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The Resurrections and Judgments

We have discussed the resurrections and judgments as they appear in the sequence of future events; however, it's helpful to trace these related subjects through the timeline, so we have a clear understanding of when each event takes place and its significance. This is especially true since there are two resurrections (one of which occurs in two phases), and several judgments.

The Resurrections

The truth of the resurrection was revealed very early, how early we are not sure, but it appears in some of the first writings of the Old Testament. The book of Job, the events of which seem to date from pre-Mosaic times, has this to say concerning the resurrection:

[19:25-27] I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

David mentioned the resurrection in Psalm 16, a messianic psalm, when he said,

[vv. 9-10] Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

There are several other references to the resurrection in the Old Testament (*cf.* Isa. 25:8; Ezek 37:1-14; Dan. 12:2,13; Hos. 13:14). One of the clearest references to resurrection in the Old Testament is in Daniel 12:2, where an angel confirmed the truth of the resurrection to Daniel.

[12:2] "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

Even though the teaching of the resurrection is introduced in the Old Testament, there is amazingly little said concerning this truth. It was not until the New Testament that many details concerning the resurrection were revealed. Jesus spoke of the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-32; Lk. 14:14; 20:35-38; Jn. 5:21-29; 6:39-54; 11:23-25; 14:19), but revealed few new details concerning it. His teaching on this subject resulted in conflict with the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-32, *cf.* Mk. 12:18-27; Lk. 20:27-37). Jesus taught that resurrected saints will share at least two characteristics in common with the angels: they will not marry, and they will not die (Lk. 20:35-38). He also said it would be His voice that will call the dead from their graves (Jn. 5:21-29). Without a doubt, Jesus' most definitive teaching on the resurrection was accomplished through His own resurrection from the dead. As Paul later observed, Christ is "the firstfruits" of what is to come *cf.*, 1 Cor. 15:23 (true both chronologically and prototypically).

In the New Testament the two main sources of detailed information on the resurrection are Paul and John. Paul dealt with the resurrection more extensively than any other biblical writer (Rom. 4:16-21; 8:10-23; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12-57; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:1-5; Phil. 3:10-21; 1 Thess. 4:14-16; 2 Tim. 1:10; 2:18). He clearly taught the resurrection of the physical body, not a mere "spiritual" or "mystical" event (Rom. 8:10-23). According to Paul, the resurrection is the consummation of our redemption and adoption as sons (Rom. 8:23). To deny the resurrection of the body is to deny the faith (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Apart from the resurrection there can be no redemption, for in that case not even Christ would have been raised, and those who have fallen asleep have utterly perished. Indeed, apart from the resurrection it would be the final lot of all men to perish (1 Cor. 15:17-19). Paul emphasized that the resurrection body, while a genuine physical body, will differ from the present body in ways that are not apparent to us now (1 Cor. 15:35-50). What we do know is the redeemed will bear the likeness of the resurrected Christ, a point that John also made (1 Jn. 3:2). Paul was the only New Testament writer

to make a connection between the resurrection and the rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15:51-57; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:13-17). He says in 1 Corinthians:

[15:51-55] Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead in Christ will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where O death, is your sting?”

John, in Revelation, adds the final details to the New Testament teaching on the resurrection. It was revealed to John that the first resurrection – the resurrection of the righteous – is to be completed at the beginning of the millennium (Rev. 20:4), and that the second resurrection – the resurrection of the unrighteous – will not occur until after the millennium, immediately prior to the final judgment (Rev. 20:5).

The first resurrection (the redeemed)

The first resurrection is the resurrection of the redeemed (Rev. 20:5) and will occur in two phases. The first phase occurs at the rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), and the second phase occurs a short time later at the beginning of the millennium (Rev. 20:4). The concept of a two-phase resurrection should not seem strange; some things pictured in the Old Testament as one event actually work out to be two distinct events; for instance, the coming of Christ was viewed as a singular event in the Old Testament (Isa. 61:1-3), but we see from our perspective in history that it involves two comings (His first advent to die for sin, and His second advent to rule). One item of special interest is that at the rapture, those believers who are alive will have their bodies transformed into a “glorified” state without having to pass through death. This is referred to as the “translation,” or “transformation” since only the dead can be resurrected. Paul uses the term “changed” (Gr.

allosso) in 1 Corinthians 15:51 in reference to the glorification of living believers at the rapture. Whether any differences exist between resurrected and transformed bodies we cannot say. Traditionally, students of the Bible have viewed them as equivalent.

The question is sometimes raised as to whether saints living in their natural bodies during the millennium will be subject to death, and if so, when they will be resurrected. Scripture is not clear on this point, and any answer given must necessarily be inferred. Premillennialists generally hold that believers will not die during the millennium. This is the simplest solution to the problem, since there is no mention of a resurrection of the righteous after the resurrection at the beginning of the millennium. However, the fact that no subsequent resurrection is mentioned is not conclusive proof that there will not be one – though such an important omission seems unlikely. Another related question concerns when the believers in the millennium receive “glorified” bodies. The Scripture is silent on this too, except we know their bodies must be transformed in order for them to be prepared for eternity (1 Cor. 15:35-50). Perhaps their physical transformation occurs in the moment prior to the dissolving of the present heavens and earth, at the end of the millennium.

The second resurrection (the unredeemed)

The second resurrection, unlike the first, does not occur in phases, rather it is a singular event. This resurrection will occur in eternity, after the present heavens and earth have been dissolved, and before the new heavens and earth are created (Rev. 20:11-15). All of the unrighteous dead will be raised in bodies suited to their eternal abode in the Lake of Fire. John describes this event in Revelation.

[20:11-15] Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he

had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

The Judgments

There are several judgments to be considered and we must be careful not to confuse them, as they occur at different times, involve different people, and have differing purposes.

The judgment of the church

The church's judgment (1 Cor. 3:10-17; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10-12) is sometimes referred to as the "bema seat" (Gr. *bema* = the place at which a tribunal is held). Since this judgment cannot take place prior to the rapture of the church, and would certainly seem to precede the marriage of the church to Christ, it would appear that it must occur in Heaven shortly after the rapture. This is not a judgment to determine one's eternal destiny, but rather an examination of one's stewardship of the gifts, abilities, and opportunities given each church-age believer by God (1 Cor. 3:14). Paul issues this general, yet sober warning:

[Rom. 14:10-12] ...For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

The outcome of this judgment will be rewards, or the lack thereof. Paul says in 1 Corinthians,

[3:10-15] By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built

survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Because of the emphasis usually placed on forgiveness in the New Testament, Christians sometimes fail to consider that the saved will be judged. Even though the issue will be faithfulness, rather than eternal salvation, nevertheless to the one who considers this, it ought to be a sobering thought. Many believers refuse to think about this because they naively assume that in Heaven everyone will have equal status and that rewards are simply going to be returned to God anyway—so it makes little difference how much reward one receives. Such thinking is grossly unbiblical. Paul is very clear that those who have no reward will be saved, but “so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). The picture is that of a person who escapes from a burning building with nothing but his life. Paul says, “*he will suffer loss.*” As to the notion that rewards will be returned to Christ, that too is unfounded. This idea is based upon an erroneous interpretation of Revelation 4:10—that the twelve elders pictured there represent the church is highly conjectural—and besides, it does not say they give up their rewards, only that as often as the living creatures described in vv. 8-9 give glory to God, these elders will place their crowns before the throne of God. To be sure, everyone who receives a reward in Heaven will be fully aware that they could have done nothing apart from divine enabling; nevertheless, these are eternal rewards, and to suggest that somehow they will not matter in Heaven is to disparage the way in which God has chosen to deal with His people. As to everyone being of equal status in Heaven, that too is unfounded. In Matthew 20:20-23 we read where the mother of James and John came with her sons and asked Jesus to issue a command that in His kingdom one of these two men would sit on Jesus’ right, and the other on His left. Notice that Jesus did not respond by telling her that there are no such places of honor in the kingdom, He simply said, those positions are for “*those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.*”

Other judgments of believers

While no other judgments of believers are specifically referred to within the framework of future prophecy, it would seem to be consistent with the general principles of Scripture that every re-

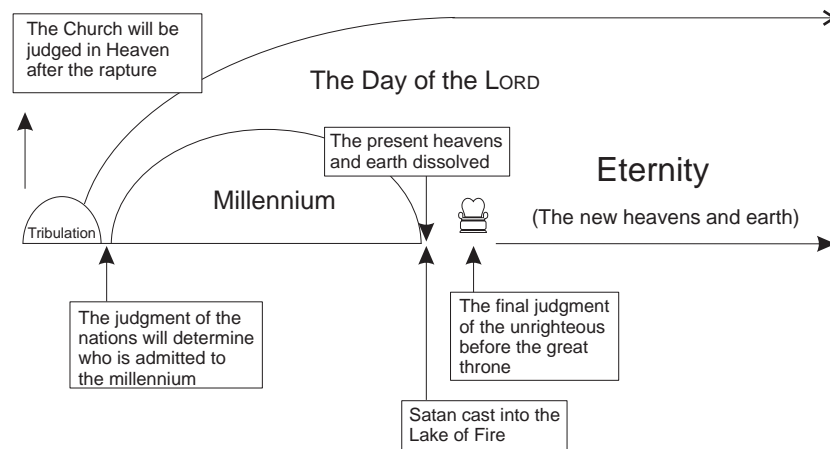


Figure 10.1 The Judgments

deemed person will, at some time, give an account of himself or herself before God. After all, if each believer is to be rewarded, each believer's life must be examined. We may suppose some sort of judgment for the Old Testament and tribulation saints, as well as those saved during the millennium, though when these judgments take place is not stated in Scripture.

The judgment of the nations

The judgment of the nations occurs during the interlude between the tribulation and the millennium (Matt. 25:31-46 *cf.* Lk. 13:22-28). The purpose of this judgment is to determine who is qualified, by way of redemption, to enter into the millennial kingdom. Since the redeemed and the unredeemed will be gathered into their respective groups by the angels at the second coming (Matt. 13:29,40,47-49; 24:31), it will not be necessary to examine each individual to see into which category they fall. Only the redeemed will be allowed to enter the kingdom; the unredeemed will be banished to Hades (Sheol) to await their final judgment and ultimate consignment to the Lake of Fire (Hell).

The final judgment of the unredeemed

The final judgment of the unrighteous will take place in eternity, after the present heavens and earth have been dissolved, but before the new heavens and earth are created. At this judgment, the unredeemed people from all human history will stand before God to be judged. This is sometimes referred to as "the great white throne judgment" (*cf.* Rev. 20:11-15). The proceedings are geared toward demonstrating two facts: 1) that the subject is a sinner deserving of eternal damnation, and 2) that the sinner is not redeemed, and is therefore liable for his own punishment. In order to make these determinations, two sets of books will be consulted. In one set of books are recorded the deeds of each person. In the other book – the Book of Life – are recorded the names of all the redeemed. This judgment is somewhat of a formality, since every person present is both a sinner and unsaved. Nevertheless, the evidence presented at this judgment will demonstrate the righteousness of God's sentence upon the condemned, and the degree of their eternal punishment.