A Survival Guide to Mayan Prophecies

Some interpretations of the Mayan calendar suggest that the world will end in December 2012.
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How to Interpret Genesis

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For centuries the word "judgment" has struck fear in the hearts of God’s people, but this doesn’t have to be our response.
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The last independent native kingdom of Mesoamerica succumbed to the Spanish Empire on March 13, 1697. This was the end of the Mayan civilization and way of life that had lasted for millennia. The story of the end of the Mayan world is enthralling, however, not only because of the military and political prowess of the Spanish conquistadors, but also because of the fact that it happened in precise fulfillment of ancient Mayan prophecies.

In the book *The Order of the Days*, David Stuart, considered the world’s foremost authority on Mayan culture, chronicles the striking fact that in the decades leading to their fall, the Itzá Maya had prophesied their own end.1 Numerous reports indicate that Snake Star, the last Mayan king, had “a strong sense of his inevitable defeat, when . . . a new era of the Mayan calendar . . . would begin.”2

The Itzá Mayan kingdom was set in a beautiful island called Nohpeten (“Great Island”) and occupied a large region around what is today the beautiful Island of Flores in northern Guatemala. In ancient times, the place was a wild territory of dense jungles that resisted the advances of the Spanish armies and civilization for almost two centuries. The first to visit the kingdom was Hernán Cortez in 1525, four years after the defeat of the last Aztec emperor Motecuhzoma II. He wanted to reach the Caribbean coast of Honduras to suppress the rebellion of a Spanish officer there and passed through this isolated kingdom in a grueling march.

The Maya received the Spaniard army with suspicion but in peace, and provided Cortez with much-needed information. When Cortez was preparing to leave, one of his horses, an utterly exotic animal to the Maya, had a large splinter in its foot, so he left it with the king, who promised to take good care of it. Later historical accounts show that the Itzá Maya came to worship the horse as a divine being. The Mayan priests fed it with flowers and birds as a deserving god. The poor beast starved to death, but the Maya made a large stone image of it and enshrined it at Nohpeten.

Almost one hundred years later, in September of 1618, Fray Bartolomé de Fuensalida and Fray Juan de Orbita traveled for weeks through the jungle with the ambition of converting this remote kingdom to Christianity. The Itzá Maya, however, gave the Franciscan priests a cold reception. Orbita and Fuensalida vividly describe the response of the king: “It is not yet time to abandon our gods. . . . The prophecies tell us the time will yet come to abandon our gods, years from now in the age of eight ahaw. . . . We will speak no more of this now. You would best leave us and return another time.”3

The failure of Orbita and Fuensalida was predictable. Earlier in the day, they had come across...
the image of a horse in one of the shrines near the center of the island. The natives explained that it was an image of the horse that Cortez had left there. In a fit of zealous rage, Orbita destroyed the horse idol on the spot, causing a deep consternation among the people who had venerated the image for almost a hundred years.

Orbita and Fuensalida knew that they were not welcome anymore and returned to Christian territory, where they reported to their superiors the intriguing prophecy that the Maya recognized as valid. Five years later (1623), Diego Delgado and a party of 90 Spanish and Mayan allies returned to Nohpeten with the ambition of converting the kingdom, but were taken prisoners immediately and sacrificed. Delgado’s heart was offered to the Itzá Mayan gods in retaliation to Orbita’s smashing of the horse idol.

About 70 years later, in 1695, Fray Andrés de Avendaño y Loyola visited Nohpeten. Avendaño was both a zealous evangelizer and deep student of Mayan culture. He spoke the Mayan language well and had studied carefully the traditional Mayan lore and the intricacies of the Mayan calendar to understand the prophecies. Avendaño knew that the age mentioned by Snake Star almost two centuries before would arrive in two years and that it was time to act.

When Avendaño arrived in the Itzá Mayan kingdom, the king led him immediately to the largest, highest temple on the land, where they saw the leg or thigh bone of a horse in a curious box that hung from the shrine’s ceiling. It was the remains of Cortez’s horse, which the natives continued to venerate almost 200 years later. Then, Avendaño told the king that he had come in fulfillment of the Mayan prophecies to convert them to Christianity. If we believe Avendaño’s own account, he reports that the Maya were particularly surprised and impressed by his mention of their prophecies and his ability to interpret them.

However, things did not go well. Prominent Itzá lords and the king’s own wife were troubled at the king’s relationship with the Spanish priests and his interpretation of the prophecies. They plotted against Avendaño, who fled in the middle of the night to the security of Christian territory. Two years later, Martín de Ursúa, governor of Yucatán, who was also aware of the prophecies, decided to invade the Itzá Mayan kingdom. But when Ursúa arrived at Nohpeten, the place was deserted. The houses, the palaces, and the temples had been abandoned. In one shrine they found old horse bones. A frail old woman left behind explained that they were the remains of Cortez’s horse. It was March 13, 1697, when the last standing Mayan kingdom fell in precise fulfillment of Mayan prophecies.

How could the Mayan prophets predict with such precision the overthrow of their own civilization? If they were able to predict their own fall, could they prophecy the end of the world?

December 21, 2012, in Mayan Prophecy

Many people think that ancient Mayan stone tablets found in southeast Mexico predict the world’s end in December 2012.

During the decade of the 1960s, a large concrete factory was being built in the small town of El Tortuguero, Tabasco, Mexico. As some manmade mounds were bulldozed, workers were surprised to
find among the rubble several carved stone tablets, eventually removed to Mexican museums. Because no one could read the glyphs, the significance of the tablets was unknown, and they were mostly forgotten. This location was one of the most important smaller sites in the region, subject to the impressive city of Palenque that lies to the south in the neighboring state of Chiapas. Most of the carved monuments came from the reign of King Balam Ahau, A.D. 644–679, which was also the heyday of the city.

Mayan glyphs were finally deciphered in the 1980s, thanks to the collaborative efforts of many scholars. (Today it is possible to read 80 to 90 percent of all Mayan texts.) With this advancement, scholars remembered the stone tablets of El Tortuguero, especially the one known today as Monument 6. It was broken into several pieces, which had been scattered: four in a local Mexican museum, one in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, two in private collections, and others lost. In 1996, Stephen Houston and David Stuart were able to publish for the first time a literal translation of this monument: “The thirteenth one will end on 4 ahau, the third of Uniiw. There will occur blackness and the descent of the Bolon Yookte’ god to the red.” Idiomatic translation: “The thirteenth calendaral cycle will end on the day 4 ahau, the third of Uniiw, when there will occur blackness (or a spectacle) and the God of the Nine will come down to the red (or be displayed in a great investiture).”⁴

The tablet called the attention for several reasons. The date referred in the tablet is 4 Ahaw 3 Unii, which in our calendar is December 21, 2012—also the winter solstice. A foreboding aspect of the date is that it is the end of an impressively long calendar cycle of 5,126 years. The beginning of the cycle was in the year 3114 B.C., creation day in Mayan lore. That great span of time dates back to the dawn of human civilization—the beginning of dynastic Egypt, the rise of the Minoan civilization, and the construction of Stonehenge.

Proponents of the theory that this predicts December 12, 2012, as the end of the world support this idea with the following:

The Maya believed that the world was created repeatedly and that floods destroyed previous creations because of perceived deficiencies (e.g., the man of wood was not capable of worshiping their creators). We are currently in the third or fourth creation, which is the age of Maize (corn), the crop that sustains humans in the Mayan worldview.

John Major Jenkins, a prominent author of books about the Mayan calendar and 2012, argues that an important key is an image in Chiapas, Mexico. The man in the image is interpreted to be one of the Hero Twins, who in Mayan creation mythology shoots a bird deity named Seven Macaw with a blowgun to usher in the transition from one world creation to the next. The caiman in the picture is the Milky Way, the polar center is at the top, and the Seven Macaw is the Big Dipper constellation. All are aligned in the way the sky looked in the summer solstice when the image was erected (600–100 B.C.). It is argued that this is a dateless reference to the creation in 3114, and, therefore, recreation in 2012.

The end of the calendar cycles was important for the Maya. An image in Copán, Honduras,
highlights the date 435 A.D., the transition to the ninth calendar cycle. Similarly, an image in Quiriguá, Guatemala, affirms that the kingship of Cauac Sky (724–785 A.D.) was rooted in the moment of the most recent creation (3114 B.C.). It is argued that if the turn to the ninth calendar cycle was important as shown in this document, the 13th referred to in Tortuguero’s Monument 6 was even more so.

What did the Maya think happens when the world is destroyed and re-created? One possible answer seems to be described in the oldest and best-preserved Mayan book. Called the Dresden codex, it is found in the Saxon State Library in Dresden and contains various almanacs, divination calendars, astronomical tables, ritual regulations, and numerous representations of gods. This bark-paper book created by Mayan scribes in the 14th century A.D. contains details of the movements of the Moon and the planets and their relation with the calendar cycles.

The document concludes with the image of a large caiman, vomiting what appears to be water from the sky. The glyphic text has the old goddess Chac Chel pouring down water from a jar in the center of the text and the god Chac painted in black, with menacing weapons of destruction.

This apocalyptic interpretation of the picture in the Dresden codex seems compelling because a great flood is mentioned in other Mayan and Mesoamerican sources. The Aztec creation mythology says that the fourth and most recent destruction and re-creation occurred with a flood. In a Quiché Mayan narrative, the humans made of wood, the previous creation, were washed away with a flood. A Mayan alphabetic text produced in colonial Yucatán but containing ancient traditions describes the flood as being provoked by the battle between the God of the Thirteen (the sky has 13 levels) and the God of the Nine (the underworld that has nine levels).

This resonates with Tortuguero’s Monument 6. Using the information gathered from Mayan inscriptions here and there and a diversity of Mesoamerican traditions, the stone tablet has been read in the following way (notice the interpretation in the bracketed text): The 13th one will end on 4 Ahau, the third of Uniiw [December 21, 2012]. There will occur blackness [disaster: as in the weapon-wielding god Chac painted in black in the Dresden codex] and the descent of the Bolon Yookte’ god to the red [the manifestation of this god heralds the flood in The Books of Chilam Balam].

Munro Edmonson, one of the translators of the Chilam Balam literature, argues that the texts for the celebration for the end of a Mayan calendar cycle that took place in Merida, Yucatán, in 1618, contain several references to the fact that the cycle (Baktun) ends in a great flood. “Here is when it shall end, the telling of the katun; that is what is given by God; the flood shall take place for the second time; this is the destruction of the world; this then is its end.”

This celebration honored the beginning of an even cycle: 1618 A.D. There were 20 ceremonies, the third of which was a cycle-ending ceremony that featured a battle in which the god of the underworld (God of the Nine) defeats and sacrifices the god of the sky (God of the Thirteen). Thus, the apocalyptic interpretation of the end of the calendar cycle seems evident.

**2012 and Apocalyptic Concerns**
This alleged prophecy of 2012 has caused great excitement in media of all kinds, including the film 2012, released in November 2009, with revenues of $769 million, a book titled The Complete Idiot’s Guide to 2012, and a Website where every kind of survival supplies may be procured.

The 2012 excitement goes beyond the Mayan long-count calendar and includes a variety of religious and scientific predictions. The most prominent that some people are relating in one way or another to the Mayan prophecies include:

- **Solar Storms.** Several scientists have posited that solar storms could be particularly strong in 2011 and 2012, produced by “coronal mass ejections” that would hit the Earth with magnetic energy and possibly produce the disruption of cell-phone communications, electrical power outages, radio blackouts, and even earthquakes. It is noted that in September 1 and 2, 1859, a solar storm disrupted telegraph systems. It even shorted out telegraph wires, causing fires.

- **CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) and the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).** The LHC is a particle accelerator and collider that causes two beams of subatomic particles to collide at very high energy levels at 99.99 percent the speed of light. Scientists believe that these collisions may produce never-before-seen particles they can study to understand secrets of how atoms and our universe work. Others are concerned that it could produce a black hole or “strangelet” (a form of matter thought to be at the center of neutron stars) that could destroy the world. The CERN research board and other scientists assert, however, that the LHC poses no risks to the planet.

- **Predictions of Nostradamus.** The Prophecies of Nostradamus is a collection of 80 watercolor images by the famous 16th-century soothsayer that some think predicts the end of the world on December 21, 2012. Italian journalists Enza Massa and Roberto Pinotti discovered the collection in the Central National Library of Rome in 1982. There is considerable controversy, however, whether the watercolors were actually drawn by Nostradamus.

- **Reversal of the north/south magnetic poles.** Geophysicists have observed with concern a crack in the magnetic field of the Earth that prevents harmful solar radiation. This crack, found in the Atlantic Ocean between Brazil and Africa, is a weakening of the Earth’s magnetic field that could lead to a reversal of the magnetic poles and leave us vulnerable to radiation from the Sun.

- **Collision with “Planet X.”** Nancy Lieder claims that aliens called “Zetas” warned of a collision or near miss in 2012 with a Planet X, which is four times as big as the Earth. She has made other predictions that have not come true.

Our planet is constantly bombarded with rocks hurtling around our solar system. Every five minutes a fragment of rock the size of a pea burns in the Earth’s atmosphere. Once or twice a century, a rock 40 to 50 meters in size hits our planet. They are large enough to obliterate a city if it were struck directly.

An estimated 500 to 1,100 asteroids 1 kilometer or more in size have trajectories that cross that of the Earth. An asteroid of this size would have devastating global consequences, lofting enough pulverized debris to plunge the Earth in a freezing cosmic winter for years. Some 320 asteroids of this size have already been identified, and their trajectories are being projected in time to see if they
pose a threat in the medium term.

This is only part of the threat. Comets are larger, faster, and are much more difficult to track. We could get only six months’ warning of a future comet impact. There is no known threat, however, of a hit by an asteroid or comet for 2012.

- **Earth’s alignment with the galactic plane.** John Mayor Jenkins, one of the main proponents of the 2012 prophecy, argues that our Solar System will align with the center of the Milky Way galaxy on December 21, 2012. This will interrupt the energy that supposedly flows from the center of the galaxy to the Earth producing either a crescendo of natural disasters or a change in the consciousness of humanity (Jenkins’s own view). David Morrison, senior scientist at the NASA Astrobiology Institute, argues that the alignment of the Earth and Sun with the center of the galaxy occurs every December with no negative consequences. Additionally, he says that claims that we are about to cross the galactic plane are just untrue.

- **Eruption of a super volcano.** There are fears that the super volcano that is found below Yellowstone National Park may erupt. Such an eruption would be a thousand times more powerful than that of Mt. St. Helens in 1980. An explosion of this type would cause a volcanic winter, among other things, and threaten the survival of the human race.

  Most 2012 predictions have no credible evidence behind them.

### Did the Ancient Maya Predict the End of the World as We Know It in 2012?

If we want to understand the Mayan Monument 6 of El Tortuguero and its meaning, we need to understand Mayan calendars and their understanding of time.

Mayan calendars are complex. The Maya used three calendars, all of which were interrelated: a lunar or gestational calendar of 260 days, a solar 365-day calendar, and a long-count calendar that registered the passing of time on a large scale similar to our centuries and millennia. The 260-day calendar approximates the gestation for human beings, and it was the calendar that the Maya used for divinatory purposes. This calendar pervaded all the aspects of life and continues to be used among the highland Quiche Maya of Guatemala. The 365-day calendar provided a framework for agricultural and communal festivities and ceremonies.

Both the 260- and the 365-day calendars make a calendar cycle of about 52 years. This means that any date would receive two names because of the two ways of reckoning time—the 260-day and the 365-day calendar. The same two names for any given date would repeat every 52 years. The two calendars coincide, or synchronize, about every 52 years. This is the calendar round.

The long-count calendar was developed in the second or third century B.C. It counts elapsed time from a starting point in the past: August 11, 3114 B.C. It is a vigesimal (base-20 numeral)—as opposed to decimal (base-10 numeral)—counting system, in which the number 13 has special importance. The Mayas recorded dates with five numbers, each separated with a dot.

Going from **right to left**, the units of time indicate the following:

- **K’in:** 1 day (the word means “sun” as well as “day.”)
Winal: made of 20 k’ins (= 20 days)
Tun: made of 18 winals (= 360 days)
K’atun: made of 20 Tuns (= 7,200 days, close to 20 years)
Bak’tun: made of 20 k’atuns (= 144,000 days, about 394 years)

For example, the date 0.0.0.0.1 would mean 0 Bak’tuns, 0 K’atuns, 0 Tuns, 0 Winals, and 1 k’in (= day) has elapsed from the starting point—August 11, 3114 B.C. This is the date of the beginning of the long-count Mayan calendar. The total long-count cycle is 5,126 years in total. The full cycle of the long-count Maya goes from 3114 to 2012. Thus, December 21, 2012, will be 13.0.0.0.0, which is the same as 0.0.0.0.0, that is, the end of the age and the beginning of a new one.

There are several reasons that the end of the Mayan calendar did not mean for the Maya the end of the world.

● **El Tortuguero’s Monument 6 is not prophetic but dedicatory.** When the Tortuguero tablet was first deciphered in 1996 by David Stuart and Stephen Houston, it was the first monument of its kind to be found and deciphered. No other monument with similar characteristics had been found. After that time, however, two other similar monuments have been found in Naranjo (593 A.D.) and La Corona (677 A.D.) respectively, both in Guatemala.

The Naranjo document refers to 10.0.0.0.0 (A.D. 890) and the La Corona to 9.13.0.0.0 (692 A.D.). Both of these documents, like the one at El Tortuguero, were erected to celebrate the completion of new buildings. The numbers that refer to the future are nice round numbers. None of the monuments predicts disasters or anything else. It is not clear, however, why they refer to future dates. Most probably it could mean something like: “Built in 1900, this will stand in 2000.” This would fit the reference in Monument 6 from El Tortuguero to the God of the Nine seen and displayed “in a great investiture.”

Both David Stuart and Stephen Houston, the first translators of the Monument 6 of El Tortuguero, are outstanding Mayan scholars. Sixteen years after translating the document and speculating it was prophetic in nature, Stephen Houston recognized in the face of new discoveries that Monument 6 “had nothing to do with prophecy.” But it was too late. They had unwittingly spurred broad and bizarre speculations.

● **There may be no special significance for the date at the start of the calendar.** Zero years in calendars often refer to significant events in history, religion, or politics, like the birth of Jesus Christ, or the year Mohammed left Mecca, or Japan’s mythical founding by Emperor Jimmu. Regarding August 11, 3114 B.C., the starting date of the of the long-count calendar, Mayan texts explain only that “the gods of creation were set in order.” It is a mythical creation date. This probably refers to the initial ordering of broad categories of divine beings (gods of earth and gods of heaven). Astronomers tell us, however, that nothing significant occurred in 3114 B.C. in terms of the night sky or in terms of planetary alignment. Complex civilization of any sort would come well after this date and Mayan civilization two and half millennia later. Mayanists conclude that it is better to understand this date as an artificial construct.
The correlation between the Mayan dates and our dates is uncertain. The correlation most scholars use today is called GMT (after Goodman, Martínez, and Thompson). Not all scholars, however, accept these dates. There has always been a doubt, for example, whether the date from Monument 6 of El Tortuguero falls on December 21 or December 23 of 2012.

The difficulty of correlation is illustrated by an inscription found at Santa Elena Poco Uinic—a very remote place in Chiapas, México. It records the date 9.17.19.13.16, which according to the GMT correlation system fell on July 13, 790 A.D. The accompanying glyph depicts a sun with two elements covering the top and its sides. Mayanists thought that it referred to a solar eclipse. After research, they found that there had been a solar eclipse over southern Chiapas three days after, on July 16. This, of course, would agree more with correlation dates falling on December 23, 2012. The truth may be, however, that both counting systems are correct, and that the use of the calendar was not entirely consistent either throughout history or throughout the Mayan world.

The Maya stopped using the Long Count Calendar a little after A.D. 910. The Maya created and used their two short calendars (the 260-day and 365-day calendars) long before creating and using the long-count calendar. The long-count calendar is intimately related to the institution of the sacred ruler, the kol ahaw. In fact, both institutions rose, flourished, and fell together. The purpose of the great long dates in the stone monuments was to glorify the great kings. Once kings lost power, the reason for the long dates ceased to exist. The last long-count date registered in a Mayan monument dates from 910 A.D., six centuries before the Spaniards arrived. The Maya themselves abandoned the long-count calendar long before the time of the Spanish conquest.

The Maya believed that the world existed before 3114 B.C. and would continue to exist after 2012 A.D. The long-count date of December 21, 2012, will be 13.0.0.0.0. Did they expect further events after that date and how would they record them? The long-count Mayan calendar works like the odometer of a car. The date 13.0.0.0.0 will be also 0.0.0.0.0 and will mark the beginning of a new cycle. The Stela 1 at Cobá also shows that Maya would add an extra digit, indicating the beginning of a new age in the calendar. Thus, December 22, 2012, will be simply 1.0.0.0.0.1, and it will continue as time marches on indefinitely.

The Maya expected events to happen after this date. One glyphic text in the Temple of the Inscription at Palenque, Chiapas, celebrated that the 80th-round calendar anniversary of the reign of the great king Pakal would take place eight days after the end of an 8,000-year long-count cycle. This refers to October 4772 A.D., almost three millennia after 2012.

Mayan inscriptions also refer to events before the starting point of the long-count calendar. A Mayan glyphic text in the Temple of the Cross at Palenque records the birth of a woman and a man seven to eight years before the beginning of the Long Cycle (i.e., 3122–3121 B.C.). These were probably creation deities who engendered the three patron gods of the local dynasty. It seems clear that the creation date in 3114 is a momentous occasion but not one marked by cataclysm or destruction.

The end of the era was more like the resetting of the clock than about death and destruction.
Indeed, the deity that best signifies the beginning of a new era was named Lady House. She is not a harbinger of doom but represents the Dawn. In a Mayan alphabetic text from the colonial period, this goddess is called Ix Kin Suntal, meaning literally “She of the sun’s turn.” A more idiomatic translation could be “Lady of the Returning Sun.” Another Palenque tablet has the date 12.10.1.13.2, in which one of the gods sits in kingship before the creation date. So there were kings before creation, but it is unclear what they ruled.

All these tablets connect events in the present with events in the past. The Maya loved to connect the king’s ceremonies to events in the mythical past. In fact, it is possible that they fudged a little on the dates to make the symmetries that they display in the monuments.

- **The cycle closing in December is only a part of a much greater cycle.** The scale of our deep-time cosmology pales in comparison to that of the Maya. According to current science, our universe began to exist around 14 billion years ago. For the Maya, however, time began 28 octillion, 679 septillion years ago, i.e., 28 followed by 27 zeros. Stelae 1 and 2 in Coba, México, mention the creation date (13.0.0.0.0) but prefixed by 19 units of 13. This means that the creation date was in fact an abbreviation of a still longer date, equaling $8,285,978,483,664,581,446,157,328,238.631$ years of elapsed time from the true beginning of time in Mayan conception of the cosmos. Projected into the future, the Mayan calendar posits 43 octillion years. This is well beyond the time that according scientific calculations our sun will cease to exist. December 21, 2012 is considered the first of many future repetitions. An identical repetition will occur in a little more than 100 thousand years from now.

- **There is no evidence that the Maya were aware of precession.** John Mayor Jenkins, the dean of 2012 enthusiasts, suggested in his book *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012*, published in 1998, that the Galaxy, or even the universe, will be realigned or altered in a way that will either usher in a new and improved era (Jenkins’s own position) or destroy the Earth. The Maya, with their vaunted astronomic observation abilities, are credited with having anticipated this event. “Precession is the astronomical term that refers to how the sun becomes gradually aligned with the Milky Way.”

  As the Earth rotates around the Sun, it wobbles, which results in a little difference between the solar year (how long it takes for the Earth to rotate around the Sun) and the stellar year (how long it takes to line up with the stars). Hipparchus, a Greek astronomer, observed this phenomenon in 128 B.C. Even if the Maya were aware of precession, a precession cycle is of about 26,000 years and cannot be predicted through observation to a specific date. It can be predicted to a period of a few centuries but not to a year, much less to a specific date.

  In fact, there is evidence that the Maya were not as accomplished at astronomy as they are sometimes credited to be. The famous Venus Tables of the Dresden Codex show that they are not merely tallies of observed data but that they are astronomical observations for long periods that were “tweaked” to conform to other ritual cycles that were important for them. What was important for the Mayan timekeeper was that a number *conceptually* accommodated the different types of heavenly phenomena.
The Maya were not map makers. The famous Maya Stela 25 at Izapa was probably not a cosmic map of creation as 2012 enthusiasts argue. There are no other maps in the vast corpus of Mayan literature and art. In their book *2012 and the End of the World: The Western Roots of the Maya Apocalypse*, Mayan specialists Matthew Restall and Amara Solari argue that explosion of interest and speculation about 2012 and supposed Mayan prophecies tell more about modern Western culture and its obsession with millenarianism and apocalyptic fears than of ancient Mayan beliefs. The supposed Mayan prophecies are in the end more an excuse than the basis of the 2012 phenomenon.

The Interrelationship Between the Future and the Past in Mayan Prophecies

Did the Itzá Maya predict the fall of their own civilization? Did the Mayan prophets in this case know the future, were they just lucky in their predictions, or have other factors not been addressed?

For the ancient Itzá Maya, time was not just a measure for history; it was also a “deterministic, shaping force in human experience.” Each k’atun was named after the day in the calendar in which it ended and had its own personality and character. Thus, each had its own idol, its own priest, and its own prophecy of events. The names of the k’atun would repeat every 256 years. The system was cyclical, and the Maya believed that history was based on familiar recurring patterns and, therefore, prophecy was, in fact, “a reflection of events and trends of the past.” This is why it is so difficult to differentiate between history and prophecy in Mayan thought and documents.

Again, the ancient prophecies of the Itzá Maya said that the time they would abandon their gods would be the age 8 Ahaw. Since time was a deterministic force based on recurring patterns, it is revealing to know what happened in the previous ages of 8 Ahaw:

(Katun) 8 Ahau was when Chichen Itzá was abandoned. There were 13 folds of Katuns when they established their houses at Chakanputun.

Thirteen katuns later, we find a similar event.

(Katun) 8 Ahau was when Chakanputun was abandoned by the Itzá men. Then they came to seek homes again. For 13 folds of katuns had they dwelt in their houses at Chakanputun. This was always the katun when the Itzá went beneath the trees, beneath the bushes, beneath the vines, to their misfortune.

Thirteen katuns later, history repeats itself.

(Katun) 8 Ahau was when the Itzá men again abandoned their homes because of the treachery of Hunac Ceel, because of the banquet with the people of Izamal. For 13 folds of Katuns they had dwelt there, when they were driven out by Hunac Ceel because of the giving of the questionnaire of the Itzá.

It is fascinating to note that events and trends of history recurred from one era to the other. There was a pattern of rises and falls throughout the history of the Maya. Those priests who “read” the calendars and interpreted the meaning of the days in which they were living were in fact recognizing the pattern of history and applying it to the future.
The Maya were not masters of time but slaves of their own history. They were deterministic in their understanding of history. In some sense they fulfilled their own prophecies. Since a significant portion of the population believed in these prophecies, they proved true. Thus, it was not sheer prediction that we find in these Mayan prophecies but self-fulfilling prophecies. If you believed in them enough, you yourself would fulfill the prophecy.

The ancient Mesoamericans were not different from us in this respect. They had something similar to our horoscope. The Aztecs called their 260-day cycle the *tonalpohualli*, which means “count of days.” It contained the full array of numbers and day names that were the essential tool for the Aztec soothsayers to foretell the future. These manuals of fate were known as “books of days,” and day priests would use it to understand the supernatural forces and influences associated with a given day. Every day (260 of them) had positive and/or negative associations. They referred finally to the life force thought to reside in the head of the person. Once a baby was born, he was ritually bathed and assigned his or her *tonalli*. (If the day was bad, the rite could be delayed in a specific period of time.)

The *tonalli* readers were called *tonalpouhque* and were considered among the wisest and most important members of the community. Their prognostications penetrated all aspects of life. In fact, the day count has survived to the present time in remote areas of Mesoamerica. It is because of this belief in the power and nature of time itself that ancient Mayan prophecies had such a power in the life of the Mayan people. The horoscope has a similar power on those who believe in it. Charles Strohmer, a former practitioner of astrology, describes how this system works and why it has so powerful an influence in some people but is uncompromising in asserting that astrologers do not and cannot know the future. Astrology is, instead, a shaping force that ends up governing the life of those who believe in it.\(^\text{12}\)

The story of Monument 6 of El Tortuguero, Tabasco, Mexico, has been remarkable. The speculation of the Mayan scholars who first claimed that it was prophetic in nature produced wild speculations. Nevertheless, new discoveries and a better understanding of the Mayan culture and worldview have thrown new light on the meaning and significance of this fascinating monument. Tablets found at Naranjo and La Corona, Guatemala, suggest that Monument 6 is not prophetic but dedicatory. Its purpose was to celebrate the completion of a new building and its permanence into the far future.

Inscriptions at Palenque, Mexico, also refer to dates long after 2012, suggesting clearly that they did not believe in an intervening destruction. The Maya believed that 2012 marked the end of a cycle that was itself part of larger cycles. In fact, Mayan conceptions of time go deeper into the future and the past than modern science does.

There are, however, important similarities between Mayan conceptions of the forces that shaped history and certain sectors of modern society. The Maya were deterministic in their worldview. For them, time was a force that shaped history and was largely out of the control of humanity. That ancient worldview mirrors current beliefs in astrology and/or other deterministic forces among
different sectors of human society today. In the end, the way we read Tortuguero’s Monument 6 may tell more about our beliefs and worldview than those of its creators.

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How to Interpret Genesis

The scientific study of nature has led to some faulty conclusions about the origins of the Earth.

Randall W. Younker

Some of the most controversial chapters in the Bible are the first 11 chapters of Genesis. Many scientists have argued that everything in the universe, including planet Earth and the life on it, came about by purely natural means—that God had nothing to do with its origins. Most scientists today believe this. In direct contrast, the first 11 chapters of Genesis assert that God, by the mere power of His spoken word, created everything—the Sun, Moon, stars, this planet, and all life on it.

The key challenge to the Genesis claim comes as a result of the scientific study of nature—what believers refer to as “God’s Second Book.” As modern scientists have studied the Earth—particularly through the disciplines of geology and paleontology—they have observed phenomena in the layers of the Earth’s crust that they interpret as requiring millions of years to form. In addition, scientists have noticed a sequence of fossils in the geologic column that they suggest shows change or evolution from simple life forms to more complex, modern ones.

Finally, as scientists have studied certain radioactive elements in the geologic strata, they have seen that the lowest rocks seem to be very old—some hundreds of millions of years old—and that the upper layers gradually show less age. (It should be remembered that most scientists work within a worldview that rejects the idea of God a priori—before reaching any conclusion whatsoever—so all phenomena encountered are interpreted within a purely naturalistic philosophy.)

Upon putting these observations together—the large number of thick strata, fossil sequences, and radiometric dating—scientists have concluded that the Earth and life on it took millions of years to form. This broadly accepted conclusion contradicts the common understanding of the biblical account of origins: God created life on Earth by the power of His spoken word in six literal days only a few thousand years ago.

Influence of Modern Science on Biblical Scholars

Since the 1800s, many biblical scholars have been strongly influenced by the findings of science in the areas of geology and paleontology as well as by the naturalistic philosophy for understanding the world in a way that removes God from the picture. These scholars have concluded that the Bible should likewise be viewed through a naturalistic lens. Thus, disregarding Scripture’s own description of the revelation/inspiration process, they do not study it as a book of divine origin, but rather consider it as of purely human origin. Consequently, the Bible is viewed or understood as fallible.
—containing errors—since humans are clearly capable of making mistakes. For these scholars, the fact that the Bible was composed in antiquity—before the advent of modern science—makes it even more likely that its description of origins is erroneous. In view of this critical understanding of the Bible, biblical historical critics proposed an alternate process by which the Bible came into existence. This alternate process denied the Bible’s self-claim of supernatural origin, replacing it with the view that the text was the outcome of a purely natural, human process.

In the case of Genesis, scholars suggested that the book was not written by Moses under inspiration sometime before 1450 B.C. Rather, they say that Genesis was written and edited by a number of unnamed authors (often referred to as “J,” “E,” and “P”) and “redactors” over a period of several centuries—between 1100 and 450 B.C. Scholars who promote this view—often referred to as “historical critics”—have offered several lines of evidence for their reconstructions of Genesis. They point to phenomena in the Genesis text such as apparent doublets, contradictions, and anachronisms in an attempt to show the complex, diachronic manner in which Genesis was composed. The identification of these purported phenomena in the text have led them to suggest, for example, that Genesis 1 and 2 present contradictory creation accounts written at different times and for different purposes.

Their rejection of the supernatural manifested in the world has also led these critics to reject any miraculous claims in the Bible, such as the idea that God could create the Earth and its life forms merely by speaking, and that this occurred over the course of only six days. The critics prefer to accept the conclusions reached by the bulk of contemporary science—that the Earth and its life forms came into existence through purely natural processes over millions of years. Also rejected is the idea that the entire surface of the Earth as we know it was destroyed by a divinely initiated flood. For them, no global flood occurred, or if there was any flood at all, it was only local in nature.

The biblical critics also argue that the creation account in Genesis is full of naive ideas that prove the account cannot be historically true or scientifically plausible. For example, they claim that the Hebrews possessed a naive cosmology—an unscientific understanding of the structure of the universe. Pulling together different biblical texts, and making some assumptions about what neighboring ancient Near Eastern peoples thought, the biblical critics constructed what they thought the Hebrews would have actually believed about the nature of the universe. In this reconstructed Hebrew cosmos, the heavens were seen to be like a hollow, upside-down metal bowl resting over a flat Earth, with the Sun, Moon, and stars fixed to the underside of the dome where they could be seen by humans at night. The dome was also thought to have gates allowing for the occasional flow of water (rain) from the waters above the heavens. The critics also assume the ancient Hebrews believed in large subterranean seas and a literal hell.

**Responding to Critical Arguments**

Each of the arguments put forth by the historical critics for the non-inspired, alternate origin of Genesis has been thoroughly critiqued by biblical scholars who reject the historical-critical method.
For example, careful analysis of the original word for “day” in the creation account shows it does not mean an indefinite period of time, but rather, a literal day of about 24 hours such as we know it today.\(^1\) Thus, the Bible does indeed state that God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. Similarly, an analysis of the Hebrew word for “flood” shows it to be a unique word for a global water catastrophe leading to the literal destruction of the entire world—a “de-creation” of the work God had executed during creation week.\(^2\) As for the idea that the Hebrews had a naive view of the cosmos, recent studies of the Hebrew word for “firmament” show it does not mean an upside-down metal bowl.\(^3\) Indeed, a review of the history of critical biblical scholarship shows that 19th-century scholars were the inventors of the belief that the ancient peoples (Hebrews and others) conceived of a flat Earth with a metallic half-domed sky.

Other challenges concerning the unity and antiquity of the Creation/Flood account have also been addressed. For example, the presence of doublets (e.g., two different names for God [\textit{Elohim} and \textit{Yahweh}] and the telling of the Creation story twice in Genesis 1 and 2) has been shown to be a common narrative technique in ancient Near Eastern literature, and thus does not necessarily reflect the existence of more than one author.\(^4\)

Apparent contradictions—such as whether plants were created on Day 4 of creation week (Genesis 1) or were not added until after the creation week was finished (Genesis 2)—have been convincingly explained. In the example mentioned, the Hebrew words for plants in chapter 1 are different from those used in chapter 2. The plants created on Day 4 in chapter 1 are those of fruit trees suitable for food. In contrast, the plants found in chapter 2 include thorns and thistles or certain grass-like plants requiring considerable work to bring to harvest. The context of chapter 2 clearly shows that this second group of plants came about as the result of sin.

Finally, the appearance of the so-called anachronisms in Genesis—for example, the appearance of tents and camels in the second millennium B.C.—has been shown, in many cases, not to be anachronisms at all. Renowned Egyptologist and scholar Dr. Kenneth Kitchen has shown that tents were common in the ancient Near East in the second millennium—just as the Bible describes. Similarly, the presence of camels prior to the time of David has also been well-documented in recent times. I had the privilege of contributing to this conclusion upon discovering an ancient petroglyph (rock carving) of a man leading a camel by a rope in a Bronze Age context (pre-1400 B.C.) north of the traditional location of Mt. Sinai.

**Significant Literary Features of Genesis**

A number of literary features in Genesis, such as the structure of Genesis 1–11, are more typical of the second millennium before the Christian era than the first—suggesting that much of Genesis reflects earlier times. For example, several second-millennium “primeval histories” exist—origin stories such as the Akkadian \textit{Atrahasis Epic} and the Sumerian \textit{Eridu Genesis} with which Genesis 1–11 has much in common. All three of these primeval history stories contain three sections—a creation story, the rise of a problem, and a judgment by flood.
Though ancient Mesopotamian cultures produced later flood stories (like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*) and creation stories (like the *Enuma Elish*), these later versions were no longer “complete” primeval histories containing all three elements—creation, problem, flood. The fact that all three exist in Genesis would indicate that Genesis was composed at the same time as its Mesopotamian counterparts—in the second millennium. This fits with the biblical view that Moses wrote the Book of Genesis sometime before 1400 B.C.

Of course, the Genesis version is significantly different from its Mesopotamian counterparts. In fact, several scholars have noted that the author of Genesis was deliberately challenging the Mesopotamian version by being “polemical.” That is, the author of Genesis was disagreeing with the Mesopotamian version of creation and was claiming to provide a corrective version of how things came into being.

It is worth noting that a number of literary features in Genesis 1–11 suggest that the author intended to provide a historical narrative of Earth’s early history—not simply a theological statement, or a non-literary, literary depiction of Creation such as a poem, parable, saga, myth, etc. For example, a unity of the narrative of Genesis 1–11 continues into the rest of Genesis and, indeed, runs into the Book of Exodus. Together, these books tell a continuous story from Creation, through Abraham, Joseph, the descent to Egypt, and the Exodus. In fact, the creation story of Genesis 1–11 has been identified by many scholars as a prologue to the rest of the Pentateuch. Second, a certain Hebrew verbal form exists—the “waw consecutive”—that is typically used for historical narratives (such as is found in books like the Chronicles and Kings). The *waw* consecutive is found in the creation account as well, suggesting historical intent and purpose for the narrative. A third literary feature clearly points to the historical impulse of these chapters: The appearance of “*toledoth* formulae,” usually translated as “these are the generations of. . . .” Fourth is genre similarity. Finally, many elements in ancient Near East parallels of primeval histories can be shown to be historical.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that it remains eminently reasonable to conclude that:

1. Genesis is in fact an early literary work—the product of the second millennium before the Christian era;
2. the text was composed as a unified account, although there may have been some minor editorial work at a later time; and,
3. the text was intended to be understood by its authors as an authentic account of Earth’s origins in which the world was created in six days and later destroyed by a global flood.

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Does God Care About Oxen?

Kindness to animals is used to illustrate a more specific principle in the early Church.

A. Rahel Schafer

First Corinthians 9:8–10 is one of the more controversial of Paul’s Old Testament citations: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (vs. 9, NKJV). Many scholars see this quotation as Old Testament civil law ripped from its context and applied allegorically, spiritually, fancifully, or even mystically. (Philo and Hellenistic Judaism often referred to the supposedly higher meaning of the text.) Even more radically, some follow A. P. Stanley in arguing that “the lesson which is regarded as subordinate is denied altogether.” In other words, Paul is accused of not only ignoring and misapplying the original context of the command, but also of audaciously declaring that it has nothing at all to do with the literal meaning of the words.

Broad New Testament Context

Scholars debate many issues in the book of 1 Corinthians, including Paul’s motivation for writing. In this longest of Paul’s Epistles, however, written to the largest city in Greece at that time, the apostle is almost certainly dealing with the difficulties of authority and leadership. Because Paul stayed longer in Corinth, he was better able to warn, admonish, and speak the truth forcefully to the opposing parties.

Openly immoral members of the Corinthian church were apparently demanding the prerogative to exercise their individual rights, in accordance with the then-current practices of prostitution and asceticism. The disunity of the church thus weighed heavily on Paul’s heart as he wrote 1 Corinthians. However, discussion about factions and other problems in the church also give a clearer glimpse of the struggles Paul faced in understanding how Christian freedom relates to societal tradition.

A concise structure of the book is as follows: In chapters 1–6, Paul is responding to oral reports about the church: divisions, incest, lawsuits, and immorality. (Chapter 4:1–21 is about attitudes toward the apostles.) In chapters 7–16, Paul addresses the issues raised in a letter from the Corinthians concerning marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship, resurrection, and the collection for Jerusalem. Within this second section, 1 Corinthians 8–11 discusses food offered to idols. Those who wanted to eat food offered to idols asserted that their belief in monotheism allowed them to be free from irrelevant dietary restrictions. Some, however, were eating meat offered to idols in order to “flaunt their freedom,” a form of gluttony. Paul had to address the problem this freedom posed to those whose conscience was pricked by the eating of food offered to idols.

Within this bigger picture, some scholars consider the abrupt switch to apostolic authority in
chapter 9 to be out of place within the discussion, or even part of a separate letter. Several recent works, however, have shown that chapter 9 is actually key to understanding some of the main reasons Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

Among those who see 1 Corinthians 9 as part of Paul’s original discourse, three main views emerge. The majority of scholars see chapter 9 as Paul’s defense against those who opposed him in Corinth. In other words, in order for his comments on idols to have any effect, he had to establish his authority over and against those who were questioning him.

A second group views this supposed digression as the crucial part of a legitimate Greek ceremonial argumentation, serving to strengthen what is already believed. Although the argument for profitability in regard to food and sexuality is not yet complete, chapter 9 helps to prepare the Corinthians to judge wisely regarding idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14–22).

A third group finds that the issue is not Paul’s authority or whether or not he was allowed to accept financial support as an apostle, but that he refused to exercise his rights in order to set an example of giving up one’s rights for the sake of another. Personal sacrifice and commitment to the unity of the church are part of imitating the “model character of the apostle and his ways in Christ.”

The freedom of the liberal Corinthians parallels the apostle’s freedom to accept support for his labors, but love often means giving up entitlements for the sake of others. Although Paul accepts the arguments of those who wished to eat food offered to idols, he asks them not to use their rights for the sake of those weak in faith. Paul recommends his apostleship as a positive example of self-renunciation.

Others note that more than one of the above views could have been operating at the same time. Along these lines, arguments for one of these views that negate the other possibilities often create a false dichotomy between them. Indeed, Paul employs several rhetorical and logical strategies in 1 Corinthians 9, and appeals to both human and divine authorities.

However, the third view seems most coherent and convincing in terms of Paul’s flow of logic. The apostle appears to be setting himself up as an example in unselfishly giving up his rights for the sake of others and the gospel. One of his rhetorical strategies is to list three similar examples in the realities of everyday life (1 Cor. 9:7), and then to appeal to three authorities for even more persuasive corroboration: the Law of Moses (vs. 9), the temple service (vs. 13), and commands from the Lord (vs. 4). Thus, the Old Testament context of Paul’s quotation becomes crucial for the interpretation of his reasoning in 1 Corinthians 9. If Paul here uses Deuteronomy 25:4 out of context in applying it to human workers instead of oxen, the reader would no longer be able to follow or trust his logic and argumentation. In light of this, the original context of Deuteronomy 25:4 must be considered before returning to a closer examination of 1 Corinthians 9.

Old Testament Context

In spite of the lack of consensus concerning the date and authorship of Deuteronomy, many scholars do find a unity in the book itself as the book of the law, a series of sermons, or a treaty
documenting the covenant between God and Israel. Most, however, still see Deuteronomy 25 (and indeed Deuteronomy 12–26) as a disparate collection of laws that have little connection to each other beyond their importance to the covenant. Others find that each law is related to the previous not by a common topic, but by a similar word or grammatical pattern, as if the compiler was reminded of each succeeding law in a somewhat haphazard pattern.

A few scholars have ventured to analyze the structure of the multitudinous stipulations. Christenson has proposed a very broad concentric and chiastic structure for Deuteronomy 12–26, considering that even more broadly, Deuteronomy 21:10–25:19 contains laws concerning “human affairs in relation to others.” C. Carmichael suggests that the arrangement of Deuteronomy reflects the order and structure of the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21–23.

In the Book of the Covenant, laws concerning social privileges are bookends around laws concerning the legal system and courtroom laws. Interestingly, Carmichael lists Exodus 23:10–12, which also highlights a concern for animals, in the second section of social privilege laws. This pattern is paralleled, but with more complexity, in Deuteronomy 12–26, where Deuteronomy 25:4 is considered a law about privileges (interpolated among laws of the courtroom). Christenson’s analysis also places Deuteronomy 25:4 within the laws of humanitarian concerns and social ethics (25:1-16), paralleling Deuteronomy 24:6-16 and separated by the summary law protecting the disadvantaged (24:17-22).

Others have tried to find structure in Deuteronomy 12–26 based on the Decalogue as an organizing principle, with “the individual laws thus appear[ing] as concretizations of the Decalogue.” Braulik sees Deuteronomy 25:4 as part of the commentary on the eighth commandment, dealing generally with matters of jurisprudence, especially regarding right actions in the face of judgment. McConnville argues that the commandment prohibiting a false witness entails fairness to all, even the dignity of animals. As Deuteronomy presents itself as Moses’ sermons or commentary on the Decalogue, this latter option seems more probable.

Thus, most commentators see Deuteronomy 25:4 within a section of surrounding laws concerning humane treatment of people, especially the poor and marginalized, who are allowed to eat what is left in the field at the end of harvest (Deut. 24:19–22). Some suggest that Deuteronomy 25:4 had already become a proverb by the time Deuteronomy was written, especially since every other verse in Deuteronomy 25 is about justice in human relationships. In this view, Deuteronomy 25:4 would function well as a proverb for justice in human working relationships.

However, although Deuteronomy 25:4 is addressed to humans, not oxen, the law engenders compassion for animals in the owner. The only other place this word for “muzzle” occurs is Ezekiel 39:11, where it is a participle, best translated “to block” or “to obstruct.” This broader meaning could be paralleled in the rabbinic prohibitions regarding threshing oxen, which cover a wide variety of distractions or pain for the ox. Indeed, some rabbinic sources consider this passage to refer only to animals and their care. The Talmud suggests that Deuteronomy refers to all animals when compassion is commanded, and even if an animal eats food that is for the priests, muzzling would be...
inappropriate and cruel.\textsuperscript{9}

The ox is working hard to thresh the grain, but if it is muzzled, it cannot eat on a regular basis, as cattle need to do. If the muzzle is removed, the ox may not work faster, and the owner will lose a bit of grain, but the animal will be much more satisfied. In addition, the act of threshing is part of a temporal clause, implying that the muzzle was never to be used during any part of the threshing process.

When considering the Hebrew word for “threshing,” several other Old Testament texts shed light on Deuteronomy 25:4. For instance, Jeremiah 50:11 mentions the ox getting fat while threshing, perhaps because it is not muzzled. Indeed, Christenson suggests that the alternative to muzzling the ox would be to administer a whip to encourage it to work. However, Hosea 10:11 speaks of a trained heifer that “loves to thresh,” which seems to suggest that the whip might not have been necessary. It hardly seems possible that the ox could truly eat enough grain to disadvantage the farmer, especially considering the biology of ruminants, where chewing the cud consumes large parts of the day.

Interestingly, this law is an anomaly in the ancient Near East, where laws about oxen do not mention any care for the ox itself, mostly discussing what must be done to repay the owner if the ox is lost or killed. Thus, any analysis of Deuteronomy 25:4 must take into consideration the basis for its injunction in the animal world.

**Immediate New Testament Context**

R. Hays reflects the comments of many scholars on 1 Corinthians 9:8–10 when he states that “there is no indication that Paul has wrestled seriously with the texts from which the citations are drawn.”\textsuperscript{10} However, he at least tries to justify Paul’s hermeneutic by calling it strategic and rhetorically intertextual, unlike others who find no connection between this command to oxen and Paul’s application to clergy. J. Smit argues that Paul “widens the scope” of Deuteronomy 25, and uses the method of “Qumran pesharim,” changing the application from the original text.\textsuperscript{11} Thielman finds that Paul says God was “not concerned about oxen,” and argues that the law is relevant for Christians only as it is reinterpreted in light of the eschatological Christ event, and superseded by Jesus’ authority. Conzelmann even contends that Paul uses an allegorical approach like that of Philo. Thus, it is important to examine the flow of Paul’s argument in the first part of 1 Corinthians 9 before attempting to mediate between these positions, and consider whether God cares for animals.

**Exegetical and Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 9**

Paul presents four introductory questions: “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1). Then, in verse 2, he expands on the last question in to remind the Corinthians that even if he is not an apostle to others, he is an apostle to them. Therefore, he has a defense for his examiners. He first mentions some specific apostolic rights through more questions: “Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles? . . . Or is it only Barnabas and I who
have no right to refrain from working?” (vss. 4-6).

Then he shifts to the common-sense basic rights of all laborers with further questions: “Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?” In support of these above presuppositions, Paul appeals to the Pentateuch: “Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?” (vs. 8). Paul quotes the Law of Moses specifically: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (vs. 9).

Paul has already used many figures in his argument, but only the ox has previous scriptural support. Indeed, examples and analogies are “only valid if they are understood literally in the first place.” Paul could have used a less controversial example, like that of the priests, but perhaps he wanted to help the Corinthians understand that they had been trying to “muzzle” Paul by calling into question his authority and trying to obligate him to them and their opinions.

Chrysostom offers another interesting hypothesis: Paul wanted to “prove his case beyond any shadow of doubt. If God cares about oxen, how much more will he care about the labor of teachers?” This “lesser to greater” argument is a rabbinical method, but contrary to what many assume, Jewish exegesis should not be equated automatically with misuse of the text, or taking it out of context.

Paul then asks the question: “Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this?” (vs. 9, NLT). Figures of speech are used to give force, life, or intensity to an argument. The rhetorical force of “only” often entails a question that is solely to elicit a resounding “No!” But here, in light of the dependence of Paul’s argument on the care for animals inherent in the Deuteronomic context, the phraseology could suggest a question that is more hesitant, rather than inviting an emphatically negative answer. When considering the context of Deuteronomy 25:4 in this way, G. M. Lee interprets it as a “cautious or deprecatory assertion”: “I expect God cares for oxen. Suppose, now, he says it in any case for us, too?”

Along the same lines, the Greek word for “only” in verse 10 can be translated many different ways, but is usually rendered here as “altogether” (KJV, NKJV, NASB) or “entirely” (CEV). This seems to be another one of the main reasons that Paul is accused of taking Deuteronomy 25:4 out of context. If God does not care about oxen, but entirely about humans, then the literal meaning of the law becomes void. Some recent studies, however, have shown that in this context, “only” is better translated “certainly,” “undoubtedly,” or “assuredly.” In this way, Paul’s focus on humanity is maintained, in that humans are given the law, but humans are required by the law to care for oxen.

Thus, the foundational premise of animal care in Deuteronomy remains the basis for Paul’s argument concerning pay for laborers. Paul is arguing from the minor to the major, in that “on every account a provision made for the beasts . . . must hold good, a fortiori, for God’s proper servants.” In other words, all Scripture has an eschatological goal or purpose, and Scripture ultimately was written for those at the end of time, but this does not make other provisional interpretations irrelevant or invalid.
Paul then continues in verse 10 with a parallel-structured statement: "this was written for our sakes also, in order that:

- "he who plows should plow in hope"; and
- "he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope."

That this was written "also/certainly" for us makes even more sense now (in contrast to "altogether"), because of these further examples that Paul draws out. If Deuteronomy 25:4 was not actually written for the oxen originally, then the plower could not plow in hope, and the human who threshed could not be a partaker of the hope.

The phrase "this is written, that" in verse 10 also plays an important role that many scholars do not analyze fully. Most argue that the next clause in 1 Corinthians 9:10b is a new quotation or that Paul continues to give the reason that Deuteronomy 25:4 was written for him. However, Smit argues thoroughly and convincingly based on grammatical, syntactical, and pragmatic evidence that Paul is explaining the quotation from the law. Especially to be noted is the lack of "it is written" (NIV) as in verse 9. The only other place in which this occurs in Paul’s letters is Romans 4:23, where it is a link between a quotation and its further explanation. The plower is also a link between the quotation and its application. Here in verse 10, Paul is basically rewriting Deuteronomy 25:4.

Thus, the agricultural metaphors of sowing and plowing, and the close relationship between the worker and the product of the worker’s labor are key connections between these two passages. Brewer goes even farther and categorizes Paul’s statements on this passage as legal rulings, evidenced by his words, “as it is written in the law of Moses.” Extensive evidence illustrates that the ox could be substituted for any laborer in ancient custom, and Brewer even contends that Paul’s interpretation of Deuteronomy 25:4 is literal. Whether humans (in Paul’s day) or animal (in Deuteronomy), recompense for labor was the only morally acceptable course of action.

Indeed, in verses 11–16, Paul continues to emphasize his rights for recompense, but then proceeds to emphasize how he has not used them. A paraphrase and further analysis of the passage indicates parallels between rights (vss. 11, 12a, 13, 14) and renunciation (vss. 12b, 15, 16) in Paul’s application of these examples to his own situation:

A—rights: we sow spiritual things and should be able to reap material ones; as others partake of this right, we should even more (vss. 11, 12a)

B—renunciation: however, we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ (vs. 12b)

A’—rights: those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar; thus, those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (vss. 13, 14)

B’—renunciation: but I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die! No one can make my boasting void, for if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of (vss. 15, 16)

The overall structure in this passage connects the dots between Paul’s rights, his refusal to take
advantage of them for the sake of the gospel, and his subsequent service to all in the name of Christ.

A—the law allows remuneration (vss. 8–10)

B—but Paul avoids it for the sake of the gospel (vss. 11–18)

C—though he is free, he becomes a servant to all (vs. 19)

A’—Paul labors to reach all human beings, even those under the law (vss. 20, 21)

B’—and he becomes like them as much as possible for the sake of the gospel (vss. 22, 23)

C’—he even puts his body under subjection so he is not disqualified in preaching (vss. 24–27)

Paul has a right to be paid, like the ox (A), for his labor to all human beings (A’). However, the apostle chooses not to be remunerated for the sake of the gospel (B) and attempts to fit in with others to reach them (B’), even serving them, though a free man (C), and enduring bodily discomfort for the sake of the gospel (C’).

Because he is an apostle, Paul has a right to be sustained by those for whom he labors, just as do the threshing ox, the vine keeper, and the plower. But he has chosen not to take advantage of that right so he may win more to Christ, present the gospel without charge, and not abuse his authority in the gospel. He would rather become a servant to all. Indeed, in his preaching “his reward is to render the gospel free of charge.” His argument depends on a continued application of the law to make an even greater contrast between what he deserves as a laborer and what he renounces for the sake of the gospel. In the end, it is not so much about care for oxen, for that is assumed in Paul’s logical argument. It is instead that Paul (the ox—or laborer) chooses to forego his right to be “unmuzzled,” to reach more people with the gospel.

**God’s Care for Animals**

Paul’s interpretive use of the Old Testament in this passage can best be classified as analogical. This kind of usage makes a comparison between two things for the purpose of clarification. When the Old Testament context is understood correctly, even its proverbs and legal codes can be applied to current situations by the New Testament church and modern believers. Biblical commands, no matter the original time period or culture to which they were addressed, usually carry a universal and timeless principle. Analogy from human life is “supported further by parallel analogies or examples from scripture.”

However, Paul also uses the authority of the Old Testament as part of his argument, so it is more than a simple argument from analogy. The context for Deuteronomy 25:4 includes a concern for all laborers, so, when considering the scope of the law, Paul draws out its significance for the present situation, determining that the principle could be applied to Christian ministers with validity. Paul thus reasons from the lesser to the greater: because God is concerned for animals, He is therefore all the more concerned for humans.

When consideration is given to the larger context of Deuteronomy 24 and 25, it becomes
apparent that Paul does not abandon the literal meaning or take any liberties with the law, but perceives the goal of engendering a sense of moral duty and gratefulness in all. The universal principles found in Deuteronomy 25:4 are that of fairness and generosity, and Paul understands that Moses was ultimately writing for humanity’s sake as much as for the animals’, especially because humans are to act for the sake of the oxen. Indeed, the person who shows mercy has the higher benefit than the receiver of mercy, even when this kindness is an inconvenience. In this way, the law is for the sake of animals (receivers of compassion) and humans (givers of compassion), so that Paul’s application actually is more faithful to the context of Deuteronomy 25:4 than are many who accuse him of misapplying it.

In our eagerness to apply biblical laws to our current situations, we must not forget that the applications lose their power when the original law is no longer valid. Deuteronomy 25:4 can now be viewed as a call to support Christian ministers. The primary theological use of Deuteronomy 25:4 by Paul is ecclesiological, especially for the support of pastors. Christian leaders have a right to be assisted in their ministries. This is especially important because the church really is an “independent community” with different governments, social groups, rituals, and rules. Pastors rarely receive support from non-Christians, so church members may need to sacrifice to assure their leaders’ financial survival.

Deuteronomy 25:4 does not mean that humans may disregard the compassionate treatment of God’s creatures. God is not talking about animals just to show that He cares about humans. Both aspects must be kept in balance, as “the wholeness of the covenant community extends even to its livestock.” The true meaning of leadership is a Christlike stance toward others. Scripture and analogy come together to inspire us to greater service toward all God’s creatures, even when that may mean giving up what we deserve.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES
1. Unless otherwise specified, all Bible texts in this article are quoted from the New King James Version.

9. See, for example, b. B. Qam. 54.


God’s Judgment as Salvation

For centuries the word "judgment" has struck fear in the hearts of God’s people, but this doesn’t have to be our response.

Jirí Moskala

What is your first reaction, thought, or feeling when you hear that God will judge you?

Whatever your background—political, social, religious, ethnic, educational, or age—the answer is unanimous: Fear!

In the past, I thought this was mainly my problem, because I grew up in a totalitarian communist regime. When I heard the word judgment, I imagined a judge in dark clothing, with a severe expression on his face, pointing with his finger at someone, and condemning that person to death.

I have found, however, that everywhere, impressions about the divine judgment are dark and cold. Most people think of God as a heavenly policeman, waiting to punish them for their mistakes and perceive Him as a cosmic Nebuchadnezzar before whose sovereign authority nobody can escape. They feel that they are under the magnifying glass of the heavenly Judge, and thus are full of anxiety.

My distorted understanding was grossly influenced by some preachers who used divine judgment as a pedagogical tool to motivate believers to obedience, to encourage them to be good and to behave nicely. They thought that scaring and threatening people with judgment would help them to follow God faithfully—contrary to Romans 2:4. They built their concept on a mistranslation of Jude 23: “Others save with fear” (as some old translations have it), and presented the divine judgment in full negativity.

These interpretations troubled me deeply; from my early childhood, I had a bleak and unfriendly picture of judgment that played a dreadful role in my mind. As a result, I was afraid of God, frightened by Him, and naked before His eyes. I felt lost, alone, and abandoned, with an acute sense of guilt. I perceived nothing favorable in God’s judgment.

Fear as a universal human reaction toward divine judgment is understandable because we know that God is holy (Lev. 11:44, 45; 1 Peter 1:15, 16) and a consuming fire (Isa. 30:27), and we are sinners (Rom. 3:23). Consequently, we cannot possibly stand before the awesome Judge of the Universe (Gen. 18:25). Our typical response is aptly described by Asaph: “Who can stand before you? . . . From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet” (Ps. 76:7, 8).¹ At the bottom of our negative thoughts lies the conviction of our insufficiency and sinfulness.

According to popular understanding, to judge means to “condemn,” “punish,” and “destroy.” This is why people are scared, full of anxiety. This is why they avoid even talking about it. When
people equate God’s judgment with condemnation, punishment, and destruction (and such meaning can clearly be attested to in the Bible), no wonder they do not experience joy and assurance of salvation in Christ Jesus. This threat of divine judgment robs them of thankfulness, and their world is divided between the redemption secured on the Cross and the fear of God’s judgment.

Thus, they live in a spiritual schizophrenia. On the one hand, they know that they are saved in Jesus Christ, but on the other, they understand that there will be a judgment. They do not know how to reconcile these two realities, and they lose peace and certitude. Are fear and hopelessness inseparable from the concept of judgment? Are uncertainty and soberness its necessary companions?

There is a positive dimension to divine judgment—without denying that there is also a negative, very sober, and tragic side of God’s judgment. For the biblical authors, the divine judgment is something that is desired and to which they looked forward with great anticipation: “Rise up, O God, judge the earth” (Ps. 82:8). Judgment plays a vital role in God’s plan of salvation, and it is a central part of the eternal gospel (Rev. 14:6, 7). “The center of biblical theology . . . is the glory of God in salvation through judgement.”

If that is so, the basic question is, therefore, what is the primary meaning of God’s judgment?

To Judge Means to Justify

According to biblical understanding, “to judge” means “to justify,” a legal action with an awesome impact on our lives. Every time we confess our sins and are forgiven, we pass through God’s eschatological judgment, which breaks through to our situation, and we are justified by His grace—declared just. Judgment is justification: God as a true Judge justifies repentant sinners (Rom. 3:22-26), and they are cleansed and acquitted from all guilt (Ps. 51:1, 2).

God does this—and can do it—because He is our heavenly Judge. In this way, for example, Abraham was judged by God and pronounced righteous because Abraham believed in Him (Gen. 15:6). Joshua, the high priest, was made right (Zech. 3:3-5). Isaiah boldly declares: “In the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult” (Isa. 45:25). In this way, to judge means “to cleanse” (Ps. 51:7-10). Justified sinners stand in a restored and right relationship with their Lord. This positive proclamation of God on our behalf gives full assurance of salvation, new courage to live. It brings true peace and joy into our lives.

David joyfully states: “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit” (Ps. 32:1, 2). This is why Paul unambiguously clarifies: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). And Jesus plainly assures: “Whosoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). The forgiven transgressor does not come into the judgment of condemnation and will not experience God’s disapproval.

Consequently, Paul announces that those who truly accept Jesus as their personal Savior are raised to new life and are already sitting on the heavenly throne in Christ at the right side of the
heavenly Father (Eph. 2:6). Thus, if we are already there, why are we so worried about making it into heaven one day? Not one of our performances (however noble), great achievements, or good deeds can help us get into the kingdom of glory. We receive salvation as a pure gift only through and in Christ.

“If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”

No wonder authority was given to Him to pronounce judgment (John 3:17, 18), and all glory belongs to Him (Ps. 34:2).

Additional examples are plentiful and portray this reality in various episodes in the Bible. The first recorded judgment is over Adam and Eve after they broke their love and trust relationship with their Creator and ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6). Instead of being destroyed as God initially said—“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (2:17)—by God’s grace their lives were spared, and He even looked for them in the garden (3:9).

God’s call “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9) was an expression of His deep love in search of humanity and revealed His judgment and grace at the same time. On account of the grace coming from the Lamb, who was slain before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4), they were given life. The very first expression of the gospel announced God’s love for sinners because only He could provide a solution for our lost sinful situation and defeat Satan (Gen. 3:15). When we are in Christ, we are sons and daughters of God and heirs of His kingdom. In Christ we have everything (Gal. 3:29), and we can entirely wrap ourselves in His divine forgiveness.

George Ladd correctly explains: “The doctrine of justification means that God has pronounced the eschatological verdict of acquittal over the man of faith in the present, in advance of the final judgment... Thus the man in Christ is actually righteous, not ethically but forensically, in terms of his relationship to God.”

God is just (Deut. 32:4; 1 John 1:9); He never perverts His judgment, nor can He be accused of favoritism (Prov. 17:15; Acts 10:34, 35). He is just while justifying sinners (Rom. 3:26) because He changes them.

God sees in the present what we will become by the power of the Holy Spirit, His mighty word, and His blazing grace. He declares us righteous because by His amazing grace we will be righteous, our lives will be transformed. We are new creatures in Christ, and His grace will grow in us (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Peter 2:2). Grace is amazing because it changes people and does what we cannot accomplish for ourselves (Rom. 7:14-18). When we pass through God’s acquittal, He justifies us as our Judge, and in His eyes we are what we will be.

To Judge Means to Save

God saves believers from the second death, sin, guilt, the power of evil, and gives eternal life (John 3:16; Rom. 6:5-9, 23). King David first described a negative aspect of divine judgment in terms of destruction and cutting off but then emphasized judgment as salvation: “All sinners will be
destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off. The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble” (Ps. 37:38, 39). Asaph stressed that when God rises up to judge, it means that He is coming "to save all the afflicted of the land" (Ps. 76:9). Thus, these biblical texts explicitly state that for God to judge means to save His people. God’s judgment is salvation and comes uniquely from the Lord (Ps. 62:1; Isa 12:2). God is the Savior and Redeemer (Deut. 32:15; Isa. 44:6; Jer. 14:8).

The biblical flood account (Genesis 6-9) is another good example of salvation in the midst of God’s judging activity. The whole story culminates with this statement: “God remembered Noah” (8:1). This climax does not mean that God had a loss of memory and suddenly He remembered, but that He intervened in favor of Noah in the midst of judgment to save him and his family.

Furthermore, Noah received grace from God (Gen. 6:8). It is important to note that the word for “grace” appears for the first time in the Bible in the Flood narrative. Surprisingly God’s intervening grace is the apex of the story, because from it all salvific actions flow for humanity.

And God’s grace was not only for Noah; it was offered to the antediluvian people as well. Genesis 6:3 reveals that God’s Spirit was striving with people by calling them to repentance. However, God had to sadly proclaim: “My Spirit will not contend with man forever.”

In this verse, the Hebrew word for “judge” appears, and translators are puzzled because they are not sure what to do with this concept. They do not try to hide the difficulty of this verse and propose various solutions. In what sense was the Spirit of the Lord no longer able to “judge” them? God wanted to justify and save the antediluvian people, but because of their stubbornness, refusal to listen to His word, follow His instructions, and that their thinking was evil, He was unable to judge them favorably.

Nevertheless, even in such an estranged situation, God gave them 120 years of additional grace so they could repent and turn back to Him (Gen. 6:3). Unfortunately, God’s amazing grace was not received graciously, and the result is described in language indicative of a total state of human depravity: “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (vs. 5). Noah was a preacher of righteousness to them, but his words and example of godliness were not taken seriously.

God had to stop the avalanche of evil, but He was waiting till the last second. When He intervened with His negative judgment, He actually intervened in His grace, because He could no longer envision the destruction, perversion, violence, torture, and exploitation of the pre-Flood world. He destroyed what had already been destroyed by humans (Gen. 6:11-13). God, as the Surgeon, removed the cancer of sin.

Sadly, at the end, God was able to save only one family whose members were willing to cooperate with Him. If God had not intervened, the blight of sin would most probably in time have overrun even this faithful remnant. God’s promised Seed would not have had a place to be born, His word would not have been fulfilled (Gen. 3:15), and the Messiah’s coming would have been hindered. Thus, the cancer of sin would have completely engulfed the world, evil would have won, Satan would
have triumphed, God’s cause would have been defeated, and humanity lost. God’s grace prevailed, however, even in this tragic event (Rom. 6:20, 21).

To Judge Means to Deliver

God as our Judge delivers us from condemnation and the tyranny of sin because He is the true Liberator (John 8:32, 36; Gal. 5:1, 13). He is the Victor over Satan (John 12:31, 32); therefore He is able to deliver from different addictions to sin. He is the Giver of freedom. We are in danger of slavery to sin (Rom. 6:11–18), and our Judge delivers us from the power of the evil one (Matt. 6:13).

“Throughout the Bible those who experience God’s deliverance experience it through his judgment.”

God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt and set them free in the midst of His judgment upon the Egyptian gods and upon those who were associated with them (Ex. 3:8; 5:2). This deliverance goes even deeper. To be free from sin means to be healed (Ps. 41:4). Salvation is ultimately deliverance from the power of sin and a complete well-being or healing.

God helps us to understand the nature of His judgment through the Old Testament Book of Judges. What was the primary function of these judges? To condemn, punish, or destroy God’s people? On the contrary, judges were sent by God to deliver them from the oppression and devastation of their enemies. They were called to protect, care, save, deliver, and liberate God’s people from their foes. They were there to give and secure freedom. This book should be named the “Book of Liberators” or “Deliverers.” Judgment for God is His passionate way of demonstrating His positive attitude toward the oppressed, His coming to rescue them.

God wants our freedom, and the original intention of His law was to protect our freedom. It is important to observe that God’s first command was actually commanding freedom: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden” (Gen. 2:16). True freedom lies in accepting our limits and God’s instructions and discipline (Prov. 1:1-7).

To Judge Means to Vindicate

Our Judge vindicates His people against the accusations of our archenemy Satan. The Psalmist reassures: “The Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants” (Ps. 135:14). The story of Job reveals this truth. In the heavenly tribunal, Satan accused Job of selfish motives: “Does Job fear God for nothing?” (Job 1:9). The key term in this question is “for nothing.”

In this court setting, God is on the side of Job even though He cannot answer directly and immediately Satan’s accusation. At the end, God accomplishes moral victory when Job’s unselfish love, trust, and service are revealed. God’s love, truth, and justice prevail (Ps. 100:5). He is just while justifying sinners (Rom. 3:4, 26). This theodicy is the heart of the spiritual warfare.

John declares that Jesus silenced Satan’s accusations because of His victory on the cross. His blood defeated Satan’s charge that a loving devotion to God is impossible. Christ’s victory is claimed by His followers. He identifies with them (Matt. 25:40, 45), so they associate with Him, willingly follow wherever He leads (Rev. 14:4), and follow Him faithfully even to the point of death.
John reports that he heard a loud voice in heaven that described this reality: "'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short’" (Rev. 12:10-12). Satan accuses, but God defends and vindicates (Rom. 8:31-39).

**Crucial Observations**

Only people who are on death row can rejoice over the news that there will be a trial addressing their situation. This news means new hope for their case. When we accept that we are condemned to eternal death because of our sins, then we can actually rejoice over the news that there will be God’s judgment. This judgment is our only hope. It is a chance for sinners to be saved. However, in this judgment, all depends on our relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We need to realize that the court system in ancient Israel was different from our Western system of justice. In our society’s court system, we mainly have two individuals (besides the prosecutor and jury), each with a different function, for ensuring justice in legal cases. (And in our culture we have good reasons for doing so.)

These two main figures are the judge (whose principal function is understood to be sentencing or condemning people) and an attorney (to defend the accused persons). But in ancient Israel, there were no attorneys. Only one person was needed in legal procedures—a judge who was, at the same time, an attorney. One individual fulfilled both functions. The judge was perceived as the savior. Only he could deliver and vindicate an accused person from injustice. If someone needed help, only a judge could intervene and bring solution to the problem (Luke 18:2-8).

We today associate judgment with fear, but the biblical authors connected judgment with surpassing joy. Consider the verbs in the following biblical passage that describes an attitude toward judgment: “Rejoice . . . be glad . . . resound . . . be jubilant . . . sing for joy . . . sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth” (Ps. 96:11-13). Also a psalm of the sons of Korah reiterates: “Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments” (48:11).

God does not need to organize a judgment in heaven to condemn humanity, because we are already condemned to death. We are all sinners, guilty, and doomed to death, and if God would not intervene in our favor, we would certainly die. God does not need to condemn us for the second time. But when He judges us again at the pre-advent judgment, it means that His principal purpose is different: He secures legally our place in heaven in front of the heavenly court for all eternity. This judgment also unmasks the antagonistic activities of the little horn before the universe (Daniel 7–8).

Thus, we do not need to be afraid of God’s pre-advent judgment, because at that judgment He affirms, confirms, reveals, discloses, and demonstrates to the heavenly world the decisions we made.
for Him during our lifetime. He will not add anything else to our decisions and neither will He alter them. As the faithful and true Witness of our lives, He testifies for His people that we are His (Rom. 8:31). Paul states clearly: “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). The pre-advent judgment does not pronounce a new sentence in contrast to what we experience in our daily life. Jesus will only verify and affirm God’s saving activity or the condemnation of a particular person.

The destruction of the wicked, the evil angels, and Satan himself is good news because there will no longer be an evil force or sin that would destroy what is valuable, good, and beautiful. There will be no more death, pain, criminality, or disease. No more cemeteries, jails, or hospitals. Love, peace, creative work, and meaningful relationships will be the content of life. God’s love, truth, and justice in judgment will prevail (Phil. 2:10, 11).

The only way we can stand before the holy God is by His grace. We are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 3:22-31). He is more than willing to save us; by walking with such a gracious God, it is easier to be saved than to be lost (Rom. 8:35-39). We have eternal life not because we feel it, but because God says so (Ps. 10:12; 1 John 1:7-9).

**God’s Judgment Reconsidered**

We are used to thinking negatively about God’s judgment, however, the Bible provides a different paradigm regarding this essential divine activity, and we need to learn to perceive it as an affirming event. God is for His people and never against them. Only when we are attracted to God by His goodness and beauty are we then able to respond positively to Him (Rom. 2:4). As a consequence of the first sin, we are all afraid of God, and we are hiding from Him (Gen. 3:10). “The judgment makes known Yahweh’s nature.” Through it, He reveals who He is. The Lord as Judge is the Savior.

The biblical record is transparent: The primary meaning of God’s judgment is to justify, save, deliver, and vindicate. When we ask God for forgiveness, praying for it honestly, openly, and sincerely, God as our Judge forgives our sins and proclaims us right. He does this—and can do it—because He is our heavenly Judge. God’s eschatological judgment breaks into our time, and we are judged favorably; we pass from death to life; we are not condemned and have eternal life (Gen. 15:6; John 3:16, 17, 36). Only when we do not accept the positive dimension of God’s judgment are we under condemnation, i.e., the negative meaning of His judgment.

The proclamation of the judgment in the context of Revelation 14 is very good news, and it is a part of the eternal gospel. From this *indicative* of the gospel that “His judgment hour has come” springs the *imperative* of the gospel: “Fear God and give him glory. . . . Worship him who made” everything (Rev. 14:7). The gospel is a proclamation of the good news about God as our Judge.

Judgment is about restoring justice. The Psalmist cries: “Rise up, Judge of the earth. . . . How long, Lord, will the wicked, how long will the wicked be jubilant?” (Ps. 94:2, 3). True uncorrupted justice can be inaugurated only by God; His love, truth, and justice will prevail. The only solution to our sinful situation—to not be under condemnation—is to accept and personally know our Judge,
because in the face of our Judge we can recognize the face of our Savior (Isa. 63:6-9).

At the end, when Jesus comes in glory with the holy angels, only two groups of people will be there. One group will cry in desperation to the mountains and rocks: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!” (Rev. 6:16). The other group with victorious shouts of great joy will look up with confidence expressing their realized hope: “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9). Words cannot contain their excitement. The choice is ours.

Can we hide from God? David proclaimed that God is everywhere, and there is no place to conceal us from Him (Psalm 139). But still, there is a special place where the heavenly Father cannot “find” those who follow Him. This unique hiding place is in Jesus when we accept Him as our personal Savior. David prays: “Rescue me from my enemies, O Lord, for I hide myself in you” (Ps. 143:9).

The “in Christ” motif means that the heavenly Father looks upon us but sees His beloved Son Jesus Christ. When we are in Christ, all that is His is given to us as a free gift, the result of His amazing grace. His purity is our purity, His righteousness is our righteousness, His perfection is our perfection, His character is our character, and we are accepted by our heavenly Father as if we had never sinned.

“Living in every instance in the judgment of God makes our life what it is,” writes theologian Peter Brunner. “Living in the judgment of God is the creative power that makes us what we actually are. We do not make ourselves what we are; God’s judgment about us makes what we are, for the judgment of God works very differently from human judgment. . . . I am what God thinks about me. God’s judgment carries with it the immediate power of execution. God’s decree creates what it says. . . . If God decrees, ‘He is my beloved child,’ then that is what I really am, even when so much seems to speak against it. . . . God’s judgment about you and me creates the basic foundation of our existence. I live as I live in the judgment of God. I am what I am through the judgment of God. Any weight that I might place on the scale of my life produces only a superficial and temporary swing. But what God’s judgment brings into my life shifts the balance for all time and eternity. That is why the question of what God thinks of me is the most important of all questions.”

Praise the Lord that God is our Judge!

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from the New International Version of the Bible.


