

Judgment - Introduction

The Final Judgment and the End of the World



By Justin Sivley

Throughout history, humanity has sought answers to the question, “How is this all going to end?” Some scientists have proposed that billions of years from now the sun will explode into a Red Giant and engulf the Earth and several other planets as it expands. The entertainment industry often depicts the event as resulting from an alien invasion, or an asteroid colliding with the planet, or some environmental, or even man-made disaster that makes the planet uninhabitable. Still others have looked to religious sources for the answer to that question, but these are as varied as the religions of this world and the people who adhere to them.

With so many different answers to the same question, is it even possible to know the truth? Is there any source of reliable truth that can provide a coherent picture of what will happen at the end? We believe that there is such a source in the Bible. Whether we want to call that final event “the Last Day,” “the day of the Lord,” “the Judgement Day,” or something similar, the Word of God provides some specific details about that day.

The pivotal moment of that day will be the return of Jesus. Jesus promised his disciples in John 14:3, *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”* (All Scripture quotations from the English Standard Version of the Bible). After his resurrection, when Jesus had ascended to the Father while his apostles were watching, those men were told *“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)”*

Jesus himself taught that when he returned, it would be a day of judgement. In Matthew 25:31-46, he told his disciples that when that day comes, all the nations would be gathered before him, and these would be judged as righteous or unrighteous. The righteous would thereafter be welcomed into eternal life, while the unrighteous would be cast out into eternal punishment. Earlier in his ministry he had stated that *“an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29)”*

When the Lord stated that those who had done good would be resurrected to life, he was not speaking of those who are “good” from a human perspective. There are plenty of people who do many good deeds in this world, and we would call “good,” but many of these, sadly, will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Doing good works will by no means save an individual, a point stated in passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:4-5 among others. Jesus even warns that there will be those who, believing they have done good works in his name, will be cast out when that day comes:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

So how does one ensure that he is among the righteous on that day? The answer that Jesus gives in Matthew 7:21 is to do the will of the Father in heaven. The Bible teaches that the one must have faith in Jesus (John 8:24; Mark 16:16), and be willing to repent (turn from) sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 17:30-31). A person must confess the name of Jesus before others (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10), submitting to being baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38, 22:16; Romans 6:3-4), and thereafter strive to live a faithful life obedient to Christ (1 John 1:7; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 2:10). This person’s sins will be forgiven, and he will have the hope of eternal life with Jesus and the Father when the Lord returns.

One point that must be clearly understood about the day of the Lord is that the timing of that day is entirely unpredictable. Though countless individuals have attempted to affix that day to a specific date, Jesus himself stated in Matthew 24:36 *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”* In the same chapter (v. 38-44) the Lord indicates that men and women will be going about a daily routine, when without prior warning, with no sign of it’s coming, that day will come.

More than once, that day is spoken of as coming “as a thief in the night” (Matthew 24:43; 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10). As an illustration, a thief does not announce his intentions, but arrives without immediate warning. So it will be on the day of the Lord. No one will know the day of the Lord’s coming until that day arrives. And so, one must be prepared for that day to come at any moment.

Though it will come “as a thief,” when that day does come, it will be known to all. The idea of a secretive return of the savior to “rapture” the saved is foreign to the Scriptures. In answering a question about the return of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul writes concerning that day:

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1Thessalonians 4:16-17 emphasis added)”

So, though it is impossible to know precisely when that day will come, there will be no doubt when that day does come. And in the Scripture, all the information that is needed for a person to be prepared for that day is given. If we will study the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), we will be able to understand “the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21),” and through doing his will, we can be prepared for that day when it does come.