

# JUDGING AND JUDGMENT

TO JUDGE THE WORLD 1



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*Judging and Judgment*

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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## Welcome to *Judging and Judgment*

Many people consider that judging is not a Christian thing to do. “Judge not, that you be not judged.”

Such people could not be more wrong.

Everyone must exercise judgment every day, and in a wide range of activities. The question is not *whether* we should judge, but *in what manner* we should judge. God has structured human life so that we cannot exist without judging and judgments, so we need to make sure that we’re exercising this responsibility as responsibly as we can.

“Judging and Judgement” is Part 1 in a series entitled, *To Judge the World*. In this four-part series we will be looking at what the Bible teaches about exercising just and righteous judgment, so that we experience the promised *shalom* of God. We begin with an overview look at the role of judging and judgment in Scriptures, where we find that those who are called the saints of God are appointed to judge the world.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview. We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Judge the Word?

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? 1 Corinthians 6.1-3*

*Wait a second*

Christians can often be cowed into silence by unbelievers who claim you can't trust the Bible because it's full of contradictions.

Just take today's passage, for instance. Here is Paul telling us that believers will judge the world and all things "that pertain to this life." But that appears to be exactly the opposite of what Jesus taught in Matthew 7.1, one verse of the Bible you can be sure every unbeliever has memorized: "Judge not, that you be not judged."

We can't have it both ways, our unbelieving friends insist. Either Paul is right, that we should judge everything and everyone, or Jesus is right that we shouldn't judge anyone ever. If Paul is right, that negates Jesus, and makes Him at least fallible in His teaching. If Jesus is correct, then Paul is wrong, and if he's wrong here, he can be wrong about much else as well.

Believers can sometimes become befuddled by this objection, and similar claims concerning "contradictions" in the Bible, because they don't have the full picture of what the Bible teaches about this and many other subjects. And this is a problem, not just because we end up looking bad and can't defend our faith, but because we may be failing in some very important areas of the life of faith, and thus missing the full and abundant life Jesus came to give us.

One area in which it is clear many Christians are dropping the ball is in exercising judgment. Judging and judgment are foundational to ethical living, regardless of your ethical framework. As we shall see in subsequent installments, both Jesus and Paul are correct about the matter of judging others. But we're going to need more light from throughout the Scriptures before we can understand what judging the world means, what it requires, and why we need to be more intentional and consistent in so doing.

*Inescapable*

Believers cannot avoid judging the world. As Calvin noted in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 6.2, "[believers] will judge the world, as indeed they begin already to do, because their piety, faith, fear of the Lord, good conscience, and integrity of life, will make unbelievers altogether inexcusable, as it is said of Noah, that by his faith he condemned all the men of his age" (Heb. 11.7).

Believers pronounce a kind of judgment on the world simply by refusing to affirm the world's values or to walk in the world's ways (Prov. 28.4). We recognize the truth of Scripture which says that God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are of a higher order than ours (Is. 55.8, 9). To the extent we walk in God's ways and think with the mind of Christ, we may expect to be out of sync with the world and therefore to be exercising a kind of judgment over it.

Since judging the world "comes with the turf" of being a Christian, we will be better equipped for this work if we understand the Biblical teaching about the role of judging and judgment within the household of faith. We will have no problem reconciling the teaching of Jesus with that of Paul if we understand both of them in the greater light of the whole counsel of God.

## *Judging and Judgment*

### *Ready to judge?*

But judging the world is not simply something we do by virtue of our identity as followers of Christ. Life requires judgment. Life is a continuous series of decisions, choices, reactions, and courses of action. In each of these we must exercise judgment – not just we as Christians, but all people. Sometimes the rush of things coming at us can be like the scene of Lucy and Ethel at the chocolate factory, trying to bag those chocolates coming at them on the conveyor belt, and becoming overwhelmed because they lacked the basic skills for the job.

Many Christians lack the basic skills for exercising judgment, yet the demands for choosing, deciding, and judging keep coming at them all day long. If we're not equipped to judge as Jesus and Paul teach us to judge, we'll end up simply going with the flow of the world. In which case, our faith will become overwhelmed, and we will fail in our calling as followers of Christ.

In this four-part study, *To Judge the World*, we'll look carefully at the Biblical teaching about judging, judges, and making judgments that line up with the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and the rest of Scripture. We need to be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us to everyone who asks (1 Pet. 3.15). But they're not likely to ask if they don't see in our lives something that stands out from the way the rest of the world thinks and lives. And if we are to stand out – as light, salt, and leaven – we will need to learn how to be effective choosers, decision-makers, and judges.

Unbelievers will always find things in Scripture which they consider to be objectionable or contradictory. And they may even consider our own lifestyles objectionable, as Calvin and many other commentators on our text indicate. But we must do our best to make sure our choices are consistently Biblical, our way of life lines up with Scripture on every point, and that we can explain our views about “things that pertain to this life” in ways that reflect the mind and judgment of Christ.

Then, though we be despised by the world, we will have exercised proper judgment over it, and will stand squarely in the path of discipleship, walking faithfully with the Lord (Ezek. 2.1-8).

### *For reflection*

1. What is your understanding of the Christian's responsibility with respect to judging others? What about judging things like culture, morals, and social protocols (manners)?
2. What are some of the “things that pertain to this life” concerning which we must make judgments every day? On what basis do people make such judgments?
3. What is ethics? Do Christian ethics differ from worldly ethics? In what ways? How do we know that?

*Next steps – Preparation: Today, keep track of every time you need to make a choice of some sort. Jot these down as you come to them. At the end of the day, review your choices in prayer. How confident are you that you judged as Jesus would judge in each of these choices?*

## 2 Structured for Judgment

*“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 16.18-20*

### *A new people*

Having escaped the Egyptians through the Red Sea, the people of Israel began their journey toward the mountain of God. They had been 400 years in Egypt, and for the last generation at least, they had known nothing but slavery. Their Egyptian masters ruled every aspect of their lives, telling them where to live, when to work and what work to do, and supervising all the details of their private lives.

In short, the people of Israel were not required to make many decisions.

As they journeyed toward Mt. Sinai, where Moses was leading them, the question must have occurred to many of them, “Now what?” How would these twelve tribes of former slaves ever manage to become a real nation?

God provided the answer for them at the very beginning of their journey, giving them fresh water in the desert, and instructing them through Moses to “heed the voice of the LORD your God, do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes” (Ex. 15.26). His grace and His truth would be their salvation.

Then, to reassure Him that His grace and Word would be sufficient, He brought them to Elim, where the twelve wells of water spoke to each tribe of God’s faithfulness and sufficiency, and the seventy palm trees reminded the people of how God had grown them, through their time of enslavement, from an immigrant band of seventy refugees to a nation of more than a million.

But still, some must have wondered, “How is this going to work? How will we ever become an orderly people?”

God’s answer was to structure His people so that sound judgment could be exercised at every level of society and in every community in Israel.

### *Judges*

The structure God intended for His people was foreshadowed during their sojourn in the wilderness. God gave His people His Law – commandments, precepts, statutes, and judgments designed to enable them to flourish in love for God and their neighbors. And to make certain that the people would all gain the benefit of this holy and righteous and good Law, God led Moses to structure the people so that they could be watched over by men carefully instructed in sound judgment according to God’s Word (Ex. 18): “Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.”

That pattern continued for forty years, until the people were assembled on the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho, preparing to enter the land of promise. What was instituted in the wilderness was now to be established in every community: Israel was to appoint judges in every city, and by their wise decisions and careful choices, the people would “live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”

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Judges were to be appointed in every city to “judge the people with just judgment.” These judges would meet in the gates of the city to consider matters relevant to the overall wellbeing of their community. They would discuss the Law of God and determine the best ways of ensuring its faithful practice in all the households of the community. If cases arose within the community where a decision needed to be made between disputing parties, the judges would assemble in the open air, hear the plaintiffs and defendants, and determine before the Lord the decision most in line with the demands of justice. Their deliberations would have been open to the public, and thus would have provided an opportunity for further teaching and learning of God’s Law.

### *Beginning at home*

But the work of judges was only the most visible aspect of judging and judgment in God’s plan for Israel. Teaching the Law of God was to begin in the home, in formal and casual situations, under the oversight of faithful parents, so that each person in Israel could have the Law of God written on their heart. Moreover, every aspect of their cultural lives, whether in the home (“doorposts”) or the community as a whole (“gates”), was to reflect the order, wisdom, beauty, decency, and justice encoded in the Law of God (Deut. 6.1-9).

All the people of Israel were to learn God’s Law and to exercise just judgment in applying it to every aspect of their daily lives. Thus they would show that they feared and loved God, and they would have little doubt in any situation concerning what was right to do in loving their neighbor. When individual judgment broke down, and failed to fulfill the requirements of God’s Law, community judgment would be appealed to before the elders and judges of the city.

The work of judging and judgment in ancient Israel had one overarching objective: to realize the *shalom* of God. The *shalom* of God is that sense of His presence, expressed as righteousness, peace, and joy. As the people of Israel grew from a rabble of slaves to a nation of Law-keepers, their example would capture the attention of surrounding nations, who would marvel at their Law, and wonder about the God Who gave such wisdom to men (Deut. 4.1-8).

From the beginning of His redemptive work with the people He had chosen for Himself, God built a structure of judging and judgment into the life of the nation, and of the communities and households that comprised that nation. It was the duty of every Israelite to read, study, submit to, and obey the holy and righteous and good Law of God, to exercise just judgment in all their roles, relationships, and responsibilities. For thus it would go well with them and they would prolong their days in the land of promise, and realize all the covenant blessings of God (Deut. 4.39, 40).

How would this straggling rabble of ex-slaves become a nation characterized by *shalom*? By embracing God’s structure for judgment, and judging sound judgment in all their ways.

### *For reflection*

1. Why were judges necessary in all the cities of ancient Israel?
2. The Law of God was holy and righteous and good in ancient Israel, and Paul explained that it remains the same today (Rom. 7.12). What does this suggest about the structure for *shalom* that God’s people should follow in our day?
3. Today we refer to God’s *shalom* as His Kingdom (cf. Rom. 14.17, 18), and we pray and seek its fuller coming in our lives and world (Matt. 6.10, 33). Can we expect to realize this apart from sound judging and just judgment at every level of life? Explain.

*Next steps – Preparation: How would you describe the role of God’s Law in your life at this time?*

### 3 Not Enough Judgment

*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* Judges 21.25

*An ironic title*

That last verse of the book of Judges comes as an apology for the whole book, especially the final chapters. How can we explain Israel's persistent lapses into sin? The tendency of the people to turn to idols, to become subject to foreign powers they were supposed to destroy? To follow leaders who were fallible in obvious and important ways? And finally, to turn against their own kindred in vicious warfare and strife?

Was it because there was no king in Israel in those days? That was part of it. However, God provided judges for the people, though they mostly acted as military deliverers. We see them exercising little of the kind of judgment Moses spelled out, helping the people learn to live by the holy and righteous and good standards of God's Law. Instead, the judges featured in this sad book were merely temporary deliverers, who rescued the people of Israel, or portions of them, from the oppression of neighboring peoples.

The problem in the book of Judges was not so much that there was no king in Israel; it was rather that the people were doing what was right *in their own eyes* rather than in the eyes of the Lord. The book of Judges shows us what happens when the people of God *fail* to exercise just judgment in the ways God prescribed through Moses. Absent sound judgment at every level of society, the *shalom* of God is elusive, if not non-existent.

Thus "Judges" is an ironic title for a book which highlights the failure of judgment at every level of Israelite society. Its purpose is to set the stage for Ruth and 1 Samuel by suggesting Israel's need for a *king* who will establish *justice and judgment* in the nation. The message of the book of Judges is that, the practice of just judgment failing, no human judges can keep God's people from descending to the sinful ways of the surrounding nations. God's people need a *king*, who exercises *righteous judgment* so that his people can *judge righteously* and realize the promised blessings of God.

The book we might, by its title, have expected would celebrate the importance of sound judgment, shows us instead what happens when insufficient and inadequate judging and judgment are exercised by the people of God.

*Downhill disaster*

The book of Judges begins hopefully. Joshua is dead, and the nation is without a leader, with still much work to do in subduing the Canaanites. So the people wisely consult the Lord for guidance and gain a significant victory over the Canaanites and Perizzites (Jdgs. 1.1-7). From there, under the leadership of the tribe of Judah, the people scored important victories in other parts of the land.

But things went downhill from there. Not every tribe took up the baton. Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan dropped the ball, some of them coming under tribute to the nations they failed to dispossess. Rather than be strong and courageous to carry out their appointed task, these tribes were content to settle into one or another arrangement of accommodation with the Canaanite peoples.

From there it was less than a generation before "the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers...and they followed other gods" (Jdgs. 2.11, 12).

Consequently, instead of resting in God's *shalom*, the people of Israel came under the hot anger of the Lord:

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“Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed” (Jdgs. 2.15).

Poor decisions, misguided choices, and bad judgments landed the people of Israel smack dab in the crosshairs of God’s wrath. And even though He graciously raised up judges to deliver them, “they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so” (Jdgs. 2.17).

#### *No king in Israel*

The books of Judges and Ruth appear to have one primary purpose: to emphasize Israel’s need for a king, and specifically, to point to David as the Lord’s anointed. Moses had given the people hope that, when they finally did anoint a king, he would be a man of God’s Law and would rule the people according to that Law (cf. Deut. 17.14-20). The king would write for himself a copy of the Law of God and “read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes” (Deut. 17.19). As a result, the Lord would “prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel” (Deut. 17.20). Under the king’s just oversight, local judges and heads of households would follow suit, and the *shalom* of God would obtain throughout the land.

In other words, the faithful king, ruling according to the Law of God, would lead the people and their judges to judge righteously in all areas of life, thus ensuring the blessings of God on every facet of life in the land of promise (Deut. 28.1-14). Under David and Solomon, this vision would be realized, albeit only in part (cf. 1 Kgs. 10).

Yet the full realization of God’s program would await the coming of a King greater than either of these (Is. 9.6, 7).

#### *For reflection*

1. Why were the people of the book of Judges unable to exercise just judgment?
2. What kinds of distractions kept the people of the book of Judges from judging and making judgments in line with God’s Law?
3. How does the book of Judges counsel us concerning the importance of exercising sound judgment?

*Next steps – Transformation: Meditate on Psalm 1. What does the righteous person do? Does this describe your practice?*

## 4 Judging and Judgment at Work

*Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited His people by giving them bread. Ruth 1.6*

### *An enclave of shalom*

The primary purpose of the book of Ruth is to point to David as the legitimate king of Israel. The years following the book of Judges saw the people of Israel clamoring for a king, so that they could be “like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8.5). The problem, of course, was that God never intended Israel to be like all the other nations, but to be a holy people, a royal priesthood, and nation possessed by God and suffused in all its people and parts with His *shalom*. He gave them His Law precisely to facilitate this and to ensure that Israel would stand out as a nation to be admired and emulated (Deut. 4.5-10; cf. Mic. 4.1-8).

By the time the people got around to seeking a king such as Moses had promised, their judgment had drifted so far from God’s Word that they could only think of kingship as all the other nations practiced it – a strong man to keep them safe from their neighbors. So, naturally, they selected the tallest, handsomest, and most promising of their young men, a man with powerful resources, to be king over them (1 Sam. 9.1, 2).

But Saul was the wrong choice. He was not descended from the line of Judah, as God had specified their king should be (Gen. 49.8-11), and the people selected him on the basis of outward appearance, rather than inward character and disposition. Saul’s forty-year reign would be little more than a repeat of the book of Judges, this time under a king who feared the people more than he feared God (1 Sam. 13.11, 12).

When Saul died in battle, a civil war erupted in Israel between Saul’s descendants and loyal followers, and those of David. The struggle dragged on for seven years (2 Samuel 1-4).

Everyone knew that Samuel had anointed David to be king. But, always eager to capitalize politically on some putative stain or blot, the followers of Saul undoubtedly tried to discredit David by pointing out that he had Gentile blood in his lineage, and that at more than one place in his pedigree (cf. Ruth 4.18-22).

The writer of the book of Ruth intended to silence that objection to David’s claim by setting his genealogy in the larger perspective of God’s divine initiative and covenant. His purpose was to show that the chaos of Judges led to David through the *shalom* of God granted through the people of Judah (cf. Ruth 1.1, 6; 4.22). And in the process of accomplishing this brilliant literary stroke, the writer gives us a glimpse of the work of judging as God intends it to exist among His people.

### *Judah and Boaz*

As if to make known His opinion concerning the chaotic, every-man-for-himself situation of the book of Judges, God sent a famine throughout the land of Israel (Ruth 1.1). That famine got the attention of the people of Judah, who appear to have seen it as a wake-up call to repent and return to the Lord. After many years, the Lord “visited” the people of Judah by lifting His famine and allowing their harvests to abound.

When Naomi heard this, she immediately made plans to return to her homeland, believing she would find shelter, provision, and comfort from the bitterness God had visited upon her in the land of Moab.

When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem of Judah, they found a community abounding in the blessings of God. Harvests were abundant (Ruth 1.6). A great landowner like Boaz observed the statutes of God’s Law in the stewarding of his land and the treatment of his workers. He treated his workers with great dignity and respect (Ruth 2.4). Boaz made sure the laws about poor people gleaning were faithfully observed (Ruth 2.1,

### *Judging and Judgment*

2). He warned his workers to respect Ruth as a woman – though a Moabitess – and not to interfere with her person or labor (Ruth 2.9, 14-16). He understood God had allowed this Gentile woman to be incorporated into His people, and he was determined to let her find full refuge, safety, and flourishing under his Law-honoring protection (Ruth 2.11, 12). The situation on Boaz's estate was one of *shalom*. Not even surrounding farms or neighboring families knew as much of this blessedness as he did (cf. Ruth 2.8, 9, 22).

God had indeed visited His people, and faithful people like Boaz understood that the proper response to God's grace was to take up His Law in judging all aspects of their lives, so that grace and mercy (the meaning of "Ruth") might find a continuing home among them.

#### *Judges in the gates*

In Ruth 4 we see the judgment of God at work with respect to matters affecting the *shalom* of the community. Boaz decided to marry Ruth, but he knew that, following the Law of God, another was ahead of him in the legal line to take Ruth as a wife and inherit her dead husband's property (Ruth 3.10-13; cf. Deut. 25.5-10). He would not act outside the Law of God in this matter, so he proceeded as the Law prescribes, trusting in the Lord to show what is just and conducive to ongoing *shalom*. He gathered his "opponent" in this case for a hearing before the elders of the city.

Boaz brought the matter before the judges of the community, assembled in the gate, where everyone could watch the proceedings and learn how the process of exercising just judgment operates. There being no statute that spoke directly to Boaz's situation, the judges interpreted the existing Law into the situation and made a judgment that pleased everyone, most of all, God.

The *shalom* of Bethlehem remained unbroken. Indeed, it was reinforced and enhanced by the sound judgment of Boaz and the elders of the city, further adorned by the agreement and blessing of their neighbors (Ruth 4.11, 12).

God was at work in this community for *shalom*, and therefore the offspring of this story of grace and renewal must certainly be the one God has chosen to bring His *shalom* to all His people (Ruth 4.22).

But even David was not God's final answer, not His final key to bringing sound judging and judgment to His people, and with it, His promise of ever-increasing, everlasting *shalom*.

#### *For reflection*

1. The writer of Ruth seems determined to connect David to faithfulness in keeping God's Law. Why? Why should that matter to us?
2. *Shalom* grows out of the combined sound judgment of people who are living under the Law of God. Can we expect to know God's *shalom* apart from His Law and all His holy Word? Explain.
3. Bethlehem in the time of Ruth and Boaz provides a glimpse into the coming Kingdom of God, where our eternal King rules according to His Word unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Why do you suppose we don't see more of the *shalom* of God in our day?

*Next steps – Preparation: What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? What specific actions will you take today to pursue that shalom-laden ideal?*

## 5 Shepherds and Judges

*I said, "You are gods,  
And all of you are children of the Most High.  
But you shall die like men,  
And fall like one of the princes."  
Arise, O God, judge the earth;  
For You shall inherit all nations.* Psalm 82.6-8

### *A failure of judgment*

Jesus indicated that the condemnation pronounced in Psalm 82 was against those in Israel who had been entrusted with the Word of God and the responsibility of exercising just judgment (cf. Jn. 10.34, 35). In this psalm, God calls the elders, judges, and other rulers of His people together and condemns them for judging "unjustly" (v. 2), that is, in a manner not according to His Word.

Their duty was to interpret the Law of God so that the poor and fatherless, and the afflicted and needy would be properly cared for, and the "hand of the wicked" would be restrained. Yet the rulers of Israel had turned their backs on the light of truth in God's Law and were walking about "in darkness," causing the foundations of *shalom* to become unstable throughout the land (v. 5).

God's warning to them was that, while they had been appointed to an exalted place of service, to carry out the judgments of God on behalf of His people, they would nevertheless die like the men and princes of the earth – condemned and abandoned for their failure to exercise the judgment God required of them.

God Himself would then arise to judge the earth, and as He did, bringing His just Word to bear in every nation and among all the peoples of the world, He would inherit the earth and rule over it with just judgment.

God likened the rulers of Israel, who had been set to judge God's people and to maintain His *shalom*, to shepherds who cared more about themselves than the flocks entrusted to them (Ezek. 34.1-10). They took advantage of their exalted role to aggrandize themselves at the expense of those they were appointed to serve (vv. 2, 3). They failed to care for those in need of healing and to seek those who had drifted from the fold (vv. 3-6). By failing to exercise sound judgment on behalf of the people, they opened them up to winds of doctrine and notions of truth that ravaged and depleted them (vv. 7, 8). Consequently, those false shepherds and unworthy judges would hear what must be the most terrifying words any shepherd, pastor, teacher, elder, head of household, or other judge of God's people could ever hear: "Behold, I *am* against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them" (v. 10).

### *God will judge*

The promise of Psalm 82.8 is reiterated in Ezekiel 34.11-31: God will arise and judge His people. He will come to be their good Shepherd, so that just judgment and *shalom* might return to the flocks of the Lord, and they might grow strong and productive, be happy and at peace, and all their surroundings may abound with the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Lord in His new covenant of peace. "I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. Thus they will know that I the LORD their God, *am* with them, and they, the house of Israel, *are* My people," says the LORD God. 'You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you *are* men, and I *am* your God,' says the LORD God" (Ezek. 34.29-31).

### *Judging and Judgment*

It was inevitable that the judges appointed throughout the nation of Israel in the Old Testament should fail in their assigned task. From the beginning, they had no heart for God or His Law (Deut. 5.29); they wanted to be like the other nations, with a safe national government and high places for worship scattered about the land; and they preferred the short-term delights of power, privilege, and possessions to the blessings of *shalom* outlined in God's covenant and guaranteed by His Law.

So clearly, if God's people were ever to realize His promised peace and bounty, He would have to arise and judge the earth. He would have to come to shepherd His flock. He would have to take upon Himself both the failure of those false judges, and all the wounding and wickedness their failure had allowed, as well as the burdens and obligations of the just King God had promised long ago through Moses (Gen. 49.8-11; Deut. 17.14-20).

And when He came, when God arose to judge and shepherd His people, His rule and Kingdom would come on earth under the scepter of the Prince of Peace; and righteousness and justice would increase continually, without end: "The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Is. 9.6, 7).

#### *To judge the world*

God the righteous Judge and good Shepherd has come. He has borne the judgment of God against not only the false judges of the world, but the wayward and wicked people – every one of us – who have followed our own judgments rather than those of the Lord into lives of disappointment, misery, sin, hopelessness, and death. And the good Shepherd and righteous Judge has come as the Prince of *Shalom* to bring the righteousness, peace, and joy of God's rule and realm to all those He calls out of darkness into His glorious light (Rom. 14.17, 18; 1 Thess. 2.12; Col. 1.13, 14).

The Prince of Peace – our Lord Jesus Christ – has given us His Word of truth to set us free from the lies of unbelief, and His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. And He has appointed us to learn and practice just judgment, so that His *shalom* might settle in and upon us and issue through and from us to make all things new. All who believe in Jesus are appointed to judge the world (1 Cor. 6.2), to serve as shepherds in the flock of God, seeking the promised bounty, goodness, fruitfulness, and *shalom* of the Lord.

Our duty, if we are not to fail like those judges condemned in Psalm 82 and Ezekiel 34, is to *learn* sound judgment and to *exercise* just judgments in all our decisions, choices, and actions. For as we do, the Kingdom of Jesus, and the increase of His righteousness (judgment) and peace, will increase without end.

We are those through whom the Lord arises to judge the earth; and if we are faithful and diligent in this calling, the inheritance of the nations will be His, and ours.

#### *For reflection*

1. Why is shepherding a good way of thinking about the role of a judge?
2. Jesus is our good Shepherd. What can we learn about exercising just judgment by learning from Him?
3. Jesus said that learning, obeying, and teaching His Law was integral to the promised *shalom* of His Kingdom (Matt. 5.17-19). What are the implications of this for you?

*Next steps – Preparation: Meditate on Psalm 1. What will you begin to do in order to become better grounded in God's Law and all His Word?*

## 6 Time for Judgment

*So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Matthew 19.28*

### *Bitter but sweet*

The Old Testament is, for some believers, a reverse edition of the book John was instructed to eat in Revelation 10.8-11. That book was sweet to the taste and went down easily, but it left a bitter feeling in John's stomach. The Old Testament, at least for a growing number of evangelical Christians, doesn't taste so sweet or go down so easily.

In fact, certain pastors today are teaching their people that the Old Testament is too hard to understand, is fraught with too many difficulties, and contains so much that runs contrary to the spirit of our age that we ought to just set it aside and not bother with it any more. It's a bitter book, these pastors insist. Apparently they are not aware that this heretical view, claiming only a New Testament canon, was analyzed and soundly rejected by the martyr bishops and theologians of the late second century AD.

The heresy was called Marcionism then; it should be regarded as Foolishness today.

The Old Testament is indeed a difficult book, especially its record of the failings of the shepherds and judges God appointed to care for His flock. His instructions were straightforward: Feed the Lord's sheep on the Word and Law of the Lord, and tend the communities of His people for righteousness and *shalom*.

But as we have seen, generation after generation of Israel's judges failed in their calling. When they failed, the people failed as well, and the promised *shalom* of God failed to materialize with any degree of consistency. And yes, that can be a bitterly disappointing story.

But there is a sweet core to the bitterness of the Old Testament, and that is the continuing story – from Genesis to Malachi – of a promised Good Shepherd Who would come to bring a Kingdom not of this world and the *shalom* of God which surpasses understanding for all who believe in Him. And when He comes, Jeremiah explained, He would bring other shepherds with Him, and they would restore the Lord's sheep to their folds, and cause them to be fruitful and increase, so that they fear no more, are dismayed no more, and rest in the glorious *shalom* of the Lord (Jer. 23.1-4).

It was just those shepherds Jesus was addressing in Matthew 19.28.

### *The day of judgment*

Jesus plainly said that His disciples (cf. v. 25) would assume the role of shepherds and judges that generations of Old Testament rulers had failed to fulfill. He would give His Kingdom to them (Lk. 22.29) and the keys to open that Kingdom to faithful seekers everywhere (Matt. 16.19), and they would exercise judgment over the people of God for *shalom*.

Jesus clearly had in mind the Old Testament background of local judges and national kings, and He established the disciples as pre-eminent over all the affairs of His Kingdom. He would embolden them to lead the Church in bearing witness to Christ. He would employ them in starting churches throughout the Roman world and establishing within those churches elders and judges who, following the apostles, would work for the *shalom* of God's people. He would inspire certain of them to write a new book, sweet to the taste but bitter in the outworking, because He knew His Word would be clear and thrilling, but it would lead to much strife and conflict in a world at war with God.

## *Judging and Judgment*

Jesus promised that the Word of His disciples – His own Word through them – would accomplish the needed judgment of His people, so that they could feast together with the Lord and one another, and inherit all the promised blessings of God's eternal covenant (Matt. 19.29; Lk. 22.28, 29). That Word – the New Testament – would illuminate the sweet core of the Old Testament and shed light sufficient for understanding all God's revelation as pointing to Jesus (Jn. 5.39).

This is all very clear. But what may *not* be so clear is the question of when Jesus intends to do this. *When* will He establish His Kingdom, with His apostles as chief judges, ruling by His Word over His people as they inherit the land and promised *shalom* of the Lord.

### *Two clues*

Our text offers two clues.

First, Jesus says this Kingdom of *shalom*, with the Word of the apostles ruling according to His Word and Spirit, would begin “in the regeneration.” I take this to mean, “in the day when the Spirit of God begins to regenerate those who believe in Jesus.” When the Spirit comes to work with the Word of God for life and *shalom*, then the regeneration will have begun (Jn. 6.63). The evidence of the book of Acts certainly concurs with this timing, as we find there the apostles in the role of chief judges of Jesus' ongoing work of spreading the Good News, building His Church, and advancing His Kingdom.

The second clue supports this view as well. The apostles would begin judging Jesus' people for *shalom* “when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory.” When Jesus ascended to heaven, He sat down at the right hand of the Father, as the Apostles' Creed affirms, where He sits as *supreme* Judge over the world and all things.

Jesus is enthroned in glory. The day of regeneration has been dawning now for nearly 2,000 years (1 Jn. 2.8). And the Word of God through the apostles stands as the interpretive key to the Old Testament, which it unites to itself in Jesus as the final authority on all matters of faith and life.

The Church is being built on the foundation of the apostles *and* the prophets – the New Testament *and* the Old. And we who have come to know the regenerating grace and power of our Lord Jesus are being *fitted* by that Word to *judge the world* (1 Cor. 6.1-3) and to bring righteousness, peace, and joy – the *shalom* of God – into every area and aspect of life.

We need *all* the counsel of God in *all* His Word if we are to fulfill our callings and mandate as Kingdom followers of Jesus Christ.

### *For reflection*

1. How does the New Testament help us in understanding the Old Testament?
2. Since *all Scripture* is given by inspiration of God and is profitable (2 Tim. 3.15-17), should we neglect *any* part of Scripture in being fitted for the good works for which we have been redeemed (Eph. 2.10)? Explain.
3. The writings of the apostles are founded upon, refer frequently to, and affirm the writings of the Old Testament. Did the apostles set aside the Old Testament or the Law of God? Should we?

*Next steps – Preparation: Review your practice of reading, meditating on, and studying the Bible. Are you gaining the benefit God intends from all His Word? How might you improve your time in the Scriptures?*

## 7 To Judge the World

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? 1 Corinthians 6.1-3*

### *Appointed as judges*

We have seen that the work of judgment, which Jesus appointed to His apostles, has already begun. The book of Acts reports the exciting results that God brought about through the sound judgment of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, James, and the other apostles, as they launched the worldwide mission of Jesus and rooted it firmly in the soil of the Roman Empire.

In the process of carrying out Jesus' mandate, the apostles drafted many inspired works to help us in understanding their mind and the mind of Christ. The New Testament opens the mysteries of the Old Testament in exciting ways, so that now, just as in the days of the apostles, we have access to all the counsel of God to help us grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus (Acts 20.27; 2 Pet. 3.18), and to fit us for every good work for which we have been redeemed (2 Tim. 3.15-17; Eph. 2.8-10).

To every believer is assigned a work of judging and judgment. Every day we must make choices and decisions, take steps and walk a certain way, relate to others by a set of disciplines, and do all our work as unto the Lord and for His glory. We are *always* judging and exercising judgment, and the combined judgment of all the followers of Jesus Christ has potential to turn our upside-down world rightside-up for Jesus Christ (Acts 17.1-9).

In the remaining three parts of this series we're going to look more carefully at the details of what a life of judging and judgment entails. In Part 2 we'll consider the nature and scope of the judging and judgment God has called us to exercise. Part 3 will look more carefully at the distinctive features of the righteous judgment we are to use in judging the world. And Part 4 will show us how to apply the work of God's judgment in specific areas of life for the Kingdom and glory of God.

Let's take a closer preview look at what's coming in this series.

### *Part 2: Judge Not?*

As we mentioned earlier in this study, some Christians will certainly have pause over the matter of judging the world. They will remember that Jesus said we should not judge others, lest we come under judgment ourselves.

But as we shall see, that statement is often taken out of content and left incomplete by those who shy away from their appointed task of judging the world. No one can avoid exercising judgment. Even those who do not have faith in the Lord must make choices and decisions, follow a certain path in life, and determine how they will conduct their relationships and carry out their work. Every area of our lives requires judging and judgment, including what we observe from the example or hear from the advice of others.

So we cannot avoid judging and judgment. We simply need more insight from Jesus and His Word as to what that entails. We do not judge as the world judges, but, following the guidelines of the Old and New Testaments, we want to judge with *righteous* judgment, for this is how we hope to be judged ourselves.

In Part 2 of our series, *To Judge the World*, we'll consider the question, "Judge Not?" and discover a more Biblical view of this inescapable responsibility.

## *Judging and Judgment*

### *Part 3: Exercising Judgment*

Following on the teaching of Part 2, in Part 3, “Exercising Judgment,” we’ll examine more closely what this inescapable duty requires of us. Judging and judgment begin with ourselves, of course, as we come before the Lord and His searching Word and Spirit, so that He can convict us of any sins and shed light on our daily path.

As we go out into our world each day, our calling is not to point out every person’s failing, nor even to express our judgments at every opportunity. We must be reluctant judges, addressing only matters that can edify others and advance the cause of Christ and His Kingdom. We must also make sure that our judgments are generous, righteous, consistent, restorative, and joyful in nature.

When we judge like Jesus judged, and as God intended from the beginning of His Word, we bring light and life into every situation. And although this does not guarantee that everyone will be pleased with our judgment, it does ensure that God will be glorified, and we will know His pleasure in all our judging and judgments.

### *Part 4: To Judge the World*

The Church, as the Body of Christ, and each of us as individual members of the Church, must prepare ourselves and exercise vigilance in judging the world and exposing its folly as the Lord leads. Our times can be confusing, and the worldviews we confront are subtle and often dangerous. We need to be firmly grounded in God’s Law – and all His Word – if we’re going to make sense of our times and keep from being blown here and there by the false winds of unbelief. In many arenas – political, social, environmental, vocational, and more – we will be called upon to exercise the righteous judgment of Christ.

But we also need to know how to relate to the world of culture, how to make the most of everyday opportunities for conversation, and how to show hope to people for whom hope is but a fleeting and often elusive ideal.

The saints of God do, indeed, judge the world, every day, in every situation. But only as we learn to judge *as God intends* and *as Jesus and the apostles* demonstrate will our judging and judgment bring the *shalom* of God into the everyday situations of our lives.

As believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we do not shun the calling to judge the world. Rather, we take it up circumspectly and with joy. We must make sure that we understand this calling, that we are daily preparing to embrace it, and that our judging and judgments are a source of grace, truth, and *shalom* to our sad and weary world.

### *For reflection*

1. Think about a typical day in your own life. In how many different situations are you required to make some judgment?
2. People frequently associate *judgment* with *condemnation*. But only God can exercise this kind of judgment. That being the case, what must our judging and judgment entail? If we do not judge to *condemn*, then why?
3. Wouldn’t this be a good series to study with someone else? Make copies of the Part 1 PDF (see below) and share them with some friends. Urge them to read it and work through the questions for each lesson, and at the end of the study. Then get together to discuss what you’ve learned. Make a commitment then to study all four parts in this series, *To Judge the World*.

*Judging and Judgment*

*Next steps – Preparation: Make a list of some friends with whom to share this study. Seek the Lord about this effort, asking Him for wisdom and direction as you consider studying this four-part series with others.*

*Judging and Judgment*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What role do judges have in God's scheme of things?
2. Why are judges likened to shepherds in God's eyes?
3. Can we avoid the necessity of judging and making judgments? Explain.
4. What's the difference between judging to *condemn* and judging with righteous judgment?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.