

WHAT IS GOD'S JUDGMENT?

Part III: "ETERNAL JUDGMENT"

In this third and final installment on God's judgment, we will examine the foundational teaching of "eternal judgment" (Heb. 6:1,2). This teaching is inherently prophetic since it encompasses the future fate of every person who has died outside the faith, which includes, nearly everyone! That is tens of billions of people. Even though that "mustard seed" of which Jesus spoke—the kingdom of God—has grown to include an estimated 2.2 billion Christian-professing people today, there are still 5.3 billion non-believers. And that only includes those living today. What about all the past generations of people, most of whom died outside the faith?

What is God's plan for the vast majority of His human creation which falls outside His grace? Are they doomed like so many churches teach? Have peoples' eternal fate been determined because the missionary had a flat tire and never made it to the remote village, or because they live in a country which stifles the flow of the gospel? That would seem to be the ultimate injustice, and God is a God of ultimate justice. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9).

God has a plan for non-believers, and it is not hellfire, nor is it a second chance. Rather, it is, in fact, a **first** chance. And that plan is "eternal judgment," otherwise known as the Final Judgment. Understanding this basic teaching will certainly bring inspiration and encouragement to many. Long ago God revealed to ancient Israel His plan for the salvation of **all** mankind, and that plan was laid out in the annual feasts which He commanded them to observe (Lev. 23). Or more specifically, it is revealed in the spiritual meaning and application of these feasts. I have written an article entitled "The Feasts of the LORD," which you may wish read at this point.

The third of these six feasts was called the "Feast of Weeks," because God said, "You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks" (Deut. 16:9,10). Another name for this festival, and certainly the most descriptive, was "Feast of Harvest, the Firstfruits" (Ex. 23:16). The firstfruits harvest for ancient Israel was the relatively small springtime harvest of barley and wheat which lasted fifty days culminating in the Feast of Weeks. So this was a harvest festival.

In the New Testament we read about a different type of harvest—the harvest of **people** for salvation. When Jesus sent out seventy of his disciples to preach the gospel, he told them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Lk. 10:2). Also, Jesus said,

"Do you not say, 'There are still four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life..." (Jn. 4:35,36).

The apostle James wrote, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we [Christians] might be a kind of **firstfruits** of his creatures" (Jas. 1:18). The apostle John adds, "...These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (Rev. 14:4). The spiritual harvest of "firstfruits" has been going on for nearly 2,000 years, and yet the number of Christians harvested for salvation from among the billions of mankind is relatively small, just like its physical

counterpart, the spring harvest in Palestine. By deduction we know there cannot be a firstfruits harvest without at least a second one. And so there will be a future time when God sets about to reap a spiritual harvest of the remainder of mankind. This is “eternal judgment.”

In addition to the relatively small spring grain harvest of firstfruits in Palestine, there was the much greater fall harvest of fruits and vegetables. The last of the annual feasts—Feast of Tabernacles—celebrated this harvest. This feast also had another name, the “**Feast of Ingathering**, which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field” (Ex. 23:16; 34:22). So the Feast of Tabernacles/Ingathering is another harvest festival like the Feast of Weeks, which celebrated the firstfruits harvest. Remember, the latter was a relatively small springtime grain harvest which pictured the harvest of people—the saints—for salvation during the church age. But again, you cannot have a first harvest without at least a second one.

The Feast of Ingathering pictures the far larger spiritual harvest in the future when God gathers to Himself all who have died outside the faith, and offers them the chance to be His children. As a Jew, Jesus observed this feast, and he gave us its spiritual meaning.

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this he spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in him would receive...” (Jn. 7:37-39).

In the New Testament the Feast of Firstfruits is called “Pentecost,” when Jesus’ disciples received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). The Feast of Ingathering shows us a time when all mankind will be freely offered the regenerating, eternal-life-giving waters of the Holy Spirit! Many scriptures teach us that the Holy Spirit has the power to make spiritually dead people come to life again, to life that is eternal. Jesus said,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the [spiritually] dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” (Jn. 5:24,25; I Jn. 3:14).

When dead people are brought back to life, that is a resurrection is it not? So the saints may be described as people who have been resurrected from spiritual death to God by the Holy Spirit. Revelation 20:4-6 is an enigmatic passage for many, so let me summarize. The saints are described as kings and priests who reign for a thousand years, symbolic of the relatively long church age. God told the ancient Israelites they were a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6). In like fashion, the New Israel, the collection of the saints, is called a “royal [kingly] priesthood” (I Pet. 2:9).

Now back to the passage of Revelation 20, the saints during the church age who have “passed from death into life”—been resurrected—are said to depict the “**first** resurrection.” Once again, you cannot have a first without a second. As if to preempt the natural question: what happens to everybody else who was not a Christian? the passage parenthetically inserts the words, “but the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” The “rest of the dead” include the vast majority of mankind, who died unsaved. The enormously heartwarming news is they are going to “live again”! Thus this will be the **second** resurrection, to take place soon following Jesus’ return.

This resurrection is further described in verses 11-15, and has come to be called “The Great White Throne Judgment.” It is only a summary, but we read that the unsaved dead will live again, have the scriptures revealed, and be judged accordingly. Jesus often chastised the religious leaders of his day for their unbelief, and on one occasion he warned them, prophesying,

“The men of Nineveh will rise [be resurrected from the dead] in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Mt. 12:41,42).

The implication of Jesus’ words is huge. He said that people who had lived up to a thousand years previously would come back to life with those of his generation to enter the Judgment. Elsewhere Jesus said people who had lived in Sodom and Gomorrah and Tyre and Sidon would also be resurrected with cities of his generation—a two-thousand year span (Mtt. 10:14,15; 11:20-24; Lk. 10:10-16). Clearly these people and cities were representative of **all** generations who died in unbelief. All generations of the unsaved will rise from their graves to be part of one generation in the Final Judgment.

Our minds will go immediately to the logistics of such a scenario. How would tens or scores of billions of people have the space to all live on the earth simultaneously? How can they be fed, clothed, and housed? What if in their previous life they were sick, infirmed, mentally ill, or mentally slow? What if they died of old age? What about the millions of aborted fetuses? We could go on and on with all our questions that seem unanswerable. And more, the Bible is utterly silent on all of them.

To me the most important question is: how will all these people be taught the gospel? First, they should mostly be a ready audience, since they all previously died and are not likely to want to die again. In my imagination I see God begin by saying to all these people, like He did to ancient Israel,

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that...you...may live” (Deut. 30:19).

I also imagine that most will chose life, that they will chose to eat from the Tree of Life, and live—forever!