

The Judgments

In the program of God there are several judgments yet in the future. It is not accurate to speak of one great Judgment Day to come for these future judgments will occur at different times.

I. THE JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS' WORKS

A. The Scriptures Involved

Two principal passages recount the fact and details of this judgment (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Other relevant passages include Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 9:24-27; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; and Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10.

B. The Judgment Itself

Though not specifically stated, this judgment will apparently take place immediately after the Rapture of the church, since the twenty-four elders who likely represent believers have their crowns in the scene in heaven at the beginning of Tribulation (Rev. 4:4, 10). Further, when the bride returns with Christ at His second coming she is clothed with the righteous deeds which have survived the examination of this judgment (19:8).

The site of this judgment is the bema of Christ. Earthly bemas were raised, throne-like platforms on which rulers or judges sat when making speeches (Acts 12:21), or hearing and deciding cases (18:12-17).

Only believers will stand in this judgment, for Paul makes clear that it relates to those who have built on the Foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-12).

The nature of the believer's works will be examined in this judgment to distinguish worthy works from worthless ones. These works are the deeds done by the believer during his Christian life. All will be reviewed and examined. Some will pass the test because they were good; others will fail because they were worthless. Both good and bad motives will be exposed; then every believer will receive his due praise from God. What grace!

C. The Outcome of Judgment

The outcome will be either reward or deprivation of reward. Salvation is not in question, for those deprived of reward "shall be saved, as though through fire." Yet, as mentioned above, apparently every believer will have done some things which God can praise.

Nevertheless, the deprivation is real and may involve forfeiture and shame. Certainly it means forfeiting rewards that otherwise might have been received. The word *zemioo* in verse 15 carries no idea of suffering in the sense of physical or mental suffering. Its basic idea is loss in the sense of forfeiture of reward which could have been received (see A.T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914], p. 65).

John clearly teaches that rewards may be lost because of unfaithfulness during one's lifetime (2 John 8). His concern was that his readers would receive a full reward, that is receive all that could be theirs through continued faithfulness. This same idea of loss is part of Paul's analogy of

the judgment Seat with running a race (1 Cor. 9:24-27). His concern was that he not be disappointed, that is, do nothing that would make him unworthy to receive rewards. Perhaps even more vividly John wrote about the possibility of a believer being ashamed at Christ's coming (1 John 2:28). "The passive voice coupled with the expression *autou* suggests that a believer withdraws in shame. It suggests a shrinking back from Christ, perhaps from a sense of guilt, with the believer producing the action [rather than Christ putting the believer to shame]" (Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Negative Aspects of the Christian's Judgment," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 137:129-30 [April-June 1980]).

Summarizing in a very balance way, Hoyt concludes as follows: "The Judgment Seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder. However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have been graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the Judgment Seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential" (p. 131).

II. JUDGMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS

Daniel 12:1-3 speaks of the Tribulation period (v. 1), resurrections of the righteous and the wicked (v. 2), and rewards for the righteous (v. 3). Many understand the resurrection and reward of the righteous to refer to the resurrection and judgment of believers of the Old Testament at the conclusion of the Tribulation. New Testament revelation places the resurrection and judgment of the wicked of all time at the conclusion of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). Of course it is not unusual for Old Testament prophets to place side by side events which later revelation separates by some period of time.

It is possible that verses 1-3 refer only to the resurrection and rewarding of Jewish believers of the Tribulation days. They will be rewarded for having insight for seeing through Antichrist's deception, and for leading others to faith during the Tribulation days.

III. JUDGMENT OF SAINTS OF THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

Revelation 20:4-6 relates the resurrection of saints of the Tribulation period who died during that time. Because of their opposition to Antichrist's program, they were martyred, but God raised them from the dead just before the Millennium begins. No specific mention is made of a judging and rewarding; it can only be assumed to take place at the time of resurrection. (The phrase "judgment was given to them" in v. 4 refers not to being judged but to the activity of saints judging people in the millennial government.)

IV. JUDGMENT OF JEWISH SURVIVORS OF THE TRIBULATION

Before the inauguration of the millennial kingdom, the survivors of the Tribulation, both Jewish and Gentile, must be judged in order to insure that only believers will enter the kingdom.

The judgment of Jewish survivors is described in Ezekiel 20:34-38 and illustrated in Matthew 25:1-30. Ezekiel states that it will occur after all surviving Israelites have been regathered from the ends of the earth to the land of Palestine. Christ will cause them to "pass under the rod" (see

Lev. 27:32) to purge out the rebels. As a result, those rebels (unsaved) will not enter the land of Israel (Ezek. 20:38) but will be cast into the outer darkness. (Matt. 25:30). In contrast, those who successfully pass through this judgment will enter the millennial kingdom to enjoy the blessings of the New Covenant (Ezek. 20:37). This group will not be given resurrection bodies at this time, but will go into the kingdom in their earthly bodies and will become the parents of the first millennial Jewish babies.

V. JUDGMENT OF GENTILE SURVIVORS OF THE TRIBULATION

Also at the second advent of Christ, Gentile survivors of the Tribulation will be judged by Him. Matthew 25:31-46 describes this in detail. Joel predicted that it would take place in the “valley of Jehoshaphat” (Joel 3:2) which may refer to the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat simply means “Yahweh judges.”

Both passages say that these Gentiles will be judged for their treatment of Israel during the Tribulation period. Christ is the Judge; the Gentiles are being judged; by all rapture schemes the church has already been raptured to heaven; the “brethren,” the treatment of whom becomes the basis for the judgment can only refer to Christ’s natural brethren, other Jewish people (Rom. 9:3). For a Gentile to treat any Jewish person with kindness during the Tribulation will place his life in jeopardy. No one will do this merely out of a beneficent attitude, but only out of a redeemed heart. Therefore, this is not a judgment of works, but of genuine faith which produced such selfless works (or the lack of it which produced no such works).

Those who lack saving faith and demonstrate that lack by not doing good works will be sent to the lake of fire. Those whose good deeds prove the presence of saving faith will enter the kingdom. Like the Jewish survivors of the preceding judgment they will enter in earthly bodies and become parents of the first millennial Gentile babies.

You will notice that I have understood this judgment to concern individual Gentiles, and not, as some translations imply, national groups of people. The word used in the passage is translated in the New Testament by “people” two times, “heathen” five times, “nation” sixty-four times, and “Gentiles” ninety-three times. Other references to a judgment at the second advent of Christ depict a judgment of individuals (Matt. 13:30, 47-50).

VI. JUDGMENT OF SATAN AND FALLEN ANGELS

Satan and his angels will also be judged, evidently at the conclusion of the millennial kingdom. To be sure Satan has had other sentences passed on him, but this will be his final one that confines him forever in the lake of fire (25:41; Rev. 20:10). The angels who are judged at this time also will experience the same fate (Jude 6-7). Believers will apparently be associated with the Lord in judging (1 Cor. 6:3).

VII. JUDGMENT OF THE UNSAVED DEAD

At the conclusion of the millennial reign of Christ unbelievers of all time will be raised and judged. Their resurrection is the resurrection of judgment spoken of by the Lord in John 5:29.

Their judgment will take place before a Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Their Judge is the Lord Christ (see John 5:22, 27).

Those judged are simply called “the dead”—unbelievers (in contrast to “the dead in Christ” which refers to believers). This judgment will not separate believers from unbelievers, for all who will experience it will have made the choice during their lifetimes to reject God. The Book of Life which will be opened at the Great White Throne judgment will not contain the name of anyone who will be in that judgment. The books of works which will also be opened will prove that all who are being judged deserve eternal condemnation (and may be used to determine degrees of punishment). It is not that all their works were evil, but all were dead works, done by spiritually dead people. It is as if the Judge will say, “I will show you by the record of your own deeds that you deserve condemnation,” So everyone who will appear in this judgment will be cast into the lake of fire forever.

-Basic Theology by Charles Ryrie pgs 512-516