

will rejoice around the throne of God. They are people of all ages resurrected at the time of Christ's resurrection and ascended to heaven with Him (Matthew 27:52; Ephesians 4:7-8).

This is good news! There are some of earth's redeemed around the throne of God. They experience the same challenges and temptations in life that we face. Through the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, they overcome. We give praise to Jesus our all-powerful Creator.

But in Revelation 5:1, the scene dramatically changes: "And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals." Notice the throne once again and a scroll written on both sides. It is sealed with the divine seal, and no one in heaven or earth can open the scroll.

Verse 2 asks, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals?" Heavenly beings tremble. The issue is serious. If no one in heaven can open the judgment scroll; all humanity will be lost. No angelic being can represent humanity in earth's final judgment.

4. Why is does John weep when he looks into heaven, and what is the solution to his tears? (Revelation 5:1-7)

Jesus, the Lamb of God who has sacrificed His life for the salvation of all humanity, takes the scroll of judgment and opens it. All of heaven bursts forth in rapturous praise. His victory over Satan's temptations, His resurrection, His high priestly ministry provide salvation for all who choose by faith to respond to His grace.

Our Debt Is Paid

God cannot overlook sin. Justice must be served, and the sentence pronounced, but Christ Himself pays the debt. The sinner is free. In the final judgment, Jesus stands before the whole universe and declares that our debt is paid.

The judgment is incredibly good news for the people of God. It speaks of the end of the reign of sin and the deliverance of God's people. Can anything be more encouraging? Jesus stands for us in the judgment. His perfect righteous life covers our imperfections. His righteousness works within us to make us new. His grace pardons us, transforms us, and empowers us to live godly lives.

We need not fear. In the judgment, the powers of hell are defeated. Judgment is passed in favor of the people of God. The purpose of the judgment is not to find out *how bad we are* but to reveal *how good God is*. He sacrificed His life for us. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our slain Lamb, our interceding High Priest, our living Christ, and our coming King. Christ is all we need and everything our heart desires.

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STUDY GUIDE 4

THREE COSMIC MESSAGES

EARTH'S FINAL CONFLICT

MARK FINLEY

Lesson 4: WHY THE JUDGMENT IS GOOD NEWS, NOT BAD NEWS

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Online UNIVERSITY
www.hopelives365biblestudy.com

DANIEL WEBSTER WAS ONE OF AMERICA'S BEST-KNOWN STATESMEN AND ORATORS.

His ability to captivate audiences throughout colonial America made him one of the most popular speakers of his day. On one occasion he was asked what he regarded as the greatest thought that ever occupied his mind. He replied: "The sense of my individual responsibility to God."

Daniel Webster's words lead us to carefully consider our daily choices. Choices are the stuff life is made of, and our choices will determine our eternal destiny.

Revelation's Last-Day Judgment

The Bible's last book, Revelation, focuses on the end of the age-long controversy between good and evil. Lucifer, a rebel angel, challenged the justice, fairness, and wisdom of God. He claimed that God was unfair and unjust in the way that He administered the universe. At the very center of this conflict over the character of God is Revelation's final judgment.

Revelation's End-Time Message

The heart of the book of Revelation is an urgent last-day message found in the 14th chapter. In the imagery of three angels flying in mid-heaven, God proclaims his last message of mercy to a dying world.

1. What two main facts are we told about the judgment? (*Revelation 14:7*)

Revelation 14:7 reveals that the judgment is about God's fairness and justice. It declares that "the hour of His judgment has come." Once and for all, the beings on unfallen worlds will see that God has done everything He can to save every human being. Here are four realities about the judgment.

The judgment reveals God's justice and mercy. The judgment is part of God's ultimate solution to the sin problem. In Revelation, the judgment reveals God's unfathomable love as well as His justice in dealing with the controversy between good and evil. It reveals once and for all, now and forever, in the present and through all eternity, that heaven could not have done one more thing to save us. The cross and judgment both reveal that God is just and merciful.

The broken law demands the death of the sinner. Justice declares that "the wages of sin is death," but mercy responds that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Christ's death establishes the eternal nature of the law, and the law is the basis of judgment. Our good works, empowered by the Holy Spirit, do not save us, but they do testify that our faith is genuine. There is a second eternal truth about the three angels' announcement concerning the judgment that we cannot miss.

The judgment has arrived. It is a present tense judgment. The hour of God's judgment is here. John declares in no uncertain terms in Revelation 14:7 that "the hour of His judgment has come." Here is an urgent, present-truth message for the entire world. Notice our text does not say that "the hour of His judgment *will* come." It emphatically announces that "the hour of His judgment *has* come"—in the present tense. Revelation declares, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12). If Christ is coming to give out the rewards, there must, of necessity, be a judgment before He comes to determine who receives which reward when He arrives.

A Magnificent Scene in Heaven

After describing Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, the break-up of the Roman Empire, and the union of church and state throughout the centuries, God focuses Daniel's mind on a glorious celestial event that will set all things right.

2. In your own words describe the courtroom scene. (*Daniel 7:9, 10, 13*)

The destiny of all humanity is decided in heaven's courtroom. The oppressive powers that persecuted God's people are judged. Right prevails. Truth triumphs. Justice reigns.

3. What is the ultimate result of this heavenly judgment?

(*Daniel 7:14, 22, 27*)

Jesus is worthy to receive the kingdom. Love conquers. Grace is greater than sin. Right triumphs over wrong. Justice prevails. The judgment reveals the saving righteousness of Jesus and His triumph over the principalities and powers of hell. Let us study this point more deeply.

Read Revelation 4:1: "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven " and a voice calling, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." Jesus invites us to look through the open door in heaven's sanctuary to view eternal scenes in the great controversy between good and evil. What do we see when we look through heaven's open door? What issues are being decided in heaven's celestial court?

We notice in Revelation 4:4 that 24 elders are around God's throne. Who are these 24 elders? In 1 Peter 2:9, the apostle declares that we are a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood." These 24 elders represent all the redeemed that one day