

Judgment of the Nations
Matthew 25:31—46

Jesus continues to teach the Disciples about what their future holds. We learn a lot about the tribulation and the Second Coming in Matthew 24–25 and now Jesus tells them what will happen to the nations after the Second Coming. Unlike the last two parables Jesus is now telling them directly what to expect going into the Millennial Kingdom. A parable is an allegory that speaks of a particular truth while this teaching of judgment speaks of an actual future event.

As mentioned in previous lessons, by comparing the timetable of Daniel 12:11—12 with the events of Matthew 24:30—31 it appears the Second Coming will occur 30 days after the end of the Tribulation and the reaper angels will be sent out 45 days after that. These reaper angels will gather the unrighteous from the face of the earth and cast them into Hades. Matthew 13:39—43, 47—50 speak of a time when the reaper angels will be sent out to gather up unbelievers from off the face of the earth. This reaping of the unrighteous is seen as happening shortly after the Second Coming at Armageddon (Revelation 14:14—20). When they appear at the Great White Throne at the end of the Millennial Kingdom they will be condemned to Hell for eternity.

The righteous will also be gathered up from the earth and brought into the Kingdom. This Kingdom is a physical kingdom that will be set up in Jerusalem on the earth (Zechariah 14). It is not a spiritualized kingdom of believers, as most believe.

Coming in His glory

The first thing we learn is that this judgment will occur after the Son of Man appears in His glory. The term Son of Man is used approximately 80 times in the Gospels often by Jesus referring to Himself (Matthew 8:20; 9:6). The Son of Man was in the world sowing good seed (Matthew 13:37), is acknowledged by Peter to be the Messiah (Matthew 16:13—16), will be dead in the ground for three days and nights (Matthew 13:37), will rise from the dead (Mark 9:31), will return to this earth with His angels (Matthew 16:27; 24:30; 26:64) and sit on His glorious throne (Matthew 19:28; 25:31). As Stephen was being stoned he was able to look into heaven and see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, a stance indicating that He was about to pour out His wrath on the world (Acts 7:56). In Revelation 14:14 the glorified Son of Man is pictured on a cloud with a sharp sickle in His hand ready to pour out His wrath. Daniel had a vision of the Son of Man descending from heaven to the earth to rule over the people of earth in His eternal Kingdom (Daniel 7:9—10). It should be pretty obvious that this Son of Man is the second Person of the Trinity in His humanity.

The nations

Verse 31 says that after Christ comes to sit on His throne that there will be a judgment of the nations. The Greek word used here is *ethos* (Greek: ἔθνος). *Ethos* is most commonly used in two ways, to mean nations (all nations other than Israel) and Gentiles (all individuals other than Israel). The AV translates this Greek word as nation 64 times and Gentile 93 times. The context of the passage helps determine the proper interpretation.

Most translations use the word nation in this passage but a few see individuals in view here. The Amplified Version says that all the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate people one from another. The NIV and Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament also agrees with this translation.

In defense of using the word nation, we know Israel was judged as a nation for embracing idols. This led to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities of northern and southern Israel. All people in Israel, righteous and unrighteous, were affected. There were also many heathen nations who were judged by God to be worthy of complete destruction as carried out by Israel.

However, this judgment is different than physically destroying an ungodly nation. The destruction here is eternal damnation. It's hard to believe that a whole nation not helping Israel in her time of need during the Tribulation will be utterly condemned. This means if the United States Congress votes to withhold aid to Israel that all those in this nation at the end of the age will be condemned to an eternity in hell.

This argument also works the other way. If a nation steps up to aid Israel then the whole country will be able to enter the Kingdom. The vilest of sinners could then be allowed into the Kingdom because their country helped to sustain Israel during the Tribulation. This model to determine who is worthy of eternal life and death does not seem to have biblical support. Even when God dealt with Israel harshly as a nation there were individuals who were obedient to Him and worthy of an eternity with Him (think prophets).

The solution is to understand this to be a judgment of Gentiles. Individuals will be judged according to what they have done and how they have treated Israel. This would be in accordance of Genesis 12:3, those who bless Israel will be blessed while those who curse Israel will themselves be cursed.

Saved by works?

This passage is often used to show that salvation comes through works. Those who do good works are rewarded with entrance into the Kingdom while those who do not do good works are condemned. Those who see it this way miss one very important word in verses 37 and 46. Those who are rewarded with the Kingdom are called the righteous. These people were already righteous and because they were, they did the good works. This would be in accordance with James 2:14—26. Works is a demonstration of their faith, not a pathway to salvation. According to Paul Sadler:

The *sheep* in this context are those individuals who treated Israel favorably during the time of Jacob's trouble. These are the righteous from among the nations who fed, clothed and housed God's chosen ones in their hour of trial. Paul M. Sadler, *The Triumph of His Grace* Page 40.

Sheep

This is the only time that Gentiles are called sheep in Scripture. These are believers who will help Israel get through the Tribulation and are being rewarded for their good works. It's interesting that they were not aware that their treatment of Israel is equated to how they treated the King, Jesus Christ. It's possible that the other sheep of John 10:16 refer to these Gentile believers who helped sustain Israel.

Goats

There are only two categories of people, those who believe (the righteous) and those who don't believe (the unrighteous). These unbelieving goat individuals will have believed the antichrist to be Israel's Messiah and will reject aiding the Little Flock of believers. Instead of helping them, they will work to eliminate them. This same concept is found in Acts 9 as Saul (Paul) was on his way to Damascus. Saul thought he was doing the Lord's work by eradicating those who worshiped Jesus as God. Jesus Christ came to him in a bright light and booming voice asking Saul why he was persecuting Him. Persecuting these Kingdom believers was tantamount to persecuting God.

Multiple judgments

There are actually a number of judgments that will take place after the Tribulation. The Tribulation is a time of judgment for Israel. It is compared to a refiner's fire that purifies Israel by separating unbelievers from the believers (Ezekiel 22:17—22; Malachi 3:2—5). This affects the living Israelite during the Tribulation, not those who have died in previous generations. In the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22) Israel was preparing to be wedded to Christ. Those who are not clothed in proper wedding clothes will be removed from the earth leaving only the righteous. This is similar to the judgment of the sheep and goats.

Many see only one judgment at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11—15). They lump the Bema Seat Judgment for the Body of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) with the sheep and goats judgment. The GWT judgment is about works (Revelation 20:12), judging those who have died and those in Hades. They will all be sent to the Lake of Fire (verse 14).

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