

(7) Matthew 25.31-46

A Summary of Sessional Judgments

The long parenthesis is at an end (24.32-25.30). The Lord is no longer speaking in parables but describing actual events at the time of His coming. Before any king can establish a kingdom there must be preparatory judgment (cf. 1 Kings 2). The judgment described in this passage concerns the surviving individuals of every Gentile nation on earth at the coming of Christ. The Lord Jesus is the 'judge of the living and the dead' (Acts 10.42). In Matthew 25, He is judging the *living*. After the millennium He will judge the *dead* at the Great White Throne. Scripture speaks of *two* kinds of judgments:

1. *Providential* judgments – God will **send** on this earth (as seen in the tribulation seals, trumpets and vials).
2. *Sessional* judgments – the Lord Jesus will **sit** on a throne of judgment.

Sessional Judgment	Time/Purpose	Location	Subjects	Scriptures
Judgment Seat of Christ	After the <i>rapture</i> To reward <i>saints</i>	Heaven	Believers of the church age	Romans 14.10 1 Corinthians 3.9-15 2 Corinthians 5.10
Judgment of the Living Nations	After the <i>tribulation</i> To determine entrance to the <i>kingdom</i>	Earth	Believers (sheep) <i>and</i> unbelievers (goats) of the tribulation	Matthew 25.31-46
Great White Throne	After the <i>millennium</i> Eternal sentence (destiny) of sinners	Space	Unbelievers	Revelation 20.11-15

Other possible sessional judgments include *tribulation martyrs* (Revelation 20.4) and the *nation of Israel* (Malachi 3.2-5). This has been illustrated in Matthew 24.45-25.30 and will take place on the borders of the land (Ezekiel 20.34-38). *Resurrected* Israel must also be examined for reward (Isaiah 26.19; Daniel 12.2; Revelation 11.18).

Splendour of the Son [v.31]

v.31: The second coming of Christ will be attended by 'glory' and 'all the holy angels'. This glory (honour) is described as 'great' (24.30), deriving from His Father (16.27) *and* personal (19.28). An angelic host will *accompany* and *assist* the Lord at His appearing (2 Thessalonians 1.7) as well as saints of every age (cf. Jude 14; Revelation 19.14). The title 'Son of man' emphasises the true and total identification of the eternal Son with mankind – both as their *Saviour* (Luke 19.10) and *Judge* (John 5.22). Christ referred to Himself as 'Son of man' seventy-seven times, often in reference to His second coming in judgment to earth (Matthew 16.27-28). It is therefore a title particularly linked to *Israel* and the *millennial kingdom*. The NT epistles concern the **church**, of which Christ is the Head, not King – and thus there is not one single use of the title 'Son of man'. Christ will sit on the 'throne of His glory', a personal throne on earth from which He will execute 'judgment and justice' (Jeremiah 23.5). At present, He shares His Father's throne – the throne of God (cf. Hebrews 1.13; 12.2; Revelation 3.21). One of the most glorious thrones in Scripture belonged to Solomon (1 Kings 10.18-20; 2 Chronicles 9.17-19), but it cannot be compared to the magnificence of the millennial throne of Christ.

Separation of the Shepherd [vv.32-33]

v.32: This is a judgment that will take place just outside Jerusalem in the *Valley of Jehoshaphat* (Joel 3.1-3). Whilst the valley's location has not been identified beyond doubt, it is likely between the city and the Mount of Olives. However, JD Pentecost writes, "*When Christ comes back, the Mount of Olives will split and be divided into a 'great valley' (Zechariah 14:4). This is the logical place for the judgment, and... the name 'Jehoshaphat' means 'Jehovah judges'.*" 'All nations' will be 'gathered' (divine passive, cf. Isaiah 66.18; Joel 3.2) in the presence of the King. The word 'nations' (*ethnos*) refers to every individual surviving Gentile (as distinguished from Jews). The purpose of the gathering is to 'separate' into one of two groups – the righteous *sheep* (saints) who will enter the kingdom (vv. 34, 37) and the cursed *goats* (unbelievers) who will 'go away into everlasting punishment' (vv.41, 46). A shepherd separating sheep from goats was a common figure in Palestine, especially at night as sheep could tolerate cooler temperatures, but goats had to be herded together for warmth. Generally, sheep had a higher relative worth than goats due to their ease of care and desirable wool. The basis of separation is the type (nature) of the animal. **v.33:** The sheep are set on the 'right hand' – the place of acceptance, blessing, and honour (Psalm 45.9; 110.1). In contrast, the 'left hand' is the place of *rejection*.

Sovereignty of the King [vv.34-40]

v.34: The *Son of man* is now identified as 'King' (cf. Daniel 7.13-14). Though despised and rejected of men, He will ultimately become the 'King of nations' (Revelation 15.3, JND). The righteous 'sheep' are 'blessed' (ongoing favour) by the Father, having been found praiseworthy. The mention of the 'Father' presupposes a relationship with Him and gives

rise to the language of *inheritance* as those belonging to His family. The 'blessing' is therefore of *grace not works*. The establishment of the millennial kingdom has been 'prepared' (purposed) of God 'from the foundation of the world' (since creation, cp. v.41; Hebrews 4.3). It is the fulfilment of promises and covenants given throughout the OT (Genesis 3.15; 12.1; 2 Samuel 7.12-16; Ezekiel 34.20-31; Jeremiah 31.31-40). Sadly, each dispensation has proved man's inadequacy to *merit* the kingdom, so now it is established by *grace* and *power*. 'From (*apo*, since) the foundation of the world' is a phrase that occurs **six** times in Scripture (cf. Matthew 13.35; Luke 11.50; Hebrews 4.3; 9.26; Revelation 13.8; 17.8), each reference associated with *time* and the *earth*. **But** what is *eternal* and *spiritual* is described as '*before (pro)* the foundation of the world'. This remarkable phrase occurs only **three** times describing *divine relationships* (John 17.24), *individual* believers of the *church* (Ephesians 1.4) and the *work of Christ* (1 Peter 1.20).

v.35: The evidence that proves the righteous character of the 'sheep' is now presented. There is no suggestion of salvation by works. There are many kind people who feed the hungry or provide accommodation for strangers, but this does not prove a person is born again. The context in which these verses are found is critical. The tribulation will be a time of Satanically inspired Jewish persecution beyond anything the world has ever seen, including the holocaust. 'My brethren' is a likely reference to the Jewish preachers of the gospel of the kingdom during the tribulation (Joel 3.2; Revelation 7.1-8; 12.17). It is the treatment of these brethren that serves as a barometer of one's reception of the gospel, and therefore Christ Himself. This is clearly prefigured in Luke 10.1-12. These verses do not promote a 'social gospel' outreach. The *divine* and *apostolic* mandate has always been to **preach** the gospel.

The works of the 'sheep' (delineated in vv.35-36) are representative, but nevertheless act as a guide to practical discipleship. All in all, the list is repeated *four* times to emphasise God's people should be concerned with the physical and temporal needs of others. First, they displayed compassion by seeking to alleviate *hunger* and thirst (Job 22.7), and by showing *hospitality* (Isaiah 58.7). Those who refuse the mark of the beast will be unable to buy or sell (Revelation 13.17). **v.36:** Those that were poorly dressed (cold) were supplied with clothes (*heat*, cf. Deuteronomy 15.11; Ezekiel 18.7; James 2.15-17), and, in terms of *health*, any who were 'sick' were 'visited' (a word suggesting care and concern, cf. James 1.27). These Jewish brethren will be *harassed*, even imprisoned for their faithfulness to the gospel, but the 'sheep' will visit them, bringing inevitable suspicion on themselves (Colossians 4.18; Hebrews 10.34; 13.3). **vv.37-39:** For the first time the 'sheep' are described as those who are 'righteous'. They are righteous as to their *standing* before God – a righteousness founded on faith in their coming Lord. It is this standing that forms the basis of their righteous (morally just) *actions* towards others. The righteous express surprise at the Lord's commendation, no doubt wondering when they had ever ministered personally to Him. **v.40:** But He identified personally with His suffering servants, thus kindness bestowed upon them was, ultimately, shown to the Lord Himself (Zechariah 2.8; Matthew 10.40). Ministering to the people of God is *ministering* to Christ. **Mistreating** the people of God is *mistreating* Him (Acts 9.4-5). There could also be a sense in which the 'sheep' ministered in such a spirit of humility and selflessness – not to be 'seen' of men (Matthew 6.2, 5, 16) – they had forgotten about many of their deeds, not counting them worthy of remembrance by the Lord. But He overlooks nothing (cf. Matthew 10.42)!

Sentence of the Judge [vv.41-46]

v.41: In contrast to the 'sheep', the 'goats' on the left hand are caused to 'depart' from the presence of Christ into 'everlasting fire'. The goats are 'cursed' – given over to eternal ruin – because they rejected Christ and the message brought by His servants. Their ruin is experienced in 'everlasting fire' (the lake of fire) which, at this time, will already contain the *beast* and the *false prophet* (Revelation 19.20). It is not necessary for these individuals to be raised and brought to the Great White Throne as they are already in their physical bodies and have stood before the Judge. The judgment is as 'everlasting' as 'eternal life', the same Greek terms being employed to describe both, as well as the eternity of God (cp. vv. 41, 46; 1 Timothy 1.17). Whilst the prospect of eternal judgment is disturbing, we should remember that such a place was 'prepared' (cp. v.34) for the 'devil and his angels'. But in rejecting Christ and His servants, the 'goats' have associated themselves with the devil, and must therefore share his destiny.

vv.42-43: The *righteous* condemnation of the 'goats' is proved by their rejection of the messengers of Christ. They neglected their duty towards these servants, failing to minister to them or receive them into their homes that they might hear the message. **vv.44-45:** In so doing they had rejected the Lord Jesus Himself. Their use of *respectful* and *religious* terminology ('Lord', cp. 25.11) cannot fool the Judge who has eyes as flames of fire! Indeed, it could be the address of subjugation rather than worship (Philippians 2.11). **v.46:** Sadly, the five *foolish virgins* (25.10-12), the *wicked* and *slothful servant* (25.26, 30) and the *goats* all share the same destiny – 'everlasting punishment'. They were *unprepared*, *unexpectant* (and therefore lazy) and *unrepentant* in view of the coming Bridegroom, Lord and King (respectively). In contrast, the five *wise virgins*, two *good* and *faithful servants* and the *sheep* all share the destiny of entrance to the kingdom which is merely the *first stage* of their ceaseless (eternal) life with God.