

Various Judgements

by Dr. David R. Nicholas, Th.D., President of Shasta Bible College & Graduate School Although one general judgment into which several other judgments are merged is often assumed by Christian theologians whose Biblical interpretation is influenced by amillennial presuppositions, a thoughtful, inductive study of Scripture reveals a minimum of seven major divine judgments and up to 12 well-defined judgments, depending on where one begins.

Postmillennialism, for example, holds to a general judgment of all people while Historic Premillennialism (nondispensational premillennialism) generally splits the general judgment into two phases, the second coming judgment and the judgment at the end of the tribulation.¹ Two passages of Scripture have been cited to support this position (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15), and it is often concluded that the judgment of the nations, for example, is synonymous with the Great White Throne judgment.

Expressing his doubts as to the legitimacy of this assumption, Chafer cites the account of a young man who when he was asked the identity of the sheep in the judgment of the nations, replied, "the saved people, of course." In response to the question, "and who are the goats?"--he answered, the unsaved people." Then, when asked to identify those called "my brethren," he was speechless. According to Chafer, the young man undertook a more careful study of Scripture and became a "most exceptional and useful Christian."² Thus, the task of identifying and hermeneutically supporting the validity of these well-defined judgments has fallen to dispensational premillennialists. Walvoord, for example, lists seven major divine judgments.³ Hoyt lists twelve categories of final judgment.⁴ Chafer holds that there are eight "well-defined judgments presented by the Word of God."⁵ And Ryrie lists seven future judgments.⁶ However one chooses to describe or enumerate the various judgments God has revealed in His Word, a responsible, literal interpretation of Scripture unequivocally teaches multiple judgment events which take place at different times in God's eschatological program. The following is a breakdown of various judgments generally acknowledged by dispensational premillennialists:

The Judgment at the Cross: According to John 12:31-33, the judgment of the cross qualifies as a final judgment. It resolved the matter of sin (John 19:30); it took place at the end of the ages (Heb. 9:26-28); and it sealed both the doom of Satan and the world. As Chafer puts it, "the believer has been in court, condemned, sentenced, and executed in the Person of his Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:24; Rom. 5:9, 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 10:10, 14-17; 1 Pet. 2:24).⁷ The cross, therefore, stands as the supreme foreshadowing of all final judgment, for it reveals the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 3:25) and sorts humanity into two categories (Jn.3:14-18).

The Judgment at the Rapture: Immediately following the Rapture (the snatching of the saints from the earth), the Church (composed of all true believers) will stand in heaven before what is described in Rom. 14:10 and 2 Cor. 5:10 as the "judgment seat of Christ." The fact that Rev. 19:8 pictures Christ's bride, the Church, as already rewarded when He returns to earth at His second coming indicates that this event will be subsequent to the Rapture but before the Second Coming. The Greek term *bema*, used to describe this judgment, portrays a seat or raised platform where a judge sits to adjudicate a case (e.g. Matt. 27:19; Jn. 19:13; Acts 18:12). The Greeks employed the same term to describe the platform on which a judge or referee sat during the Isthmian or Olympic games at Corinth. Here the winners of the various athletic events received their rewards. No doubt the Apostle Paul had such a scene in mind when he used the phrase, "judgment seat of Christ." Thus, the contexts and the historical background of

the term imply that the bema is for believers a place and time of rewarding rather than punishing. Both Rom. 14:10-12 and 1 Cor. 3:10-4:5 support this view. It is those who have built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (the Church Age believers) who will participate in the "judgment seat." No unsaved people or Old Testament saints will be present.⁸

The Judgments at the Second Coming: a. The judgment of Israel (Jewish people) at the end of the Tribulation, described in Ezek. 20:34-38 and illustrated in Matt. 25:1-30, concerns Jewish survivors who have been regathered from all over the earth to the land of Israel following Christ's victory over His enemies at Armageddon. The parables of the Ten Virgins and the Talents (Matt. 25:1-13; 14-30) illustrate this event.⁹ This judgment will determine who is eligible to enter the Messianic kingdom. The righteous of Israel (those evidencing faith in Christ) will enter the Kingdom to experience God's covenant commitments to the nation.¹⁰ Those who are proven unfaithful to Christ (rebels) will be purged and cast into outer darkness (Matt. 25:30). Because Israel failed in her appointed role as God's light to the Gentile world, God promised that another Light would light the Gentiles (Isa. 60:1-3). While Christ came as the "true light" (Jn. 1:9; 8:12) in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, God will set Israel apart once again during the Tribulation as His light to the world (Rev. 7:1-8). Thus, at Christ's Second Coming, Israel's individual faithfulness to that appointment will be judged.¹¹ These Jewish believers will enter the Kingdom in their earthly bodies and will be among the first to repopulate the earth during the millennial reign of Christ.¹² b. The judgment of the Gentiles will also take place at the end of the Tribulation (Joel 3:1-2; Matt. 25:31-46) at a place near Jerusalem (the Valley of Jehoshaphat). These are the Gentile survivors of the Tribulation who will be judged for their treatment of Israel (probably the 144,000 of Rev. 7) during that terrible period. These may be the "brothers" referenced in Matt. 25:40. The Gentile righteous will be revealed because anyone treating a Jew with kindness, especially during the final 3 ½ years of the Tribulation will do so only out of a redeemed heart.¹³ Since Messiah's Kingdom rule will be over both Israel and the Gentile nations, and since none who are unsaved will enter the Kingdom, there will be a separating of the saved ("sheep") from the unsaved Gentiles ("goats"), who will be assigned to everlasting punishment. This judgment will be subsequent to Israel's judgment, and will be a judgment of individuals from the nations (Matt. 25:32) not a judgment of national entities.¹⁴ c. The judgment of Old Testament and Tribulation saints (Dan. 12:2-3; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 20:4-6) will take place as well at the conclusion of the Tribulation period. Both will be raised from the dead and rewarded. Rev. 20:4-6 describes this as the "first resurrection."¹⁵ Some have found this confusing since many believers will have already been resurrected at the time of the Rapture seven years previous. However, "first resurrection" is a reference to a category of resurrected believers rather than a chronological order.¹⁶ "The idea makes the resurrection of the wicked, which does not occur until after the millennium, the second resurrection, corresponding in name to the 'second death,' as noted in Revelation 20:6,14."¹⁷ Here again, the numerical term is a reference to kind rather than sequence. The "first resurrection," includes those who are raised to life eternal (cf. Jn.5:29). "There are several points in time when believers are raised to life eternal, but all would be considered the 'first resurrection!'"¹⁸

The Judgments Following the Millennial Kingdom: a. The judgment of Satan was sealed eternally at the Cross. However, it is not until after he is loosed for a season at the end of the Christ's millennial reign for a final fling at deception and rebellion that he will be cast into the lake of fire with the beast and the false prophet to suffer eternal torment (Rev. 20:7-10). Although this is Satan's last judgment, other stages of judgment precede his final fate. Midway through the Tribulation he is cast out of heaven and confined to earth (Rev. 12:7-12). Then, at the outset of Christ's Millennial reign he is to be bound and thrown into the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3).¹⁹ b. The judgment of fallen angels will be finalized when they,

along with Satan, are judged by both believers (I Cor. 6:3) and Christ (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10) and cast into the Lake of Fire. Jude 6-7 and 2 Peter 2:4 reveal that prior to this time many of the angels who initially joined Satan in his insurrection (Rev. 12:3,4) were cast into the abyss (Tartarus) for confinement until their final judgment. Others have been at large under the direction of Satan serving as his evil emissaries or demons who war against Christ and His servants (Matt. 12:24-27; Eph. 2:2-3; 6:11-12).²⁰ c. The judgment of the unsaved dead will take place at the conclusion of Christ's millennial reign but before the eternal state begins. At this time the unbelievers of every age will be resurrected to face what is called the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) when they will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:22, 26-29). In contrast to believers who are called the "dead in Christ," these individuals are referred to as "the dead." There will be no need to separate believers from unbelievers because all who stand in judgment here will have chosen during their lifetimes to reject God and His Christ.²¹ While The Book of Life will be opened at the Great White Throne Judgment, it will not list the names of those being judged. Those judged at this time will be judged from the books of works containing incontrovertible evidence that they justly deserve eternal condemnation because of their inability to meet God's standard of holiness. These books may also be used to establish degrees of punishment. The ultimate fate of the unsaved is to be thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is referred to as the "second death."²² d. The judgment of the present heavens and earth is anticipated in several Scripture passages (e.g. Matt. 24:35; Rev. 20:11), while it is specifically described in 2 Pet. 3:10. This destruction is necessary for two reasons: the presence of sin in the universe and the residual effects of the curse placed on creation.²³ While some theologians hold to a renovation of the heavens and earth and others to a recreation, it is clear that the "new" heaven and earth will be a glorious contrast to the first heaven and earth which are to pass away (Rev. 21:1-4).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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End Notes

1 Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), p. 383.

2 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, VII (Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), p. 214.

3 John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), p. 468.

4 Herman A. Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 217-22.

5 Chafer, p. 214-17.

6 Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), pp. 512-16.

7 Chafer, p. 214.

8 Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 271.

9 J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), p. 259.

10 Benware, p. 274.

11 Pentecost, p. 259.

12 Ryrie, p. 514.

13 Benware, pp. 273-4.

14 Pentecost, p. 259.

15 Hoyt, p. 219.

16 Benware, p. 275.

17 Leon Wood, *The Bible and Future Events* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), p. 153.

18 Benware, p. 275.

19 Hoyt, p. 221.

20 Hoyt, p. 221.

21 Ryrie, p. 515.

22 Benware, p. 276.

23 Benware, p. 276.