

Week 40

The Judgments

Key Verses

John 5:26-27 Jesus said, "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man."

+ Introduction

Last week we looked at the End Times focusing on the prophecy we find in Scripture, primarily in the book of Revelation. Though no one knows the details or exact timing, we are to be prepared for that which is to come. We can only do that by living life fully today as followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our Righteousness. He is the One who atoned for our sins and the One who returns, reigns, and ultimately judges.

No matter the context, the word "judgment" always carries a certain amount of weight. People certainly do not like to be judged, but judgment is something that all people everywhere are guilty of doing. Whether judging someone based on looks, what they do, or what they have done, we all share equal guilt in the judgment arena. The problem with human judgment is that it is flawed. In other words, as humans, we judge based upon something we deem right; it is never unbiased.

But what about the judgment of God? Certainly, God is sovereign, and that must also mean that His judgments are sovereign as well. In this lesson, we are going to study the future judgments of God. This is not meant to be exhaustive on every judgment in the Bible; we will review the future judgments of the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Judgment and Rewards of the Old Testament Saints, the Judgment of Satan and fallen angels, and the Great White Throne Judgment.

When we think of Jesus Christ and His ministry, our mind tends to focus on such things as His love, compassion, healing, blessing. Those elements are certainly true of Jesus, the suffering Servant. However, we forget an entire side of Jesus that will be front and center when He returns: His role as Judge. Throughout Scripture, we see the role of God and Jesus as Judge.

David in Psalm 9:4 says of the Lord, *"For You have maintained my just cause; You have sat on the throne judging righteously."* Psalm 50:6 says, *"And the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is judge."* When He judges, He does so with perfect righteousness and fairness.

In the New Testament Jesus, Himself declares the role that has been given and entrusted to Him as Judge.

JOHN 5:26-27 *Jesus said, "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷and He gave Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man."*

JOHN 9:39 *And Jesus said, "For judgment, I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."*

Even early in His ministry, Jesus understood His role as Judge. During His first coming, He judged more indirectly. Jesus spoke the truth that separated the believers from unbelievers and, in effect, was a judgment on unbelievers. At times, His judgment was direct such as when He pronounced woe on cities (Matthew 11:20-24); and on the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-36). But, for the most part, His role as Judge was an undercurrent of His first coming. But there will come a time when it will be more dramatic and direct. It will be full-blown in the Second Coming. *The Baptist Faith and Message* states:

According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised, and Christ will judge all men in righteousness."¹

Please note that the explanations below are in large part from two key articles on bible.org cited in the endnotes and are not original to our writing team.²

+ The Judgment Seat of Christ

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we get the primary biblical proof text for the rapture. Several things occur at this time. There is the glorification of living believers in glorified bodies, the resurrection of those believers who have died in the Lord also in glorified bodies, and the transportation of both to meet the Lord in the air. This will be followed by their examination before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is not the final judgment mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15, which is limited to only the unbelieving world. Rather, the Judgment Seat of Christ is for the body of Christ, the church. A similar judgment will occur for resurrected Old Testament and tribulation saints, but probably not until after the tribulation (compare Daniel 12:1-3 with Revelation 20:4).

The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place and time when the Lord will mete out punishment for sins committed by the child of God. Rather, it is a place where rewards will be given or lost depending on how one has lived their life for the Lord.

Both Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:9 speak of the "judgment seat." This is a translation of one Greek word, "*bema*." This word was taken from Isthmian games where the contestants would compete for the prize under the careful scrutiny of judges who would make sure that every rule of the contest was obeyed (2 Timothy 2:5). The victor of a given event, who had participated according to the rules, was led by the judge to the platform called the *Bema*. There the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

Though believers are under no condemnation in respect to their sins, having been justified by faith in Christ (Romans 8:1, 13-17), they are subject to judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ in relation to their works. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, believers' works will be evaluated to demonstrate whether they are good or bad, and rewards will be conferred (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12). The goal of the Christian in his life is to be pleasing to God whether in time or eternity. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not related to salvation but to the bestowal of rewards, and every Christian is assured that he will receive some reward (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Wayne Grudem notes, "But we must guard against misunderstanding here: Even though there will be degrees of reward in heaven, the joy of each person will be full and complete for eternity."³ The best illustration of the Bema Seat Judgment is a graduation ceremony. Everyone in attendance is going to graduate, but some will graduate with higher honors because of what they did in school. Likewise, everyone at the Bema Seat Judgment is in heaven because of faith in Christ, yet some will receive more rewards based on their Christian life.

✦ The Judgment and Rewards of the Old Testament Saints

The judging and rewarding of those that passed away in the Old Testament is a topic that is often missed or just plainly skipped in most discussions on the topic of the judgments. As with all of the judgments, timing is incredibly important. While many would place the resurrection and reward of Old Testament saints with that of the church at the rapture, a number of factors favor this after the tribulation and at the same time as the resurrection and reward of tribulation saints mentioned in Revelation 20:4.

First, Daniel, who wrote concerning the termination of God's program for Israel in chapter 9, places the resurrection of the righteous in Israel as occurring after "a time of distress such as never occurred ..." Clearly, this is the Tribulation, Daniel's Seventieth Week, or "the time of Jacob's Distress" mentioned by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:27).

The second factor is that resurrection is viewed in Scripture as an event that terminates one program and initiates another, and one would not expect Israel's resurrection could come until God had finished the seventy years decreed for His people, the Jews, according to Daniel 9:24-27. Therefore, since the events mentioned in Daniel 9:26 (the cutting off of Messiah and the destruction of city and sanctuary) had to occur after the 69 weeks of years had run their course, but before the seventieth week begins, there has to be a space of time, the parenthesis of the church age, between the conclusion of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth.

The third and final factor is that resurrection (rapture), and *Bema* of the church concludes this parenthesis, the church age, but Old Testament saints (the righteous dead) are not resurrected and rewarded until after the seventieth week when God concludes His program with Israel as far as the seventy weeks of Daniel are concerned.

Therefore, the order of God's resurrection program, which includes the judgment of rewards, would seem to be:

- the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the resurrection program (1 Corinthians 15:23)
- the resurrection of the church age saints at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16);
- the resurrection of tribulation period saints (Revelation 20:3-5), together with-
- the resurrection of Old Testament saints (Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19).⁴

✦ The Final Judgement of Satan and His Angels

Throughout the centuries, as anticipated in the enmity mentioned in Genesis 3:15, there has been constant warfare between the holy angels who minister to God's people and Satan and his unholy angels, the demonic spirits. While, for God's own purposes, Satan has been allowed to continue his evil schemes, Scripture speaks of three sure events regarding the activity of Satan and his demonic forces: his binding during the millennium, his short release, and his final incarceration in the Lake of Fire. Then all opposing powers against the Lord will be dealt with in judgment (Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

✦ The Great White Throne Judgment

The vision of the Great White Throne in Revelation 20:11-15 describes history's last and final judgment. It is an awesome and solemn scene that should cause everyone to stop and think about the eternal implications of this future event. For the non-Christian, the one who has never trusted in the person and work of Jesus Christ, it should cause him to want to search out the truth regarding Jesus Christ, to embrace Him in faith as the Savior from his sin and eternal doom. For the Christian, the future reality of this event should cause deep concern because of the many (including some of our friends and relatives) who will face this throne of judgment because they never received the Savior by faith.

All who have mocked God denied His being, rebelled at His rule, or rejected His sovereignty and rejected His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, must stand before this throne to be condemned to eternal judgment. May the reality of this judgment cause us to carefully reflect on the serious consequences of this passage on a Christ-rejecting world. There are several factors involving this judgment to consider:

1. The time of this judgment

Revelation 20:5, 11-15 explain this takes place after the conclusion of the millennium following the doom of Satan and the destruction of heaven and earth, but before the eternal state of the new heavens and earth of Revelation 21:1.

2. The place of this judgment

In Revelation 20:11, heaven and earth are seen fleeing from the face of Him who sits on this throne. In other words, they are destroyed and dissolved (2 Peter 3:7, 10-12). The point is the Great White Throne Judgment does not occur on earth or in heaven as we know it, but somewhere beyond, perhaps in extreme outer space. It occurs in the new heavens and earth, which are not created until after this event (compare Revelation 20:11 with 21:1).

In other words, God has removed Satan and his demons, the False Prophet and the Beast, and is about to judge the rest of the unbelieving dead. So, it only fits that He also judge the old earth and heavens that have been the arena of Satan's activity and man's sin and rebellion. This takes place after the resurrection of the unbelieving dead from the grave and Hades. They are resurrected, gathered before the throne, and behold the dissolution of heaven and earth as a foreboding preparation for their judgment. All their hopes and dreams were placed in an earth and a system that was passing away (1 John 2:17), and now they see it dissolve before their very eyes, *"And no place was found for them,"* meaning for heaven and earth. In the eternal state, there will be no place for that which reminds men of the rebellions of Satan and man with all its wickedness and sorrow (Revelation 22:3; 21:4; Isaiah 65:17).

3. The participants of this judgment

The Judge is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:22-23, 27). All judgment has been placed into His hands as the perfect Son of man, Son of God, the One qualified to judge by virtue of His sinless humanity and defeat of Satan and sin through the cross (Revelation 5:1-14). Those judged are "the dead, great and small," those who had no part in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5-6). Specifically, this is the dead of the second resurrection, the resurrection of the unjust, the resurrection unto the second death mentioned in Revelation 20:5-6, 12-14, and John 5:29b. *"The dead, great and small"* emphasizes that no one is exempt. All who have died without faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of their status in human history, religion, politics, economic status, or morals, must stand before this throne of judgment.

4. The judgment or punishment

Revelation 20:14 states, *"And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire."* "Death" refers to the body now resurrected, while "Hades" refers to the soul, the immaterial part of man. According to Scripture, both body and soul are eternally separated from God in the eternal Lake of Fire, a very real, literal, and eternal place.

It is so important to note the emphasis here. The real issue is whether one's name is in the Book of Life, not one's deeds. The deeds of the unbeliever are only examined to show that the person, no matter how much good they have done, falls short of God's holy demands. Paul shows us in Romans that all categories of people, the good, the bad, and the ugly, are really in the same boat and on their way to eternal separation from God. Obviously, most see that the immoral person deserves the wrath of God, as the Apostle describes

in Romans 1:18-32. But he also shows us that the same applies to the good person and moral person as well as the religious person (Romans 2:1-3:23). Nobody bats 1000, no matter how good they may appear to men. In the face of the awesome holiness of God, they are sinners and cannot stand in the presence of God on their own merit.

+ Conclusion

In his book *Systematic Theology*, scholar Wayne Grudem explains,

Scripture clearly affirms that God will be entirely just in His judgment, and no one will be able to complain against Him on that day. God is the one who “judges each one impartially according to his deeds” (1 Peter 1:17), and “God shows no partiality” (Romans 2:11; compare Colossians 3:25). For this reason, on the last day “every mouth” will be “stopped,” and the whole world will be “held accountable to God” (Romans 3:19), with no one being able to complain that God has treated him or her unfairly.⁵

God’s judgment must never be looked at as an issue of fairness. If God judged based on fairness, we would all be in hell because that would be the fair thing for sinful mankind. This lesson is but the tip of the iceberg regarding the judgments found in the Bible. However, it shows us that what is to come is based on what we believe even now. Our faith, trust, and obedience to Jesus Christ make our lives joyful and purposeful on this earth and prepare us for the home we will have in heaven. God’s gracious gift of salvation is available today, do not miss it!

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¹ *The Baptist Faith & Message*; LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, TN, 2020; p. 113.

² <https://bible.org/article/doctrine-rewards-judgment-seat-bema-christ>; <https://bible.org/article/judgments-past-present-and-future>

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2004, 1144.

⁴ Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1958, 411.

⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, p. 1149.