

Judgment of the Nations

By Rich Jacobs, MD

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not I take care of You?' Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. Matthew 25:31-46, NASB

Matthew 25:31-46, is sometimes misunderstood by Christians. This lesson is designed to explore what our Lord was teaching in these passages.

1. Re-read **Matthew 25:31-46**, above. Pay close attention to the underlined verses.
 - a. Notice that these events take place when Jesus comes again, accompanied by all His holy angels. These are definitely end-times events.
 - b. When Christ returns, it will be to establish His earthly kingdom. The thousand years of His earthly rule is called the Millennium.
 - c. Notice that Christ will assemble the surviving remnants of the nations to His throne. This is the time of their judgment. There is no requirement that all these nations appear before Christ for judgment simultaneously.
 - i. Only two verdicts will be rendered. Some nations will be judged as "sheep". These will be placed at the right hand of the Lord, a place of favor. The other nations will be judged as "goats", to be placed at Christ's left hand, a place of disfavor.

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- ii. Only two sentences will be rendered as a result of these verdicts. “Sheep” will be allowed to remain in Christ’s earthly kingdom during His Millennial reign. Goats will be cast into perdition with Satan, Antichrist, the False Prophet, and the demons.
- d. The basis for the verdicts and the sentences is how these nations treated God’s people during the 70th Week of Daniel.
 - i. Notice that Christ condemns the nations that were cruel or indifferent to His “brothers”. He praises and blesses those who were kind and helpful to His “brothers”. Jesus calls everyone who believes in Him and accepts Him as Lord as brothers (“brethren”). Examples of this are shown, below.

*Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to My **brethren** to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.” Matthew 28:10, NASB*

*Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My **brethren** and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’” John 20:17, NASB*

*For both He who sanctifies (i.e. Christ) and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them **brethren** . . . Hebrews 2:11, NASB*

- ii. During the Great Tribulation, many nations will collaborate with Antichrist to persecute believers. Many believers will be martyred during this time. The godly remnant of Israel also will be a target of persecution. Apparently, some nations actively collaborate with Antichrist while other nations seek to help believers. When Christ returns, the nations will be judged on this basis.
2. The Judgment of the Nations is prophesied in other parts of the Bible. Consider these scripture verses.

*You have **rebuked the nations**, You have **destroyed the wicked**; You have **blotted out their name forever** and ever. Arise, O LORD, do not let man prevail; Let the nations be judged before You. Psalm 9:19, NASB*

*You, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, **awake to punish all the nations**; do not be gracious to any who are treacherous in iniquity. Selah. Psalm 59:3, NASB*

*He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, even **He who teaches man knowledge**? Psalm 94:10, NASB*

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*Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And **He will judge between the nations**, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and **never again will they learn war**. Isaiah 2:2, 3, NASB*

3. It is worth noting that God judges both the individual and entire groups of individuals, such as nations. This is revealed elsewhere in the Bible. For example, the entire book of **Obadiah** pronounces a divine adverse judgment on the nation of Edom for its hostility towards Israel!
4. Theologic controversy associated with **Matthew 25:31-46**. Some of these are explored, below.
 - a. **Objection**: Some people argue that this eschatological interpretation of these verses implies salvation through works rather than by grace.
 - i. These verses appear to be about those who will become citizens in Christ's earthly kingdom, not about eternal salvation (although the "goats" do inherit eternal perdition).
 - (1) It seems logical to conclude the sheep were not Christians before the resurrection and rapture of the saints, during the 70th Week of Daniel. Nor were they counted among the remnant of Israel, since the "nations" usually refers to the gentiles. The "sheep verdict" appears to grant additional grace to end-times gentile unbelievers, based on their mercy and graciousness for persecuted saints during the Great Tribulation (see **Matthew 7:1, 2**).
 - (2) The sheep citizens of Christ's earthly kingdom still will experience death, although this will be an era of great blessing. Also, apparently not everyone in Christ's kingdom secures God's blessings. Speaking of life during the Lord's earthly reign, the prophet Isaiah wrote the following.

*No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth **will die** at the age of one hundred and the bone who does not reach the age of one hundred **will be thought accursed**. Isaiah 65:20, NASB*

- ii. There is no claim that goats become sheep, as all sheep are born sheep. Instead, sheep merely behave as sheep and this allows them to inherit the kingdom. This may be a good example of how both predetermination and faithfulness are operative together in salvation.

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- b. Objection: These passages are really about the final judgment, not about a separate judgment of nations.
 - i. The Judgment of the Nations follows the Great Tribulation, the resurrection and rapture of the saints, and the second coming of Christ in the Lord's narrative of the chronology of end time events, as recorded in **Matthew 24** and **25**. The Judgment of the Nations seems to be a separate event that follows these events in the Lord's narrative, which ends in eternal judgment.
 - ii. **Revelation** outlines a sequence of end-times events that corresponds to the sequence outlined by the Lord in **Matthew 24** and **25**. The Great Tribulation (**Revelation 6:9, 10**), the resurrection and the rapture (**Revelation 6:12-17; 7:9-17**) all precede establishing the Kingdom of Christ on earth (**Revelation 11:15ff**) and the wedding supper of the Lamb (**Revelation 19:9**). The Judgment of the Nations precedes the wedding supper of the Lord, but is followed by the Great White Judgment Throne (**Revelation 20:11-15**) and the New Creation (**Revelation 21, 22**), which take place after the Millennium. Thus, the final judgment appears to be a separate events from the Judgment of the Nations.
- c. Objection: These passages merely set the Lord's expectations for believers. They do not represent a separate judgment.
 - i. While these passages frequently are used by preachers to exhort Christians to help and serve others, including the "least of these", they clearly speak about the judgment of nations. The context in **Matthew 24** and **25**, also is eschatological.
 - ii. It is not inappropriate to use these passages to exhort saints in charity and service -- something God expects from believers and unbelievers alike.

