

Judgment of the Living Nations (Mat. 25:31-46)

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Context

1. **The context of Matthew 24-25: Jesus is responding to questions posed by the disciples (Matthew 24:3) concerning events yet future to their day. “When will these things be . . . ”**
 - The destruction of the Jewish temple.
 - The sign of his coming.
 - And of the end of the age.

2. **Remarks are associated with His Second Coming in Judgment at the end of this age.**
 1. The general characteristics of the end of the age.
 2. Specific signs of the end of the age.
 3. Warnings to be prepared at His return.
 4. *Judgment which follows upon the warnings.*

3. **The Warnings**
 1. As in the days of Noah → concerning the unprepared are taken in judgment (Mat. 24:37-44).
 2. Faithful and evil servant → concerning servants which grow comfortable with the culture wind up opposing the faithful servants and are judged (Mat. 24:45-51).
 3. Wise and foolish virgins → concerning religiously active persons who are not truly born of the Spirit will be shut out from the wedding feast which follows upon His return (Mat. 25:1-13).
 4. Parable of the Talents → concerning the stewardship of servants while their lord is absent (Mat. 25:14-30).

Today's passage (Mathew 25:31-46)

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come

to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.¹

General Christian principles of mercy

- Caring for the hungry
- Compassion for strangers (foreigners)
- Providing clothing for the poor
- Ministering to the sick
- Visiting those in prison

The importance of context

1. **As important as those principles are and as widespread as we find such compassion teaching spread throughout the Bible, I'm going to focus today on understanding the context within which this judgment takes place.**
 - A. **Many sermons and commentaries are available with do an excellent job of focusing on the general principles which are to characterize the compassionate ministry of believers at all times.**
 - B. **My experience: relatively few Christians have a good understanding of the significance of the context of this passage.**
2. **This passage is more than a parable teaching about the need for Christians to demonstrate compassion — as important as that may be.**
3. **Not a parable: but a real judgment that actually transpires at the Second Coming.**
 - A. **One of several judgments: judgment of those who remain alive at the return of Christ.**
 - Several passages inform us that Jesus will judge both the dead (which is a familiar concept) *and the living* (Acts 10:42; 1Pe. 4:5).
 - Paul informs Timothy that this judgment will occur “at His appearing and His kingdom” (2Ti. 4:1).
 - “When the Son of Man comes in His glory [at His appearing] . . . then He will sit on the throne of His glory [at His kingdom]” (Mat. 25:31).

- The judgment of the living.

4. Context: *at His kingdom*

- A. The importance of certain words in the Biblical text: *until, when, then*
- B. Verse 31: *when . . . → then . . .*
- C. A dependency: only *when* He comes in His glory, only *then* He will sit on the throne of *His* glory — not before.
- D. Jesus is presently seated at the right hand of the Father's throne — which He differentiates from His own throne which is presently unoccupied.
 - I. Seven letters to seven churches in Revelation: to church in Laodicea: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on *My throne*, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on *His throne*." (Revelation 3:21)
 - Two thrones: "Mine" and "His"
 - Two tenses: past and future
 - Past tense: "overcame and sat . . . on His throne" → at His departure, the ascension.
 - Future tense: "will grant to sit . . . on My throne" → at His return, the Second Coming.
- E. The throne in this passage is the throne of His father David on earth - not God's throne in heaven.

As Gabriel promised Mary, ". . . behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him *the throne of His father David*. "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:31-33)

F. God's throne is not the throne of David.³

- God's throne is in heaven, David's throne is on the earth.
- God's throne is from eternity, David's throne was not established before his lifetime.
- God's throne is eternal by definition. David's throne would be temporal if not for God's promise to make it everlasting.
- David's descendants sat on his throne. They never sat on God's throne.
- God refers to David's throne in the third-person, as "his throne" or "David's throne" or "the throne of David."

5. Context: concerns those among the nations who *remain alive* at the Second Coming

- A. **The historically unique dangers of the time of the end**
- B. **“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.” (Matthew 24:21-22)**
- C. **Huge physical disturbances as God's judgments are poured out prior to the Second Coming: “After the first six seal and six trumpet judgments, the population of the earth has been reduced by more than half.”⁴**
- D. **All those who refuse to worship the beast and are unable to hide will be killed (Dan. 7:21; Rev. 6:10-11; Rev. 12:10; Rev. 13:7,15)**

Three groups: sheep, goats, “My brethren”

1. **The sheep → those who give aid to His brethren.**
2. **The goats → those who fail to give aid to His brethren.**
3. **The brethren → distinct from both the sheep and the goats.**
 - Their condition: sick and in need of food, drink, clothing, housing
 - Their location: dispersed abroad (strangers) or in prison
4. **Every person left living is in one of these three categories**
5. **What distinguishes the sheep from the goats? How they treat His brethren.**
6. **What distinguishes the sheep from His brethren? Hmm....**
 - Question to consider: *do the brethren inherit the kingdom?*
 - Would Jesus, after commending the sheep for ministering to His brethren (whom He seems to have particular concern for) and giving the sheep entry to the kingdom, then deny entry by His brethren?
 - Both the sheep and His brethren inherit the kingdom, the goats do not—they are judged.
 - So why are His brethren considered separately from the sheep?

Who then are His brethren?

1. **Scriptural clues**
 - A. **The meaning denoted by the term *brother* depends upon the context**
 - His literal brothers, born of the same mother (Mat. 12:46; 13:55; Mark 3:32; Luke 8:20; John 2:12; 7:5; Acts 1:14; 1Cor. 9:5).
 - Those who do the will of God (Mat. 12:50; 28:10; Mark 3:35; Luke 8:21; John

20:17).

- Jews, physical descendants of Jacob (Acts 2:29; 7:23-26; 13:26; Rom. 9:3-5).

2. A solution:

- The commonality is *faith*: both sheep and His brethren are *born-again believers*. Since only people who are born again see the kingdom of God, both groups are believers (John 3:3).
- The difference is *nationality*: the sheep are Gentile believers from among the nations, His brethren are Jewish believers.
- As H. A. Ironside observed, “These are those of Israel who are related to Christ, *both according to the flesh and the Spirit*, and will be His authoritative witnesses in the coming time of tribulation, when the present church age is ended.”⁵

3. Why Minister to His brethren (Mat. 25:35-36)?

Brethren's Problem	Cause	Sheep's Response
Lacking food and water	Unable to buy or sell (Rev. 13:17)	Given food and drink
Naked	Unable to buy or sell (Rev. 13:17)	Clothed
Stranger, foreigner without housing	Flight of Jewish believers (Mat. 24:15; Rev. 12:13)	Taken in, given a place to stay
Sick and in prison	Persecution of all believers, but especially Jewish believers (Rev. 7:3-8)	Visited

4. Why “His brethren”, in this context, does not include Gentile believers.

1. Plight and flight of Jewish believers - a tiny sampling of representative passages
 - Jeremiah: “Ask now, and see, Whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins Like a woman in labor, And all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is *the time of Jacob's trouble*, But he shall be saved out of it. 'For it shall come to pass in that day,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'That I will break his yoke from your neck, And will burst your bonds; *Foreigners shall no more enslave them*. But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them. 'Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' says the LORD, 'Nor be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar, And your seed *from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid*. For I am with you,' says the LORD, 'to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But *I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished*. . . . The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until He has done it, And until He has performed the intents of His heart. *In the latter days you will consider it.*” (Jeremiah 30:6-11,34)
 - Daniel: “At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch *over the sons of your people*; And there shall be a *time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation*, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall

be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.” (Daniel 12:1)

- Notice whom the arch-angel Michael stands up for:
 - Jews : “the sons of [Daniel’s] people”
 - believers : every one “found written in the book”
 - Jewish believers
 - Matthew: “Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let *those who are in Judea* flee to the mountains. Let him who is *on the housetop* not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. . . . And pray that your flight may not be in winter or *on the Sabbath*.” (Matthew 24:20)
 - Revelation:
 - “And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.” (Revelation 7:4)
 - “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted “the woman who gave birth to the male Child”.” (Revelation 12:13)
 - It was Israel, by way of a Jewish virgin named Mary, who gave birth to Jesus (Isa. 7:14; Luke 1:31; Rom. 9:5).
2. The sheep inherit the kingdom and therefore *must* be believers — they represent the non-Jewish believers and are treated separately from “His brethren.”

5. Salvation by works?

- A. **The context helps us here: a period of unparalleled anti-Semitism.**
- B. **Consider the huge risks undertaken by the sheep!**
- C. **The larger the risks, the stronger the faith which the works reveal.**

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:14-17)

Why a judgment of the living nations?

1. **Consistent with the parables of the kingdom of heaven → the wicked removed.**⁷

A. Parable of the wheat and tares:

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. . . . Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in

the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather *out of His kingdom* all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun *in the kingdom* of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:43)

B. Parable of the dragnet:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but *threw the bad away*. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:47-50)

2. Consistent with the previous warnings in Matthew 24 and 25 → the wicked removed.

- Like the days of Noah - when the flood *took* the wicked away (Mat. 24:37-44).
- The evil servant is cut in to and appointed his portion with the hypocrites (Mat. 24:51).
- The foolish virgins are shut out from the wedding feast (Mat. 15:12)
- The servant who abused the talent entrusted to him is cast into outer darkness (Mat. 25:30).

3. To Populate the millennial kingdom to follow: “. . . inherit the kingdom prepared for you . . .” (Mat. 25:34)

4. So that the Kingdom begins with 100% believers: both the nations and Jews.

5. To fulfill the promise of Jesus, “Blessed are the meek, For they [and only they] shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)

What are the major things we've learned in our time in Matthew 24 and 25?

1. The problems and dangers which have characterized history past (include world wars) will be eclipsed by the convulsion which attends the time immediately prior to Jesus' return.
2. At His return there will be a separation in preparation for a time of blessing to follow: those without a relationship with Christ—those He doesn't know—will be removed from the earth in judgment.
3. Two key questions:
 1. Given the many warnings and parables: am I a believer? Have I been born again of God's Spirit (John 3)?
 2. Given the Jewish aspects revealed of the coming time of danger, where do I stand?
 - If these persecutions came to pass today, would I be found among the Gentiles

that take the enormous risks involved to minister to “His brethren” in their critical time of need?

- Or is my attitude essentially that of a “goat”?

4. When the *people* of God neglect the *Word* of God they become unaware of the *will* of God and oppose the *work* of God!

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Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Matthew 25:31-46
2. Ref-0057, January/February 2001, p. 30
3. “Several factors indicate that David's throne is separate and distinct from God's throne in heaven. First, several descendants of David have sat on his throne, but only one of his descendants ever sits on the right hand of God's throne in heaven. That descendant is Jesus Christ (Ps 110:1; Heb 8:1; Heb 12:2). Second, David's throne was not established before his lifetime (2Sa 7:16-17). By contrast, since God has always ruled over His creation, His throne in heaven was established long before David's throne (Ps 93:1-2). Third, since God's throne in heaven was established long before David's throne and since God's throne was established forever (La 5:19), then it was not necessary for God to promise to establish David's throne forever (2Sa 7:16) if they are the same throne. Fourth, David's throne was on the earth, not in heaven. David and his descendants who sat on his throne exercised an earthly, ruling authority. They never exercised ruling authority in or from heaven. By contrast, as noted earlier, the Bible indicates that God's throne is in heaven. Fifth, the Bible's consistent description of David's throne indicates that it belongs to David. When God talked to David about his throne, God referred to it as ‘thy throne’ (2Sa 7:16; Ps 89:4; Ps 132:12). When God mentioned David's throne to others, He referred to it as ‘his throne’ (Ps 89:29; Jer 33:21), ‘David's throne’ (Jer 13:13), and ‘the throne of David’ (Jer 17:25; Jer 22:2, Jer 22:4, Jer 22:30). By contrast, the Scriptures' consistent description of the throne in heaven indicates that it belongs to God the Father.”²
4. Ref-1265, Rev. 9:15
5. Ref-1124, 339-340
6. Ref-1268, p. 203
7. The separation of the sheep and the goats at the Second Coming also refutes the idea of a posttribulational Rapture. “The implications [of this passage] are clearly in favor of a pretribulational view. If the rapture and translation of the church occur while Christ is coming from heaven to earth in His second coming to set up His kingdom, and the church meets the Lord in the air, it is obvious that this very act would separate all the saved from the unsaved. Under these circumstances, no judgment of the nations would be necessary subsequent to the second coming of Christ, because the sheep and goats would already be separated. The implication of this passage in Matthew is that no rapture of living saints occurs at the time Christ comes to set up His kingdom.”⁶

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0057** *Israel My Glory* (Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry) [www.foi.org]. See Isa. 46:13.
- Ref-1124** Ironside, H. A., *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948).

Ref-1265 Anthony C. Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation - Volume 1*, (Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004) [<http://www.SpiritAndTruth.org/id/revci.htm>]. ISBN:0-9788864-1-0^c.

Ref-1268 John Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1974). ISBN:08024-5189-6^d.

Links Mentioned Above

a - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.

c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-9788864-1-0>.

d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?08024-5189-6>.