

God's Work of Judgment

A Series on Divine Judgment: Part 2

God's work of judgment is seen in the past history of man, contemporary today and in the future. Throughout the Old Testament, God's judgment was based on His considered evaluation of sin through a legal process. This judicial process can be seen in the very beginning with Adam and Eve after their violation of God's prohibition of eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

There is a trial for violating God's word (Gen 3:9-13) and then a verdict (Gen 3:14-20). God's word is the basis of determining guilt.

Satan is judged (Gen 3:14-15). This indicates that God's judgment includes all personal beings, and later the prophet Ezekiel reveals another specific judgment of Satan (Ezek 28:11-19, see the article: Who is Satan? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/6Angels/FallenAngelSatan.aspx).

Woman is judged (Gen 3:16).

Adam is judged and physical death is introduced (Gen 3:17-19).

God's judgment has been catastrophic upon human beings who were wicked, evil and left to their own devices, without any law or moral standard (Gen 6:5-8).

Rulers, who see themselves as the law and disobey God's word, experienced God's judgment that resulted in natural disasters that harmed their nation's health and life (Ex 7:14-17; 9:1-4).

The Bible doesn't explain the concept of sin until the introduction of the Mosaic Covenant. One of the main functions of the Law of Moses was to teach what sin is (Rom 7:7) and the legal basis for God's judgment. Sin, in essence, is a desire that leads to the disobedience of God's word.

As a conditional covenant, the Law of Moses promised the nation of Israel blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience. It was the method to teach what it means to be holy.

If the nation of Israel was unfaithful to the Law, God stipulated a variety of punishments: physical and mental disease, drought, crop failure and economic ruin, defeat in battle, destruction, political and religious oppression, exile, slavery (Deut 28:20-42). This temporary loss of God's relationship was intended to turn the nation back to God and covenant fidelity.

When in direct contact with the Holy, immediate death placed an emphasis on respecting holiness and a fear of disobeying God's word (Num 4:15; 2 Sam 6:6-7; 1 Chron 13:9-10).

Yet in keeping with His character of "being compassionate and gracious, slow to anger" (Ex 34:6), God usually does not act upon a human being's sin immediately. "Yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations" (Ex 34:7). A good example of this is seen in the Conquest, where God literally judged the "iniquity of the Amorites" in their third and fourth generations.

In His Covenant with Abraham, God reveals that Abraham's descendants will leave the Land, be enslaved 400 years and then return when it will be time to punish the iniquity of the Amorites. Specifically, God's prophesy involves Abraham's grandson Jacob. This 400 years is an approximation of the 430 year period of time between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant (Gal 3:16-17, see the article "430 years in Egypt?" at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/5Bible/TransError430Years.aspx).

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But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete. (Gen 15:14-16)

Moses reminds the nation of Israel that the Conquest was God's judgment of the wicked nations of Canaan.

Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, "Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land," but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deut 9:4-5)

While much of the Old Testament portrays divine judgment as the consequence of sin, the Law of Moses was not simply about sin and God's justice for it. With love and compassion for His people, God included provisions for atoning for intentional and unintentional sins.

The Law of Moses was intended to teach the nation of Israel what sin was and its persistence. The Law was necessary to teach the nation how to be holy so that God could fulfill His unilateral and unconditional covenant with Abraham. The apostle Paul makes the connection between the two covenants when he spoke to the Galatians.

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. (Gal 3:24)

Instead of expressing His wrath on sinners for their sin, God instructed the use of a substitute that would take the place of the sinner's life and represent his sin(s). The death of the substitute would pay for the penalty of sin, and its blood would be applied on the seat of propitiation (Mercy Seat of the Ark) to cover the sins (expiate) and satisfy the judgment of God (propitiate).

For the nation of Israel, this provision provided a means of sanctification so that God would dwell among them.

Elaborating on the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant, God made the New Covenant for the atonement of sin, because of the impossibility of maintaining the Law of Moses (Jer 31:31-34); the nation of Israel profaned the holiness of God's great name (Ezek 36:22-25).

To avoid God's wrathful judgment of sin, God provided a substitute (John 3:16), which Isaiah had prophesized earlier within the context of the Law of Moses: a Servant in substitution of human beings, bearing their iniquity, transgressions and sins as a guilt offering (Isa 53:5-12). The apostles would elaborate further and describe Jesus, God's only Son, as the unblemished animal (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22-24; 3:18).

Furthermore, the New Testament portrays Jesus Christ as the place of propitiation, a figurative Mercy Seat, where God receives payment for the sins of mankind (Rom 3:21-26; Heb 9:1-28). Jesus Christ provides the blood sacrifice and is simultaneously the place where God receives payment.

As the "propitiation of our sins" (1 John 2:2), Jesus Christ substituted Himself for mankind and He alone bore the wrath of God's judgment (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). This judgment of God is unique. God had to judge His only Son so that Jesus could fulfill the Law of Moses, inaugurate the New Covenant and initiate the recovery of the image of God.

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This idea that Jesus Christ takes the place of the Law of Moses as the basis of God's judgment is new to the Jews. Nicodemus, who was a teacher of the Law, sought Jesus out at night to try to understand what this "Rabbi that came from God" (John 3:2) was teaching.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. **For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world**, but that the world might be saved through Him. **He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **This is the judgment**, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. (John 3:16-21)

"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world"

Jesus places an emphasis on His Father's love by teaching Nicodemus that God sent His Son as Savior and Messiah. This was new to Nicodemus, because the Jews believed that the Messiah would be a political / military leader, observant of the Law and its commands, and exact judgment on the nations oppressing Israel.

It is worth observing that Jesus speaks of "the world" figuratively to refer to human beings who are physically alive.

"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already"

While Nicodemus knows that God judges human beings during their physical life, Jesus introduces him to the idea that the basis of God's judgment is faith in His Son. This was new to Nicodemus, believing in the name Jesus results in the forgiveness of sins; there is no involvement of sacrifices that the Law of Moses demanded. And worrisome to Nicodemus is that those who are not Believers have "been judged already".

It is worth observing that Jesus' work of judgment, in His own words, does not involve human beings who are physically alive.

"This is the judgment"

Ever since the Mosaic Covenant, the Law of Moses has been the basis of judgment for the nation of Israel. Now Nicodemus realizes that Jesus is telling him that there is a new basis for judgment – the Messiah.