

The Judgment, Where and When?

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WE OFTEN THINK of God's judgment day as a time when we, along with every other person, must stand before the throne to answer for the way we have lived.

Actually the Bible plainly teaches that the judgment has been taking place for a number of years and is going on right this minute in heaven! That is an amazing statement, yet the Scriptures declare it to be true. "He [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31). God has had a specific time scheduled for the judgment. He appointed a particular time far in advance. But how do we know when that time of judgment began, or if indeed it has yet begun?

Almost at the very end of the Bible, Jesus announces, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). If Jesus brings each man's appropriate reward with Him at His return, then obviously a work of judgment must precede the Second Coming of Jesus. God must investigate the case of each human being prior to the appearing of Christ to determine whether he shall receive eternal life or eternal death.

The Word of God everywhere pictures a clear cut distinction between the saved and the lost at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Judgment will have decided the destiny of all by that time (see John 5:28, 29; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). The righteous dead rise in immortality and glory at the appearing of Jesus, while the wicked dead do not come to life to receive their final punishment until a thousand years later (see Revelation 20:46).

The judgment that decides who will be saved and who will be lost must occur before the resurrection of the righteous when Jesus comes. Otherwise, saints and sinners alike would be raised together and separated after the Second Coming. But God's Word declares unmistakably that those who come up in the first resurrection in connection with Jesus' appearing have already been judged worthy of eternal life. This is the purpose of the investigative phase of the judgment.

Do we know when this judgment by God began, or if it has begun? Does the Bible help us to know the date God planned for the judgment? Yes, the Bible gives us the exact time of the judgment.

Daniel received a number of visions from God dealing with events to happen in the last days, as well as many other items of importance. In chapter 8 Daniel records a vision God gave him of a power which would cause desolation to God's people and to truth.

Then he heard a voice asking how long this dismal state of affairs would continue, and the answer came back, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Daniel 8:14).

"The judgment goes on in heaven while men live out their lives on earth. Divine love and intelligence constantly judge our love for Him."

What does "cleansing the sanctuary" mean? Who cleanses it, and how is it cleansed? In the ceremonial services which God gave to His Old Testament people, He foreshadowed the plan of salvation in object lessons so the people could grasp by faith what would happen in reality when the Messiah came. The sanctuary was a beautiful building divided into two rooms-the holy place and the most holy place. When a man sinned in Old Testament times, he brought a lamb to the sanctuary courtyard. There he placed his hand on the animal's head, confessed his sin, and with his own hand killed the innocent sacrifice. This symbolized the transfer of his sin to the Lamb of God who would die to save all men.

Then the priest (who also represented Jesus) caught some of the blood in a little bowl and either applied it to the corners of the altar or carried it into the first room of the sanctuary-the holy place-where he sprinkled it seven times upon the curtain which separated the two rooms. This symbolized the transfer of the sin to the sanctuary itself. You can read about this in Leviticus 4:27-35.

Day after day, throughout the year, the peoples' sins passed symbolically from the sinner to the sacrifice to the sanctuary.

There they accumulated figuratively until the tenth day of the seventh month. On that day, the day of atonement, a solemn ceremony represented God's final eradication of sin by cleansing the sanctuary of its year's total of transgressions.

The people realized that this was a time of judgment in which their lives passed in review before God and a final disposition was made of their sins. God said, "In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, for on that-day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. And he shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary" (Leviticus 16:29-33).

The person who did not examine his life and confess his sins before God on this solemn day was rejected by God as unrepentant, and he remained unforgiven.

This yearly service represented what God will do once at the end of time in completely and finally obliterating sin. The day of atonement represented the judgment of the entire world, which determines who has confessed his sins, accepting Jesus' blood, and who has not.

So when God told Daniel that after two thousand three hundred days the sanctuary should be cleansed, He was pinpointing the time of judgment. Scholars have recognized for centuries that in Bible prophecy one day represents one year of actual time (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). The 2300 days of the prophecy, then, would amount to 2300 actual years. God told Daniel that the cleansing of the sanctuary, the judgment, would begin after those years had ended. If we can discover when this time period begins, we can calculate where it ends-the time the judgment begins.

Daniel 9:23-25 gives us the answer. An angel sent from God informed Daniel: -Understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.... Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks." (Daniel 9:23-25).

The angel explained to Daniel the portion of the prophecy which he did not understand-the time element. Seventy weeks (490 days or actual years) would be determined (or "cut off") from the 2300 years to apply specifically to the Jewish people. The 2300-day prophecy must begin, therefore, with the seventy weeks at the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (verse 25). Artaxerxes issued this decree to restore Jerusalem in 457 BC. So 2300 years from 457 BC brings us to AD 1844, when the sanctuary would be cleansed.

We can be sure our dates are correct by checking them with the life of Jesus. Daniel 9:25 declares that 69 weeks or 483 years would pass from the commandment to restore Jerusalem until Messiah should come. In AD 27, exactly 483 years following 457 BC, Jesus received baptism from John, and this marked the beginning of His ministry. He went about preaching, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1:15). What time was fulfilled? The prophetic yardstick of Daniel 9:25. We can be sure that the sanctuary began to be cleansed in 1844, just as God said it would be.

The Old Testament sanctuary of God obviously no longer existed in 1844, since the Romans destroyed it completely in AD 70.

The sanctuary which began to be cleansed in 1844 was the sanctuary of God in heaven. We read: "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord." "For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf- (Hebrews 8:1, 2; 9:24, RSV).

The Book of Hebrews points out clearly that the sanctuary of Old Testament days served only as a copy, or model, of the sanctuary in heaven. The Old Testament services and ceremonies fore-shadowed in symbols what Jesus Christ does in reality when He deals with sin (see Hebrews 8:1-6; 9:1-28).

So the day of atonement, which in symbol cleansed the earthly sanctuary of sin by a work of judgment, represents the actual cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary by Jesus our High Priest. He began that work of judgment in 1844, and it has continued ever since.

In God's judgment our lives lie open to intimate inspection. Heaven keeps accurate records of every person's life. The things we do (or don't do), the words we speak, and the things we think are all recorded by God. Jesus said, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). Nothing can remain hidden from God. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil- (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

God has a book of life (Revelation 20:12) in which He records the name of each person who accepts Jesus. The blood of the Savior covers that person's sin when he gives himself to the Master, and his name appears in the book of life. God also keeps a continuous record of his life, whether he has remained faithful to his commitment to Jesus or not.

Of course, God doesn't need books to remind Him who has accepted Christ. He doesn't need to look up our record to determine how we stand before Him. God knows us intimately, personally. He is acquainted with every emotion and unspoken desire. But for the

satisfaction of the vast numbers of created beings throughout the universe, God maintains a clear record of each individual's life. After the sin problem has ended and the saved begin eternity with God, no questions will ever arise concerning God's justice or His love. The records are available for anyone to examine and satisfy himself that God has dealt fairly and compassionately with every case.

You see, the judgment goes on in heaven while men live out their lives on earth. We do not appear personally, physically, before the throne of God to answer for our lives. Divine love and intelligence constantly judge our love and service for Him.

Only those who reject God's offer of pardon will have to stand before God's throne to hear the judgment pronounced upon them. Speaking of the resurrection of the wicked dead at the close of the millennium, the apostle John writes: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened ... and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:12-15).

God pleads with us in every way He knows to avoid facing the judgment of condemnation: "Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah. 1:18).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea and separate them from us as far as the east is from the west (Micah 7:19; Psalm 103:12). Our heavenly Father longs to save us. His judgment is not to destroy us but to vindicate us through the blood of Jesus.

The only reason we will have to stand before God's judgment throne and hear the sentence of everlasting death pronounced upon us is if we refuse to allow God to forgive our sins and give us the righteousness of Jesus.

Soon the judgment will come to an end. Christ will rise and proclaim, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." (Revelation 22:11).

At that point each man's destiny will be fixed forever. Each will have decided for or against life. God's judgment in your case can only reflect the choice that you have made. Choose life now!

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