

JUDGMENT DAY

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST (1)

“ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

2 Cor. 5:10 NKJV



INTRODUCTION

Adult Studies 25-27, *Judgment Day*, will consider the three main judgments God has planned in the future. One day, everyone who ever lived will attend one of these judgments. Our prayer is that each reader will be guided by the Holy Spirit and the Word to understand this topic.

The judgments to come will include all ages and every individual who has existed throughout history. This topic is complicated by the fact that thousands of years of human history and a huge number of people are involved. In addition, the dead have to be raised; bodies, souls and spirits need to be reunited; and much more. The future judgments comprise the consummation of the ages, which means billions of people will be judged in a fair and just manner.

Divine judgment is predestined for every human who has ever lived, believer or not. More than one judgment is in God's eternal plan, so clear Scriptural teaching is needed to answer the basic questions concerning the judgments to come.

- What judgment lies ahead for me, and when is it?
- What determines a person's eternal fate?
- Is this judgment stuff just something preachers tell us so we live good, moral lives?
- If a believer's sins are forgiven, why would he or she be judged for them in the future?

BIBLE TRUTH

Judgment Is Predetermined for All

Every human who has ever lived will be judged some "day" (Acts 17:31). **"Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath"** (Isa. 45:22-23). The Apostle Paul reiterates this; **"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"** (Phil. 2:9-11).

Each of us has an appointment with the Almighty. This is a monumental event, for our eternal destiny is at stake. There is no escape from being brought before the Lord in judgment, nor will anyone somehow be overlooked. It does not matter if one is an atheist, agnostic, Muslim, Christian, child, or developmentally disabled.... Every person will one day be judged by the Lord.

How Many Judgments

Every human who has ever lived will be in one of three final judgments mentioned in Scripture.¹

- The Judgment Seat of Christ (JSC)
- The First Resurrection (FR)

- The Great White Throne (GWT)

Who Is the Judge?

All judgment has been given by God the Father to the Son, Jesus Christ: **"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son"** (Jn. 5:22; also 27). Considering the three judgments ahead, the Bible makes it clear they are all presided over by Jesus Christ. At first glance, it seems the Father sits on the Great White Throne: **"And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened"** (Rev. 20:12a). In light of the fact the Apostle John wrote the books of John and Revelation, the reference to "standing before God" may be better translated "standing before the throne," as the Greek Majority Text indicates. Thus, both the small and great will stand before the throne, when the books are opened. The immediate context indicates that Christ is the One on the throne, since He is the One from Whom the earth and heaven flee away (Rev. 20:11).

The issue at each judgment is a person's relationship with Jesus Christ, as will be explained more fully as we get into this study. We can be sure His judgment will be fair, true, and done in a just manner: **"For true and righteous are His judgments...."** (Rev. 19:2).

¹ The judgments under discussion are those related to mass groups of people, dead and alive, bowing before Christ. These judgments relate to matters of eternal reward and damnation. This study is not referring to specific, limited, earthly judgments, like that of Babylon (Rev. 17:1).

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST (JSC)

What Is the JSC?

"For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10b). **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"** (2 Cor. 5:10). The Judgment Seat of Christ (JSC) is the first judgment in the future; this is *our appointed judgment*. "Our appointed

judgment" refers to the specific judgment reserved for believers of the Age of Grace (mid-first century until the Rapture). First Thessalonians 4:16b makes it clear this judgment pertains *only to believers*, those in Christ: **"And the dead in Christ will rise first."** Believers who are already dead, and those who are alive at the Rapture, will take part in this judgment. The unsaved will be judged at a later date.

Only believers are involved in the JSC, which means the Rapture specifically pertains to believers. Unbelievers do not take part in the Rapture. So, exactly what is going to happen at the JSC? Many of us suffer from a common misperception of what will happen. We have been taught, since our youth, that God will review our entire lives, and replay the events before our eyes. Thus, the Lord will not be judging who is or is not saved, but exposing the sins of those who are saved; similar to putting our entire lives on a giant video screen exposing our sorry lives, for all to see. According to this misperception, all our secret sins, which no one ever knew, and all the hidden things of our dark-evil souls, will be exposed by the all-knowing God. Finally, all of the terrible thoughts and rotten actions of our lives will be brought into the light. The JSC will play our lives back in slow motion, to catch every sordid detail. Though no one knew of our hidden sins, God did, and He will reveal them to us, if not everyone. We will be embarrassed and ashamed, wishing we had done more for the Lord. In the end we will be saved "by the skin our teeth," and be happy with whatever meager rewards we may receive. This misperception does teach we will get rewards, but the exposure of our hidden, sinful lives will take away much of what we could have received.

If replaying the sins of a person's life is what occurs at the JSC, then it is a fearful event. However, this misperception is totally inconsistent with God's definition of love and grace; it portrays God as vindictive and vengeful to His own saints. We will see the JSC is not at all like that just described. The misperception seems to be designed to scare us into moral living, but it misses the point of what occurs at the JSC. God does not need humans to scare others into moral behavior; the Spirit and Word conduct that ministry quite well. We will see there is no reason to fear the JSC; it is intended to be of comfort. God will actually praise us at that time; He will not scold, threaten, or expose us to ridicule and embarrassment. Wow! That's a relief, and totally consistent with the character of the Lord. Our judgment is a day of joy, comfort, and praise. In contrast, another judgment (the Great White Throne) is associated with

the Day of the Lord's vengeance, so we can see a sharp contrast between that day and the JSC.

The Judgment Seat Is Really a Rewards Seat

The expression translated "the judgment seat of Christ" occurs only in the Pauline epistles. Actually, Paul calls it "the *Bema* of Christ." The words "judgment seat" are the English translation of the Greek word *Bema*. The usual Greek word for judgment (*krisis*) is not used. The word *Bema* is used by other authors, but they do not use the expression "the *Bema* of Christ." The word *Bema* referred to a raised platform, reached by steps, often used as the official seat of a judge. In the city of Corinth, a stone platform (*Bema*) was built, with a seat, and used by local officials (see Corinth pictures below). The *Bema* could be used to address legal issues, for oratory, or to present awards. Paul was brought before Gallio, at the *Bema* (Acts 18:12).



Photo courtesy of www.HolyLandPhotos.org

Paul's use of *Bema* indicates he is referring to something special for believers of this Age. Paul uses the earthly *Bema* to symbolize the heavenly seat upon which Christ will examine believers to determine eternal awards (crowns). Paul's many references to athletic events and crowning a victor, implies he was using *Bema* in reference to Greek sporting events (Phil. 3:13-14; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 1 Cor. 9:24-27). If the winner of a sporting contest had followed the rules and won the competition, he was judged the winner and honored at the *Bema*. There, the winner was crowned with a laurel wreath. Paul is the only author to use *Bema* in relation to Christ's examination of believers (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). The other two judgments to come, the First Resurrection and Great White Throne, are not called a *Bema*. The special use of *Bema* by Paul, instead of *krisis*, indicates that normal judgment was not in view, but something different.

Our Age, the Age of Grace, was a mystery (secret) revealed at just the right time in history (1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:2-6; Col. 1:25-27). As we know from Adult Study 13, *Grace—Experiencing It*, if God's mystery had been revealed at any earlier date, Christ would not have been crucified, and that would mean no forgiveness of sins for anyone (1 Cor. 2:7-10). Just as the entire Age of Grace was a mystery (secret) until the first century, the components of that Age were, of necessity, also secrets. The Judgment Seat (*Bema*) of Christ and Rapture are part of the mystery; therefore, they were not mentioned outside the specific writings for our Age (the Pauline Epistles). This means Paul had a very distinctive ministry, for He alone revealed the truths for our Age. The distinctive ministry and teachings of the Apostle Paul help us understand the various judgments and what occurs at them.

The phrase "Judgment Seat" may not be the best translation of *Bema*. Today we associate a judgment seat with being tried for a crime. The *Bema*, as Paul used it in relation to Christ, is a place for determining the rewards a believer is to receive. Thus, at the JSC, we are not judged for the sins we have committed; instead, we are examined for reward, then given praise. Paul's references to running the race, finishing the course, receiving a crown, and specific use of the word *Bema*, convey the idea this event is different from a normal judgment seat. Regardless of translational issues, the term Judgment Seat of Christ is an event to reward believers, just as contestants were rewarded in Paul's day.

How the Rapture Fits In

Our Age ends with the Rapture. At the Rapture, the bodies of all the believers of our Age, who had previously died, are raised from the grave, united with their soul and spirit (which have been in heaven and are brought back with Christ). Those believers are made whole at the Rapture, that is, all three parts are fully united: body, soul, and spirit. After the dead believers rise, the believers who are alive are *caught up* also, and we all meet Christ in the air. **"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be**

changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality" (1Cor. 15:52).

Our bodies (whether dead or alive) are raised as new, glorified, immortal bodies—much like that of Christ's resurrected body. God's plan from the very beginning was for human beings to receive salvation, be transformed in mind, and, in the end, receive a glorified body; this all is completed when we are taken home with Him. The glorification of our bodies ("we shall be changed") completes God's plan for believers, except for what He has planned for eternity in Heaven.

The origin of the word Rapture comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: **"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."** The phrase *caught up* comes from the Latin word *rapto*, the root word from which we get the words raptor and Rapture. A raptor is a bird of prey, like an eagle, which swoops down and catches its prey in its talons. The Lord will swoop down from Heaven and snatch us away; however, He does not harm us in any way (as talons would), but takes us in His arms to protect us and keep us safe. The Rapture is a deliverance from harm by being taken to Heaven: **"Therefore comfort one another with these words"** (1 Thes. 4:18).

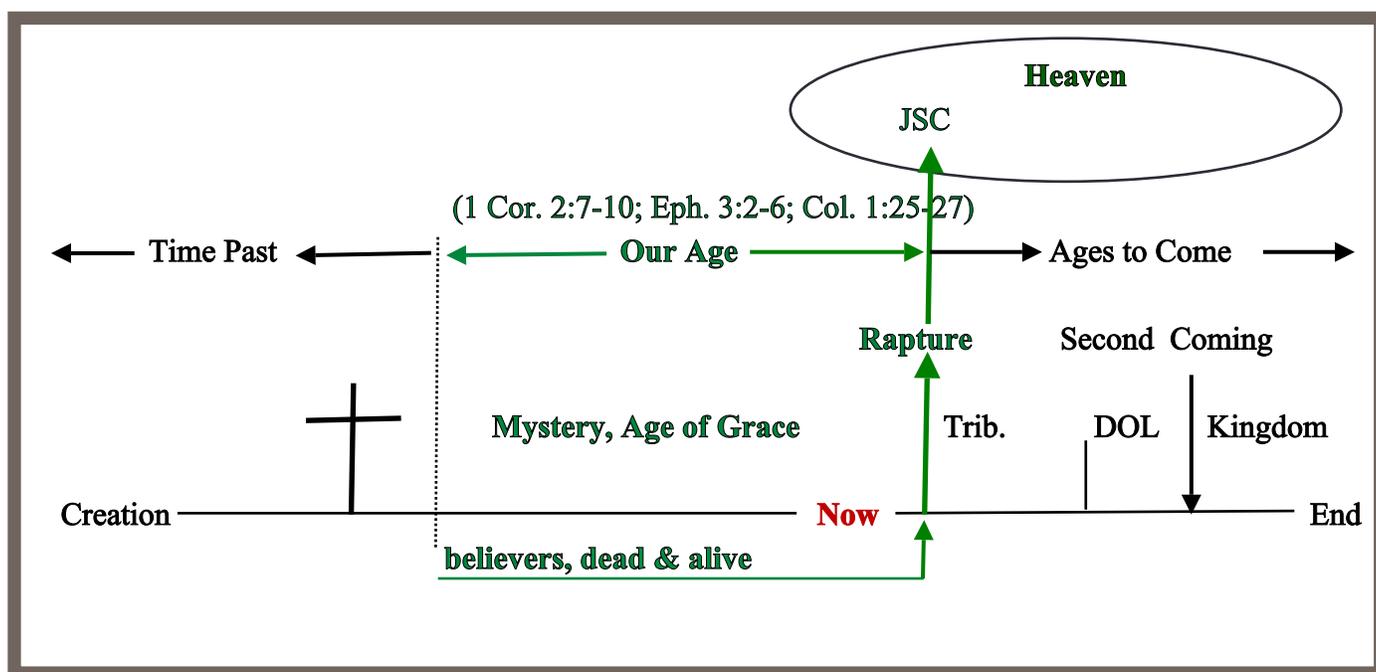
An important item to recognize is that Christ does not come to the earth at the Rapture; His feet never touch the ground. He comes in the air, and we go up to meet Him. This is in sharp contrast to the Second Coming of Christ, in which His feet touch down upon the Mount of Olives and there is unparalleled suffering and anguish upon the earth (Zech. 14:4).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the Lord descends from heaven with a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. The Bible does not state who shouts, but it very well may be the archangel's voice. The archangel is not named; perhaps it is Michael. The shout and a voice do not refer to a warlike shout to arms, as will be the case when an angel sounds the last trumpet in Revelation 11:15.² The shout, voice, and trumpet are a call to "go," implying an urgency to get God's people out of the world by swooping them up. Since Satan is "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), there is strong reason to have angelic forces involved to prevent Satan from interfering in any way.

When Is the JSC?

The Judgment Seat of Christ appears to take place in Heaven immediately after the Rapture. The purpose of the JSC is not to determine if you are saved; if you are there, you are saved!

Below is a simple timeline, with creation on the left and time proceeding to the right. The first thing you will notice is this timeline is not to scale, if it were, the time before the Cross would be much longer. Left pointing arrows point to time past, right pointing arrows point to time future. The Cross is the most important feature of this chart. Our Age is shown in the center of the chart. The tribulation is abbreviated as Trib., and the Day of the Lord as DOL. The Millennial Kingdom is shown after the Second Coming of Christ. Christ's first coming was at His birth, and His Second Coming is in vengeance and to make war. The Rapture is not the Second Coming of Christ because He never comes to the earth; instead, He swoops down in the air and takes away the believers. In biblical terms, the Rapture is part of the newly revealed secret coming of Christ (not part of the long ago revealed first and second comings).



In the chart above, green indicates our Age, the believers involved the JSC, and the Rapture. A red **Now** shows where we suppose we are today. At the Rapture, the green lines show those taken to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Only believers of the Age of Grace are taken, whether they have died or are alive. All the believers of Time Past and of the Ages to Come will be judged some other time (next studies). All the unbelievers of all the ages, including ours, will be judged at some future time.

² In the book of Revelation, the Second Coming of Christ is announced with the sound of the seventh angelic trumpet. The use of the word *trumpet* by Paul, and its use in Revelation, makes some people believe Paul is referring to the Second Coming of Christ. The book of Revelation had not been written when Paul wrote about the trumpet of God in 1 Thes. 4:16, or the last trumpet in 1 Cor. 15:52. If Paul were referring to the trumpets of Revelation (which was not yet written), his words would not have made sense to the people of his day. The completely different aspects of Paul's reference to Christ's coming (for deliverance and rewards) and the Second Coming (for battle), make it clear they are not the same event.

SUMMARY

Everyone is appointed a day in which he or she will bow before the Lord and be judged/examined. Three distinct judgments are in the future. The judgment to which a person will go, whether he or she likes it or not, depends upon the age in which the person lived and whether he or she was a believer. Jesus Christ is the Judge for every human being; He will be fair and just. The Judgment Seat of Christ is the judgment believers in the Age of Grace will attend, whether they have died or are alive.

Unbelievers will be judged at a different time. The JSC is in heaven immediately after the Rapture. We will be given new, glorified bodies when we are taken up at the Rapture. The JSC is about rewards and praise; a person's sins (even those done in secret) are not the issue. God's love and grace are inconsistent with the notion of reviewing our past, hidden sins. The JSC and Rapture are events that should cause no fear or worry.

GOSPEL

If you believe you are a sinner and Jesus Christ died in your place, as your substitute, you are saved and will be taken to the JSC. Faith in Christ qualifies you to be there. You do not have to make special preparations to be ready, and you need not worry God will somehow overlook you at the Rapture. The Rapture and JSC are designed to protect us and to give us praise; there is

nothing to fear. Instead, we should look forward to the end of our Age with great anticipation. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"** (Jn. 3:16).

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