

Doctrinal Summary of The Judgment of the Nations

In Matthew 25:31-46, Matthew writes about a judgment carried out by Jesus when He returns at the second advent to establish His kingdom. This is one of two judgments that takes place at the end of the tribulation following the judgment of Babylon (cf. Rev. 17-18). The focus of this judgment is on those belonging to the various nations of the earth who survived the tribulation according to Matthew 25:32.

“All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;”

The word “nations” is translated from the Koine Greek word ἔθνη (“ehth-nae”) which literally means, “a grouping of people who are united by kinship, culture, government, or region, being tools or instruments used to accomplish something.” While originally used to refer to the genealogical lines of specific families and their offspring (thus, “race”), ἔθνη took on the larger role of referring to groups of people who resided in the same area and under the same social, governmental, and cultural norms (thus, “nation”). Such is the usage of ἔθνη by Jesus in Matthew 25 where He applies it to all the nations besides Israel as He prophesies the judgment that will come to them at the end of the tribulation.

The reality that this judgment occurs at the end of the tribulation is based upon Matthew 25:31 (spec. “when the Son of Man comes in His glory...then He will sit on His throne.”) and its harmony with Revelation 19:11-19 where Christ comes back to earth with His Bride, the church to establish His kingdom.

At that time Jesus will segregate the various people of the nations of the earth based upon whether they are believers or unbelievers. Jesus likes this segregation to a shepherd separating sheep from goats. The sheep in Jesus’ illustration are non-Jewish tribulational saints while the goats are non-Jewish tribulational unbelievers. Jesus commands the sheep to “inherit the kingdom prepared for” them and they enter the kingdom at the beginning of the millennial reign. But Jesus commands the goats to “depart” from Him in Matthew 25:41.

“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;”

The word “depart” is translated from the Koine Greek word πορεύεσθε (“por-eu-mes-theh”) which literally means, “you all are commanded to participate in being acted upon in a continuous type of action to travel from one place to another with an emphasis on departure from a specific place.” Jesus sends the non-Jewish tribulational unbelievers away to Hades having sentenced them to the Lake of Fire for eternity. Harmony of Revelation 19:21 with Revelation 20:11-15 results in the understanding this sentencing is not carried out until the Great White Throne Judgment. At such time all unbelievers from the beginning of human history the end of the millennial reign will be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity along with Satan.