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## BLESSED IS THE NATION WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD

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### Judgment and Punishment in the Ages to Come

by

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While Scripture indicates that men will judge angels, and that people will witness for and against one another in the great judgment, we have every reason to believe that all verdicts of punishment or reward involving men will be given by the Lord Himself.

This truth is comforting and reassuring, for as Abraham said, *"Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?"* Since God is a God of law and order, justice and mercy, we can expect God to abide by the principle found in His Word relative to punishment.

One such principle is in **Deuteronomy 25:2,3** where we read: *"And it shall be, if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his fault, by a certain number. Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed; lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee."*

There has actually been preaching and teaching on the judgment to come that has made God appear to be "vile" to many people. God is very specific in His Word that the punishment for any wrongdoing must be in harmony with the harm and evil done, as stated in the passage we read and in many other passages.

Another very important factor in the punishment of evildoers as prescribed and demanded in the Word of God is motive. Much care and effort was to be given to ascertain the purpose and the motive behind the wrongdoing. This is illustrated in the 20th chapter of Joshua.

These things are not written to suggest more leniency toward wilful evildoers, for there is a great deal too much of such unscriptural leniency in our age. Neither is it given to give the unrepentant any false sense of comfort or hope, for the punishment and judgment that awaits the unrepentant is dreadful. On the other hand, we need not and we must not teach an unscriptural future punishment that makes God appear "vile" and utterly unreasonable.

The following scripture recorded in **Luke 12:47, 48** states that knowledge and understanding will also be an important factor in the Lord's verdicts in the time of judgment. *"And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."*

Since the Lord laid down these principles in pronouncing judgment, we may rest assure He Himself will abide by these self-evident righteous principles.

Since judgment and punishment after death is very definitely a church doctrine, on source of information on this subject must, of course, largely be the letters written to the churches by the apostles as recorded in the New Scriptures.

While most of the books of the Bible refer to life beyond the grave, the Pauline epistles give more light and truth concerning

the ages to come than any other portion of the Scriptures.

There are those who base their teaching of future judgment and punishment on passage they find in the book of The Revelation. While they will admit that the book of The Revelation is written in sign language (symbols), that a horse, a beast, a woman, the sea, and so forth does not mean a literal horse, or beast, or woman, or sea; still they insist that the lake of fire is a literal lake of fire.

"Fire" throughout the Scripture symbolizes cleansing, molding, and the removing of dross. In **Second Thessalonians, chapter 1**, the Apostle Paul refers to *"them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Concerning these, the Apostle wrote in verse 9: *"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."*

If there is one word more than any other that has given sincere people an unscriptural concept of God's punishment for the wicked after death, it is the word "everlasting." Any Greek dictionary will show that the Greek word translated "everlasting" in the King James Bible means "age long or for the duration of an age."

With this in mind, let us consider **Ephesians 1, verses 9-11**. We must ponder these verses, they are very revealing.) *"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."*

According to verse 9 God has in His Word "made known unto us" Christians the secret will, or purpose, "which he hath purposed in Himself according to His good pleasure."

The next verse, verse 10, tells us what that purpose of God is: "That in the dispensation (or administration) of the fulness of times (or ages) he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him."

In verse 11 Paul states that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Or, as the apostle James tells us in **Acts 14:18**, *"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."*

God takes full responsibility for the creation of man. God not only foresaw sin and the fall of men, He also made provision for man's salvation before the foundation of the world.

What was God's purpose in creating man if He foresaw sin and the fall of man? God's purpose, as stated in verse 10, was that age after age He would work at the redemption of man and finally all things in heaven and on earth would be gathered together in Christ.

We who are "born again" in this age are spoken of as "the first fruits." After a farmer has gone into his grainfield and plucked a few heads of wheat to dry, to test, and examine, does he light a match to that field? No, indeed not! The field is later cut and the grain is threshed.

Writing to the **Colossians**, the following wrote the following in **chapter 1, verses 19-21**: *"For it pleased the Father that in him (Christ) should all fulness dwell. And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, who were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled."*

Here, again, the Apostle Paul states that God will eventually succeed in reconciling all things unto Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ. And again Paul states that this reconciliation includes all things in heaven and all things in earth.

In Philippians 2:9-11 the Apostle Paul includes "things under the earth." these verses declare: *"Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

These three scriptures from Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians, as well as similar passages in Romans and First Corinthians, must be constantly kept in mind as we seek to learn what the Word of God teaches concerning the ages to come, and God's plan and purpose in these ages.

As one unscriptural, unreasonable, and extreme teaching, or position, generally produces the opposite extreme, so it has been with the subject we are considering. The teaching of endless, indiscriminate torment has produced the unscriptural teaching and opinion of no future judgment and punishment.

While the Lord's parables were mostly Kingdom parables and were so understood by the disciples, who, prior to Peter's commission to go to Cornelius' house to preach and prior to Paul's revelation, had little or no concept of the Church and Church doctrines, the Lord made it very clear in His teaching that there would be both judgment and punishment in the next age for evil and wrong committed in this present life. But at no time did the Lord state that punishment would be indiscriminate and endless torment.

Speaking to the Pharisees, in **Matthew 12:21-32**, Jesus made the following dreadful and significant statement: *"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."*

The fact that Jesus said these blasphemers against the Holy Spirit were to have no forgiveness in the world (age) to come would at least imply that there would be those who would be brought to repentance in the next age. This, as we have seen, is in harmony with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, Colossians 1, and Philipppians 2.

Let us now consider a number of scriptures where the Apostle Paul uses the expression, "all men." **Verses 12 and 18 of Romans 5** read as follows:

*"Wherefore, as by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."*

In Ephesians, Philipppians, and Colossians, Paul stated that all things will ultimately in the ages to come be reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ to Whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. In Romans 5:18 Paul makes the same statement using the word "justification" instead of "reconciliation."

The Apostle Paul undoubtedly had a vision and God's marvelous and victorious plan for the ages to come when he wrote **verses 32-36 of Romans 11**:

*"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompense unto him again?: For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen."*

Would you say that these are the words of a man who believed that 80 or even 90 per cent of the human race, God's highest creation, were destined by God to endure endless torment, and that by a God who works all things after the counsel of His own will and according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself?

In **I Corinthians 15:19-28** we find the following revealing passage, which needs little of no comment if we read with an unbiased mind:

*"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.*

*"For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."*

Would God be all in all if Satan took 80 to 90 per cent of the human race, God's own creation, away from God for endless time?

The **53rd chapter of Isaiah** is recognized by all Bible students as the great redemption chapter of the Old Scriptures. It foretells the sacrificial and substitutionary suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In **verse 11** of Isaiah 53, we find the following statement: *"He (Christ) shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied."* It is very difficult to believe that the Christ would be satisfied with the travail of His soul with 80 per cent of the human race confined to endless torment.

On the other hand, if we accept the words of the Apostle Paul that in the ages to come all things will eventually be reconciled to God, then we can understand how Jesus Christ will be satisfied with the results and accomplishments of his suffering and death.

Turning again to the writings of the Apostle Paul, we shall read **verses 13-15 of II Corinthians 5**: *"For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is to your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again."* The Apostle Paul was so zealous fervent, and thrilled by the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that he was accused of being of an unsound mind. Paul's answer was, *"The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he (Christ) died for all."*

If, as Paul wrote, Christ died for all, then He atoned for the sins of all mankind. Or, as John the Baptist stated, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This does not mean that all are saved or regenerated by the Spirit and Word of God, but it does mean that the sins of all were atoned for when Jesus Christ died and arose.

We shall now read from **II Corinthians 5, verses 18 and 19**—perhaps two of the most marvelous scripture verses in the entire Bible: *“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation: To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”*

As we consider these verses and the tremendous truth they reveal, we can understand why Paul became so enthused that some thought he was beside himself.

In verse 18 Paul refers to the born again believers and states that God hath (past tense) reconciled us unto Himself by Jesus Christ and hath given to us (Christians) the ministry of reconciliation.

But in verse 19 the Apostle goes much further and states, “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” and then Paul adds this startling statement, “not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

When Paul said, “All things are of God,” he meant that creation, salvation, reconciliation, justification, redemption and restitution are of God. It is God’s undertaking, and God will accomplish the good purpose of His will foreknown and determined before the foundation of the world.

If God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and if God does not impute “their trespasses unto them” then what does God condemn the world for, and why is not everyone saved? The Lord answered that question for us in **John 3:17,19:**

*“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved...And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*

Note, God sent His Son into the world that the world through Jesus Christ might be saved, and note also that this is the condemnation, that men will not come to, or trust, and honor the Son.

If we limit God’s salvation, reconciliation and restitution of all things to this present life and this brief age, then it appears as though God has failed, but if we accept the word of Paul that God’s reconciliation and restitution will continue through the ages to come, then we, too, will exclaim as Paul did in Romans 11:33,36:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever Amen.”

In the **last verse of John 3** we read: *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

A reasonable question in view of this question would be: “How long does the wrath of God abide on him who will not honor and obey the Son?”

Some will insist the wrath of God will abide on him for eternity, and that all who died unrepentant will suffer endless, conscious torment.

Before we seek to answer the question of how long the unrepentant and unregenerated will suffer the wrath of God, let us ask ourselves another question: Will God’s wrath continue to abide on men in the ages to come after they have bent their knee and in humility have confessed with their tongues that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father?

For as we read in **Philippians 2:9-11:** *“God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

To those who think that Christianity has failed because the world has not been Christianized in this age, let me say that it never was God’s plan to Christianize the world in this age.

The reconciliation of all things will be accomplished in the ages to come, and the born again believers of this age will have a part in that ministry of reconciliation.

God’s sovereign will and purpose for the present age, which extends from the first to the second coming of Jesus Christ, was stated by the Apostle James at a conference held by the apostles as is recorded in **Acts 15. Verses 13 through 18** declare:

*“And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That yourselves also know: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”*

Did you notice we read, “that the residue of men might seek after the Lord?”

Any study of the plan and purpose of God for this or any other age that does not constantly keep in mind the fact stated in verse 18 is bound to stray away into unscriptural speculation and man-made theories. We must begin with the premise, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”

Since no scripture is of private interpretation, and since no doctrine or teaching should be based on any single verse of

scripture, we shall cite several other scriptures substantiating the teaching that God has a plan and a purpose which He is working out without any changes in the original blueprint.

In **Isaiah 46:9,10** we read: *"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like unto me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."*

Notice, God declares the end from the beginning, His counsel stands unchanged, and He does all His pleasure.

Let us also read **Isaiah 45:22,23** where we find the words the Apostle Paul quoted in **Philippians 2:10, 11**.

*"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."*

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is so important that we shall read two more passages. **Psalms 33:9-11**.

*"For he spake, and it was done, he commanded, and it stood fast. The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought.: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."*

**Acts 2, verses 22 through 24**, contains a very clear example of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God showing that the crucifixion of Christ by wicked men was in the plan and purpose of God. These verses declare: *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."*

Having established by the Scripture the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty and foreknowledge of God, we must view the teaching of endless torment in the light of this complete and absolute foreknowledge of God and God's power to accomplish all His purpose.

Those who do so will find that the doctrine of endless torment of 80 per cent of the human race is not only contrary to the Word of God, it is also contrary to the nature and character of God. This is so self-evident it needs no comment.

God is not merely sovereign, accomplishing His original purposes, and doing all His pleasure, but according to the Scriptures and all history, God also uses evil as well as wicked and sinful men to accomplish His plan and purpose, as in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The Prophet Amos asked, *"Shall the trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"*

**Isaiah 45 verses 5 through 7** answers Amos' question as to whether God sends and uses evil:

*"I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things."*

Job, the patriarch of ancient times, recognized evil as being allowed by God and used of God. We find the following in **Job 2:9, 10**.

*"Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speaketh as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."*

Many people have great difficulty in harmonizing the sovereignty of God with the sin, sorrow and suffering with the present age and in our brief individual lives.

This is largely due to ignorance of what the Scriptures teach concerning God's great, glorious and ultimate purpose which God is working out for and in His entire creation.

Perhaps the prodigal son, while feeding swine in a strange and unfriendly land, wondered many times, "Why did not my father compel me to stay home: Why did my father allow me, in my selfishness and foolishness, to have my own way?"

But after the prodigal had had his experience feeding swine and eating husks he finally returned to the pleasure and bountiful provisions of his father, undoubtedly knowing why his father had allowed him for a brief time to go his own selfish and rebellious way.

Is our God less wise and loving than the father in the parable of the prodigal son? By what authority can finite man limit the infinite God to a period of 60 or 70 years?

