

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XLVIII

JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED

Whatever of uncertainty the present human limitations in understanding may cast over the difference which now exists between the saved and the unsaved, from the Scriptures it is obvious that in their destinies these two classes are widely separated. While, as to their bodies, all who have died are now in their graves, the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. These are the words of Christ, and He goes on to say: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [condemnation]" (John 5:25, 28, 29).

From this Scripture it is clear that all -- both good and evil -- are to be raised from the dead at the command of the Son of God, and while, at the present time, there is some difference to be observed between the saved and the lost, it is not until the resurrection that men find themselves separated into an unalterable two-fold classification with eternal destinies assigned which are removed from each other as Heaven is removed from hell.

The fact that Christ, when speaking of the universality of the resurrection and the two classes to be raised, omitted any reference to the relative time of resurrection for each group, affords no basis for the prevalent theory that there is to be but one general and simultaneous resurrection. Confusion here is needless since other Scriptures supply the time element and without the slightest contradiction. The saved of this and past ages will be raised at the coming of Christ to receive His own (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17). This resurrection, which evidently is extended in point of time to include those who are saved and who die during the Tribulation (Rev. 20:4, 5), is termed "the first resurrection," and in distinction to this it is said that the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished. Thus it is revealed that the first resurrection precedes, and the final resurrection follows, the millennial kingdom on the earth. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). That all of the dead are not raised at the first resurrection is clearly stated in the Bible (1 Cor. 15:24; Phil. 3:11, margin; 1 Thess. 4:17).

Having declared the fact of the first resurrection, the Scriptures go on to state that "the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:5), and it is this company of the dead, both small and great, who, having been raised from the dead, shall stand before the Great White Throne to be judged according to their works (Rev. 20:11-15). Included in this company are all the people of every dispensation who were not raised in the first resurrection. The Scriptures are silent as to the divine method of receiving the saints of the kingdom into their eternal reward. It is obvious that none of these are found standing before the Great White Throne; and all who stand there are said to pass into their unutterable doom.

At this judgment the books are opened in which are recorded the evil works of the lost. In like manner another book is opened which is the book of life: not that any standing there will be found written therein; but rather to give full proof that none are written therein. Having been judged, this unnumbered throng are dismissed into the lake of fire, which is the second death, and the word death here, as in all the Scriptures, does not mean a cessation of existence. Physical death is a separation of soul and spirit from the body, while spiritual death is a separation of soul and spirit from God. The second death means continued and conscious existence separated from God in what is termed a "lake of fire." It is implied that the Beast and the False Prophet who are living men are alive and conscious in this "lake of fire," though they were cast therein a thousand years before (Rev. 19:20; 20:10).

In this judgment, the wicked are subject to various degrees of retribution since they are judged according to their works. In other ages human works have more directly related men to God; but in the present age both that which is good and that which is evil in the sight of God has been crystallized into one issue. Following the great event of Christ's death for the sin of the world, there could be but one question remaining -- Do men believe the thing which God has wrought for them? Christ stated: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29), and again, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

The rejection of Christ is the all-inclusive sin. It not only does "despite" to the Spirit of grace, rejecting the infinite love of God (Heb. 10:29); but, if it were possible, the Christ rejecter would take his sin off from the Lamb of God and lay it back upon himself to his eternal condemnation.

As to the destiny of the heathen to whom no knowledge of the Gospel has come, Scripture again is silent, except that it teaches that all men are lost who do not believe on Christ. Two features characterize this age:

(1) The Gospel is to be preached to every creature, and

(2) those to whom it is preached are to be judged according to their reception of it. The woeful failure of the children of God to take the Gospel to every creature has created a condition for which Scripture does not and could not provide a revelation. However, it is to be concluded that the heathen are eternally lost apart from the knowledge of divine grace, since the importance of preaching the Gospel to them is stressed by Christ beyond any other issue in this age.

If the doctrine of the judgment of the wicked is to be understood, the terms employed in the Scriptures to describe the final state of the lost should be carefully considered.

1. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *sheol* (sometimes translated "grave," "pit," and "hell"), like the New Testament Greek word *hades* (translated "hell," and "grave"), refers to the place of departed spirits, and three shades of meaning are giving to it: (1) The grave where activity ceases (Psa. 88:3); (2) The end of life so far as mere human knowledge can go (Eccles. 9:5, 10); (3) A place of conscious sorrow (2 Sam. 22:6; Psa. 9:17; 18:5; 116:3).

2. In the New Testament the Greek words *geenna*, *hades*, and *tartaros* are translated "hell." *Geenna* is a name which speaks of human sacrifice and suffering; *hades* indicates the place of departed spirits; and *tartaros* refers to the lowest abyss, and to it the wicked spirits are consigned (2 Pet. 2:4).

Additional English words found in the New Testament are: (1) "perdition," meaning utter loss and ruin; (2) "damnation," which is usually more accurately translated judgment, or condemnation; (3) "torment," which speaks of physical pain (Luke 16:28); "second death," which is the same as the "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14); "everlasting fire" (Matt. 18:8); and "everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25:46). The Greek word for "everlasting" -- more often translated "eternal" -- is *aionios*, and may be used to indicate the ages of time, implying a time of termination; but this word is almost universally used in the New Testament to express that which is eternal. The new life which the believer has received is forty-seven times said to be "eternal" or "everlasting." We read of the "eternal Spirit," the "everlasting God," "eternal salvation," "eternal redemption," "eternal glory," "everlasting kingdom," and the "everlasting gospel." Seven times this word is used in connection with the destiny of the wicked (Matt. 18:8; 25:41, 46; Mark 3:29; 2 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 6:2; Jude 1:7). Some are asserting that *aionios* is limited as to duration when referring to the suffering of the lost; but, if this were true, every promise for the believer and the very existence of God would be limited as well.

Men are pleased to receive the Bible revelation concerning Heaven, but do not heed its warning regarding hell. Human sentiment, opinion, and reason are valueless concerning these eternal

issues. It is wisdom to heed the voice of the Son of God, and He more than any other has stressed the woes of the lost (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). If eternal punishment cannot be comprehended, it should be remembered that infinite holiness and the sin by which infinite holiness is outraged are equally unmeasurable by the human mind. God is not revealed as one who causes good people to suffer in hell; but He is revealed as one who at infinite cost has wrought to the end that sinners, believing in Christ, may not perish, but have everlasting life.

QUESTIONS

1. Are all, both saved and unsaved, to be raised from the dead?
2. When does the real difference between these two classes especially appear?
3. Is there grounds for believing in but one general resurrection?
4. a. What is meant by "the first resurrection"?
 - b. When does it occur?
 - c. Who are included in this resurrection?
 - d. Who are excluded?
5. a. When are the wicked dead to be raised?
 - b. Into what judgment will they go?
6. a. What is the result of this judgment?
 - b. Define the meaning of "second death."
7. a. What is the basis of man's relation to God in this age?
 - b. Describe the wickedness of rejecting Christ.
8. What two features were to characterize this age?
9. What is the state of the heathen world?
10. What are the three shades of meaning of the words *sheol* and *hades*?
11. Name and define the words used in the New Testament to describe the condition of the lost.
12. Why do we believe that the word *aionios* means eternal as to duration?
13. What complications arise when the word is made to indicate a limited time?
14. a. Who alone speaks with authority as to the destiny of men?
 - b. What is the attitude of God toward men?