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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Divine Purpose #35

“The Consummation of the Covenantal Program (6):

The Kingdom of God - IV”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Revelation 20, verse 7 through verse 10. Now, we have been looking at Revelation 20, 1 through 3, and the binding of Satan. And then, we looked, for more than one of our Wednesday nights, at Revelation chapter 20, verse 4 through 6, and the vision that John had of the thrones and the saints and their rule and reign. And, now, we’re moving on to the fifth of the last things in verse 7 through verse 10, and the final rebellion. And the apostle writes in Revelation 20, verse 7.

“And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed from his prison, and he shall go forth to deceive the Gentiles, which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to war: whose number is as the sand of the sea. And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and encircled the camp of the saints.”

"The Consummation of the Covenantal Program, part VI" by S. Lewis Johnson
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That word, *parembole*, is a word that means something like the rampart; its a military term. "And so the camp of the saints," that rendering should be set in the context of a military gathering.

"And the beloved city: and fire came down from heaven, and consumed them. And the devil who deceiveth them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and the false prophet."

Now, we must, and I don't know any reason why, grammatically, this is not absolutely correct. I don't know of anyone who would dispute it. We have to supply the verb "to be" in the present tense.

"Where the beast and the false prophet are, and they shall be tormented."

Now, this expression is one that means not so much throughout every day and throughout every night, as during the day and during the night, and the force is very much the same in this instance. In other words, their torment is a continual torment.

"Unto the ages of the ages."

That last statement, "unto the ages of the ages," is an expression that, if one were to look at it just philologically, you might have some questions about whether it referred to eternal death. That is, if you separated it from its usage, because the term,

ation, which is used here for ages, and then, of the ages, is a term, which standing by itself means simply an age. And, consequently, on the basis of this, many who have believed in annihilationism or conditional immortality, which is very popular today, even men in Evangelical theological society hold to conditional immortality, that would be rather helpful to their position. Unfortunately, however, usage of the term *aion*, in ancient literature, is contrary to that. And, furthermore, the word *aion* is, itself, a compound word that comes from the present participle of the verb to be, on, which means essentially "being," and the adverb, *aei*, which means "always." So the word upon which so many rest their case of annihilationism or limited punishment is a term which, itself, is built upon roots that mean always being. So that kind of argument, which is not a good hermeneutical principle anyway, defeats their own position. This is a clear statement of eternal punishment.

Richard Weymouth, who translated the New Testament, a very fine student of Greek was himself an annihilationist. His Weymouth's New Testament has been read by many people down through the past decades, a very popular translation because it was a very good translation in many ways. He was speaking with a man by the name of Goodrich, who was a friend of G. H. Lang. And Mr. Goodrich pointed him to this passage and also to the passage in Matthew chapter 25 in verse 46. And Professor Weymouth said, "Well, I must confess that if this is not eternal punishment, philologically," he was still grasping at the little straw that he had, "it surely is theologically."

There have been some rather interesting attempts to deal with this subject and to present conditional immortality in the past five or seven years. In fact, believe it or not, there is a book out on conditional immortality that has a word of recommendation

from F. F. Bruce, of all people, who I'm sure does not believe that doctrine but, nevertheless, has put his name on the back of that book. I'm surprised that Clark Pinnock would but, nevertheless, that is the way that we go, if we don't pay any attention to the exegetical treatment of the New Testament and Old Testament texts.

If I were the President or if I were the Chief Justice and I had control of everything in this country, I would make it a law that nobody could preach who didn't exhibit a skill in the Greek New Testament, the Hebrew Old Testament, and also know a great deal of hermeneutics. And then this country would be really, truly a great country. I don't think that's going to come to pass. Do you? [Laughter]

Let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. And, again, Lord, we come to a passage in the Book of Revelation, which is not easy to interpret. The finest of the interpreters have admitted there are many things about this passage that are puzzling and we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt enable us to understand the things that will be helpful to us, help us to avoid manifest errors in the study of the Scripture, enable us to profit in a practical way, too, from our time together.

We ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now, I don't know whether many of you have the outlines. If they have been handed out or not. But you'll notice that what I have done, again, is to use the same outline but I'm using a little different principle each time. I have expanded each one of these sections in the night in which we were dealing with that section. And

so, tonight, you'll notice, that the fifth last thing, the last rebellion, is expanded a bit and we're going to be dealing with that.

But let me say a few words first by way of introduction. Our contemporary loss of a sense of sin is intimately related to this brief but puzzling section. It surely is one of the characteristics of our age that we have lost the sense of sin. That particular loss is a much greater evil than Nazism or communism because they are merely the early fruits of the sense of the loss of our sin. So what we think about as important, this is undoubtedly one of the most important things in our life.

I'd like to read a section from a writer whose words I have appreciated very often in the past. He says, "One of the stock arguments against a sense of sin, especially, when it is intense is that it has a tendency to make its possessors morbid. And that is, indeed, true. Even the best of all things, since man is a sinner, involve him in danger of some kind. Only angels can afford to go to extremes without peril or injury. Absence of sense of guilt feeling is still greater peril for man and the entire human adventure. The morbidity which may develop from a sense of sin is a jovial sanity, compared to the morbidity which most certainly does develop from the absence of it. The sickness which sense of sin may produce is much better for civilization and the European future than the diseased mentality engendered by the lack of it. Calvinism, for example, is much less of a peril to Western civilization than Nazism." There, you can tell that he was writing during that period of time. "However successful our generation may be at suppressing its sense of guilt, in tucking away out of sight, its success in this is the chief cause of contemporary social failure, complete success is impossible. Out of sight, does not mean out of mind. It returns in some guise or other. Neurosis conveys it or hysteria. Even Hitler is not immune to stirring of conscience,

even though he may neither recognize nor admit it as conscience. What about his periodic nightmares? After all, conscience is a nick-name." I'm sorry. "Conscience is a nightmare to much more normal men than Hitler. Nothing, absolutely, literally nothing, can allay the eternal restlessness of mortal man. There is no thicket in which he can hide himself from storms of self-accusation. No shore that cannot be washed by the recurrent tides of brooding awareness. The sense of guilt is universal in time and space. The jauntiest and cockiest of generations and individuals sense its Domoclean presence in deed and indeed. What ever may be ghostly in the being and character of God, it will not be his holiness."

We have been saying, in our series of studies, that the Bible, essentially, is the book of a Coming One; it's also the book of man's condemnation. And in it is unfolded God's great purpose with regard to sin and the Savior, of course. We know and we understand that, as we read much in the Bible.

Well, we are coming to a particular part of the Book of Revelation that, I say, is puzzling. But, I'd like before we look, specifically, at verse 7 through verse 10, to say just a word about the validity and the weakness, *Heilsgeschichte*, to build on the doctrine of sin, rather than the grace of God. As you may know, there are people who read the Bible and see in it, primarily, man's reaction to God's specific tests of us. And those specific tests of us are designed to show us our sin. And so the Bible is regarded, essentially, as a series of developing tests to which man is put. And in each one of them men are shown their sin. Down through the years, on into the future, so the program continues.

Now, that is a way of looking at the teaching of the Bible. *Heilsgeschichte* is the German term that means "History of Salvation." And so in the history of salvation one

can, according to this particular approach, see that God has been putting man to the test down through the years, designed to show him his sin in order that he may turn to Christ.

Now, there's a lot of validity to that. One would not question that entirely. I think some of the particular ages that individuals seek to find in the word of God are very difficult to find. There is a great deal of overlapping of some of them, but when you melt it all down, there is such a thing as the Old Testament age of the Law. There is such a thing as the age of the church. And there is such a thing as the age of the kingdom. We have been talking about that. And if we concentrate upon those ages, then, in effect, this will not do us too much damage to look at the Bible in that way.

But one way in which it may do us a great deal of damage is that it tends to focus on man rather than on God. And so, consequently, the result is that it's anthropomorphic. It's not a divine way of looking at the history of salvation. It would be much better, in my opinion, to do what we have been trying to do. That is, to look at the history of men in Old Testament times and New Testament times from the standpoint of the biblical covenants. And we set out in the beginning the fact that the biblical covenants were the outworking of the eternal covenant of redemption. We sought to show that. I think, we can show that from the word of God exegetically. And we made the observation and we sought to make the connection, inferentially, that what we see in history is the outworking of God's eternal purpose.

And so we have said that the theology that we have been presenting to you is a theology of the divine purpose. Now, in that sense, we look at things from the standpoint of God; rather than from the standpoint of man. And, thus, the concentration is on the being of God, the nature of being of God, his attributes, and the

way in which the being of God and his activities are seen in Holy Scripture. They receive the concentration of our attention, not man.

Now, we don't avoid the other. But, nevertheless, the proper viewpoint is the divine viewpoint; rather than the human, in my opinion. So we can look at it in the human way and profit from that. For example, many years ago, I was taught by someone that the last phase of God's demonstration of human depravity is before us in this particular passage. The "must" of verse 3, in which we read, "After these things he must be loosed for a little season," was stressed by the teacher as revealing the divine purpose and the outworking of his revelation and I would agree with that. And then the teacher went back to the ages of the past and said, "When Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, he had a possible excuse. He could say, 'We didn't know.' And so as a result of that God gave men conscience. But when men failed under conscience, they could say, 'We didn't have any authority.' And then, when men failed under conscience, God gave them human government. And when they failed under human government, they could say, 'We, the few, are held responsible for the many. And that's unfair.'"

And we've talked about that as the principle of representation has tried to show, the whole Bible is built on the principle of representation. Adam representing us and Christ representing his people. "Then, under human government, when they failed they could say, 'We had no divine principles.' And so God gave them the Law. And the Law was given. And when men failed under the Law, we were told that they could say as an excuse, 'We had no divine enablement.' And so the age of the church came. And the age of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And as a result of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, history shows that we shall still fail."

And so, consequently, the church might have the legitimate excuse or an excuse, I don't know if that the individual would say it was, ultimately, legitimate. I don't want to do him an injustice, we have Satanic opposition. And so the age of the kingdom is established and Satan is bound in prison in the abyss for a thousand years. And the principle aim of it is to show that men are still wicked and sinful, even though the evil one is no longer there to deceive them and hinder them. Now, I say, there is some truth in this. And, I think, in this passage, if you are looking for some passage, you may find some of it.

Now, the 7th verse is a verse that speaks about the release of Satan. This is the fifth last thing. And we read, "And when the thousand years are finished." That could be rendered, "shall be finished," even though, this is an aorist subjunctive. Those of you that are Greek students in the audience, there are a few of you that know that the aorist subjunctive is legitimately rendered that way in many contexts. And, in this one, it would make excellent sense. "Satan shall be loosed from his prison." This is probably the strangest parole in all of history. I don't guess we should ever use this as any example, because it's the Lord who releases him from his imprisonment. It's evident from this, however, that the Kingdom is not the full consummation of the purpose of God. Sin, death, and the curse, evidently, are still present. Righteousness rules during the age of the Kingdom, but it doesn't dwell in the earth.

Now, I'd like to make just a comment about this as an implication. You'll notice, from the outline, I have an Arabic 1. And these are just to give me clues of a few things that I want to be sure to mention. An implication of the millennial reign of our Lord.

Now, one of the implications of the millennial reign is this. Of course, we could say that the kingdom is not the full consummation of the divine purpose. That's

obvious. That isn't what I want to stress. What I'd like to stress is this; when we read in Revelation 20:4 through 6, that the saints rule and reign for a thousand years, now the very fact that they "rule and reign" that there are people who are under them. In other words, if everybody was a saint and if everybody was without any sinful nature, what's the point of ruling and reigning. So the very fact that we have individuals who are said to rule and reign indicates that there is a need for ruling and reigning. And, of course, as this passage unfolds, that's one of the issues that, obviously, is one of the results of the kingdom. There are people on the earth during this period of time who do not have complete deliverance from the sin nature and their sin.

So that's one of the implications. Now, that, also, I can also add one other thing and that is this; perhaps these go together. You can see from this that the kingdom is an interim time. Now, I mentioned this once before, maybe twice before, because I mention some things even though I don't have them in my notes and then, of course, I don't know whether I did or not, six months later. The kingdom is an interim period of time. We look into the future and we hear people say that Christ is going to come, and he's going to rule and reign upon the earth for a thousand years. And we think of this as a tremendously long period of time.

Just think, go all the way back to Thomas Aquinas. Well, that's not even a thousand years. But we think of Thomas Aquinas as living in the Dark Ages and all of these years that have intervened and all of the things that have happened, that's a vast period of time, and the Lord is going to reign for longer than that. That's a lengthy kingdom. But then look at that lengthy kingdom in the light of eternity. And then the kingdom becomes, I cannot even represent it if I put a point on a blackboard and said 'That's the kingdom,' in relationship to infinity. It would be wrong. So the kingdom is

an interim kingdom. That's one thing that we need to keep in mind. A thousand years is not very long when looked at in the light of eternity.

Now, the second thing that, I think, that we need to look at is the Kingdom in relationship to the purpose of God. I'd like to suggest two things and I only underline the word "suggest" because I'm not speaking, as I say, with my customary dogmatism. First of all, I would like to say that the kingdom is a demonstration of the incorrigibility of the Devil. One thousand years have elapsed. He has suffered down through the centuries, even before the creation, on through the creation. He has been defeated at every significant place and at the cross of Christ, his doom was sealed.

In fact, even he has the intelligence to know in the last years of this present age that his time is short on the earth. But even though all of that has transpired, even though he has thought he won a victory in the Garden of Eden and now knows he is defeated and now has spent a thousand years in the abyss; we discover that when he is released, he thinks about deceiving the nations of the earth again. The devil is an incorrigible angelic being; that seems quite plain from this passage.

Now, of course, the second of the things that comes to our mind is what we were talking about in the introduction, about the nature of man. We have here a demonstration of human depravity. Here are individuals who have been upon the earth during the time of the kingdom, and we read in the 8th verse, "And he will go forth to deceive the Gentiles or the nations, which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to war: whose number is as the sand of the sea." Think about that; that's an expression, incidentally, that is used of Abraham's seed. "Whose number is as the sand of the sea." He is able to gather together that many.

We say, the leopard cannot change his spots. Satan is still the same. And the sin nature is still present and being propagated during this period of time.

Well, I don't guess there is any further reason to say anything about that. I think, from our standpoint today, we look at human nature and we know that that's true. We know that having come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, we're still troubled by sin. And you would think that when a man gets to be as old as I am that he wouldn't be troubled any longer. That he would learn. Studying the Bible, teaching in theological seminary for almost forty years, and being around preachers, I take that back, that may be the stumbling block of all. [Laughter] But, nevertheless, being around all of the Christians all of this time and still troubled by sin, all the day long? Well, I must confess, if you're supposed to have some kind of victory that you are never troubled by sin, I don't have it. I'm still troubled by sin. Of course, I've learned some ways to hide it. You may not understand that I'm troubled by this or that; but it's there, and I'm still struggling and fighting and with God's help hoping that I will gain some measure of victory. But I know that, ultimately, it will not come until our Lord himself comes. Well, at least we can say that's one of the purposes of the Kingdom of God has been to demonstrate Satan's incorrigibility and also to demonstrate the depravity of human nature.

Now, mind you, when we say that the depravity of human nature, we're not going to cop out as the Arminians do and say that we really have free will and, therefore, we can make a decision for God apart from divine enablement. To think there is a great body of Christians, in fact, by far the majority of the professing Christians who believe that doctrine. And yet, the Bible says, "The mind of the flesh is in enmity against God." It is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can it be so

then they that are in the flesh, cannot, cannot, cannot, please God. We are unable of ourselves to please God.

Of course, there are many other passages that express that truth. We avoid them because we often read them through glasses that have already been tinted in certain ways. So human depravity, human inability, if you are looking for a nice exposition of it and what it means read Charles Hodges' chapter on it in his "Systematic Theology on Human Inability," an excellent chapter. It's not the greatest. I could add a few footnotes; and others could, too. But it's a very good chapter written in Professor Hodges' calm way, expressive of the inability of natural man to please God.

Now, in verses 8 and 9, we come to the rebellion of the nations. These are marvelous truths, you know, I could just talk on and on. In verse 8, the apostle writes concerning his vision, which he is receiving, "And he shall go forth to deceive the Gentiles, which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog, and Magog." What a strange clause, Gog, and Magog, for a phrase? "To gather them to war." Now, that probably is not parallel with the preceding clause. "He shall go forth to deceive the Gentiles," or the nations, "which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog." Probably, we are to understand this as a purpose clause connected with that. So deceive them in order to gather them together to war. "Whose number is as the sand of the sea. And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and they encircled the camp of the saints, and the beloved city, and fire came down out of heaven and consumed them."

There are one or two passages in the Old Testament that suggest that during the period of the kingdom, men will be yielding feigned obedience. There's a famous psalm, the 66th, in the 3rd verse, in which the Hebrew text is properly rendered in the New American Standard Bible, suggests feigned obedience. And the context suggests a

context of a kingdom time. But only suggests, I don't want to make too much of that. Psalm 110 in verse 2, in which we read, "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies," words addressed to the Messiah, may have some application to this, too. But it's quite evident that even if these texts do not suggest this that these individuals do still have the sin nature; those who are dwelling upon the earth at that time.

So the Devil is released, he is paroled for a short time, and he goes out to deceive the Gentiles, to gather them together to war; whose number is as the sand of the sea. One might ask the question, how will it be possible for Satan to deceive the nations? How is this possible? Of course, we could abandon all of this and say, well, the Book of Revelation is just so difficult to understand, we've got to leave that for when we get to heaven and we're enrolled in Theology 101. But we do have to study the Scriptures. And all of us have studied the Scriptures and all of us have studied the Scriptures and have discovered some things that we thought we knew, we really didn't know later on, we've changed our views. But the question naturally arises, how is such possible?

Well, I can only make one little suggestion and this one, if I've been saying suggestion all along it's because I'm, you know, I'm protecting myself, because somebody is going to come up and say, "Well, if you believe such and such." Wait, I only suggested that. I'm just trying to give you something to think about. But if it's true that in the Kingdom of God upon the earth, as the prophets seem to plainly say, particularly, in passages such as in Micah and Isaiah and in Zechariah that Israel will have a preeminent place in that period of time then one can see immediately how it would be possible for some jealousy to arise.

And since the Lord God says in the word of God, a passage we'll look at on Sunday, the Lord willing, "You only have I known of all the nations upon the earth." You can see right now that there would be grounds for jealousy. Why only Israel? Why not the United States? Why not England? Why only Israel? That may be, however, a rather carnal suggestion. But, then, after all, one has to be carnal to yield, does not one? In this period of time? One commentator says, "You can just imagine people talking about that ill-favored, money getting, abject race being over us!"

Well, regenerated parents are no guarantee for regenerated progeny, and as the kingdom unfolds, perhaps something like this. I really don't understand, other than to say, human nature is terrible. Can you think of the children of Israel in the land of Egypt and Moses working these mighty miracles one after the other, one after the other, and even though God has supernaturally moved in the midst of that society, in spite of it, the Egyptians still fight against God, and finally, meet their death in the sea. That's hard to understand. That's hard to understand how anyone can keep fighting in the manifest revelation of the mighty power of God. But, such is human nature. It may seem incredible to you, but it's not incredible to any of us, if we could see what we really are. I'm sure.

They go out to the four quarters of the earth. The outcome of worldwide kingdom is worldwide rebellion. Think of that. First and last, rebellions reject what? The visible lordship of the Lord God. That's what Adam did in the Garden of Eden, when the Lord God came into the garden in the cool of the evening; that was probably a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. If the Scriptures are to be followed in what they say, "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has led him forth in full revelation.

In the Old Testament, Israel was warned, "You will not see the face of God, and live." So we assume that it was the second person of the Trinity who came down into the Garden for fellowship with Adam and Eve. So they rejected his authority; and they will reject human beings will reject his authority a second time, evidently, when he reigns visibly upon the earth.

But then what about the purposes of the rebellion? That's, I guess, we've commented upon it, obviously, it's designed by Satan to attack the lordship of the Lord God. It's designed to reveal the depth of sin in the human heart, the incorrigibility of Satan. But what about this expression that appears here, Gog and Magog? That seems so strange, right in the midst of a passage that seems so straightforward, we should have just this little phrase, Gog and Magog?

Of course, if you turn to the Old Testament or, for example, if you were to take your concordance and open it up, you would find that the term "Gog" occurs in three places. It occurs in place in 1 Chronicles, I think, chapter 5. It's in a genealogy there. And then it occurs in Ezekiel 38 and 39, and so does Magog, for that matter. And Gog is an individual and Magog a territory in Ezekiel chapter 38 and 39.

But it certainly seems out of place here. "Into the four corners of the earth, Gog, and Magog." So in interpreting the Book of Revelation, which is full of language derived from the Old Testament, I've mentioned this before to you, there's not a single quotation from the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation that may be called, I'm going to speak technically now, an explicit quotation. That is, a quotation with an introductory formula like "It is written" or "Moses saith" or something like that. And, yet, the Old Testament is woven through its fabric throughout so that we have a book

remarkably dependent upon the Old Testament and, yet, there is no specific quotation.

The Lord God is giving John revelation; and he's rather expert in his word.

So he gives his revelation in Old Testament terms, largely, not entirely largely. So if we want to understand passages in the Book of Revelation, the quickest way to get some help is to get a concordance if you don't know your Bible that well and look up the passages in the Old Testament revelation. Well, you'll get some help here. Gog and Magog occur in Ezekiel 38 and 39. But when you look at the chapter, you discover that Gog is not Gog and Magog are not used in the same sense there as they are here.

These words are in opposition to what has just preceded, "To go forth and deceive the nations, which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog, and Magog." That is, the nations in the four corners of the earth are said to be Gog and Magog. Now, if you cannot find a clear indication from the Old Testament Scriptures, it's valid then to look at the way in which interpreters have understood these expressions.

Well, in Jewish literature, Gog and Magog, came to be understood as a symbolic expression for the forces of evil and that which resulted in what has come to be Rabbinic language and literature was, evidently, the same kind of thing that John was relying upon here or the Lord had used in the revelation to John. So, in other words, in Jewish literature, Gog and Magog was a symbol of the forces of evil.

Now, we use expressions like that in English. We say, boy, that fellow who was fighting the other night in the heavyweight division and he had not lost a fight until he got in the ring with Mike Tyson, and that was his Waterloo. Now, what's that got to do with Waterloo? Well, that's an expression that has become a symbolic expression for climatic, significant defeat. And so when the New York Giants came into town on Sunday afternoon, they little realized it, that they were coming to as Gog and Magog

into the city of Dallas, and be beat by those Yankees and sent `em back unhappy to New York City. [Laughter] Once! This is not going to the locker-room with the Giants. It wouldn't make any difference, if they said, that's some preacher who said that. Anyway, we know there are fifteen more games to play, so we're not going to brag too much. But, anyway, just to use the expression, when they came to town, Gog and Magog, the forces of evil, Lawrence Taylor and the rest of the crowd. Well, that's the sense, really, in which it is found here, Gog and Magog. "So the Gentiles or the nations, which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog, and Magog," The universal forces of humanity and, of course, sinful humanity, in this case.

There is one other thing that is rather interesting here and I'm going to suggest something that I'm not really sure about at all. For many years, in teaching the Book of Revelation, which I taught for many years, exegeting the Greek text, I used to make the charge that the use of Gog and Magog here is contrary to the usage in Ezekiel 38 and 39. That if one interprets Ezekiel 38 and 39, the warfare that is described there is warfare that seems to occur before the kingdom of God upon the earth. I'm not really sure of that. As I've thought more and more about this, as I've pondered Ezekiel 37, 38 and 39, and Ezekiel 37 records the regathering of Israel, and their entrance into their national, covenanted blessings; and in view of the description that is given in the earlier verses of chapter 38 of the Book of Ezekiel, it's possible and many of the contemporary interpreters have been turning to this viewpoint, it's possible that the same order prevails there as prevails here. In which case, and that would be an argument in its favor, in which case, we have in Ezekiel 37, 38, and 39, we have Israel's restoration, the kingdom, then the period of time in which there is rebellion and, finally, in Ezekiel 40

through 48, under an idealistic and symbolic picture, the new heavens and the new earth.

There's a little question about that. But, at any rate, if that's so, then we have proper order. And so we have the forces of evil set forth here that are involved in conflict subsequent to the kingdom but preceding the new heavens and the new earth. So why don't you, if you are interested in the subject, you read those chapters and then read this and, perhaps, you will agree or disagree.

Now, finally, since our time is drawing near an end, we must turn to verse 10. We read, of course, in verse 9, "And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and they encircled the camp of the saints, and the beloved city: and fire came down from heaven and consumed them." Of course, obviously, divine judgment. And then, in verse 10, we read of Satan's final restraint. If verse 7, incidentally, has to do with the second coming of Satan, then verse 10 has to do with his communion and eternal security. "And the Devil who was deceiving them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and there he shall be tormented day and night, unto the ages of the ages." So the beast and the false prophet, who were cast into the lake of fire, before the kingdom of God upon the earth, are to be joined now by the third person of the infernal trinity. So we have the dragon, the beast and the false prophet corresponding, of course, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We also read that they are cast into the lake of fire. The characteristic thing about the lake of fire is the characteristic about lakes. Lakes are bodies of water that have no outlet, ideally. And so that's why this figure may be used. It's because it's

suitable to the punishment that is eternal; there is no outlet. And then, "They shall be tormented, day and night, forever and ever."

I was reading in a book this afternoon, a book, actually, that I had read before but I, frankly, had forgotten what this individual said, it's British scholar, who has taught in the United States for some time now and is an expert on apocalyptic. But this is a chapter that he has in his book. He says, "The passage is significant as suggesting that the function of the Devil is not to originate sin, but to reveal it and develop its latent possibilities in man." I think, I'll disagree with that, a bit. I would say that it is the function of the Devil to be the one in whom sin originates; and, also, to reveal and develop as a tool the latent possibilities in man.

But, at any rate, he continues, a very intelligent man, he may know more about this than I do, "Since sin is directed against the will of God, it is most characteristically to be seen as rebellion against God, a rebellion which would destroy the works of God here, the beloved city, and even the Messiah, and God, himself." But, he says, "The Devil is not God; nor is he in a real sense a rival to God. He cannot stray beyond the permission of God for his action; and, at the appointed time, it will cease. The mystery of the Devil, like the mystery of evil, itself, lies hidden in the depths of the mystery of God's purpose for his creation. In the last analysis, the Devil has to contribute to that purpose."

That's a very perceptive remark. In the last analysis, the Devil himself contributes to the purpose of God. That's very important. That is the purpose of sin, itself; to contribute to the glory of God. That's the real solution, in my opinion, to the problem of evil. And he's hit upon it. It's beyond his power to frustrate it. We really need to preach that today. We have frustrate-able deities all over Evangelicalism.

Sooner or later, out it comes, God is frustrated in his dealings with us. The answer, ultimately, is the nature of God. What kind of God do you have? Ultimately, that is a revelation of the kind of God you worship. Frustrate-able or non-frustrate-able? Well, I declare, I don't see how anyone could worship God, and affirm that he is frustrate-able. But Evangelicalism in the vast, in its vast majority, would disagree.

Perhaps, if I put the question to them this way, they might hedge and fudge. But in their other writings, you can just pick it out wherever you look. And there it is. That is precisely the Arminian theology. They actually have expressed it honestly. I respect them for it. But those who parade under the banner of a sovereign God, but really believe in a God who is not sovereign, I confess, I don't have a great deal of respect for them. He continues, he says, "For the original readers of the revelation that will have been a source of no little comfort. It should provide that for the people of God in all ages."

What a tremendous comfort it was to those who read the Book of Revelation in the first and second centuries when there were struggles and trials, and their lives were in danger in many parts of the Empire. And when they were losing their lives constantly to read this book and to know that, ultimately, God is going to bring his program to its magnificent conclusion, and he will be glorified and we, all of us, in spite of what we suffer, we will be blessed by God. That's a comfort. That's a comfort in all the trials of life, in all the tribulations, in all of the experiences of life, to know the kind of God we have. So this little passage brings a lot of these things to mind. I don't have time to say anything more about it, except to throw out a rhetorical question. This one is addressed, not to you, it's addressed to Satan.

"The Consummation of the Covenantal Program, part VI" by S. Lewis Johnson
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Lucifer, thou son of the morning, was it worth it? Was it really worth it? Was it worth it for sin to arise in the midst of thy being? To enter into the garden through a tool? And to tempt and bring Adam and Eve into the slavery of sin? Is it worth it, ultimately, in the light of the divine program?

That's a question we can ask ourselves, too. Is sin worth it? Is that persistent sin in which you are involved or that great sin which is characteristic of your life? Is it worth it? Is it worth it in the light of eternity or shall we not give to our great God and Savior, our non-frustrate-able deity, the worship and the adoration that his name desires and demands.

Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these sections from the word of God, which are so significant. We thank Thee. As Thou hast revealed to us through Holy Scripture, the kind of God that Thou art. Deliver us from sin. Deliver us from rebellion. May we know in a deeper sense what it is to worship Thee, the only true God. In Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.

For His name's sake. Amen.