

Briefing Description: Judgment Will Come to Nations Lesson 1

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Executive Summary

This document synthesizes a lesson on the biblical concept of divine judgment, with a specific focus on the "Judgment of the Nations" as detailed in Matthew chapter 25. The core argument is that God's judgment on sin is inevitable and absolute. For believers in Jesus Christ, this judgment was executed upon Christ as their substitute on the cross. For those who do not accept Christ, they will bear the punishment for their own sin.

The lesson identifies a specific, future event known as the Final Judgment, which will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. This judgment, described as the separation of the "sheep and the goats," is for the survivors of the Tribulation period and will determine who enters Christ's thousand-year Millennial Kingdom on Earth. While signs of the end times are given, the exact day and hour of Christ's return remain unknown, necessitating a state of constant readiness for all people.

A significant portion of the analysis is dedicated to the unique theological purpose of the Gospel of Matthew. It is argued that Matthew is the only gospel to detail this specific judgment because its primary objective is to present Jesus Christ as the King. This theme is developed through three distinct phases within the gospel: the King Revealed (presenting Christ's royal credentials), the King Rejected (detailing his persecution and crucifixion), and the King Returning (culminating in the prophecy of his Second Coming in glory to judge and rule).

The Inevitability of God's Judgment on Sin

The central premise of the lesson is that judgment for sin is inescapable. All sin must be punished, and God, as the ultimate judge, is aware of every transgression, including those believed to be secret. This principle is supported by several scriptural passages:

- **Numbers 32:23:** *"You have sinned against the Lord and be sure your sin will find you out."*
- **Psalms 90:8:** *"You have set your iniquities before you your secret sins in the light of your countenance or face."*
- **Proverbs 13:21:** *"Evil pursues sinners."* This illustrates that the consequence of sin is an inescapable shadow.
- **Isaiah 3:11:** *"Woe to the wicked it shall be ill with him for the reward of his hand shall be given to him."*
- **Romans 1:18:** *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."*
- **Romans 2:9:** *"Tribulation and anguish on every soul of man who does evil of the Jew first and also of the Greek or the Gentile."*

Throughout history, God has demonstrated this principle through direct judgments, such as the fall of Adam and Eve which plunged the human race into sin, and the global flood that destroyed all but eight righteous souls. These events serve as historical "signposts" warning that God judges sin.

Christ as the Substitute for Believers

For Christians, the judgment for sin is not ignored but is placed upon a substitute: the Lord Jesus Christ. A believer's sin is judged, but through an act of faith, that judgment is borne by Christ on the cross. Jesus died bearing the sins of the world, thereby paying the debt for those who put their faith in him.

Conversely, individuals who do not accept Jesus Christ's atonement for their sin must bear the punishment for their own transgressions. Scripture repeatedly warns that they will "die in their own sin" and pay the penalty themselves. The belief that one can be absolved of sin through good works or righteous deeds apart from Christ is identified as scripturally incorrect.

The Final Judgment: The Judgment of the Nations

The lesson focuses on the "Final Judgment," which is set to occur at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This event is detailed in the primary text for the lesson:

- *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. (Matthew 25:31-32)*

This specific judgment is distinct in that it is for the people who have physically survived the catastrophic events of the Tribulation period.

- **Participants:** All surviving peoples ("all the nations") will be gathered before Christ's glorious throne.
- **Purpose:** To separate the righteous ("sheep") from the unrighteous ("goats").
- **Outcome:** The unrighteous will go into everlasting punishment, while the righteous will enter into eternal life (Matthew 25:46). This separation determines who will be permitted to enter the subsequent Millennial Kingdom—a thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth—and who will be kept out.

This judgment marks the beginning of the establishment of this kingdom, during which Satan will be bound for a thousand years and the saints will reign with Christ (Revelation 20).

The Timing of Christ's Return and the Need for Readiness

A recurring theme in the teaching is that the exact moment of the Second Coming is unknowable. This point is emphasized five times in the text of Matthew:

1. **Matthew 24:36:** *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but the Father only."*
2. **Matthew 24:42:** *"Watch therefore for you do not know what day your Lord comes."*
3. **Matthew 24:44:** *"Therefore you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*
4. **Matthew 24:50:** Christ will come at *"an hour that he is not aware of."*
5. **Matthew 25:13:** *"For you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."*

The explicit implication of this uncertainty is that all people, in all generations, must be in a constant state of readiness. While general signs are given (e.g., wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines), the specific time is intentionally withheld.

Individual Judgment at the Moment of Death

For any individual, the moment of death serves as their personal and final judgment. Their eternal disposition is sealed immediately upon death, making it the equivalent of the Second Coming for them. This concept is anchored in Hebrews 9:27: *"It is appointed to men to die once, and after that the judgment."* There is no change in a person's eternal state after they die; their eternity is fixed in either heaven or hell based on the choices made in life.

Matthew's Gospel: A Unique Focus on Christ the King

The Judgment of the Nations (the "sheep and goats" judgment) is described in significant detail in Matthew 24-25 but is absent from the other three gospels (Mark, Luke, and John). This is not due to a lack of importance but because this passage uniquely fits the primary purpose of Matthew's gospel: to present Jesus as the King.

While other gospels have different points of emphasis—Mark presents Christ's humanity to a Roman audience, Luke emphasizes his servant-hood to Gentiles, and John focuses on his deity—Matthew is uniquely "king-centric," writing primarily to a Jewish audience about the kingship of Jesus. This theme is developed in three key stages throughout the book.

1. The Revealed King

Matthew consistently presents Jesus with royal character and credentials.

- **Royal Lineage:** His ancestry is traced from kings.
- **Rival King:** His birth is dreaded by King Herod, a rival monarch.
- **Royal Visitors:** The wise men, described as "oriental kingmakers," present him with royal gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
- **Royal Herald:** An angel announces the coming of the King.
- **Royal Authority:** During his temptation, Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world, to which Jesus is already entitled.
- **Royal Law:** The Sermon on the Mount is presented as the new standards of his kingdom.
- **Royal Validation:** His miracles serve to validate his royal credentials.
- **Royal Title:** He is referred to as the "Son of David," a royal name.
- **Royal Entry:** His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is that of a king.
- **Royal Sovereignty:** He claimed absolute sovereignty and could have called a legion of angels to save him from the cross.
- **Final Royal Command:** His last words are a command of supreme authority: *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."*

2. The Rejected King

Alongside presenting Christ's regal nature, Matthew meticulously documents his rejection.

- **Pre-Birth Danger:** His mother Mary was in danger of being divorced and stoned, which would have ended his life before it began.

- **Threat at Birth:** Herod sought to kill him, slaughtering the male infants around Bethlehem.
- **Life in Obscurity:** He fled to Egypt and lived for 30 years in the non-descript village of Nazareth, where he was "without honor" and the people once tried to kill him.
- **Herald's Execution:** His herald, John the Baptist, was imprisoned and beheaded.
- **Personal Hardship:** He had "no place to lay his head."
- **Public Accusations:** He was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton, and being demon-possessed.
- **Crucifixion:** The desire to kill him arose almost immediately in his ministry and was ultimately fulfilled.
- **Cry of Forsakenness:** Matthew records his cry from the cross: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:48).

3. The Returning King

The theme of kingship culminates in the promise of his return. Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew's gospel are a sweeping sermon by Jesus about his Second Coming, completing the presentation of his royal character. This is not the first mention of his return in the gospel:

- **Matthew 16:28:** *"Assuredly I say to you, there are some standing here who should not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*
- **Matthew 19:28:** He speaks of a future time when *"the Son of Man will sit on his throne in all his glory."*

The detailed account of the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 24-25 serves as the capstone to Matthew's central message: the revealed and rejected King is ultimately the **Returning King**, who will come back as the sovereign ruler to judge humanity.

Greek Terminology

Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Agape^[^1]	ah-GAH-pay	A Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional, selfless, and sacrificial love. In a church context, it often denotes charity and benevolent giving, as with an "Agape box" for offerings.
Synoptic^[^2]	sin-OP-tik	From the Greek <i>synopsis</i> ("seen together"). It is used to describe the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and wording, and can be viewed "as through one eye."

[^1]: Referenced in the source as "agopic box" and "agopy box." [^2]: Referenced in the source when describing the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.