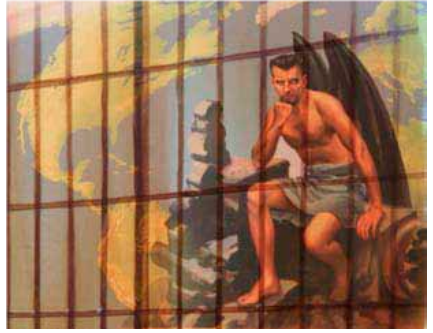


A Thousand Years in Jail



AS THE YEAR 2000 approached, many predictions were made. The battle of Armageddon would begin; Christ would arrive; the antichrist would arrive; humanity would be destroyed by a comet, a nuclear war, an epidemic; the Y2K bug would trigger worldwide financial ruin; the secret rapture would take place.

How many of these things actually took place? A series of religious books called *Left Behind*, based on the rapture, has become an astonishing success. But should we learn what's just ahead of us by reading human predictions? Let's find out God's future plans by consulting God.

Thoughts to Remember:

- “For the Son of man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). This debunks the ideas that the solution to world problems is a one-world government or the union of church and state. It also shows that human beings are not, in fact, gods.
- But what about the secret rapture? “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:27). Clearly there will be nothing secret about Jesus' coming.
- If they're not raptured, then what happens to the righteous living when Jesus comes? What about the righteous dead from ages past, and the wicked living and dead? “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16), that is, before the dead who are not in Christ—the wicked. Have you laid someone to rest—a wife, a husband, a child? There is hope! The dead in Christ will rise first.
- “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in 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, to the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28, 29). So there are two resurrections, with the righteous dead being raised first, then the wicked dead.
- First, “we shall all be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53). Just imagine: the blind will see, the crippled will be made whole, there will be no cancer or arthritis. We will each have the healthy, vibrant bodies God created us to have. Then the righteous dead will be raised. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [the righteous dead, now living] in the clouds

to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

- What about the wicked? “In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Jesus longs to save everyone; He gives us chance after chance; but sin is a combustible material. Fire will cleanse the earth of sin, and to God’s grief, those who cling to sin are destroyed with it.

- “And at that day the slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground” (Jeremiah 25:33). They won’t be buried because there’s no one left on the earth to bury them—the righteous have gone to be with the Lord, and the wicked are all dead. This is the beginning of the Biblical millennium.

- “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while” (Revelation 20:1, 2). The Greek *abussos* means “place of darkness and desolation.” Satan will be trapped alone for a thousand years on the earth, looking at the bodies, wandering the ruins, and thinking on all he has done. There’s no one left for him to tempt.

- The righteous in heaven with God spend the millennium examining the books. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?...Do you not know that we shall judge angels” (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3)? Could God have done anything more to save the lost? If we miss anyone, we look at the record to see what God did for them. God willingly answers every question. “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments” (Revelation 16:7).

- At the end of the millennium, “Then I John saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). “But the rest of the dead [all the wicked] did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5). So the city of God descends from heaven to earth, and then the wicked are resurrected for the final judgment. “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (Revelation 20:9). Rallied by Satan, their move is an obvious preliminary to an attack. “And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them” (Revelation 20:9). Clearly they won’t burn forever, but they will die and never live again. The first death, at the end of earthly life—perhaps a heart attack or a car accident—was temporary. But this is the second death. It is permanent. By God’s grace, the righteous never die the second death, because Christ died that death in our place at the cross.

The “take-home” message for you . . .

- Sin, Satan, sickness and evil are all gone. Death is over. This fulfils the promise repeated so many times in the Bible: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

Just between you . . . and God:

- At the very end of time, there will only be two classes of people. One group will let go of sin, and won’t die the second death. The other group will cling to sin and be destroyed when sin is destroyed. God extends His mercy and His hand of love to you every moment; why not take it? Is it worth holding onto the selfish habit, the money, the secret resentment? Let the loving Lord fill your heart with Himself. The difference between being saved and lost is simply choice.