

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

THE LAST JUDGMENT

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

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The Last Judgment

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The Last Judgment

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Part 1

Synopsis: The Last or Final Judgment

The Last or Final Judgment is the great Court Session, which will be held in heaven following the second coming of the Lord in glory. Mankind and angels will be arraigned before the judgment throne, where they will give an account to God for every thought, word and deed. All who appear before the judgment seat of Christ, will—on the one hand—be constrained to confess the grace of God in showing mercy to those undeserving of mercy; and—on the other hand—to recognise the righteousness and justice of God in executing wrath on those deserving of wrath. The wicked will be judged and punished according to their works. Then, they will be consigned to hell—the lake of fire—with its everlasting torments of body and soul. The righteous will be judged and rewarded—or will lose their reward—according to their works. Concerning the righteous, the final judgment carries with it no possibility of condemnation. In virtue of Christ's perfect obedience to, and fulfilment of, the law of God, and by the merits of his vicarious and atoning sacrifice, God justifies everyone who believes on his Son. Every truly regenerated child of God will be accepted into heaven, and will live and reign with Christ in his glorious and everlasting kingdom.

Note 1

The Judgment Seat of Christ

The judgment seat of Christ (or the judgment seat of God) represents the 'throne' of Christ's majestic or kingly glory on which he will sit at the Last Day to judge both mankind and angels. In the book of Revelation, the judgment seat of Christ is referred to as *a great white throne*: i.e., the throne of Christ's glory and purity, or his glorious throne. Different terms are sometimes used when referring to the judgment throne. However, these terms relate to the same period of time (the events following the second coming of Christ). They relate also to the same judgment (the last or final judgment). Furthermore, as regards mankind, they relate to two categories (the righteous and the wicked). As regards spirit beings—Satan and the fallen angels—they too will appear before the judgment throne. (Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 25:31; Luke 22:29-30; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 3:21 - 5:14; 11:15-18; 14:14-19; 20:10-11; cf. Dan. 7:9-14,26-27)

Scripture References: Note 1

Matthew 16:27

⁽²⁷⁾ For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. (See vv.21-28)

Matthew 19:28

⁽²⁸⁾ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (See vv.27-30)

Matthew 25:31-34

⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ⁽³²⁾ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as

a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: ⁽³³⁾ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

⁽³⁴⁾ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (See vv.35-46)

Luke 22:29-30

⁽²⁹⁾ And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; ⁽³⁰⁾ That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Romans 14:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

⁽¹¹⁾ For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. {*Isaiah 45:23; cf. Phil. 2:10-11*}

⁽¹²⁾ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (See vv.1-13)

2 Corinthians 5:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (See vv.6-9)

Revelation 3:21

⁽²¹⁾ To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (See vv.14-22)

Revelation 4:2-4

⁽²⁾ And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. ⁽³⁾ And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. ⁽⁴⁾ And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. (See vv.1-11)

Revelation 5:6-10

⁽⁶⁾ And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns¹ and seven eyes,² which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. ⁽⁷⁾ And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. ⁽⁸⁾ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb,

¹ *seven horns*: symbolising perfect power; i.e., all-powerful or almighty.

² *seven eyes*: symbolising perfect knowledge; i.e., all-seeing and all-knowing, or omniscient.

having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

- ⁽⁹⁾ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; ⁽¹⁰⁾ And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. (See vv.1-14)

Revelation 11:15-18

- ⁽¹⁵⁾ And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.
- ⁽¹⁶⁾ And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshiped God,
- ⁽¹⁷⁾ Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.
- ⁽¹⁸⁾ And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth. {Cf. Ps. 99:1 LXX} (See Rev. 11:19)

Revelation 14:14-16

- ⁽¹⁴⁾ And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, {*Daniel 7:13*} having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. ⁽¹⁵⁾ And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. ⁽¹⁶⁾ And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. (See vv.6-13; cf. Mark 4:29)

Revelation 14:17-19

- ⁽¹⁷⁾ And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.
- ⁽¹⁸⁾ And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.
- ⁽¹⁹⁾ And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. {Cf. Rev. 19:15} (See Rev. 14:20)

Revelation 20:10-12

- ⁽¹⁰⁾ And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever
- ⁽¹¹⁾ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. ⁽¹²⁾ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (See vv.7-15)

Comparative Scripture References: Note 1

Daniel 7:9-12

- ⁽⁹⁾ I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was like* the fiery flame, *and* his wheels as burning fire.
- ⁽¹⁰⁾ A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.
- ⁽¹¹⁾ I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke: I beheld *even* till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. ⁽¹²⁾ As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. (See vv.1-8)

Daniel 7:13-14

- ⁽¹³⁾ I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. ⁽¹⁴⁾ And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed. (See vv.15-25)

Daniel 7:26-27

- ⁽²⁶⁾ But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy *it* unto the end. ⁽²⁷⁾ And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. (See v.28)

Note 2

One or Two Resurrections?

Many Christians believe that there will be two separate resurrections and judgments: one pertaining only to the saved (the righteous), and the other pertaining only to the lost (the unrighteous or wicked). They further believe that a period of 1,000 years will separate these two resurrections, during which time the Antichrist will appear on earth among the remainder of mankind. Consequently, those remain-

ing on earth after the first resurrection will be exposed to the great tribulation. During this time also, they believe that Israel will be converted. There are a number of variations to this interpretation.

The Lord Jesus, however, appears to speak only of one resurrection—a general resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (the sheep and the goats)—not of two separate resurrections.

This general resurrection will occur at the second coming of the Lord, and it will be accompanied by the separation of the righteous from the wicked. Every individual in each of these two groups will then be judged—beginning with the righteous. (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43,47-50; 25:31-46)

Scripture References: Note 2

Matthew 13:24-30

- ⁽²⁴⁾ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: ⁽²⁵⁾ But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. ⁽²⁶⁾ But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.
- ⁽²⁷⁾ So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?
- ⁽²⁸⁾ He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?
- ⁽²⁹⁾ But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. ⁽³⁰⁾ Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Matthew 13:36-43

- ⁽³⁶⁾ Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.
- ⁽³⁷⁾ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; ⁽³⁸⁾ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; ⁽³⁹⁾ The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.
- ⁽⁴⁰⁾ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁽⁴¹⁾ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; ⁽⁴²⁾ And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁽⁴³⁾ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (See vv.24-30)

Matthew 13:47-50

- ⁽⁴⁷⁾ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁽⁴⁸⁾ Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come

forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁽⁵⁰⁾ And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:31-46

- ⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ⁽³²⁾ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: ⁽³³⁾ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.
- ⁽³⁴⁾ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ⁽³⁵⁾ For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: ⁽³⁶⁾ Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.
- ⁽³⁷⁾ Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? ⁽³⁸⁾ When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? ⁽³⁹⁾ Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?
- ⁽⁴⁰⁾ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.
- ⁽⁴¹⁾ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁽⁴²⁾ For I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: ⁽⁴³⁾ I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.
- ⁽⁴⁴⁾ Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?
- ⁽⁴⁵⁾ Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.
- ⁽⁴⁶⁾ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Note 3

Regarding Revelation Chapter 20

The passage of Scripture that, at first sight, appears to support the theory of two resurrections separated by 1,000 years is Revelation chapter 20, verses 1-7. However, in view of the degree of symbolic or metaphorical language used in Revelation, it would be very unwise to base such an interpretation on this passage—unless that interpretation were to find additional and indisputable support from other (didactic) passages of God's Word, such as the Gospels or the Epistles.

The key to the interpretation of this and other passages of Scripture lies in a correct understanding of the Lord's express teaching on this particular subject, as given in the Gospels. This also involves the application of the rule of sound exegesis referred to as *the analogy of Scripture*. The analogy of Scrip-

ture requires that we *compare all related passages of God's Word with one another* to ensure that these passages are in agreement with a particular interpretation. (Matt. 25:46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)

Scripture References: Note 3

Matthew 25:46

⁽⁴⁶⁾ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (See vv. 31-45)

John 5:28-29

⁽²⁸⁾ Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ⁽²⁹⁾ And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (See vv. 24-30)

Acts 24:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. (See vv.14-16)

Note 4

Day of Judgment May be Phased

The Scriptures teach that both the holy angels, and the saints (believers), will have some share in the judicial work of Christ. It is, therefore, possible that—although there will be only one resurrection and judgment—this judgment may be carried out in several distinct phases. In this way, the saints could be judged and rewarded first. Then the saints—together with the holy angels—could join with Christ in judging both unbelievers (the wicked) and fallen angels (the demons). (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; Jude 14-15)

Scripture References: Note 4

Matthew 19:28

⁽²⁸⁾ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (See vv.27-30)

1 Corinthians 6:1-3

⁽¹⁾ Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? ⁽²⁾ Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ⁽³⁾ Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (See vv. 4-11)

Jude 1:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, ⁽¹⁵⁾ To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their

hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (See vv.3-23)

Note 5

Judgment is Final

As regards unbelievers (the wicked or ‘the goats’), there will be no right of appeal against the sentence of condemnation, and no hope of reprieve from the just execution of that sentence. While they lived on earth, the wicked—i.e., all those outside of Christ—were condemned already and were abiding under the wrath of God.

At the final judgment, God’s righteous wrath against sin will finally be executed upon all those who have not acknowledged God, and who have not obeyed the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their neglect or rejection of Christ is neglect or rejection of God’s only appointed way of salvation, and of atonement for sin. As such, it is a wilful rejection of the only way whereby the wrath of God against sin can be appeased or propitiated. It is a wilful rejection of the only way whereby sinful and rebellious men and women can be reconciled to an absolutely holy, just, and righteous God. This is the same Eternal and Almighty God who has great compassion upon all those who truly repent. (John 3:18,36; Rom. 2:5-8,16; 2 Thess. 1:6-10)

Scripture References: Note 5

John 3:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:36

⁽³⁶⁾ He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (See vv. 16-35)

Romans 2:5-8

⁽⁵⁾ But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁽⁶⁾ Who will render to every man according to his deeds: {*Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12*} ⁽⁷⁾ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: ⁽⁸⁾ But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, (See vv.1-11)

Romans 2:12

⁽¹²⁾ For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

Romans 2:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (See vv.13-15)

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

⁽⁶⁾ Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; ⁽⁷⁾ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the

Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁽⁸⁾ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁽⁹⁾ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; ⁽¹⁰⁾ When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (See vv.1-12; see 2 Thess. 2:1ff)

Note 6

No-One is Ignorant of God

No one will be exempted from the judgment of condemnation and the sentencing to the torments of an eternal hell. All mankind has sinned, and all mankind alike deserves to perish. It matters not that some may claim ignorance of the Gospel. They cannot be in ignorance of God—for God has revealed his divine power and nature in the things that he has created. These people, then, will be judged according to the light they had; but claiming ignorance of God will not exempt them from final and eternal punishment. Hence, the importance of making known to all nations the only name by whom they may be saved from the never-ending torments of the coming wrath. (Acts 26:17-18; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:12-16; 3:23)

Scripture References: Note 6

Acts 26:16-18

⁽¹⁶⁾ But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; ⁽¹⁷⁾ Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, ⁽¹⁸⁾ To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (See vv.12-23)

Romans 1:18-20

⁽¹⁸⁾ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ⁽¹⁹⁾ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed *it* unto them. ⁽²⁰⁾ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (See vv.21-32)

Romans 2:12-16

⁽¹²⁾ For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; ⁽¹³⁾ (For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. ⁽¹⁴⁾ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: ⁽¹⁵⁾ Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) ⁽¹⁶⁾ In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (See vv.1-24)

Romans 3:23

⁽²³⁾ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (See vv.9-31)

Related Bible Doctrines

The Doctrine of the Last Judgment or the Final Judgment is directly related to the fall of man. God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he has ordained. This judgment will come upon all mankind because of mankind's sin and rebellion. The final judgment will take place following the second coming of the Lord Jesus and the general resurrection. The doctrine of the Last Judgment, therefore, is intimately related to these other doctrines. The outcome of the Last Judgment is related to the doctrines of heaven and hell. In addition to the final judgment upon all mankind, Satan and the fallen angels will be judged and consigned to the lake of fire.³

Preliminary Remarks

No Purgatory, Limbo, or Annihilation

For every individual who will stand before God at the final judgment—and this will include all mankind—there can be only one of two possible outcomes: For the righteous, the glorious outcome will be heaven. For the wicked, the dreadful outcome will be hell. There are no states or places of existence intermediate between heaven and hell (as, for example, *purgatory* or *limbo*).

Again, there is no such thing as annihilation or non-existence either immediately after death, or subsequently—and because of the final judgment. After the second coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the just and the unjust, and the final judgment, the whole person—body and soul (including mind and spirit)—will continue to exist for all eternity. They will continue to exist, either in the never-ending torments of hell, or in the everlasting glories of heaven.⁴

The Bible Reveals Everything We Need to Know

As with many—if not all—subjects dealing with the last things (eschatology), the details associated with the doctrine of the final judgment are open to some differences of opinion and interpretation. However, these differences do not relate to any matter of supreme importance. Rather, they are confined to matters such as the precise sequence of events that will take place in connection with that Day. Such differences of opinion among true believers can be accepted, as long as they do not contradict any fundamental teaching on this subject as revealed to us in the Bible.

As the infallible Word of God, the Bible is our only sure guide in all matters relating to what we must believe and how we must live (faith and practice). Everything we need to know is revealed to us in its pages. Any matter not revealed in these pages, is not important for us to know about during this life—insofar as our faith and the practice of godliness is concerned. In the absence of clear and specific information, we must not attempt to speculate on these—or any other matters—that God has not disclosed to us in his Word.

This principle is elucidated for us by the Scripture that says:

Deuteronomy 29:29

⁽²⁹⁾ The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are revealed belong* unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (See vv.1-28)

³ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: The Fall of Man; The Resurrection; The Second Coming; Heaven; Hell; Defeat of Satan and the Demons*, by Gordon Lyons

⁴ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Heaven; Hell*, by the same author.

Those things that God has revealed are those things that are contained in the 66 books of the Bible. There is no other source of divine revelation or of authoritative instruction on faith and morals for the people of God. We must confine ourselves, therefore, to those truths that the Bible reveals and teaches, without being influenced by man's non-biblical opinions.⁵

⁵ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Divine Inspiration of The Bible*, by Gordon Lyons

Part 2

Doctrine of the Last Judgment

Summary of Doctrine

The doctrine of the last or final judgment may be summarised as follows: ⁶

1. The Last Judgment is *a definite future event*, which will take place at the end of this present age. At the last judgment, the eternal destiny of men and angels will be finally determined and publicly manifested. (Matt. 13:30,37-43,47-50; Rev. 20:11-15)

Scripture References: Summary Note 1

(The Last Judgment is a definite future event)

Matthew 13:30

⁽³⁰⁾ Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. (See vv.24-29)

Matthew 13:37-39

⁽³⁷⁾ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; ⁽³⁸⁾ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; ⁽³⁹⁾ The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

Matthew 13:40-43

⁽⁴⁰⁾ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁽⁴¹⁾ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; ⁽⁴²⁾ And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁽⁴³⁾ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (See vv.24-30)

Matthew 13:47-50

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁽⁴⁸⁾ Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁽⁵⁰⁾ And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

⁶ Based on C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1871, 1977 reprint], pp. 845-851.

Revelation 20:11-15

⁽¹¹⁾ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. ⁽¹²⁾ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ⁽¹³⁾ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. ⁽¹⁴⁾ And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ⁽¹⁵⁾ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

2. *Christ is to be the Judge*: "...The Father judges no-one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." Christ is the one "...whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." And God "...has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." God is the Judge of all the earth, but God judges angels and mankind through his Son.

Scripture References: Summary Note 2

(Christ is to be the Judge)

John 5:22-23

⁽²²⁾ For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: ⁽²³⁾ That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. (See vv.16-21)

John 5:26-27

⁽²⁶⁾ For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; ⁽²⁷⁾ And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. (See vv.24-25)

John 6:28-29

⁽²⁸⁾ Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? ⁽²⁹⁾ Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. (See v.30)

Acts 10:42

⁽⁴²⁾ And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead. (See vv.39-43)

Acts 17:30-31

⁽³⁰⁾ And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: ⁽³¹⁾ Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (See vv.16-34)

3. The last judgment *will take place at the second coming of Christ*, and following the general resurrection. Therefore, this judgment cannot now be in progress (as is maintained by some). Nor does it take place when a person dies. Nor is it a protracted period *before* the general resurrection. Rather, when Christ comes, the dead (righteous and wicked) will be raised. All nations will be gathered before him. Christ will separate the righteous from the wicked as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep (the righteous) will inherit eternal life in that kingdom which has been prepared for them. The goats (the unrighteous or wicked) will be consigned to hell: that place of eternal punishment and misery that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; 2 Pet. 3:3-10)

Scripture References: Summary Note 3

(The Last Judgment will take place at the second coming of Christ)

Matthew 25:31-34

⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ⁽³²⁾ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: ⁽³³⁾ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

⁽³⁴⁾ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (See vv.35-40)

Matthew 25:41

⁽⁴¹⁾ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (See vv.42-45)

Matthew 25:46

⁽⁴⁶⁾ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

⁽⁵⁾ *Which is* a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: ⁽⁶⁾ Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; ⁽⁷⁾ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁽⁸⁾ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁽⁹⁾ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; ⁽¹⁰⁾ When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (See vv.1-12; see also 2 Thess. 2:1ff)

2 Peter 3:3-7

⁽³⁾ Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, ⁽⁴⁾ And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?

for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation. ⁽⁵⁾ For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: ⁽⁶⁾ Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. ⁽⁷⁾ But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (See vv.1-2)

2 Peter 3:8-10

⁽⁸⁾ But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁽⁹⁾ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. ⁽¹⁰⁾ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (See vv.11-13)

4. *The persons to be judged will be men and angels.* In the Bible, we are told that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and that Christ will render to every man according to his works. The final judgment, therefore, will be universal, including great and small, rich and poor. It will include everyone who has ever lived—from the time of creation, to the time of the Lord's second coming. All mankind will be included in the general resurrection, and will appear before the Lord at the final judgment. Concerning fallen angels, we are told that God has delivered them into 'chains of darkness' to be reserved for judgment. At the final judgment, these fallen angels (i.e., demons) will be consigned to that place already prepared for them, and to which lost mankind also will be consigned—for all eternity. (Rom. 14:9-12; 2 Pet. 2:4-9; Jude 1:14-15)

Scripture References: Summary Note 4

(The persons to be judged will be men and angels)

Romans 14:9-12

⁽⁹⁾ For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. ⁽¹⁰⁾ But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

⁽¹¹⁾ For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord,⁷ every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. {*Isaiah 45:23; cf. Phil. 2:10-11*}

⁽¹²⁾ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (See vv.1-13)

⁷ Heb., YHWH

2 Peter 2:4-9

⁽⁴⁾ For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell,⁸ and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; ⁽⁵⁾ And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁽⁶⁾ And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an example unto those that after should live ungodly; ⁽⁷⁾ And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: ⁽⁸⁾ (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds); ⁽⁹⁾ The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: (See vv.1-22; cf. v.4 with Jude 1:6)

Jude 1:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, ⁽¹⁵⁾ To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (See vv. 3-16)

5. The ground on which the last judgment will be based, will be the *deeds done in the body [i.e., while living in this present body]*. Men are to be judged ‘according to their works.’ (Rev. 20:13) The secrets of their hearts—i.e., their innermost thoughts, intentions and attitudes—are to be revealed. Men will give an account of every thought, word, and deed. They will be held to account for every careless word they have spoken. They will also be held to account for their failure to do those things that should have been done. God’s judgment will not be based on a person’s outward profession of faith, or on his appearance of piety or righteousness in the sight of others. Rather, it will be based on a person’s true character as known only to God, and on the thoughts, attitudes, and acts that have issued from that character—openly or secretly. (Matt. 12:36-37; 16:27; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10)

Scripture References: Summary Note 5

(The ground of the Last Judgment will be the deeds done while living in this present body)

Matthew 12:36-37

⁽³⁶⁾ But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. ⁽³⁷⁾ For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (See vv.30-35)

Matthew 16:27

⁽²⁷⁾ For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. (See vv.24-28)

⁸ Greek, *Tartarus*

1 Corinthians 4:5

⁽⁵⁾ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. (See vv.1-7)

2 Corinthians 5:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (See vv.6-9)

6. *Men will be judged according to the light they had.* In the Gospel of Luke, the Lord Jesus says: ⁴⁷ "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows..." (Luke 12:47-48a) In Romans, the apostle Paul says that all mankind is without excuse. They knew God by those things that could be seen. (God's eternal power and divine nature being clearly revealed to all mankind by the things that he had created.) Yet although they daily witnessed God's power and glory in the natural creation, they wilfully refused to acknowledge him as God. Therefore, in course of time, God abandoned them to the evil desires of their corrupt and sinful nature. The Scriptural principle is that those who sin without law (i.e., without a clear knowledge of God's requirements) will be judged without law (i.e., without the full rigour of the law's demands). Those, however, who have sinned with the law (i.e., fully knowing the law of God), shall be judged and condemned by that law. (Luke 12:46-48; Rom. 1:18-32; 2:12-16)

Scripture References: Summary Note 6

(Men will be judged according to the light they had)

Luke 12:45-48

⁽⁴⁵⁾ But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; ⁽⁴⁶⁾ The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁽⁴⁸⁾ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (See vv.35-44)

Romans 1:18-21

⁽¹⁸⁾ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ⁽¹⁹⁾ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed *it* unto them. ⁽²⁰⁾ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: ⁽²¹⁾ Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as

God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (See vv.22-32)

Romans 2:12-16

⁽¹²⁾ For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; ⁽¹³⁾ (For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. ⁽¹⁴⁾ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: ⁽¹⁵⁾ Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) ⁽¹⁶⁾ In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (See vv.1-11)

7. At the last judgment, *each person's destiny will be unalterably determined*. Each individual (righteous and wicked) will be assigned to his or her final abode. The righteous will be blessed by the King, and will inherit their share in the promised kingdom. They shall then dwell in the presence of their loving heavenly Father and his Son—with whom they shall reign over the renewed creation for ever and ever. But, for the unrighteous or wicked, the day of grace will have ended, and mercy will have been withdrawn. Instead, God's righteous anger will be expressed against all those who—wilfully and knowingly—have turned their backs on God, and on his Son Jesus Christ. For all such, there will remain only the fearful outpouring of God's righteous wrath upon the finally impenitent. Thus, the Scripture utters these solemn words: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matt. 25:46 NIV) (Jude 1:6-7; Rev. 21:7-8)

Scripture References: Summary Note 7

(Each person's destiny will be unalterably determined)

Jude 1:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. ⁽⁷⁾ Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (See vv.3-13; see esp. v.13)

Revelation 21:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. ⁽⁸⁾ But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (See v.6)

Scriptural Accounts of the Final Judgment

Some of the principal Scriptural accounts of the end times, and of the final judgment and its associated events, are given in Table 1 below. Each account should be examined carefully, and compared with the others in the list. The key to understanding the nature and scope of the final judgment lies in cor-

rectly interpreting and understanding the Lord's teaching in the parable of the sheep and the goats. (Matt. 25:31-46) This important parable will be examined later in these notes.

Table 1: List of Subjects

Subject	Teaching	Scripture Reference
Falsely claiming Christ as Lord.	False teachers disowned and judged at the last Day.	Matt. 7:21-23
Parable of the weeds or tares.	False professors within the Church; often mistaken for true believers.	Matt. 13:24-30
Parable of the weeds or tares explained.	Separation and judgment of false professors at the last Day.	Matt. 13:36-43
Parable of the net.	Separation of the wicked from the righteous at the final judgment.	Matt. 13:47-50
Parable of the talents.	Reward or punishment in accordance with degree of faithfulness.	Matt. 25:14-30
The sheep and the goats.	<i>The Last Judgment</i> : Illustrates separation of righteous and wicked, and reward or punishment in accordance with works.	Matt. 25:31-46
Power of casting into hell.	Men and women's innermost secrets revealed at the final judgment.	Luke 12:2-5
Unfaithful servant beaten with stripes.	Judged and punished in proportion to degree of unfaithfulness.	Luke 12:42-48
Parable of the ten pounds (or minas).	Each servant judged and rewarded or punished in proportion to their faithfulness—or lack of faithfulness—with the Lord's money.	Luke 19:11-27

Events Associated with the Final Judgment

Summary

At the second coming of the Lord Jesus with all his holy ones (angels), the following events will take place:

1. When he appears in his glory, the Lord Jesus will send his holy angels throughout the world to separate the righteous from the wicked, and to set apart each of these two groups. (Matt. 13:40-41,49; Mark 13:27)

Scripture References: Summary Note 1

Matthew 13:40-41

⁽⁴⁰⁾ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁽⁴¹⁾ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; (See vv.24-30)

Matthew 13:49

⁽⁴⁹⁾ So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, (See vv.45-50)

Mark 13:27

⁽²⁷⁾ And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. (See vv.24-26)

2. In the process of separating the righteous from the wicked, the holy angels will be gathering the elect from the ends of the earth, and from one end of heaven to the other. One will be taken, and the other left.

Scripture References: Summary Note 2

Matthew 24:30-31

⁽³⁰⁾ And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ⁽³¹⁾ And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (See vv.23-29)

Matthew 24:40-41

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁽⁴¹⁾ Two *women shall be grinding* at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (See vv.36-42)

Luke 17:34-36

⁽³⁴⁾ I tell you, in that night there shall be two *men* in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. ⁽³⁵⁾ Two *women shall be grinding together*; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁽³⁶⁾ Two *men shall be in the field*; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (See vv.22-37)

3. At this time, the dead—both the righteous and the wicked—will be raised. The bodies of the resurrected dead will be reunited with their souls, and the righteous will be separated from the wicked. The righteous—both those still alive at the Lord's coming, and also those raised from the dead—will then be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:12-13)

Scripture References: Summary Note 3

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

⁽¹³⁾ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ⁽¹⁴⁾ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ⁽¹⁵⁾ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. ⁽¹⁶⁾ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ⁽¹⁷⁾ Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Revelation 20:12-13

⁽¹²⁾ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ⁽¹³⁾ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (See vv.11-15)

4. The righteous (i.e., the elect) will be placed on Christ's right hand, and the wicked on his left. Every individual who has ever lived will be placed on one or other of these two categories. (Matt. 25:32-33; Jude 1:14-15)

Scripture References: Summary Note 4

Matthew 25:21-23

⁽²¹⁾ His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. ⁽²²⁾ He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. ⁽²³⁾ His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (See vv.34-46)

Jude 1:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, ⁽¹⁵⁾ To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (See vv.3-19)

5. Each individual will then be judged. The righteous will be judged first. Afterward, the righteous will join with their Lord in judging the wicked—including the fallen angels. (Matt. 25:34,41; 1 Cor. 6:2-3)

Scripture References: Summary Note 5

Matthew 25:34

⁽³⁴⁾ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (See vv.31-46)

1 Corinthians 6:2-3

⁽²⁾ Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ⁽³⁾ Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (See vv.1-11)

6. Anyone whose name has not been written in the Lamb's book of life from before the creation of the world will be cast into the lake of fire: i.e., he will be assigned to the torments of an eternal hell where suffering of body and soul will never end. (Rev. 14:11; 20:10,15)

Scripture References: Summary Note 6

Revelation 14:9-11

⁽⁹⁾ And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand, ⁽¹⁰⁾ The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: ⁽¹¹⁾ And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. (See vv.6-13)

Revelation 20:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever

Revelation 20:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (See vv.7-14)

7. All those whose names have been written in the book of life (i.e., the righteous or the elect) will inherit the kingdom prepared for them. They will reign with Christ in his glory for ever and ever over the renovated and purified creation. (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:1-5)

Scripture References: Summary Note 7

2 Timothy 2:12a

^(12a) If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*... (See vv.8-13)

Revelation 22:1-5

⁽¹⁾ And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. ⁽²⁾ In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, *and* yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. ⁽³⁾ And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: ⁽⁴⁾ And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. ⁽⁵⁾ And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever. (See vv.6-7)

In the pages that follow, we will enlarge upon some of the events listed in the above summary. In respect of Notes 6 and 7 above, these will be dealt with briefly below, and more fully elsewhere in this series.⁹

Outline of the Final Judgment ¹⁰

1. The final judgment will take place at the judgment seat of Christ, or the judgment seat of God. The apostle Paul uses these terms interchangeably.

(In referring to the judgment seat, Paul may have been alluding to the Roman judgment seat with which his hearers or readers would have been familiar. This was a long wooden bench on which the judge or magistrate sat, flanked on either side by his advisors or counsellors.) (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10)

Scripture References (1)

Romans 14:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

⁽¹¹⁾ For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord,¹¹ every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. {*Isaiah 45:23*}

⁽¹²⁾ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (See vv.1-13)

2 Corinthians 5:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (See vv.6-11)

2. The judgment seat of Christ is otherwise known as his glorious throne or the great white throne. (The view that supposes the judgment seat of Christ to be distinct from the great white throne cannot be sustained by the analogy of Scripture.) (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; Rev. 20:11)

⁹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Heaven; Hell*, by Gordon Lyons.

¹⁰ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Good Works; The Resurrection; The Second Coming; Heaven; Hell*, by Gordon Lyons.

¹¹ Heb. *YHWH*

Scripture References (2)

Matthew 19:28

⁽²⁸⁾ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (See vv.27-30)

Matthew 25:31

⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: (See vv.32-46)

Revelation 20:11

⁽¹¹⁾ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. (See vv.12-15)

3. The righteous will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done while living in this present body; to hear the sentence of acquittal from eternal condemnation, and to receive their glorious reward. Following this judgment, the righteous will then join with their Lord and with his holy angels in judging both the wicked and the fallen angels. (Rom. 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 6:2,3)

Scripture References (3)

Romans 14:12

⁽¹²⁾ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (See vv.1-13)

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

⁽¹¹⁾ For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ⁽¹²⁾ Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; ⁽¹³⁾ Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. ⁽¹⁴⁾ If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ⁽¹⁵⁾ If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (See vv.1-17)

1 Corinthians 6:2-3

⁽²⁾ Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ⁽³⁾ Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (See vv.1-11)

4. The unrighteous or the wicked will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of their every thought, word and deed. From that glorious, holy and majestic throne, they will hear that dreadful sentence of eternal condemnation—the implementation of the judgment already passed upon them while they lived on earth. (Matt. 12:36-37; 25:41,46; John 3:18-20)

Scripture References (4)

Matthew 12:36-37

⁽³⁶⁾ But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. ⁽³⁷⁾ For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (See vv.31-35)

Matthew 25:41

⁽⁴¹⁾ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

Matthew 25:46a

^(46a) And these shall go away into everlasting punishment... (See vv.31-46b)

John 3:18-20

⁽¹⁸⁾ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ⁽¹⁹⁾ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ⁽²⁰⁾ For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. (See vv.16-36)

5. Against the final judgment, there will be no appeals. From it, there will be no acquittals (as regards the wicked). Neither will there be any 'second chances' to repent and believe on Christ. Then, it will be too late: for the Spirit of grace will have been withdrawn. (Rom. 2:5-9; Heb. 2:2-3; 10:26-31)

Scripture References (5)

Romans 2:4-9

⁽⁴⁾ Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

⁽⁵⁾ But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁽⁶⁾ Who will render to every man according to his deeds: {*Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12*} ⁽⁷⁾ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: ⁽⁸⁾ But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, ⁽⁹⁾ Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; (See vv.1-16)

Hebrews 2:2-3

⁽²⁾ For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; ⁽³⁾ How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; (See vv.1-4)

Hebrews 10:26-27

⁽²⁶⁾ For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, ⁽²⁷⁾ But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. (See vv.18-25)

Hebrews 10:28-31

⁽²⁸⁾ He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: ⁽²⁹⁾ Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? ⁽³⁰⁾ For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. {*Deut. 32:35*} And again, The Lord shall judge his people. {*Deut. 32:36; Psalm 135:14*} ⁽³¹⁾ *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (See vv.32-39)

6. The dreadful sentence stands: and it cannot be revoked. Those who have rejected Christ, must themselves be rejected from the presence of the Lord, and consigned to the place of eternal punishment. (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 20:11-15)

Scripture References (6)

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

⁽⁵⁾ *Which is* a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: ⁽⁶⁾ Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; ⁽⁷⁾ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁽⁸⁾ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁽⁹⁾ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; ⁽¹⁰⁾ When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (See vv.1-12; see also 2 Thess. 2:1ff)

Revelation 20:11-15

⁽¹¹⁾ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. ⁽¹²⁾ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ⁽¹³⁾ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. ⁽¹⁴⁾ And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ⁽¹⁵⁾ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (See vv.7-10)

On the following pages, we will consider in greater detail some of the points outlined above. Firstly, however, we will consider some of the key parables designed to illustrate the truth of the final judg-

ment, and to give some indication of the eternal condition of the righteous and the eternal condition of the wicked.

Part 3

Key Parables Illustrating the Last Judgment

Jesus explained, sometimes in parabolic form, the nature of the Last Judgment and the events that would precede and attend this Last Judgment. Speaking of his second coming and of the general resurrection, the Lord describes how the righteous will be gathered by the angels, and of how they will be separated from the wicked. The Lord also speaks, in unmistakably terms, of the final destinies of both the righteous and the wicked.

Fundamental to our understanding of the events surrounding the Last Judgment is a correct interpretation of the Lord's teaching on this subject. There are three key parables that clearly illustrate these events. The key parables of the Last Judgment are:

- The parable of the weeds (or tares). (Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43)
- The parable of the net. (Matt. 13:47-50)
- The sheep and the goats. (Matt. 25:31-46)

We will consider firstly the parable of the weeds (or tares), and the parable of the net. Then, we will move on to consider the Lord's teaching of the sheep and the goats. The parable—or analogy—of the sheep and the goats is perhaps the most fundamental illustration of the events preceding and attending the Last Judgment. (Matt. 25:31-46)

The Last Judgment Illustrated Parabolically

The Parable of the Weeds or Tares

During the present Gospel age, or day of grace—and until the Lord comes—believers and unbelievers (the righteous and the wicked) will continue to intermingle; both in the world, and within the visible church. This truth is evident from the parable of the wheat and the weeds (or tares). Thus, the Scripture says:

Matthew 13:24-30

⁽²⁴⁾ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: ⁽²⁵⁾ But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. ⁽²⁶⁾ But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

⁽²⁷⁾ So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

⁽²⁸⁾ He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

⁽²⁹⁾ But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. ⁽³⁰⁾ Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the

time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

The Parable of the Weeds or Tares Explained

The significance of the weeds among the wheat is explained by the Lord in the following passage:

Matthew 13:37-43

⁽³⁷⁾ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; ⁽³⁸⁾ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; ⁽³⁹⁾ The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁽⁴¹⁾ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; ⁽⁴²⁾ And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁽⁴³⁾ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (See vv.24-30)

At his second advent, the Lord will send forth his angels to gather his elect from the ends of the earth. The angels will separate the righteous from the wicked, setting the righteous on one side and the wicked on the other. Having thus been separated into their respective groups, each individual within each group will subsequently appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The wicked will be consigned to the everlasting torments of hell, and the righteous will inherit their Father's everlasting kingdom. They shall reign with Christ throughout the endless ages of eternity.

The Parable of the Net

The parable of the net illustrates the same teaching as that given in the parable of the tares. At his second coming, the Lord Jesus will send forth his angels to gather his elect, and to separate the righteous from the wicked. Each person will then be judged (individually). The righteous will enter into their glorious inheritance to reign with Christ. The wicked will be forever separated from the glory and love of God in that place of eternal torment prepared for the devil and his angels. Thus, the Scripture says:

Matthew 13:47-50

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁽⁴⁸⁾ Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad ¹² away. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁽⁵⁰⁾ And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The dreadful destiny of the lost (the wicked) will be sealed on that day when the angels root them out from among the righteous. Then, the Lord will judge them, casting them ultimately into that place which is likened to a *fiery furnace* (Matt. 13:42), a *lake of fire* (Rev. 20:15), or a *fiery lake of burning sulphur* (Rev. 21:8).

The Lord Jesus illustrates this dreadful place as a state and condition where there will be, as it were, *weeping and gnashing of teeth*. (Matt. 13:42) In this place of indescribable torments, the wicked will have no rest 'day or night' (cf. Rev. 14:11). Rather, they will endure forever the anguish of body and

¹² Gk. *sapros*, corrupt, foul, rotten

soul that is the just penalty for their neglect or rejection of the one and only, and well-beloved, Son of God.

The Sheep and the Goats

We come now to the most fundamental parabolic teaching on this subject: the parable of the sheep and the goats. This illustration provides us with one of the clearest indications of the nature of the Last Judgment. We will consider some of the implications of the Lord's teaching below.

The Separation of Righteous and Wicked

In his parable or analogy of the sheep and the goats, the Lord says:

Matthew 25:31-33

⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ⁽³²⁾ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: ⁽³³⁾ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. (See vv.34-46)

From the above passage, the following points should be noted:

1. Following the second coming, the Lord Jesus will sit on his glorious throne (the 'great white throne'). (Rev. 11:15-18; 19:16; 20:11)

Scripture References (1)

Revelation 11:15-18

⁽¹⁵⁾ And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.

⁽¹⁶⁾ And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshiped God, ⁽¹⁷⁾ Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. ⁽¹⁸⁾ And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. (See v.19; cf. v.18a with Ps. 99:1 LXX)

Revelation 19:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (See vv.11-21)

Revelation 20:11

⁽¹¹⁾ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. (See vv.10-15)

2. All nations will be gathered before the Lord's glorious throne. To this end, the dead of all generations—from the beginning of creation to the end of the present age—will be raised. Both the righteous and the wicked will be included in this resurrection. (Dan. 12:2-3; Rom. 2:5-11,16; Rev. 20:12)

Scripture References (2)

Daniel 12:2-3

- ⁽²⁾ And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. ⁽³⁾ And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. (See vv.1-4)

Romans 2:5-8

- ⁽⁵⁾ But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁽⁶⁾ Who will render to every man according to his deeds: {*Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12*} ⁽⁷⁾ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: ⁽⁸⁾ But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,

Romans 2:16

- ⁽¹⁶⁾ In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (See vv.1-15)

Revelation 20:12-13

- ⁽¹²⁾ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ⁽¹³⁾ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (See vv.11-15)

3. By means of his holy angels, the Lord will separate the righteous from the wicked, and will set them apart in two distinct groups (as with the sheep and the goats). The righteous will be placed on the one side (the side of the saved and justified). The wicked will be placed on the other side (the side of the lost and condemned). This is a separation of individuals—not of nations—into two distinct groups. (Matt. 13:37-43; 47-50; 25:31-33)

Scripture References (3)

Matthew 13:37-39

- ⁽³⁷⁾ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; ⁽³⁸⁾ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; ⁽³⁹⁾ The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

Matthew 13:40-43

⁽⁴⁰⁾ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁽⁴¹⁾ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; ⁽⁴²⁾ And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁽⁴³⁾ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (See vv.24-30)

Matthew 13:47-50

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁽⁴⁸⁾ Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁽⁵⁰⁾ And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:31-33

⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ⁽³²⁾ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: ⁽³³⁾ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. (See vv.34-46)

This illustrates the scene set at the Last Judgment for the pronouncement of sentence. Everyone who has ever lived will appear before this judgment seat. And everyone will be included in one or other of the two categories mentioned. There will be no other categories, and no one will be exempted.

The Destiny of the Righteous

Of the righteous (the sheep), the Lord declares:

Matthew 25:34

⁽³⁴⁾ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Comparative Scriptures

Ephesians 1:4

⁽⁴⁾ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (See vv.3-14)

1 Peter 1:4-5

⁽⁴⁾ To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁽⁵⁾ Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (See vv.1-9)

Christ the King will give to all his redeemed people their promised inheritance in glory. There, they will take their place with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God and of his Christ. Note that the Scripture says that this place has been prepared for God's people from before the creation of the world. (Eph. 1:4)

The Works of the Righteous

The proof that the righteous belong to God and are the children of God is evidenced by their works. These works (or deeds) were not such as merited or contributed toward their salvation (for salvation is by God's sovereign grace, through faith alone). Rather, they were works that issued from a justified and sanctified life. In other words, the works—or righteous deeds—of the believer was the fruit of the Spirit of holiness, of grace and of sanctification. Thus, at the judgment seat of Christ, the righteous will receive this commendation for their Lord:

Matthew 25:34-36

⁽³⁴⁾ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ⁽³⁵⁾ For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: ⁽³⁶⁾ Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Matthew 25:37-40

⁽³⁷⁾ Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? ⁽³⁸⁾ When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? ⁽³⁹⁾ Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

⁽⁴⁰⁾ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. (See vv.31-33)

The Destiny of the Wicked

In the Scriptures, the unrighteous are more commonly known as 'the wicked'. The term 'wicked' does not necessarily imply that these people were openly wicked or wicked in the extreme—although many were. 'The wicked' is a universal term used to refer to all those who remain finally impenitent and unbelieving. The term refers to everyone who has never come to repentance and faith in Christ, from the 'least' to the 'greatest' unforgiven sinner.

Many in this category may have lived an apparently honest, sincere and upright life—at least, in the eyes of the world. But, in God's eyes, they were separated from him by the evil behaviour or wicked works which proceeded from their sinful nature. (cf. Col. 1:21) This evil behaviour comprised such things as a sinful unbelieving heart; sinful attitudes of heart and mind (e.g., pride, envy, jealousy, greed, covetousness, lack of love, lack of patience, lack of compassion, etc.). Their evil behaviour also exhibited itself in their desires to live their lives independently of God and of his will. It also included all their evil thoughts, tendencies, words and practices.

According to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and of the Word of God as a whole, all these things proceed from a person's sinful nature. It is these things—together with a careless neglect or wilful rejection of the Son of God—that makes a person wicked or evil in God's sight, and which leads to that person's condemnation and eternal punishment in hell.

Thus, of the wicked (the goats), it is written:

Matthew 25:41

⁽⁴¹⁾ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

This is the solemn pronouncement of everlasting separation from God, and consignment to suffering in the torments of hell—likened for its severity to an *everlasting fire*. Hell was prepared for the devil and

his angels, as well as for fallen and impenitent mankind. Before the creation of this present world and the subsequent fall of man, Satan and his angels had already fallen. Because of their sin and rebellion, God had cast them out of heaven and placed them under eternal condemnation. (Unlike fallen mankind, fallen angels are afforded no hope of salvation.) Now, at the judgment seat of Christ, both fallen angels and fallen and impenitent mankind will be consigned to the same terrible destiny.

The Works of the Wicked

The proof that the wicked were the children of the devil, or the evil one, is evidenced by their works—or lack of works. Concerning the Lord's judgment on the wicked, it is written:

Matthew 25:41-43

⁽⁴¹⁾ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁽⁴²⁾ For I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: ⁽⁴³⁾ I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Matthew 25:44-45

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

The wicked will be judged according to their deeds. But note carefully the nature of the deeds by which they are here condemned. On this occasion, the Lord does not mention the sins they have actually *committed* (although, of course, these must be included). Rather, the Lord condemns the wicked for their sins of *omission*: i.e., for failing to do the good they ought to have done. (Jas. 4:17)

Summarily stated, their great sin was in rejecting Christ by rejecting those who belonged to Christ, and by utterly failing to help those who belonged to him.

Note also the contrasting states and conditions of the two groups—those who belong to Christ, and those who do not:

Matthew 25:46

⁽⁴⁶⁾ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

In both cases, the final state of existence is in an *eternal* state. The wicked suffer eternally in the hell prepared for the devil and his angels. The righteous, however, enjoy eternal happiness in the kingdom of heaven prepared for the redeemed people of God. The same teaching is expressed in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Soon, we will be considering what these books say about the Last Judgment. Firstly, however, we will consider what is meant or signified by the seat of judgment itself—i.e., the Lord's 'judgment throne'.

Part 4

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Symbolic Elements

We should remember that—in both Daniel and Revelation—a number of symbolic elements are associated with the description of the judgment throne. Symbols are representations. They are intended to act on the mind much like a visual aid. As such, symbols do not necessarily correspond in kind, or in every detail, with the objects that they portray.

Whatever the exact nature of the ‘judgment throne’, suffice it for the people of God to know that—at the last Day—the Lord Jesus will sit in judgment, in great splendour and unparalleled glory. He will be attended by thousands upon thousands of his holy ones, arrayed in glorious apparel—itsself, a symbol of absolute purity and holiness. The symbolic representation of certain details in no way detracts from the reality or the certainty of the Last Judgment. Nor does it detract from the reality or certainty of the hell which will be the final destiny of all those whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life. (Rev. 20:15; 21:27)

God’s ‘Throne’ Symbolises Universal Dominion

Lest we should apply an unduly literal interpretation to every occurrence of the word ‘throne’, we should bear in mind the true significance of the word ‘throne’. The ‘throne’ of God denotes that place in heaven from where God rules as absolute Sovereign over the universe. It also denotes that majestic and glorious place from where God pronounces his judgments upon men and nations, and from where he executes his holy and righteous justice. God administers his judgments and justice, however, only in the midst of his everlasting love, mercy and grace.

Probably, therefore, we should not think of God’s throne as a physical or material throne—for God is Spirit. Rather, on a number of occasions where the word occurs, we may understand the ‘throne’ as symbolising the seat, source or centre of God’s divine sovereignty or universal dominion.

Thus, for example, the Scripture declares:

Isaiah 66:1

⁽¹⁾ Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that ye build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest? (See v.2)

Matthew 23:22

⁽²²⁾ And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. (See vv.16-21)

Having made this observation, however, we must concede that the Son of God—who is truly God and yet truly Man—could properly be said to occupy a physical or material throne. The glorified Lord Jesus, therefore, may in fact do so at the Last Judgment.

Who is Seated on the Judgment Throne?

Sometimes, it is God the Father whom the Scriptures represent as being seated on this glorious heavenly throne. At other times, the Lord Jesus is said to occupy the throne. There is no contradiction here; for the Scriptures speak of Christ as being seated at the right hand of God: i.e., in the place of absolute

equality, power and glory on the same throne. We should probably understand the throne of judgment and of sovereign and universal rule (figuratively) as though it resembled a judgment seat or bench.

Concerning the fact that the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus sits with his Father on the heavenly throne, the Scripture says:

Matthew 26:64

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. (See vv.62-68; see also Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69)

Revelation 3:21

⁽²¹⁾ To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (See vv.14-22)

Revelation 22:1

⁽¹⁾ And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. (See v.2)

Revelation 22:3

⁽³⁾ And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: (See vv.4-7)

The above verses serve to illustrate that the heavenly throne is the throne of God the Father, and of Jesus the Lamb of God. For this reason, the Scripture sometimes speak of the Lord Jesus as being the one who is seated on this throne, and sometimes of the Father, and sometimes of both.

Having briefly considered the meaning and significance of the throne of God, we will now move on to other passages in the Word of God where this throne is mentioned in connection with the Last Judgment. Two of these passages concern the visions of the Last Judgment that the Lord gave to the prophet Daniel; and—several centuries later—to the apostle John.

Daniel's Vision of the Throne

Like the apostle John in Revelation, the prophet Daniel was given a vision or preview of the judgment throne.¹³

Thus, Daniel says:

Daniel 7:9-10

⁽⁹⁾ I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was like* the fiery flame, *and* his wheels as burning fire. {*Cf. Ezek. 1:26-28*}

⁽¹⁰⁾ A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. {*Cf. Rev. 5:11*} (See Dan. 7:1-12)

¹³ Not all commentators agree that the judgment scene depicted in Daniel chapter 7 relates to the Last Judgment.

The Ancient of Days

In the above passage, the One seated upon the throne is designated *the Ancient of Days*: i.e., the eternal or everlasting God. In Daniel's vision, God's eternal Son is seen to approach the glorious heavenly throne.

Thus, Daniel says:

Daniel 7:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. ⁽¹⁴⁾ And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed. (See vv.15-25)

The above passage from Daniel chapter 7 should be studied in conjunction with Revelation chapters 4 and 5. Again, the entire context from which the passages are taken should be studied carefully in conjunction with the corresponding passages in Revelation (chapters 11 through 20).

God's Son is The Judge

Concerning the Day of Judgment, the Scripture says:

Matthew 25:31-32a

⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ^(32a) And before him shall be gathered all nations...

And, concerning the One whom God has appointed to judge the world, the Scripture tells us:

Acts 10:42

⁽⁴²⁾ And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he [Jesus] which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead. (See vv.34-43)

Acts 17:31

⁽³¹⁾ Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (See vv.16-30)

2 Timothy 4:1-2

⁽¹⁾ I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; ⁽²⁾ Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (See vv.3-8)

Although God is the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25), God the Father has committed all judgment to his Son. The Son executes judgment on behalf of the Father; and, as we have seen, the Son will judge the world at the last Day. Thus, the Scripture says:

John 5:22

⁽²²⁾ For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

John 5:27-29

⁽²⁷⁾ And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

⁽²⁸⁾ Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ⁽²⁹⁾ And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (See vv.16-30)

We will now move on to consider the apostle John's vision of the Last Judgment. But before doing so, we will consider the significance of the 'great white throne', which John saw in his vision of the Last Judgment.

The Great White Throne

The great white throne spoken of by the apostle John in Revelation chapter 20, is the throne of Christ's majestic glory. (Cf. Matt. 19:28; 25:31). The great white throne is the place from where the Last Judgment will be executed upon all mankind. Since there will be countless multitudes appearing before the throne; and since the Lord Jesus will be attended by myriads of holy angels, then it seems clear that the Last Judgment will take place in the vast heavenly realms. Concerning this glorious throne of judgment, the apostle John says:

Revelation 20:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. (See vv.12-15)

The judgment throne is described as *great* to indicate its majestic glory; or, rather, the majestic glory of the One who sits upon it to judge the world in righteousness. Similarly, the throne is described as *white* to signify the absolute purity, holiness, justice and righteousness of the throne's divine Occupant.

At this point, we should observe the parallel forms of expression used by Daniel and by John in their respective visions. The apostle John portrays the judgment seat as *a great white throne* (Rev. 20:11 NIV), whereas the prophet Daniel portrays the judgment seat as, *His throne...flaming with fire*. (Dan. 7:9 NIV)

In Daniel's vision, the matchless splendour of the One seated on the throne, and the flaming fire associated with the judgment throne itself, signifies essentially the same things as are expressed by the apostle John in his phrase, *a great white throne*: That is, the whiteness of John's vision, and the flaming fire of Daniel's vision, represent the majestic power and glory of the Lord, together with his absolute purity, holiness, justice, integrity and righteousness.

The Great White Throne Judgment

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be set for the Last Judgment. All nations will be gathered before this throne. As the Scripture says:

Revelation 20:11-15

⁽¹¹⁾ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. ⁽¹²⁾ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ⁽¹³⁾ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. ⁽¹⁴⁾ And

death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.
⁽¹⁵⁾ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (See vv.7-10)

At the Lord's second coming, the dead of all generations, and of every tongue, tribe, people and nation on the face of the earth, will be raised to life. Their bodies may have been laid to rest in the earth, in the sea, or in space. Again, their bodies may have been buried, cremated, or perhaps destroyed or lost irretrievably through some disastrous occurrence. Yet, irrespective of any such circumstances, the bodies of all those who have died will be reconstituted and reunited with their immortal souls. Then, together with all those still alive at the second coming of the Lord, they will be brought before the great white throne.

The universal resurrection of the dead will be in fulfilment of the Scripture that says:

Hebrews 9:27

⁽²⁷⁾ And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:
(See vv.23-28)

Thus, the dead of all the ages will stand before the throne of Christ's glory—awaiting the judgment and the sentence.

The Books will be Opened

At this time, the books will be opened. The 'books' are the heavenly records of everything concerning all the individuals who stand in the presence of God's Son. Then, another book will be opened. This book is the book of life. Everyone whom God predestined to salvation and eternal life from before the creation of the world, have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. (Eph. 1:4-5,11; 2 Thess. 2:13-14)

Ephesians 1:4-6

⁽⁴⁾ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁽⁵⁾ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁽⁶⁾ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (See vv.3-10)

Ephesians 1:11

⁽¹¹⁾ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (See vv.12-14)

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: ⁽¹⁴⁾ Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (See vv.15-17)

The dead will be judged according to what is written in the books concerning them: i.e., they will be judged according to their works or deeds. A person's works includes their relationship with, or attitude toward, the Son of God. Works or deeds also include a person's manner of life or conduct; and it includes the motives and intents of his or her heart.

Each person will give an account to him who sits on the throne. They will give an account for everything that they have thought, said or done. (1 Cor. 4:5) They will give an account also for all the things that they have failed to say and do. (Jas. 4:17) Again, they will give an account for every idle or careless word that they have spoken. (Matt. 12:36-37) The secrets of their hearts will be laid bare, and every sin harboured in secret will be exposed. The penetrating eye of the Lord will search out everything, and bring it to light for all to see. Nothing will remain concealed from the eyes on the all-seeing, all-knowing God, or from Jesus Christ his Son. (Matt. 10:26; Rom. 2:16)

Those—and those alone—who, by God’s free and sovereign grace, have had their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, will inherit the kingdom prepared for them. They will reign eternally with Christ in his glory. Those, however, who spurned the grace of God and who have not been clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, will be condemned to eternal separation from Christ and from his kingdom in the lake of fire.

Reward or Punishment

Judgment for Reward

We have shown that it is not unbelievers (the wicked) alone who will appear before the glorious judgment seat of Christ, or of God. Believers, too, will take their stand in the presence of the Almighty. However, in the believer’s case, the judgment will have nothing to do with a sentence of condemnation: for, by the grace of God, believers are no longer under condemnation. (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1) Rather, in their case, it will be a formal and public acquittal before mankind and angels from the sentence of condemnation.

Yet, in another sense, the Lord will indeed pronounce judgment on the believer. He will assess each believer’s life and works, and will approve or disapprove accordingly. In the light of this judgment, each believer will receive a reward or will forfeit part or all of his reward in heaven. (He will not forfeit his salvation, however.) This reward will depend on the believer’s faithfulness to Christ and to his service.

Thus, the Scriptures say:

Romans 14:10b

^(10b) ...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Romans 14:12

⁽¹²⁾ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (See vv.1-13)

1 Corinthians 3:8

⁽⁸⁾ Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. (See vv.1-17)

2 Corinthians 5:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (See vv.6-11)

The Lord will judge each believer according to his deeds or according to how he has lived in this world with respect to God’s will and purposes for his life. These deeds, however, do not in any way contribute toward, or subtract from, the believer’s justification. God has already justified the believer by grace through faith. However, every believer will give an account to God of the deeds done by him or her in the body: i.e., during this life on earth—whether these deeds were good or bad, right or wrong.

On the basis of his works or deeds, the believer will be judged, and will receive a proportionate reward—or may even forfeit much or all his reward. However, he will not forfeit his salvation. Salvation was given to him as a gift from God. It was not bestowed upon the believer because of that person's supposed merits, or even because of his faith. His faith, too, was a gift from God—freely bestowed.

Certainly, it is true, that the believing sinner exercised faith in Christ *freely and willingly*. But he could do so only after the Holy Spirit had convicted him of sin, and convinced him of his great need of redemption. Again, he could exercise faith in Christ freely and willingly only after God had created within him a genuine desire for forgiveness and cleansing, and had led him to call on the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord. All this is the work of the Spirit of God. It cannot be brought about by the will or desire of any man or woman.

Salvation, therefore, is a free and unconditional gift of God's sovereign grace. This gift of salvation is guaranteed to every child of God—not in virtue of the believers' works or faith—but in virtue of the perfect righteousness and the vicarious obedience and atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. The indwelling Holy Spirit—who is present only in the lives of God's redeemed children—is the pledge or guarantee that this salvation will be brought to completion through the Spirit's work of sanctification and, ultimately, glorification.

The Reward of Eternal Blessedness

In addition to the gift of full salvation and eternal life, the Bible speaks repeatedly of future spiritual blessing that is promised to the true and faithful people of God. This blessing has been laid up for us in heaven.

But what is the nature of this promised blessing?

In fact, the promised heavenly blessing is not a single, but a manifold blessing. Firstly, it may be viewed as the fulfilment of God's gift of redeeming grace in the lives of all his children. Under this aspect, the heavenly blessing consists of the completion of our salvation in glory; in the perfection of the saints (glorification), and in the sharing in full in the promised inheritance: that inheritance of which the indwelling Holy Spirit is the pledge or deposit.

Every regenerated and justified child of God has been adopted into the family of God, and has been made an heir in his or her heavenly Father's house. The inheritance grants to the children of God all the rights and privileges of those who are the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. This includes the gift of eternal life in the presence of the Father and the Son. It also includes the end of all sorrow, tears, suffering, pain, anguish, and despair—and, of course, the end of the last enemy, which is death itself. These illustrate just some of the elements of the heavenly blessing promised to God's people.

As can be seen, these blessings are directly associated with God's gift of salvation and eternal life. Since this salvation is a gift from God, it cannot be merited. And since God's call and God's gifts are irrevocable, the believer's calling and election cannot be revoked. (Rom. 11:29) His salvation is eternally secure. (John 10:28)

However, although salvation itself cannot be merited, heavenly rewards can be merited—although these rewards add absolutely nothing to our salvation. That salvation has been given to us as a gift of God's grace—and as gift of God's grace alone. The heavenly rewards, however, are apportioned to the believer for faithful service, or for good deeds rendered in the name of Christ. These are deeds that have issued from a regenerated and sanctified heart, and which are the fruit of a renewed or justified life.

At the judgment seat of Christ, the *unfaithful* believer will forfeit much, most, or all of his anticipated reward. (He will retain his salvation, since this is a gift—not a reward.) He will still benefit, therefore, from the blessings immediately associated with God's gift of salvation, including his glorification and acceptance into heaven. However, he can expect to forfeit other heavenly benefits or blessings, and to occupy a much lower place in the heavenly kingdom. On the other hand, the *faithful* believer will gain everlasting rewards from his Master for the deeds he has done in his Master's name; and for his holy manner of life or conduct while on earth. Those who have suffered for the sake of Christ will reign with

Christ. He who has been faithful over a few things, will find himself made ruler over many things. (Matt. 25:21,23; Luke 19:17)

Clearly, then, the faithful believer will attain to much greater blessedness in heaven than the unfaithful believer. Again, the faithful believer will be given honours, privileges and responsibilities in Christ's everlasting kingdom that will be denied to the unfaithful believer.¹⁴

The Punishment of Eternal Suffering

In marked contrast to the joy, peace and happiness that will be experienced by the righteous in the presence of their loving heavenly Father, the wicked will be forever separated from God and from his eternal love. They will never experience anything other than eternal anguish, sorrow and remorse. In addition, they will be tormented by the pangs of an ever-accusing conscience, and they will be driven to the deepest depths of despair when they consider their utter and unending helplessness and hopelessness. (Luke 16:22-28)

For those who refuse to acknowledge God, and who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, there will be no second chances and no hope of reprieve. While they lived on earth, the sentence of condemnation had already been passed upon them. This sentence was just, fair and righteous: for all mankind deserved the due penalty of their sin. The penalty of sin is death: spiritual, physical, and eternal death. The culmination of this penalty will be the final consignment of the wicked to eternal alienation from God and from all hope of redemption.

This is an awesome and dreadful destiny. So great and enduring are the terrors of hell that it is variously likened to a *fiery furnace*, a *lake of fire*, or a *fiery lake of burning sulphur*. That is, it resembles a perpetually burning lake where one cannot die, but can only suffer for ever and ever. The body—like the soul—will be rendered indestructible (although not incapable of suffering). It will be adapted for eternal existence. No one, therefore, who is cast into 'the lake of fire', can ever be annihilated by its unending torments.

This punishment is a dreadful and fearful reality for all those who refuse to acknowledge God, and Jesus Christ his only Son. This applies to all those who have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and justified through repentance and faith in the Son of God. In view of this terrible prospect, the people of God must do all in their power to persuade those who are perishing, and to warn them in love, and with great concern, of their very great danger.

God is Not Willing that Any Should Perish

The Scriptures tell us that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. However, as it was in the days before the Flood, so it will be in the days before the Last Judgment. In the days of Noah, violence, corruption and wickedness ran rife among mankind. Therefore, when mankind despised God's mercy by refusing to heed God's warnings, God acted in judgment. He destroyed all mankind, together with every air-breathing creature on the earth. The only exceptions were Noah himself, and seven other people in the ark. Of the entire human population living at that time, they alone had believed God's warnings of impending judgment on the world. In his great mercy and grace, God had saved Noah and his immediate family, together with a large number of animals, from the impending Deluge on the earth. (Gen. 6:1-22; 7:21-23; 2 Pet. 3:5-12)

Genesis 6:5

⁽⁵⁾ And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.
(See vv.1-8)

Genesis 6:11-13

¹⁴ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Heaven*, by Gordon Lyons.

⁽¹¹⁾ The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. ⁽¹²⁾ And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

⁽¹³⁾ And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (See vv.9-22; see esp. v.17)

Genesis 7:21-23

⁽²¹⁾ And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: ⁽²²⁾ All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry *land*, died. ⁽²³⁾ And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained *alive*, and they that were with him in the ark. (See vv.1-24)

2 Peter 3:3-7

⁽³⁾ Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, ⁽⁴⁾ And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation. ⁽⁵⁾ For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: ⁽⁶⁾ Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. ⁽⁷⁾ But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (See vv.1-2)

2 Peter 3:8-9

⁽⁸⁾ But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁽⁹⁾ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:10-13

⁽¹⁰⁾ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, ⁽¹²⁾ Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? ⁽¹³⁾ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in a coming day. Violence, corruption and wickedness will again prevail. And, once more—following his gracious warnings—God will act in judgment: this time, however, it will be the Last or Final Judgment. All will perish who have not sought deliverance through God's only appointed means of escape and salvation: i.e., repentance toward God, and faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ. All, however, who turn to God in repentance and faith will be saved from the unending wrath of God upon the finally impenitent.

Epilogue

Let us give thanks unto God and to his Son Jesus Christ that he has loved us with an everlasting love and has purchased our redemption. By grace, and by grace alone, God has saved us from the coming wrath. Let us never forget that others now stand where once we stood—lost, and under the wrath of God. Let us remember them, pray for them, and tell them of God’s promise of eternal salvation to everyone who repents of their sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. For God will never condemn those for whom Christ died, and whom he rose to justify.

This life, at best, is very brief. But the life to come will be a life that has no ending. It will continue throughout the eternal ages—either in the blessed presence of God in heaven, or forever separated from God in the torments of hell.¹⁵

¹⁵ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Hell*, by Gordon Lyons.

