

The Abyss, Part 3
Last Things
By Bob Vincent

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 3:18-22; Genesis 6:1-7
Preached on: Sunday, March 7, 2021

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Lord, I think of a song, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down." We thank you that the Lord Jesus Christ by his death, his burial and resurrection and ascension has purchased for us the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's gifts. Grant to me, Lord, as a pastor/teacher to exercise that gift with humility and utter dependence on you by the power of the Holy Spirit and grant that this word would come to us as a living word, as a powerful word, as a life-changing word, that we hearing the word with our ears and reading it with our eyes may eat that word with our mouths. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Well, we come again to the abyss. Now the abyss is an interesting concept. This is part of studying last things and we began as we looked at the abyss, looking last Lord's day at the concept that Jesus really did descend into hell and what that meant, and it meant more than Jesus died on the cross and that was that. It means that Jesus did what all people before his resurrection did, he experienced what it was to be dead and that is very significant, and once we grasp that truth and I mentioned last week that I had been looking at difficult texts for years and then they began to really hit me, particularly the text from last Sunday which was Romans 10, and then Sandy reminding me of a book written by the pastor of our oldest son, and that book really helped me to see things in crystal clarity.

Where was Jesus Good Friday night, which he died on Friday, he was buried that night, which was the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, and continued dead until Sunday, the first day of the week, which began at sundown Saturday, and sometime after sundown Saturday, he rose from the dead. His

body, we know, was in the grave. His body began to experience what all bodies experience after death, that is, he had lost a huge amount of blood when that Roman spear pierced him in the side and the water and the blood came out as the layer of his heart was pierced (John 19:34), and he lost a massive amount of blood when his lungs stopped breathing, when his heart stopped beating, when his human brain quit functioning because

Remember, the human brain is part of the body. It's not part of the non-material part. The human brain is like a computer; whereas, the human mind is like the program and the memory of a computer.

So, when Jesus died on the cross, his body began to experience what other bodies experience, but he did not experience corruption or decay to the point that there was no recovery. Like Lazarus who had been dead for four days whom Jesus raised from the dead, the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit through the work of the Father.

So, where was Jesus during that time in his person? And I believe if we look at this text in 1 Peter 3 in light of what we've been seeing, we see something rather interesting, and it is, I'm offering a slightly altered translation to what we've just read, that we are told that he died on the cross, verse 18, 1 Peter 3:18; that in the second full sentence there, "He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit," and in this case I would not capitalize the word "Spirit" because the original Greek manuscripts were written in all capitals.

There were no lowercase letters and there wasn't punctuation, and so you therefore kind of have to read to know, "Okay, this is where this word ends, this is where this word begins."

So, while he experiences death in his body, he experiences life in his spirit. So, his spirit survives death as did the spirits of all people before him, the saved and the lost, and as people's spirits do today. But unlike believers who after the resurrection and ascension of Christ go to heaven when they die, everything that we can figure out from the Old Testament and the New prior to the ascension of Christ, when people died, when believers died, they went to Paradise which was a container for the righteous dead, not into the place of torment. I'm throwing that out.

Now again, these are things that like – oh, I hate chewing tobacco. My father-in-law used to chew, and he spilled it a couple of times. But that's what you have to do, you have to chew on it. You have to chew on it, or like some gristle when you happen to be in a nice place and you don't want anybody to look at you trying to remove it, you're just going to have to chew on that gristle awhile. So that's something I want you to chew about, that

only with the ascension of Christ, do believers go from earth to the very presence of God in heaven. Chew on it. Chew on it and we'll get rid of that gristle in a minute.

Now, so, where does he go, then, if this is true? It says that through whom or in whom, that is, in his human spirit, the Lord Jesus also went and preached to the spirits in prison.

Now, who are those spirits in prison, and is there a second chance for people after they die? And the answer to that is nowhere in the Bible is there any sense whatsoever that human beings get a second chance after death. I'll give you \$1,000 if you can show me from the word of God where a human being gets a second chance after death. Why do humans not need a second chance? Because Romans 1 teaches us that every single human being who has ever lived on this planet, no matter where he lives, if he lives in the upper reaches of the Amazon, wherever he lives, that person knows enough about the true God to be without excuse. And that's a story for another day, to go into scripture on that. But all people everywhere, know enough about God to be held accountable for their refusal to repent of their sins and come to him, and if somebody did that, God will always make sure that person has the opportunity to hear the gospel and be saved.

So, there is nowhere in the Bible anywhere that human beings have a second chance after death to be saved, and there are whole religions built on some obscure verse like baptized for the dead. Anyhow, we won't go into all that.

But then reading it again straightforward, he went in his human spirit and preached to the spirits in prison. What spirits in prison in light of verse 20? These are the spirits who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

Now, what on earth is he talking about? He's talking about spirits. He's not talking about human beings. What kind of preaching did Jesus do? Did he give a gospel invitation? Did he say, "Come to me"? No, he was declaring his victory over sin and death and Satan and the principalities and the powers, and he was declaring it to the spirits who already were in condemnation.

What are those spirits?

Well, I have a handout for you and the handout that I want you to look at, we'll start there with Jude 1:6, and that's going to give us some hint here. Jude verse 6, "And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under

gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” What’s he saying? He’s saying there are some spirits that are in prison right now and they haven’t come to the final trial, they’re in a holding tank.

It’s not like going, I’ve gone and visited many people in prison over the years and they’re awaiting a trial, they couldn’t make bond, they’re in jail, they’re awaiting their trial, they’re in bondage, and so he’s saying here these angels are being kept in eternal chains, under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day. That’s in the future.

So, they’re, what? They’re angels and what are they? They’re angels who didn’t keep their own position of authority. They didn’t honor their own estate. They violated a cosmic order of things. Angels—separate from humans—angels are not human beings at all. Angels are not created in the image of God, but they are created. Angels look like us, sometimes they have wings, but that’s mainly the cherubs and the seraphs, but angels appear to be just like you and me. When those two angels went to Sodom and Gomorrah when God sent them there and they walked in there, what happened? They were objects of human lust. They looked like men. They looked like ordinary men, but they were extremely striking, radiant-looking men (Genesis 19:4-5).

They didn’t show age. Angels don’t age. Guess what? With or without a mask, if you look in the mirror, you see something. I looked at a picture of Sandy and me this week when we were cutting our wedding cake and, my, how I’ve changed. Our hair was the same color then and our hair is the same color now. Angels don’t age and we’re all attracted to youth, aren’t we, because it’s something we’ve lost. We want to recapture it. But the angels did not show age. They reflected the glory of God in a similar way that the unfallen Adam reflected God’s glory, though he was in the image of God, and they were not.

So ordinary angels look like ordinary human beings who are just strikingly handsome, strikingly beautiful, and no appearance of age.

So, we’re told here that certain angels did not stay within their position of authority and they are being held for judgment day. Look at verse 7, Jude, verse 7, “just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.”

Now, if you read that carefully, Jude verse 6 and Jude verse 7, the sin of those angels was similar to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. What does that mean? It means that those angels did something perverted and twisted. They

violated God's creation order because God did not ordain for angels to engage in procreation. That was not his purpose. Did it mean that they could not?

No, I don't think it means that. They don't get married because God's intention was that angels would never get married, but they had bodies of a form, and they could do things with those bodies. But they followed the example of Sodom and Gomorrah, and they went after something they should not have done, sexual immorality and unnatural desire.

Now, look down at verse 14 and this is very striking if you look at Jude 1:14 and 15. When the writer of Jude is thinking about dealing with rebellious people, he cites Enoch. Look at Jude 1:14 and 15. It was about these that "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'"

Now, it's obvious that Jude, who was the half-brother of Jesus, it's obvious that Jude is referring to a book when he speaks of Enoch, the seventh from Adam.

Who is Enoch? Enoch is one of two human beings in the Old Testament who never experienced death. Enoch never died. He walked with the Lord and the Lord took him. Who is the other one who never experienced death? It was Elijah the prophet. He was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. There's a third person who went to heaven, but he died first and that's Moses, and we're told that there was an argument over Moses' body (Jude 1:9), but Moses' body was taken to heaven. That's why on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus is visited by Moses, the law, and by Elijah, the prophets, representing the whole rest of the Old Testament.

So, notice, then, there's a reference to the book of Enoch. Now if you look down at the bottom, you're going to see two explanations and I'm going to give you something a little technical and I find that it's important in preaching to impart knowledge. My purpose is not simply to move you emotionally, and that is my purpose, my purpose is not simply to win people who don't know Christ to Christ and to encourage Christians to live for Christ, but it is to impart teaching that fits the Bible.

Now, you see something weird looking, that splotch. That is a picture of a fragment of the book of Enoch. There actually was a book of Enoch, and that is what Jude is quoting from.

Now what is Enoch? You're going to see two things I'm just going to mention in passing: Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

What are the books of the apocrypha? Many people say, "Well, you know, you Protestants don't have the Catholic Bible, and the Catholics don't have the Protestant Bible." That's not exactly true. The original King James version had all of the books of the apocrypha in it. If you get an original 1611 version, you will see that the books of the apocrypha are there. What are the books of the apocrypha?

The books of the apocrypha were books that were important to the Jewish people, and so were preserved, but were never part of the Hebrew scriptures. So, our Old Testament, that is, Presbyterians, our Old Testament and the Jewish Old Testament are identical in their content. They have the same books we have, sometimes they combined them and sometimes they split them apart, like 1 and 2 Chronicles in our Bible which appears before Ezra. 1 and 2 Chronicles are one book in the Hebrew Bible, and they're the very last book in the Hebrew Bible. But every statement in our English Bibles corresponds to every statement in the Bible of the Jews, the Hebrew Bible.

But the Jews had other books that were valuable to them for learning and those books we call the Apocrypha, and those books were part of the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures that the rabbis did before the time of Christ and included them because Jews often had questions saying, "You know, after Malachi died, what happened?" And all of those terrible things that happened to the Jewish people by the Greeks, who were the meanest people in the world to the Jews, all those things that are written in 1 and 2 Maccabees, they're in those Greek books. Those are the books of the Apocrypha.

But there are other books that are not part of the Apocrypha or of the Jewish scriptures, and we call those books the Pseudepigrapha. You know what "pseudo" means, like pseudoscience is fake science, pseudo-news is fake news. Pseudo, fake, phony, and what are Pseudepigraphal books?

Pseudepigraphal books are books that claim the name of an author who may or may not have been the author. Like for example, suppose now, let's see, George Washington who never told a lie, did he? I don't know.

Suppose that now hundreds of years after the death of George Washington after going to the barber... Is that right? Yeah. Anyhow, so hundreds of years after the death of George Washington, we found a book that was written by me and it's the stories of George Washington and Lord Cornwallis growing up together, written by George Washington. And it might be true, but I

doubt it is, and it's written by me rather than by George Washington. We would call that Pseudepigraphical. Pseudo and then epigraph comes from the Greek word "graphe" which means writing.

Now the book of Enoch is labeled that, but do you know there are Christian churches that accept the book of Enoch as part of the canonical Bible? Did you know that? What Christian denomination recognizes the book of Enoch as part of the infallible word of God? It's the Coptic Church. The Coptic Church which is in Egypt and also in Ethiopia. And so, the Coptic Church recognizes it. Now why is that important? Why have I taken this valuable time, why have I taken this valuable time to talk about the book of Enoch? Because Jude mentions the book of Enoch.

Now let's look at the bottom of the page and then we'll come back to Peter. Look at the one, Enoch 1:1, "The words of the blessing of Enoch, wherewith he blessed the elect and righteous, who will be living in the day of tribulation, when all the wicked and godless are to be removed." Flipping the page and you can go on and see and notice what he says there at the very end, which I ended the quote at verse 9 on the back page.

Enoch 1:9, "And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones," or his saints, "To execute judgment upon all, And to destroy all the ungodly: And to convict all flesh, Of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, And of all the hard sayings which ungodly sinners have spoken against them."

So, in other words, the half-brother of Jesus, Jude, who wrote the epistle of Jude, is quoting from this very book. This very book. Did Enoch write it? I don't know. I'm going to say that, yes, he did and that somehow or another Enoch's prophecy was preserved orally and then put in writing, and the Holy Spirit inspired the half-brother of Jesus in his letter of Jude to say that Enoch himself made this prophecy.

Look down at the bottom of the page. Enoch 6:1, and this takes us to Genesis 6 in a moment. "And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven," and by the way, the Hebrew expression that's found in Genesis 6 is used exclusively of angels, it is never used of human beings anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. We translate it "the sons of God," and we think of it in light of the New Testament that tells us that we've been adopted into God's family, "Now we're the children of God" (1 John 3:2), but in the Old Testament that expression, *B'nai*

Elohim (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים), “sons of God,” is used exclusively of angels, never of human beings. So what Enoch is saying fits right in with that.

And it says in verse 2, “And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: ‘Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.’ And (I’m not going to say the rascal’s name) who was their leader, said unto them: ‘I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.’ And they all answered him and said: ‘Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations.’ (What’s an imprecation? It’s when you’re calling down a judgment on yourself, you’re cursing not cussing, you’re cursing yourself.) “And they called down mutual,” it says, “imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.’ Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it.”

Is that weird? Oh, yeah, very weird, one of the things that I changed my mind about as I studied the Bible over the decades.

Now, going back to the first page, going now to 2 Peter 2:4. “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell”

What does that mean? It means that is the Greek word, Greek verb tartaroo (ταρταρώω) is a reference to Tartarus. Tartarus is the abode in Greek mythology of the Titans when the Olympian gods overthrew them.

Remember what I said last week, the mythologies of all of the people of the world reflect biblical truth in an untrue way. How many cultures and civilizations throughout the world have a story of a flood? How many cultures and civilizations throughout the world have a story of the building of a tower? How many cultures throughout the world have stories reflecting the failure and sin of original human beings? Most all of them do, but they distort them. The Bible alone gives us an accurate history of these things.

Now, again going back to 2 Pete 2:4, he says that God put them in Tartarus “and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.” It’s just like Jude.

Now look at Luke 8:30 and 31. When Jesus is casting demons out of a man, he asked, “What’s your name?” Because getting the name of something gives people power. And what does he say? “My name is Legion.” Was he exaggerating? Of course. Remember that Satan is a liar, and the father of

liars, father of lies, and all those spirits are liars as well. He was giving a big exaggeration. Were there really 6,000 demons inside that man? Of course not, but like all demons, he was full of himself, he had followed Satan in his rebellion against God in making such a boast and he said, “‘Legion,’ for many demons had entered him.” Not 6,000. Many.

Now notice in verse 31, “They begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.”

Now, very quickly and we’re wrapping this up. Look with me at Genesis 6 and just look at what it says there because I changed my mind several decades ago in my study and I want you to see it, and this is obscure and it’s weird and it’s something like gristle that you need to chew on this afternoon. But looking at page 9, the flood. Verse 1,

“When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the *B’nai Elohim* (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים), the sons of God.” “Where were you,” God asked of Job, “when I laid the foundations of the earth and all the *B’nai Elohim* (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) sang for joy?” (Job 38:7) And the sons of God “saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, ‘My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.’”

Now look at verse 4, the *nephilim* (נְפִילִים). What does that word mean? It means giant (γίγας). There were large human beings in those days. There was some bizarre offspring of spirits, angels, who, remember that, except for the cherubs and the seraphs, don’t go flying around. They can move without wings. They look like human beings. But the offspring of the *B’nai Elohim* (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) and the daughters of men created really bizarre offspring, and those offspring are called here the *nephilim*. “The *nephilim* (נְפִילִים) were on the earth in those days—and also afterward.”

Evidently, somehow that seed was passed on through one of the sons of Noah and his wife. “When the sons of God,” the angles, the *B’nai Elohim* (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) “went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” And so, we’re told that God was grieved over his creation.

Now, wrapping this up for today. Think about it.

God was sick and tired of humanity and the depravity of humanity when the angels who left their estate and were sent to Tartarus, which is a

compartment of *Sheol* (sheol, שְׁאוֹל; Hades, ᾗδης), he was so sick and tired of it that he was ready to destroy it, but he didn't. It says he found a man, Noah, whose name means "rest," and so he preserved Noah, his wife, their three sons and three daughters-in-law, he preserved them.

Did it happen the way the Bible says? I'm going to say, I do believe that. I accept the Bible at face value. I believe there was a universal flood. I believe that the great ages of our earth geologically can be accounted for by catastrophe, that the world was radically altered when God opened up the windows of heaven and let loose the great fountains of the deep. Mountains rose and mountains fell, and the earth's topography radically changed.

We don't need millions of years to account for the history of our planet. We don't know how long Adam and Eve walked the earth before they sinned against God, but I'm saying that all of the great geological things that we are given a uniformitarian view under Charles Lyell, that you don't need to follow, because the Genesis flood accounts for the whole thing. I believe that. I take the Bible at face value. I'm not a genius, but I'm not an idiot either. I've looked at these things. I've studied them, and I'm simply saying that's how it happened.

Now, think about it for a moment. Think of this, that God chose to spare the human race because God loves people, but God is true to himself and human sin calls down the judgment of God, the sin of angels calls down the judgment of God.

Why did not all the angels end up in Tartarus, in this compartment in Sheol?

The reason is they didn't rebel that way. Others rebelled in a different way. Why are there "free-range" demons out in the world today? Because they did not violate—though they rebelled against God—they did not violate the creation order as did those 200 angels who violated the creation order and produced those *Nephilim*. But I want you to see that the anger of God toward sin extends to angels, and that God created Gehenna (γέεννα, after גֵּי הַיְהוֹנָן from 2 Kings 23:10), the lake of fire, for the devil and his angels (Matthew 26:41), and God's wrath and anger not only came on angels, but it came on humanity.

Think of it. "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," the most famous sermon of Colonial America written by the most brilliant philosopher in American history, Jonathan Edwards—What's the hope?

I want you to see that there was an ark and Noah prepared an ark because God loved the human race and God wanted to preserve and save the human

race. And so, Noah prepares an ark and he and his whole family, because God's purpose in salvation is not simply individuals, but families: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and your family" (Acts 16:31).

"The like figure wherein baptism now saves us, not the washing away of the dirt of the flesh but the answer of a clean conscience before God." (1 Peter 3:21) And so God preserves Noah and his whole family in the ark because God loves humans, and God loves you, and God sent his Son into the world to go under the waters of baptism, to have the wrath of God baptize him on the cross when the wrath of God is poured out on him. He did that because he loves you. He took your place on the cross. He took your place in Sheol. He took your place that you might live with him forever.

That's the beauty of this, and rather than getting hung up on weird things in the Bible—and those are some weird things just because we're not used to thinking that way, even though that was virtually the universal understanding of the early church, we're thinking, "Oh, that's so weird."

Well, the reality is God left the glory of heaven not to become an angel but to become a human being just like you and me, and that's why we can have the Lord's Supper.

May we pray.