

AMERICA'S HOPE

MONTHLY

MAY 1994

Judgment and Punishment in the Ages to Come

By C.O. Stadsklev

Part One of Two

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 wrong doing 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 being written to suggest more leniency toward willful evildoers, for there is a great deal too much of such unscriptural leniency in our age. Neither is it written 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 be much 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 assured He Himself will abide by these self-evident righteous principles.

Since judgment and punishment after death is very definitely a church doctrine, our 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 passages 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."