that we would be willing to die rather than sin. Jesus had this experience, and He was put to death. He would not yield on any point to the temptations of the Devil. Jesus *"loved righteousness, and hated iniquity."* (Hebrews 1:9) We must have this same hatred for sin. Paul wrote, *"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."* (Hebrews 12:4) There will be a time when God's people will be required to resist unto blood in striving against sin. *"For sin shall not have dominion over you."* (Romans 6:14)

Sin Is a Choice

We are never forced to sin. Sin begins in our thoughts, therefore in our thoughts we must fight the battle immediately when temptation comes. We must choose to serve God with all our hearts. Joshua said, *"choose you this day whom ye will serve."* (Joshua 24:15) Paul wrote, *"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"* (Romans 6:16)

Moses said, *"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."* (Deuteronomy 30:19) God gives us the choice of whom we will serve, but He strongly encourages

us to choose the good. God loves us so much that He wants each one of us to be saved. Peter wrote, *“The Lord is... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* (2 Peter 3:9)

Make No Provision for Sin

There is another important thing to remember in our Christian walk. Peter wrote, *“put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”* (Romans 13:14) We are admonished not to make any provision for the flesh. Do not do anything that would make it easy to fall into sin. Never go out of the way to put yourself into a position that may cause you to fall into sin.

I heard of a man that used to be an alcoholic. He had given up drinking for quite some time and had discarded all of his bottles of alcohol; all except one. He would carry this bottle with him under the seat of his car. One of his friends stumbled across it while looking through his car one day. Shocked, his friend questioned him as to why he would have such a thing in his car. The man replied, “I carry it around just in case I need it.” This man had stopped drinking for quite some time, but was not sure he really wanted to give it up for good.

Are we like this man when it comes to sin in our lives? Are we making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof?

I read of an army general who went out to fight a battle. Before he could face the enemy he had to march his army over a bridge spanning a deep chasm. After marching his army over the bridge, and going over himself, he burned the bridge

behind them, thus making any retreat impossible. This gave the army the increased desire to win the battle for they had no way of escape. Thus the enemy was defeated.

Here is another quick story: Several men went out on an expedition to a far country. After arriving on shore in a strange country they burned the boat they had traveled upon. If they would have any desire to go back home, it would not be possible because the ship had been burnt up.

Are we burning the boats and bridges behind us in our lives? Do we have some reserve about giving our lives to the Lord completely? God says to us now, *“ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:13)

Paul wrote, *“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”* (Romans 8:12-14) Every decision we make for good or evil, we are either standing for God or for the Devil. Let us follow after the Spirit that we may live. *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”* (Galatians 5:16)

I pray that the Lord will guide you as you study His word and follow Him. Again I must emphasize the importance of calling upon the Lord when you are being tempted, and He will help you and deliver you out of your troubles.

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