Part A: Salvation, Part B: Judgment, Part C: The Ages to Come

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B-3: What Happens to the "Left Behind" Folks?

The previous Post focused on the future of the saints, the believers who followed the Light of God and were rescued and rewarded in the Afterlife. So the question now is, what about the rest, the evildoers as we might call them – not only those who will be living during the End of the Age, but those from all ages? What happens to them?

A tricky subject this, because it means addressing questions about the existence of Hell and the judgments of God. And these, in the minds of so many people, are questions fraught with fear, skepticism, and wishful thinking. At the outset, it should be understood that, behind whatever happens to any soul in the Afterlife, stands the deliberate intentions of the Almighty, our loving Father in both Heaven and Earth, to bring justice while at the same time guiding His created beings towards happiness and fulfillment and into fellowship with Himself.

Without the reality of Judgment and possible Hell to come in the Afterlife, our present lives would be meaningless. There would be no reason to live a moral life, for if there is no Judge or Judgment, what does being good get you in the end? Nothing. You might as well just be selfish – rob, steal, kill, whatever it takes to get what you want.

Another factor: the endless cycle of violence in our present world results from our lack of faith in the Judgment. But if we know that in the end the Judge will weigh up the accounts, and those who have committed evil will get their due punishment, then it frees us from the drive to seek

vengeance in this life. The cycle of war and violence can stop.

A helpful sermon, called "Accepting the Judge", by the late Timothy Keller does an excellent job of addressing this subject about the existential reality of and need for Judgment.

At this point it will help to look at something Jesus said about Himself (as the One to whom the Father had given *"authority to execute judgment"* – John 5:27):

> ***A time is coming when all* [not just "many" but "all"] *those who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and they will come out—those who did good things [will come out] to a resurrection of [new] life, but those who did evil things [will come out] to a resurrection of judgment [that is, to be sentenced].* (John 5:27-29, AMP)**

Christ's statement here about future Resurrection offers an all-encompassing perspective on the Final Judgment (as does the similar passage in Matthew 25:31-46). As we search further in the Scriptures, some fine-tuning of this overall picture comes to light. We learn, for example, that the Lord's *"authority to execute judgment"* is exercised at different times and stages.

For example, it is easy to pinpoint two main "Final Judgments", along with two main Resurrections – one at the end of the Great Tribulation prior to the dawn of the Millennial Golden Age to come, and the other at the end of the Millennium prior to the dawn of the *New Heaven and New Earth*, which will see the full reality of the merger of Heaven and Earth.

Let us start then at the end of the *Great Tribulation*: Christ has appeared, and God's people are gathered and privileged to escape the coming *Wrath/Indignation* that we learn in Revelation 16 is about to be unleashed upon the Earth.

> ***Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come… will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* (1Thessalonians 1:10, Matthew 24:31)**

In the Daniel 12 passage, often quoted in this study, we note the words, *"At that time your people shall be delivered… And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."* (12:1-2) *"Many"* does not mean "all". Those who have come to Christ (and for all we know that may include some worthy folks who came to Him in the Afterlife) will be raised at this time. But as for the rest of the dead, they have yet to be accounted for, and this subject is addressed later in chapter 20 of the *Book of Revelation*.

The great event of the deliverance of God's people happens at the end of our present Age and is known in the New Testament as the *"first resurrection"*. (Revelation 20:5-6) And it is limited to whomever God knows are His *"people… every one who is found written in the book"*, whether still alive on Earth at the end of that final *"time of trouble"* or, having died in ages past, alive in the spiritual realm. (Daniel 12:1) (A previous Post explores the subject of "Who Are God's People?")

A corresponding Scripture in the *Book of Revelation* supplies some more information about this time of deliverance for God's people, and the resulting Judgment that goes along with it:

> ***The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,***
> ***And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,***
> ***And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,***
> ***And those who fear Your name, small and great,***
> ***And should destroy those who destroy the earth.***
> **(Revelation 11:18)**

The *24 Elders* are proclaiming here the Resurrection of the dead at this pivotal point in human history – the *"time of the dead"*, especially those who've been waiting during the centuries of human history. The saints have been pleading, *"How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* (Revelation 6:10) And now is the time of their reward, for the Lord and His Christ to *"reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great"…* and to *"avenge their blood".*

The *Elders* refer to this as a time of Judgment – *"they should be judged"*

– meaning simply that God's *"servants… small and great"* shall be rewarded and *"those who destroy the earth"* shall be punished.

So what exactly will be happening during this time after the gathering of the saints? On Earth there will be chaos and destruction and the final *Battle of Armageddon.* In that Battle many who *"destroy the earth"* will receive their judgment. It is a time of separation – of the truly evil from the truly righteous.

And this, we could say, is "Part B" of the Judgment that ends this present Age prior to the Age of the Millennium. "Part A" was the separation of the righteous who were gathered out of the Earth ahead of the approaching storm of Plagues known as the *Bowls of Wrath*.

Regarding the phrase *"should be judged"*, the Greek word for it *(krino)* has as its primary meaning,

> **"To separate, put asunder; to pick out, select, choose" [*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, pg. 361]**

And truly, this is what judgment does; besides bestowing rewards or penalties, judgment also separates the good from the bad – a principle that is brought out nicely in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Weeds). As the farmer separates the wheat from the weeds, keeping the wheat while disposing of the weeds, so God will separate those who are worthy from the evildoers with whom they must co-exist during this present Age. (Matthew 13:24-32) The Lord will usher His people into His Kingdom and will send the evildoers to their "kingdom" in the *Lake of Fire*.

> ***The beast… and with him the false prophet…were cast alive into the lake of fire.* (Revelation 19:20)**

And we might assume that a good many of their followers will go to Hell with them.

And that more or less sums up what happens in this "Final Judgment" prior to the Age of the Millennium.

The following Scripture also seems to point to this reality:

> ***When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed…*** **(2Thessalonians 1:7-10, ESV)**

Now the Scriptures just quoted apply, it would seem, to the more extreme groups of people: those dedicated to the Light, to the good, and those dedicated to the Darkness, to the evil. But nothing is said about those who, even though they were not *"written in the Book"*, did not descend to the same depths of evil as those *"who destroy the earth".*

Surely, there will be vast numbers of those who could not be counted as "saints", nor even saints who arrive with disgrace and shame into the Celestial Realm. Yet they have not been so dedicated to evil that they must be sent to the *Lake of Fire.* But those who are alive during the *End of the Age* will have to endure this short era of *Indignation.* Their "judgment", it would appear, is that they are not sent anywhere.

For them and for the souls in *Death and Hades,* knowing they were not able to participate in the *Resurrection/Rapture* is a judgment in itself. And this appears to be an issue that the anti-Christ *Beast* will try to capitalize on: *"he opened his mouth in blasphemy against… those who dwell in heaven."* (Revelation 13:6) Perhaps he will try to keep the world in his corner by stirring up envy and hostility against those whom the world knows were resurrected at the end of the *Great Tribulation*.

So there is a sort of judgment against these folks who didn't follow in Christ's footsteps, a separation at least. Not all the evildoers are sent straight to the *Lake of Fire*… although that might become their eventual destination. But before that happens, because they were not so terribly evil as *"those who destroy the earth"*, they are given, we might say, a reprieve – an opportunity to turn towards righteousness – a rather long one (in Earth time at least) of 1,000 years. And we will look more into this further ahead.

So what else can we say about these who did not enter the Kingdom

during their earthly lives, nor were they granted entrance afterwards in the Spirit Realm and as a result have landed in *Death and Hades*? Or what about those living in the End of the Age era, who did not enter the Kingdom and were not resurrected, yet have managed to make it through the era of turmoil known as the *Indignation* or *Wrath of God?*

(*Hades*, by the way, is not the *Lake of Fire* – although it is often translated as *"Hell".* It is better to view *Death and Hades* as the "realm of the dead" or as Purgatory, a sort of neutral region for those who have not sold themselves out to evil, but neither have they committed themselves to the good. They have not capitulated to the Darkness, but neither have they submitted themselves to the Light.)

They did evil, perhaps rejected God in some way. They did not come to Christ during their earthly lives and/or their works ran counter to the ways of God. If they had been doing *"the truth"* and their *"deeds"* had *"been done in God"*, as Jesus taught in John 3:21, they would have been deemed as born-again "pre-Christians", worthy to be welcomed into the Kingdom. (John 3:21) *"For you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him."* (1John 2:29)

But their lives did not merit this distinction, and they were simply unable to come to the Light in the Afterlife. No doubt, there will be many who are fairly innocent, whose lives were so encumbered with survival and trying to make ends meet that they simply never had opportunity to reflect and choose a path that would lead them to the Light. What will become of them? Will not many of them want to change their ways and mindsets after entering the Spirit Realm, after having the opportunity finally to understand the Truth, or to see the choices and direction available to them, or to realize where they had been in error during their earthly lives?

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To summarize: if we understand it correctly, the Final Judgment of our present Age includes the *Marriage Supper* and the *Judgment Seat of Christ,* and they are almost simultaneous events. "Part A" of this pre-Millennium Judgment (or separation) occurs at the time of the *Rapture* (the *First Resurrection*) when all God's people from ages past, and those

still alive on Earth, are transported into the Celestial Realm.

They are separated from those on Earth who are left behind to endure the storm of the *Plagues* of the seven *Bowls of Wrath.* And of course, in the Spirit Realm also, multitudes will not be resurrected but will remain dwelling there in whatever places to which they were assigned or confined in their after-death existence in that less-than-ideal region of the nether world known as *Death and Hades.*

Following this great separation event of the Rapture comes the second major separation – the *Judgment Seat of Christ* when, as Gabriel explained long ago, *"many… will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace".* (Daniel 12:2, NLT)

Then comes "Part C", the next great event during this End of the Age era: the *Battle of Armageddon*. In it the anti-God forces are defeated, and we learn that *"the beast… and with him the false prophet… were cast alive into the lake of fire."* (Revelation 19:20) It seems that some of the world's worst criminals, past and future, will meet their fate at this Judgment (if they haven't already before this time).

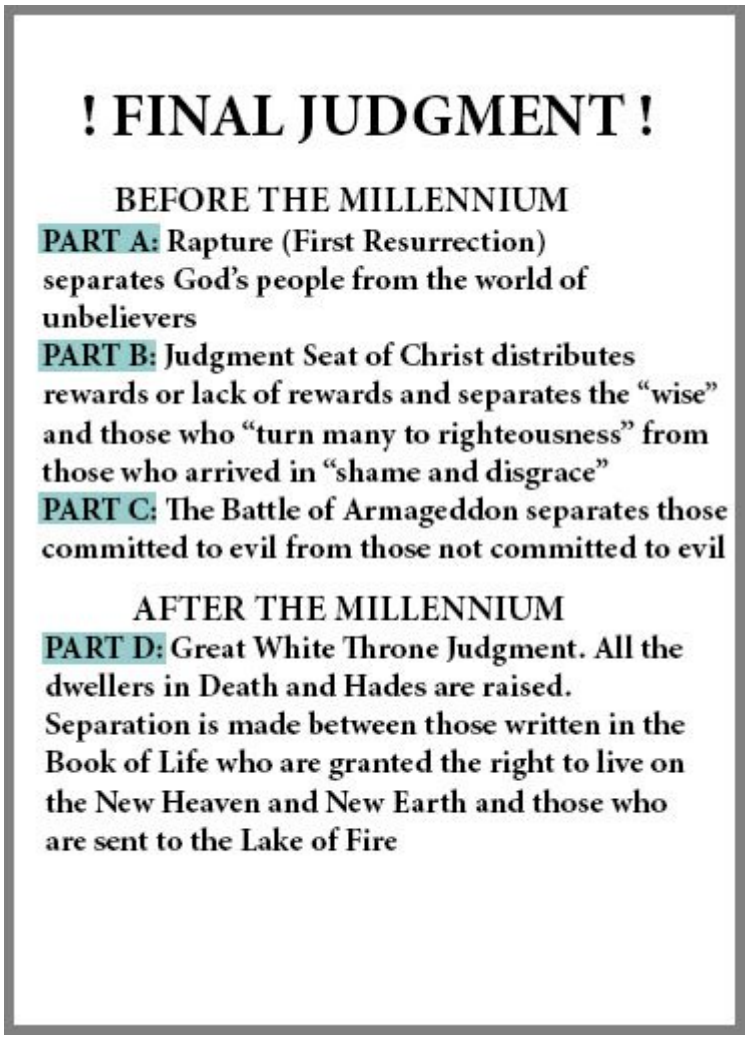
And this is the third End-of-the-Age separation before the start of the Millennium. These who have been destroying the earth are separated from those who dwell in a sort of undecided, limbo state and who will continue dwelling, either on Earth into the Millennium or in the Spirit Realm of *Death and Hades.*

Not everyone still on Earth gets sent to the *Lake of Fire* after the *Battle of Armageddon*. And this parallels (in reverse) what happened at the Second Coming. In the *Rapture* gathering of God's people, much of the world got "left behind" (not resurrected). After *Armageddon*, multitudes will again be left behind, but in a good way (because they are not sent to the Lake of Fire). And for this they will be thankful since they continue to live on into the coming Age of Peace, the Millennium.

By the way, another indication that a large number of souls are not sent straight to the *Lake of Fire* appears in Revelation 20. At the end of the Millennium – 1,000 years later – we learn that the *"Death and Hades"* realm of the spirit world will have *"delivered up the dead who were in*

***them"* and it will then be *"cast into the lake of fire"*. (20:13-14) When this happens, souls will receive their judgment before the *Great White Throne* and will be sent, either to the *New Heaven and New Earth* or to the *Lake of Fire.* (Revelation 20:12,15) With no more realm of *Death and Hades,* these are the only two realms left to which souls can be sent.**

This Judgment at the end of the Millennium can be viewed then as the continuation of the Judgment that started before the Millennium began. And once this final judgment of the Final Judgment is finished, then begins the glorious era of the *New Heaven and New Earth* with God's crowning gift of the *Heavenly City* coming to Earth. *"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."* (Revelation 21:3)



This passage in chapter 20 makes it clear, by the way, that *Death and Hades* is a different realm from the *Lake of Fire*, which is the true Hell for those who deserve and need it (and choose it). *Death and Hades*, on the other hand, although not necessarily a heavenly environment, is more like a way-station, or waiting room, or holding cell, a neutral realm, designed to give souls more opportunity to decide which way they want to go.

Then at the *Great White Throne Judgment* at the end of the Millennium, after being judged, *"each one according to his works"*, many whose names ended up getting *"written in the book of life"* are granted entrance into the *New Heaven and New* Earth, and even the right to enter the Heavenly City. (Revelation 21:10,27) Again, there will be a separation of the righteous from the unrighteous. For those whose names are not written in the *Book of Life*, it will be what they want and choose, even though it means getting sent to the *Lake of Fire.* (Revelation 20:15)

As there will be a *First Resurrection* and Judgment prior to the Age of the Millennium, so also there will be a Second Resurrection and Judgment prior to the Age of the *New Heaven and New Earth*. (Regarding these future "Ages" spoken of in the Bible, we will learn more about them further ahead in this series.)

To those who were part of the *First Resurrection*, it is promised, *"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection."* One reason they are blessed is because, as that Scripture goes on to say, *"Over such the second death has no power."* (20:6)

And what is the *Second Death*? It comes after the First Death of course. But this First Death is more than just the death of the physical body. For those not *"registered in heaven… not written in the book of life"*, especially those who *"loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"* (Hebrews 12:23, John 3:19), the *First Death* marks the transition into that less-than-ideal region of the unseen realm known as *Hades* or *Sheol*. As for the *Second Death*, this will bring entrance into the *Lake of Fire* and its heavy-duty chastisement and correction – needed for those souls who have continued in their rebellion and evil-doing and thus were *"not found written in the Book of Life".* (Revelation 20:15)

No doubt, there are many differing opinions about who will qualify for

this final sentencing to the *Lake of Fire*. Following are some thoughts on this subject:

First of all, it should be understood that for the souls who were left behind at the *First Resurrection*, the game is not over. They can be thankful, knowing they will get their "second chance" during the Millennium before they are brought before God at the *Great White Throne Judgment*. Multitudes of those who are raised at this Second Resurrection will, like the *First Resurrection* souls, *"inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* (Matthew 25:34)

These are the *"rest of the dead"* who *"lived not again until the thousand years were finished."* (Revelation 20:5) They are not in the same category as those whose earthly lives were so bad that they had to be sent straight to that dreadful realm of the *Lake of Fire* – the fate, for example, of the *Beast* and the *False Prophet* and their worshipers. (19:20, 20:10).

Now it was said of the *First Resurrection* saints that *"they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years".* Most modern translations use a more accurate version: *"they <u>came to life</u> and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."* (Revelation 20:4, ESV) This gets across better the idea that the saints were resurrected to <u>physical</u> life so they could reign with Christ <u>on the Earth</u> in the post-Armageddon Age of the Millennium.

It follows then, in the context of the passage, that when the Second Resurrection rolls around and the *"rest of the dead"* (who *"did not <u>come to life</u> until the thousand years were ended"*) are raised, that should mean they too will be raised to <u>physical</u> life (along with, of course, spiritual life and its blessings and peace). (20:5)

Unlike the *First Resurrection* folks, their Resurrection had to be postponed. But then after the thousand years, their time has come. But before they *"come to life",* they must appear before *"a great white throne and Him who sat on it."* And since *"the earth and the heaven fled away"* from before the Almighty, we understand that the Final Judgment is taking place <u>in the Spiritual Realm</u>, not the physical. (20:11) And this is the time when the dead from *Death and Hades* are *"delivered up"* and *"judged, each one according to his works"*. (20:13)

Now where the passage states, *"the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended"* (20:5, ESV), it does not mean they were resurrected to physical life just so they could die again and be sent off to their *"second death"*. They *"come to life"* so that they can enjoy physical (and spiritual) *"life"* on the New Earth. This is the great Second Resurrection when the *"rest of the dead"* will *"come to life"*. And just as the *"first resurrection"* saints *"came to life"* physically at the start of the Millennium, so these Second Resurrection souls, after their acquittal in the Final Judgment, will also return to physical life (on the *New Heaven and Earth*).

The goal of Resurrection is not to escape from our existence on Earth and spend the next Age in the Spiritual Realm. The goal is to bring Heaven to Earth, to dwell here on Earth. Of course, Earth in the coming Age after the Millennium will be far different from what it is now; it will be Heaven on Earth.

> ***And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle* [dwelling] *of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."* (Revelation 21:3-5)**

And those who *"lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years"* (20:4) will be preparing the way, establishing Earth's government, making it ready for the next stage of growth in humankind's capacity to rule in harmony with and in line with how God knows Earth should be governed.

Anyway, all that to say, it would make more sense to think that the souls in *Death and Hades* were brought to life so they could *"live again"*, both spiritually and physically. Having finished their "rehabilitation" in *Hades* (the *First Death*), they are now given entrance into the bountiful and blessed *"life"* of the Heavenly Realm known as the *New Heaven and New Earth*.

And it would seem that the vast majority of these First Death folks will be released at this time – judging by the fact that the phrase *"rest of the*

dead" **is used. Indeed, it would be hard to understand how anyone, however much of an evildoer they may have been during their first lifetime, upon entering the Realm Beyond, would not quickly come to his or her senses. The blindness to spiritual reality that we experience now will be stripped away upon entrance into the Afterlife and will undoubtedly cause immediate or eventual repentance on the part of most of the souls who were obliged to enter that unseen realm known as *Death and Hades.***

And by the time the *Great White Throne Judgment* arrives, most of them will have repented and thus will be *"found written in the Book of Life"*. This seems, at any rate, to be the implication behind the *"rest of the dead"* phrase, which is dealing specifically with the souls who were unworthy of the *First Resurrection*, but not so vile or corrupt as the *Beast* and *False Prophet* and their worshipers and other such characters through the ages who, after their First Death, had to be sent straight to their *Second Death* in the *Lake of Fire*.

Now we should consider this passage: *"If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."* (Revelation 20:15, ESV) Many a commentary will state that all the souls who were not part of the *"first resurrection"*, not only spend a thousand years in *Death and Hades*, but afterwards get sent to the *Lake of Fire* as well.

But this position fails to account for God's great desire for humankind, that He is *"not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* (2Peter 3:9) The whole purpose for Christ's coming to Earth was not *"to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."* (John 3:17) And surely, that purpose continues on after the First Death of the souls who find themselves confined to the realm of *Death and Hades*.

The phrase *"if anyone's name was not found…"* suggests that the number of *Death and Hades* inmates, who actually wind up in the *Lake of Fire*, are the exceptions and will be comparatively few. (20:15, ESV) These exceptions would be the ones who have continued their proud and evil ways during the Afterlife, still rebellious and unashamed of what they had done during their earthly lives.

To them, the Lord will have to say, *"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* (Matthew 25:41) *"This is the second death."* (Revelation 20:14) This Second Death marks the end of life in *Hades* and the beginning of a "living death" in the *Lake of Fire*.

It may be a matter of speculation, but we might guess that there is plenty of activity going on in the Spirit Realm – whether in Heaven, Hell, or In-between. And souls will be busy working, playing, interacting, learning, reflecting. It only seems reasonable that if our earthly environment is so full of activity, then why should it not be the same, and even more so, in the Realm Beyond?

Now there are several Scriptures that refer to the dead as those who are *"asleep"* who, at the Resurrection, shall *"awake"*. This might lead us to think that the Afterlife existence is nothing more than a period of total inactivity, some kind of unconscious state. But this term "asleep", used often in Scriptures in place of the word "dead", is a euphemism – a milder, more comforting way to refer to the painful and sorrowful event of death.

The "sleep" analogy carries with it the hope and expectation that the one who has died is not forever gone; if one is asleep, he shall "awake". And indeed, our former acquaintances and loved ones shall awake, not only in the spirit realm, but one day also, shall be resurrected, and with a new body, return to live on the Earth in the Millennium, or afterwards, on the *New Earth*.

To assume that our souls lapse into some kind of state of total inactivity or unconsciousness when we arrive in the World Beyond seems out of character with God's nature. Is He so overwhelmed trying to handle all the influx of souls that He has to make them go into hibernation? Surely, God is quite capable and competent, a powerful God, the Almighty, and in His universe, whether on Earth, in Heaven, in Purgatory, or in Hell, we should expect He will keep the souls of humankind very much alive, awake, and active.

And indeed, some of the findings in modern medical practice seem to confirm this reality. There are today a large number of well-documented cases of hospital patients who lapsed into coma, yet, while their bodies

were "asleep", their spirits had all kinds of experiences: observing their hospital rooms, meeting Christ, meeting angels (or demons in some cases) or former loved ones who had passed on, visiting Heaven, and so on.

From the Scriptures too, we know that departed souls can be engaged in work-like activities – such as helping to guide and counsel their fellow laborers on Earth. John the apostle recounts having met an (actively working) angel and was about to *"worship before the feet of the angel"* who had been guiding him, but the *"angel"* warned him not to, saying, *"I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."* (Revelation 22:8,9; 19:10) There is also the example of Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration where *"there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus."* (Matthew 17:3) Perhaps the best example is Christ's answer to the secular Sadducees who did not believe in life after death: *"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God… God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."* (Matthew 22:29,32)

So for those souls who must bide their time in the realm of *Death and Hades*, we can probably assume there will be plenty to do and learn, and presumably, opportunity to choose a better path than they had taken while in their earthly bodies. According to Revelation 20:13, they will be *"judged each one according to his works."* At this point perhaps it is less a matter of "faith" (belief in what can't be seen); it will be easy there in *Hades* to behold the realities of the spiritual realm, which are mostly veiled now to us who dwell in the earthly realm.

But in *Hades* what counts will be *"works"* that show repentance. Again, this final "judgment according to works" runs counter to the idea of the *Hades* realm being nothing else but a state of suspended animation; otherwise, how could the souls dwelling there have the opportunity to make any progress in their spiritual lives and eventually, merit the honor of having their names written in the *Book of Life*?

Then what about the *"works"* of their earthly lives, we may wonder? Should not their final judgment be based on those *"works"*? The problem here is that the whole reason they landed in *Hades* in the first place is because on Earth *"their deeds were evil"*, and so they were unable to *"come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed."* (John

3:19-20, NIV)

The *Judgment Seat of Christ* is meant for those who were privileged to participate in the gathering of God's people at Christ's Second Coming. Those whose earthly lives did not gain them that privilege will have been transferred into the realm of *Hades*. They are known as the *"rest of the dead"* who *"did not live again until the thousand years* [in Earth time] *were finished"* – at which time they will receive their judgment. (Revelation 20:5) So, are they to wait in *Hades* for a thousand years, only to be tossed into the *Lake of Fire* at the end of it?

If the Final Judgment is based only on their works on Earth, then everyone in *Hades* would get sent to the *Lake of Fire*. That would be the case if all activity had ceased. But if they are to be judged according to their works, then their lives must have continued in *Hades*. They would have opportunity to undo past mistakes, re-live their lives, make better decisions, and show by their *"works"* while in *Death and Hades* that they had changed for the better, or in some cases, changed for the worse.

Those who change for the worse seem to be the exception, and for them the Scripture would apply, *"If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."* (Revelation 20:15, ESV) But as that Scripture suggests, multitudes, if not most, of *Hades'* dwellers will end up finding their names *"written in the Book of Life"*. God's purpose and plan – to bring blessedness and peace to the souls of humankind and to restore them into fellowship with Him – will not be defeated but will have made a great stride forward.

As for the *First Resurrection* souls over whom *"the second death has no power"*, they proved themselves worthy during their earthly lives, having lived in righteousness, and will have received Christ and their citizenship in the Kingdom before receiving their rewards at the *Judgment Seat of Christ* prior to the Millennium. (20:6)

But for the multitudes who did not live their earthly lives in righteousness and were thus denied entrance into the Kingdom at their *First Death*, the game is not over. They will have spent a lifetime in the spiritual realm, in their Afterlife, where they will have had plenty of time to reflect and repent from the deeds of their earthly lives, which were

sadly lacking in some way, and even to show that repentance by their works and conduct in the Afterlife.

Hades **appears to be a region – like a giant rehabilitation camp – where souls, who are less guilty than the *Lake of Fire* inmates, can re-orient themselves, learn whatever they need to learn, in preparation for the final Day of Judgment. Or maybe we should say, more optimistically, in preparation for their entrance into the Heavenly Realm.**

The Catholic Church has envisioned *Hades* as a sort of Purgatory, a time and place where souls can (if they so choose) shed the sins and wrong attitudes of the past. Although the Church misused the doctrine during the Middle Ages (to extract money from their congregations), that does not mean that the concept of Purgatory is not valid.

Although Scripture does not explicitly say so, we can deduce its existence, just by the fact that there is a gap between the *First Resurrection* (and First Death) of human souls and the final Judgment before the *Great White Throne*. There is a space there, and since many souls will not go to the *Lake of Fire* (as implied in the *"rest of the dead"* phrase explained above), then it must be that they have, in that space, been purged of whatever was holding them back from entrance into the Kingdom of God.

That there does exist a Purgatorial Realm is implied also in some of Christ's statements. During His earthly ministry, for example, He warned those Pharisees and Elders who opposed Him, *"How can you escape the condemnation of hell* (*Gehenna* or the *Lake of Fire*)*?"* To others He said, *"tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you."* (Matthew 23:33, 21:31) According to these statements, a good many of Jesus' enemies were destined for the *Lake of Fire*; some, however, would make it into the Kingdom – albeit after the *"tax collectors and harlots"*.

That is, they could not enter the Kingdom right away after their physical death but would be given opportunity some time after their First Death to repent and to escape their possible destiny in the *Lake of Fire*. Presumably, after a re-training period in *Hades* (Purgatory), they would be released, and ready finally, to join the *"tax collectors and harlots"* who had already entered the *Kingdom of Heaven*. And those too obstinate and

proud to accept the "re-training" would end up in the *Lake of Fire*.

Christ's statement about the fate of the Jewish leaders who opposed Him – *"tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you"* – points to an intriguing aspect about the Realm Beyond that counters the common idea that souls will be locked into their fate at the time of their first death. There is mobility; souls don't have to remain confined "forever" to the realm in which they find themselves if their attitudes change for the better.

In that saying of Jesus one gets the impression that tax collectors, harlots, and religious/political leaders couldn't enter the Kingdom immediately. But after some re-orientation and rehabilitation, they were ready for Heaven. In God's view, though, the ones who were obviously "sinful" (tax collectors and harlots) were better prepared than the less obvious but even more sinful and self-righteous religious/political leaders.

The Final Judgment at the end of the Millennium will sift out and separate the incorrigibly rebellious – those who, even in the Afterlife in *Hades*, continued in rebellion against God and His ways. They will join those already there in the *Lake of Fire*, the *Beast* and the *False Prophet* and probably many other of the world's worst criminals. This will also be the abode for Satan and his hordes.

As mentioned earlier, perhaps we could compare *Hades* to a "holding cell" in a prison, meant for inmates whose fate has not yet been decided. While awaiting trial and possible conviction or acquittal, accused persons are put into this neutral area of a prison, separate from the main prison where all the convicted inmates are held. Similarly, many of the souls who have died on earth and were not *"counted worthy to attain that age, and the* [first] *resurrection from the dead"* must bide their time in the "holding cell" of *Hades*, presumably until the day of Final Judgment. (Luke 20:35)

But unlike the "holding cells" of earthly prisons, souls have opportunity, while in *Hades*, to re-orient themselves, to repent of their waywardness or, in many cases, to harden themselves and continue in their former evil way. We might compare the future Final Judgment to that of those who perished in the Flood and were given their opportunity for release when Christ *"went and preached to the spirits in prison"*. (1Peter

3:19)

And at the end of their sojourn in *Hades*, these "holding cell" inmates shall *"come forth– those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."* (John 5:29) For them it will be either a new lease on life in the Second Resurrection, or it will be a *Second Death*. Either they will enter what is called the *New Earth* (Heaven on Earth after the Millennium), or they will be sent to the *Lake of Fire*.

Purgatory is often thought of as a place where fiery purging of sin and unrighteousness is carried out. There may be some truth to this, but probably it is better to see Purgatory as an "unlearning/learning process". This kind of understanding helps to remove some of the dread often associated with it. The same could apply to *"shame and everlasting disgrace"*, which can be thought of as a Purgatory of sorts (within the Kingdom of God) – in a heavenly environment, not a barren, desolate one. *Hades* and the *Lake of Fire* are also "purgatories" where souls may continue the "unlearning/learning process".

How much of a difference there is between the purgatory of *"shame and everlasting disgrace"* and that of *"Death and Hades"*, we don't know. Could they be vastly different from each other? Or, could the Catholic idea of Purgatory as a function of the domain of Hell be better understood as a function existing within the Kingdom of God (in the same way we would think of the *"shame and everlasting disgrace"* region as part of the Kingdom of God)? And thus, there would be almost no difference in these celestial domains of *shame/disgrace* and *Hades*?

In fact, that is almost the impression one gets at the conclusion of Christ's Parable of the Two Servants, which states that *"the master of that* [unfaithful] *servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and will… appoint him his portion with the hypocrites."* (Matthew 24:50-51) The same Parable is re-told in Luke 12:46 where, instead of *"hypocrites",* the word *"unbelievers"* is used.

The difficult truth to swallow for many who call themselves Christians is this: the one who has had the *"born again"* experience and then fallen away, is he or she any different from or any better than the non-Christian

who only had his conscience to go by, along with some bit of God's Light? (Romans 2:11-27 expounds on this principle quite well.) Judging then by what is said in the Scriptures just mentioned, it would appear that both groups – disgraced believers and ignorant unbelievers – will arrive at pretty much the same station of Purgatory in their Afterlife existence.

In fact, here might be the significance of Christ's frequent statement, *"So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."* (Matthew 20:16, 19:30, Mark 10:31, Luke 13:30) We are judged by our works, not just our faith, as taught in James 2:14-26. (The Post "Salvation by Works?" explores this subject in more detail.)

Well, it would be pretentious to try to answer this difficult question about whether or not some believers might end up in the same space in the spiritual realm as many of those who are unbelievers. *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God."* (Deuteronomy 29:29) Through divine revelation, God may provide the clues we need to better understand these more mysterious aspects of the Afterlife, but until then, it is better not to speculate too much on such matters.

The important thing to remember is that we are all under God's loving care, regardless of where we may end up in the Afterlife. In addition, we should take seriously the fact that all believers are accountable, not exempt from bad behavior, as Jesus made very clear in His parables, especially those in Matthew 24-25.

Many Christians may find it difficult to accept the Purgatory doctrine because they place so much emphasis on the idea of one's "perfection" in Christ – all sins forgiven and wiped away at the moment of Salvation. True enough. But we continue growing, for God is always moving in our lives.

> **Exhibiting the character of Christ doesn't happen without inner conflict. Salvation doesn't bring an end to the tendency to sin; it doesn't automatically curb our sinfulness. Therefore we are told to "put off" some aspects of our lives and to "put on" Christlikeness. (in a Post from *More like Jesus* series, *Directors' Corner,* January 2016)**

And there will be plenty to learn (or unlearn) in the Afterlife, and for some a stint in*"shame and everlasting disgrace"* (Purgatory for Christians

who need it?) will be the next step required in their learning process. Life is a continual learning process and doesn't stop just because we have entered the gates of the Kingdom.

What Protestants have trouble understanding is that there will be need for correction in the Afterlife – even for Christians – and that salvation is possible in the Afterlife for non-Christians. What Catholics have trouble understanding is that salvation is a free gift of God's grace, not something that one has to work for by observance of rituals. Protestants and Catholics probably could learn a lot from each other.

So back to the question posed earlier: What about the Final Judgment and the fate of evildoers and those "left behind"? Among those who know Christ and among those who don't know Him yet, there are those who are *"wise"* and *"turn many to righteousness"*. (Daniel 12:3) Since their works *"have been done in God"* and they were doing *"the truth"* and heading towards *"the Light"*, then, even if they didn't know Christ, they can be called "pre-Christians". (John 3:21) And they will be received by Christ in the Afterlife and welcomed into the Kingdom.

There are also in both camps those who are evildoers and will have to endure some *"fire"* in the Afterlife. Among those who have come to Christ, they suffer the *"fire"* of shame and disgrace. The evildoers among those who don't know Christ will suffer the *"fire"* of separation from God in the Afterlife. In both camps, the *"fire"* has the same purpose: it is a catalyst, designed for purification and to spur individuals towards repentance and reconciliation with the Father who loves them. (More about the real meaning of *"fire"* in the post "Lake of Fire – What Is It For?")

To conclude: In this Post about the Final Judgment, we have outlined its two main stages. First stage happens with the Second Coming of Christ before the start of the Millennial Age. This includes the *Judgment Seat of Christ* to reward, from all ages, the followers of Christ according to their works or lack of works; it also includes Judgment for Earth's worst criminals who are sent straight to the *Lake of Fire*. Finally, there are the vast multitudes who, since they were not resurrected, remain where they are in *Death and Hades* or on the Earth.

The second stage comes at the end of the Millennial Age when all those

left in *Death and Hades* appear before the *Great White Throne* for judgment and are either released to life in the *New Heaven and New Earth,* or sent for further training and chastisement into the *Lake of Fire.*

Now it should be understood that the above outline can only approximate the reality of whatever "Final Judgment" means. Most likely, when we arrive in the Realm Beyond, we will find the reality to be far more nuanced, multi-faceted, and wide-ranging than we could possibly ever imagine. For now however, there is still a need to expand our sometimes limited understanding of this subject. And this in turn will help Christ's followers to better relate to and teach others who may be interested to learn more about what happens in the Afterlife.

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Continue to B-4: What Purpose this Life on Earth?