

# **Divine Judgement, and its close relationship to Salvation**

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[Bible References in ***Bold Italic*** should be read carefully]

## **Introduction**

The topic to be considered is "God's actions in Judgement and Salvation". It will be shown that these are always very closely intertwined, and the events are not pleasant even for those who are saved.

### ***Psalm 23***

We live in dangerous times – The Psalmist, David, is confident in v4-6 that even though he'll be very close to death & destruction (v4), he will be saved. Feasting "*in the presence of my enemies*" is a strange idea we need to consider carefully the implications of. And why does the Psalmist speak of going through the valley of the shadow of death?

### ***Acts 17:22-31***

Acts 17:24-31 reveals three key events in Earth history that all men must face up to, and repent concerning their attitudes towards: the Creation, the Resurrection of Christ and the Final Judgement.

God is the Creator of the heavens and earth and everything in them and no one has any excuse before God for not recognising both this, and its implications (Romans 1:20). The importance of Christ's Resurrection has been considered in recent papers<sup>1</sup>. The Final Judgement now comes particularly into view. To understand it we must see how God has worked His Judgement in the past, and how God's judgement is always closely related to the experience of salvation.

## **The times we live in - a warning**

We live in times which seem more uncertain and potentially dangerous than for some time past. In 2002<sup>2</sup>, the financial world is uncertain, and there is a threat of

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<sup>1</sup> resurc6v2\_The\_Resurrection\_of\_Jesus\_Christ\_RH\_Johnston.pdf and  
jesusliv2\_Jesus\_Christ\_is\_Risen\_from\_the\_dead\_RH\_Johnston.pdf

<sup>2</sup> In 2018 the details of the threats have changed, but there is an increasing intensity of lawlessness (that is of rebellion against God), expressed, for example, in denial of such objective biological facts that God created man as male and female..

war with Iraq. The situation in Israel seems unstable and the conflicts between the Arabs and Israel insoluble. Key world leaders are adopting a rather Messianic role, representing themselves as "white knights" who will rid the world of the evil of terrorism. There is often more to be feared from people with such attitudes than from those who are simply covetous or power hungry. We do well to pray that God will firmly control world leaders at such a time as this.

Some Christians seek to relate such events to the prophetic scriptures, trying to establish a timetable of events. Iraq is a prophetic minefield, since it includes the site of Babylon and Nineveh. As its leader is also vigorously anti-Israel, there is a huge potential for knitting prophetic scriptures into alarming predictions.

Before we go along with such teachings, it would be as well to check out what has been said by such biblical prophecy enthusiasts in the past, and see whether their prognostications came to pass. To my knowledge, from the 1960s (and probably before that) until the late 1980s the Soviet Union was seen as the "bogie man" playing a key role in the end time events - which, as now, were seen as imminently to be fulfilled. But nothing happened.

We do well not to become over excited by their predictions - for they have not come to pass - and scripture tells us to beware of false prophets. Their failures have many causes, but one stands to the fore. For the most part their predictions are based on misconceptions about the nature of Biblical prophecy. They think that all that is written in the Bible must come to pass some time. But this is not so. Whether prophecy is or is not fulfilled, and how it is fulfilled, depends on how those who hear the prophecy respond to it.

The best known and obvious example is Jonah at Nineveh, where Jonah's prophecy of judgement did not come to pass because the people repented. I do not want to get tied up with the details of these things now. I will just note that there are other clear cases, such as the rebuilding of the Temple for sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48, about which I have previously written<sup>3</sup>. This cannot now take place consistently with Jesus being the Messiah, and the final atonement for sin, as the letter to the Hebrews reveals.

Another Christian reaction is to get over-excited at the prospect of the Lord's return, like the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2). But it is well to remember that this will not be a pleasant experience even for those who will be saved. **Amos 5:18-21** gives a warning about this: the day of the Lord is not pleasant.

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<sup>3</sup> ezekelem4\_Temple\_of\_Ezekeiel\_40-48\_RH\_Johnston.pdf

## How we should approach the interpretation of Biblical Prophecy?

We need to understand principles of way God worked in the past if we are to correctly understand the future.

We must consider the main clear scripture texts on the subject. (For this reason Revelation will not be much considered. It is written in the Jewish literary form called an "apocalypse" and should be viewed with care, since the such literature is not intended as a strictly chronologically ordered literal story of events, but uses much parallelism and is often symbolically figurative.)

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-15** – Like Amos this warns us about getting over-excited, and indicates the need to **love** the truth. Paul had previously taught them about the Lord's return. So what had he taught?

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** – This reveals that the resurrection and our going to be with the Lord **includes** those who have died. (I take this to correspond with the "first resurrection" in **Revelation 20:4-6**) The Thessalonians were wrongly worried that those who had fallen asleep (died) were going to miss out.

Many people tend to stop when reading 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, but the text continues uninterrupted (chapter/verse divisions only date from 1550):

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** – Here two things are clear and closely interlinked: sudden destruction on the ungodly, salvation for the **alert and** faithful. There is nothing automatic about the salvation, the saints have to be continuously alert and ready. Note that the destruction occurs at night, the time of greatest unreadiness. But we are of the day. There is a contrast of day and night, of light and darkness.

Jesus's own words in Mark 13, Luke 17 and Matthew 24 confirm this story. We need to be careful to consider the nature of the questions Jesus is addressing.

**Mark 13** – We appear to get a conflation of the events in AD70 when Jerusalem was sacked with the final end judgement. This is partly a result of the question asked – by the inner four disciples – but, importantly, this conflation also reveals that the two events will have **a great deal in common**. There is a mixture of destruction and salvation, and again a very strong warning to be alert (v33-37), because the saints go through the awful events, and must exercise faith and alertness to be saved. There will be wars (indeed Daniel 9:26 predicts Jerusalem will be a focus of war to the end of time) and troubles and the gospel will be preached to all nations (v10). Note how very severe the times are (v19). The tribulation will be worse than anything that has yet occurred, **including the Flood judgement** – yet it is shortened for the sake of the elect (v20). Hence

clearly the elect must experience it, if it needs to be shortened on their account. From this we may be sure that this "great tribulation" is not long lasting but derives its description from being very intense – the parallel with the AD70 events is instructive. And the text specifically says that Lord comes **after** the tribulation (v24-26) to gather his elect (v27).

We have parallel passages in Matthew 24 and Luke 17. They are a bit different from each other and from Mark, adding different details, and the described events do not appear all in the same order. In one account the details appear linked to AD 70, whilst another links exactly the same details to the Second Coming. (Because of this, the Preterist believes Christ came again in AD70, but if this had been so, the world today would be filled with righteousness, very different from the present world we actually live in.) This tells us that the events of AD70 prefigured, but had essentially the same character as, the events associated with the Lord's return.

Many people get themselves tied in knots trying to unpack all the differences between the gospel accounts. They fail to notice that the different gospels address slightly different questions. They forget that the Hebrew mind does not always think chronologically, but puts things together because they are the same sort of ideas, common to the events being discussed, rather than because they happen in a particular chronological sequence.

Unlike Mark, both Luke 17 and Matthew 24 draw our attention to the similarity of the coming judgements to past judgements in order to emphasise our need to be ready.

***Luke 17:22-37*** (compare Matthew 24:32-51 especially v37-42)

It is worth noting that v33-36 differs from v31. In v33-36 there is a mixture of people – some of whom are taken (i.e. killed – compare Isaiah 8:15; 28:13) and some left. No action of faith is required of them at that point to determine their fate. This is most obvious for those asleep, but equally applies to those who are awake. Verse 31, on the other hand, demonstrates the need for those who are to be saved to exercise faith in order to secure their salvation. (This is obviously essential in connection with having the faith to leave immediately a doomed city under attack by the Romans!) As we shall see later, the OT types to which Luke refers all show that those who are saved must exercise faith and obedience to be saved. As nothing is said about faith being involved in v33-36, these verses must refer to those without faith, some of whom will die and some not when the Son of Man is revealed. It also explains that otherwise somewhat obscure text, Matthew 24:30, that "all the tribes of the Earth will mourn". They mourn because they have so many dead, just as the Egyptians had mourned over their firstborn (Exodus 12:30).

Jesus with His saints are to rule after his coming (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 12:42-46; 19:11-27; 1 Corinthians 15:25; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6), and, for this reigning over the enemies (compare Psalm 23:5) to be meaningful, they must therefore have people to rule over at that time. The ones that are left in v33-36 will be those people.

Clearly Jesus, as recorded through Matthew and Luke, considered that if we want to understand these events correctly we have to understand previous judgements. Luke specifically mentions

- The Flood (also mentioned by Matthew). Peter also regards this example as critically important (*2 Peter 3:1-7,10*)
- Sodom and Gomorrah

In addition we may also note:

- God's judgement on Egypt in the last of the ten plagues – the death of the firstborn. This took place at night – some Egyptians were killed and some left - and it led to the deliverance of the children of Israel, a typical example of the link between judgement and salvation. Looking carefully at what Jesus says in Luke's account suggests that this judgement on Egypt was in His mind.
- A further example, which I shall not develop in this paper as the scope of scripture to consider is too extensive and scattered, is the Jewish exile (See e.g. Zephaniah 1:1-2:3). Three groups of people are identified– those who were killed, those who were exiled (who were the ones God purified by the exile and returned to the Promised land after the exile), and the riff-raff poor who were left in the promised land to become intermixed with other nations.

## **The Flood**

The coming judgement was forecast by Enoch about 1000 years beforehand (*Jude 14-15*)

**Genesis 6:1-8, 13-7:17** Flood – the Flood was determined 120 years beforehand and Noah was warned and commanded to build the Ark according to a defined plan. He therefore had to be faithful in preparing the ark over a very long period. Then, before the judgement itself, just seven days before, he is told that now is the time, and to get all the livestock in. Noah acted – it would have taken seven days of hectic activity to get everything in, as anyone knows who has embarked schoolchildren on a bus, or moved house. As soon as Noah was in the ark, and God had shut the door, immediately and suddenly (Genesis 7:11,13) the judgement came - as suddenly as being hit by a bullet. The ungodly had no time

to do anything to save themselves – it was too late. Jesus speaks of the hour of judgement (Mark 13:32), and his coming as being "like lightning" (Luke 17:24). (By the way, this shows that we can also learn something of the nature of these earlier judgements from what Jesus tells us about the antitype – the coming judgement).

Although Noah was saved, he was very close to the action of judgement. And even his salvation involved hardship, the result of other people's sin. Being cooped up for over a year in the ark can hardly have been a pleasant experience, waiting for God to remember him (Genesis 8:1). Moreover the new world he entered had been completely transformed, and was a far tougher place to live in, as implied by the decline in human lifespan afterwards. (So also, we find that the task of restoring the promised land after the Jewish exile was a difficult and painful – see for example the books of Nehemiah and Ezra.)

We conclude that Noah had to exercise faith and work hard to be saved, and even that building the ark was not enough, he had to continue to be watchful for when God told him to enter it. Suppose he had delayed getting embarked – would he have been saved? The case of Lot at Sodom sheds more light on this question.

## **Lot at Sodom**

### ***Gen 19:1-29***

The angels arrived at evening, the start of a new Hebrew day – the judgements of God take just one day<sup>4</sup>.

Lot has to compel the angels to accept his hospitality, a feast is prepared and eaten – all this must have taken some time.

In the late evening before going to bed (v4), the men of Sodom arrive wanting sexual relations with the angels. Lot tries to reason with them and buy them off with his virgin daughters.

The angels rescue Lot by blinding the men (v11), a sign that Lot should have taken more notice of as showing the authority the angels were carrying.

The angels command Lot to leave Sodom with his other relatives, because they are "about to destroy this place".

Lot went out (about mid-night?) (v14) and spoke to his sons in law, but they don't believe the message and think it a joke.

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<sup>4</sup> And they do always seem to be literal days - starting at evening, and hence often being characterised by occurring in a single hour - at night

This shakes the faith of Lot into inaction – presumably the family just goes to bed as normal. They have no sense of urgency, yet they should have gone immediately, as per the command in Luke not to turn back into the house when the Lord comes.

As morning dawns, the angels again urge Lot to get out lest he be taken in the punishment (v15). The angels cannot wait much longer. By parallelism with other cases, I rather think the judgement was originally intended to take place at night, so as to secure the best surprise and reduce the risk that any of those under judgement might escape.

Verse 16 Lot hesitates, so the angels grab the hands of the family and drag them out of the city.

Verse 17 They are told to run and not look behind, not stay in the valley but go to the mountains.

Verses 18-21 Lot has no conception of the risk he faces, and begs leave to go to Zoar, which is granted.

Verse 22 The angels again tell them to hurry, and, reading between the lines, the angel seems annoyed by the delay.

Verse 23 The sun has risen by time Lot reaches Zoar

Verse 24-25 Immediately the LORD destroys Sodom. No one else had time to escape. It is implied that the judgement is complete within an hour (Abraham looks on very early in the morning v27-28). Compare judgement of Babylon which will take place within one hour (Revelation 18:1-10, noting especially Revelation 18:8,10,17,19).

Verse 26 Lot's wife looks back, and is destroyed (compare Luke 9:62). I suggest that this would probably not have occurred if Lot and his family had left Sodom immediately they were told to do so, and if they had gone to the safety of the mountains so that they did not have the opportunity to see the judgement. My reasoning is that the command not to look back is only given at verse 17, after there had been the hesitation. How much we need to be alert, get out when we are told, and not look back.

So Lot and his daughters were saved out of Sodom. But what of the sequel? Lot moves on from Zoar into the mountains (why, when he has the angels assurance that this can be his place of safety?). Perhaps the loss of his wife finally made him realise the danger he was in. He then gets seduced by his daughters – I suggest that this wouldn't have happened if Lot's wife had still been alive. So Lot's delay, his lack of alertness and unreadiness cost him dear.

Remember Lot's wife. It is possible to be spared the immediate judgement of God, yet not be saved. Her heart was in what was being destroyed.

## **The death of Egyptian firstborn and the flight from Egypt**

### *Exodus 12:1-13,21-23, 28-36*

The last Old Testament example to be considered deals very much again with the issue of being prepared and ready, and obeying the Lord's instructions. The description of the event in Exodus 12 is wrapped up in instructions about repeating the Passover.

The children of Israel were instructed to make a series of preparations – they have to kill and roast the sacrificial lamb and daub the doorposts with its blood, and eat unleavened bread (v3-7). They also have to be prepared for flight, they will have no time to get dressed, and must eat quickly (Exodus 12:11).

God promises to execute judgement against the Egyptians by killing the firstborn of man and beast. The protection of the children of Israel is not automatic, but depends on the blood being placed on their houses (Exodus 12:13). If any had not heeded Moses' words (v21-23) he would have suffered the same judgement as the Egyptians. They did obey however (v28).

The judgement falls at midnight (v29). This takes place within one hour, and Egypt is thrown into uproar (v30). Immediately Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron "by night" (v31) – may be this would be about 2 or 3 in the morning when news about the enormity and scale of what has taken place has reached Pharaoh. On their arrival, perhaps an hour later, Pharaoh commands them and the children of Israel to leave (v31-32). Likewise the Egyptians want them to go, and the Egyptians give them gifts to encourage them to go (v33,35-36).

The children of Israel then leave without delay – and they do not have time to complete their normal breadmaking (v34). Thus this is flight without delay – they had no time to dress (v11) so they must be off within an hour - (compare this with Mark 13 etc. - though this time they are plundering the Egyptians). The haste is re-emphasised in that they have no provisions prepared (v39), and v42 strongly suggests that their departure took place whilst it was still night.

This was an important deliverance, but it was not the end of the story. By Exodus 14:8-14, the salvation of these people is being tested, and they are tempted to look back (Exodus 14:11-12). But Moses strengthens their hearts and they experience the crossing of the Red Sea and the consequent further judgement on Egypt (Exodus 14:23-28). In type, whereas the Passover corresponds to those



taken and left, and the rapture of the believers, this judgement on the Egyptian army corresponds to the final judgement.

## **The Second Coming in Brief**

Leaving aside extraneous detail, based on the material presented, and as explicitly explained in Revelation 20, the scenario seems as follows. The Lord will come with a great noise. Many (but not all) ungodly people will die (as happened in Egypt). The dead saints will rise, and all the elect, exercising faith, go to be with the Lord (this is the first resurrection) – for the marriage supper. Together with the Lord, the saints will then rule over the ungodly people who remain alive for 1000 years, a period of imposed righteous rule. This period concludes with the release of Satan, evil, no longer under restraint, then breaks forth on a huge scale, revealing the unchanged hearts of the godless, culminating in the great final war, the second resurrection and final judgement.

## **Summary of lessons to learn about the Lord's coming**

- We have to be continually open to what God is telling us now.
- We have to be prepared in **advance**.
- Because of the judgement component, it may happen at night, the time of greatest unpreparedness. We must be ready at **all** times.
- Salvation is not automatic. We have to be ready to obey and **act fast**, and without hesitation, when the time comes.
- We must not delay or look back: this will make salvation harder or impossible.
- The judgement on ungodly is closely associated with salvation. We must keep our eyes forward to the salvation, and not be concerned with what is happening to others!
- Being saved out of judgement by faith is not a pleasant experience. We need to make sure we come through it by exercising faith to obey.

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