

Discover Bible Studies

#13: From Guilty Sinner to Forgiven Saint

There were no fingerprints. No weapon was ever discovered. No one saw the murderer enter the office of the doctor. No one even heard the shots ring out. But the doctor was found sprawled behind his desk. Five bullets had pierced his shirt.

It seemed the perfect crime. The police at first could find no clues. But then they noticed a tiny wire attached to a pencil holder on the doctor's desk. The wire led to a tape recorder in a desk drawer. The pencil holder, they realized, actually concealed a microphone that the doctor used to record his conversations with the patients he was counselling.

The investigators quickly rewound the tape and, to their amazement, began to listen to a replay of the actual crime. A man named Anthony had entered the office and began a heated argument with the doctor. Shots rang out. The tape ended with the terrible moans of the doctor, dying on the carpet.

Every awful detail had been recorded. The murderer thought his crime would forever remain a secret. He'd been so careful to leave no clues. But the tape told the whole story.

In this guide we're going to learn about God's final judgment when human beings are "judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Revelation 20:12). For those who have not accepted Christ as their Saviour, it will be bad news. But the judgment is wonderfully good news for those who've found security in Christ.

1. HOW YOU CAN FACE THE JUDGMENT UNAFRAID

Who will judge the world?

*"The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." -John 5:22.
(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

How did the cross prepare Christ to become our Judge?

"God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice . . . so as to be JUST AND THE ONE WHO JUSTIFIES those who have faith in Jesus." -Romans 3:25, 26.

Christ's death as our substitute enables Him to act as both a just Judge and a gracious Justifier who can forgive the repentant sinner. When the watching universe asks the question, "How can an impartial judge declare a guilty person not guilty?" Christ can

answer by pointing to the scars in His hands. He has received the just penalty for our sins in His own body.

The books of heaven preserve a record of every individual life, and these records are utilized in the judgment (Revelation 20:12). That's the bad news for those who imagine their secret sins and crimes will never return to haunt them. But there is wonderfully good news for all who've sincerely accepted Christ as their Advocate in heaven: "The blood of Jesus . . . purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

What does Jesus offer in exchange for our life of sin?

"God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." -2 Corinthians. 5:21.

Our life of sin is exchanged for Christ's perfect life of righteousness. Because of Jesus' sinless life and death, God can forgive us and treat us as if we'd never sinned.

What qualifies Jesus to be our Advocate and Judge?

2. CHRIST CAME ON TIME

At His baptism, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit:

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" -Matthew 3:16, 17.

Following Christ's anointing by the Holy Spirit at His baptism, the disciples announced:

"We have found the Messiah' [the Christ]." -John 1:41.

The disciples knew that the Hebrew word "Messiah" and the Greek word "Christ" both mean "the Anointed One."

Luke, a disciple of Jesus, recorded the date of Jesus' anointing as the Messiah as the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1). To us that would be the year A.D. 27.

More than 500 years before Jesus came the prophet Daniel predicted that Jesus would be anointed as the Messiah in A.D. 27:

"From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One . . . will be seven 'sevens' [weeks, Hebrew] and sixty-two 'sevens' [weeks]." -Daniel 9:25.

Seven weeks and sixty-two weeks total sixty-nine weeks or 483 days (7 X 69 = 483 days). In symbolic Bible prophecy each day equals one year (Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), so the 483 days equal 483 years. Daniel predicted that a command would go forth

to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and exactly 483 years after this command, the Messiah would appear.

Did Jesus appear as the Messiah at the appointed time? Artaxerxes issued the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:7-26). The 483 years, then, ended in A.D. 27. (457 B.C. + A.D. 27 = 484.) The decree went forth during the year 457 and Christ was anointed during A.D. 27, making them both partial years, so the correct time would be 483 years.)

At the very time appointed, in A.D. 27, Jesus appeared with the message: "The time has come" (Mark 1:15). The accurate fulfillment of this Bible prophecy is impressive confirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah, God in human flesh.

How long was Jesus to confirm the promise?

"He will confirm a covenant [a promise] with many for one 'seven' [week, Hebrew]." - Daniel 9:27, first part.

When we apply the year-day principle, this "week" would be seven years. So, for seven years—from A.D. 27 to A.D. 34—Jesus would "confirm a covenant," or promise, He had made to Adam and Eve shortly after they sinned. God made a covenant, a promise, that He would save the human race from sin through the death of Someone He would send to die for our sins (Genesis 3:15).

What was to happen in the middle of this seventieth week?

"In the middle of the 'seven' [week, Hebrew] he will put an end to sacrifice and offering." - Daniel 9:27, last part.

Jesus was crucified in A.D. 31, in "the middle of the week." At the moment of Christ's death, God tore "the curtain of the temple . . . in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). The sacrificial offering about to be slain (a symbol of Jesus "the Lamb of God") escaped from the priest's hands. This was a sign that God no longer wanted humanity to offer animal sacrifices. Fulfilling prophecy down to the letter, Jesus "put an end to" any need for further sacrifices to be offered. Since Christ's death, people gain access to God not through animal sacrifices and human priests, but through the Messiah, the Lamb of God and our High Priest.

3. THE ASSURANCE OF SINS FORGIVEN

According to Daniel's prophecy, why did Jesus die?

"The Anointed One will be cut off but not for himself." -Daniel 9:26, margin.

At his death on the cross, Jesus was "cut off." He died, "but not for himself," not to pay a penalty for His own sin, but to pay the penalty for sins of the entire world.

How can we know that God has forgiven all our sins?

"Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. . . . ALL HAVE SINNED . . . , and are JUSTIFIED freely BY HIS GRACE through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus . . . THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD." -Romans 3:22-25.

The key points in these verses are: We "all have sinned," but because of God's "grace," all "are justified" who have "faith" in the cleansing power of Christ's "blood." When we are justified, God declares us not guilty, taking away the guilt of our past sins. And God declares us righteous; "righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ."

All of us who are worn out by the struggle to be good enough, to measure up on our own, can find real rest in Christ's gracious acceptance. He promises, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). All of us who are burdened by scars from the past and by an aching sense of inadequacy and shame, can find peace and wholeness in Christ.

4. THE TIME FOR THE JUDGMENT TO BEGIN

In the eighth chapter of Daniel an angel showed the prophet a great panorama of the future. Daniel saw (1) a ram, (2) a he-goat, and (3) out of one of the horns of the he-goat, "another horn which started small and grew in power" (Daniel 9:8, 9); symbols representing (1) Medo-Persia, (2) Greece, and (3) Rome (Daniel 8:1-12, 20-26).

What is the fourth part of the prophecy?

"How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled-the vision concerning the daily sacrifice . . . ?' He said to me, 'It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings [or days, Hebrew]; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated [cleansed].'" -Daniel 8:13, 14.

Daniel fainted before the angel could explain the 2,300-day part of the prophecy, and the eighth chapter closes with no interpretation of it. But later the angel reappeared and stated:

"Understand the vision: seventy 'sevens' [weeks, Hebrew] are decreed [cut off, Hebrew] for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness." Daniel 9:22-24.

The 2,300 days are, of course, 2,300 years, each day standing for a year (Ezekiel 4:6). Seventy weeks, or 490 years, constituted the first section of the longer period of 2,300 years. Both time periods started in 457 B.C. when Persia issued the decree "to restore and rebuild Jerusalem." Subtracting 490 years from the 2,300 years, leaves 1,810. Adding 1,810 years to A.D. 34, when the 490 years ended, brings us to A.D. 1844.

5. THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY CLEANSED-A JUDGMENT

The angel told Daniel that in 1844, at the end of the 2,300 years, "the sanctuary will be cleansed" (Daniel 8:14, KJV). But what does that mean? Since A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple at Jerusalem, God's people have had no temple on earth. So the sanctuary to be cleansed, beginning in 1844, has to be the heavenly sanctuary of which the earthly temple was a replica.

Now, what does the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary mean? Ancient Israel called the day for cleansing the earthly sanctuary Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It was really a day of judgment.

As we discovered in Guide 12, Christ's activity for us in the sanctuary has two phases: (1) The daily sacrifices focus on the priest's ministry in the first room of the sanctuary, the Holy Place. (2) The yearly sacrifice concentrates on the High Priest's ministry in the second room, the Most Holy Place (Leviticus 16).

In the earthly sanctuary, as people confessed their sins day by day, the blood of slaughtered animals was sprinkled on the corner of the altar, then transferred to the Holy Place (Leviticus 4 and 6). Thus, in symbol, day after day the confessed sins were brought into the sanctuary and laid up there.

Then each year, on the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was cleansed from all sins confessed during the past year (Leviticus 16). To effect this cleansing, the High Priest made a special sacrifice of a consecrated goat. He then carried its blood into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled this cleansing blood before the atonement cover to show that the blood of Jesus, the coming Redeemer, would pay the penalty for sin. The High Priest then symbolically removed the confessed sins from the sanctuary and placed them on the head of another goat, which was led out into the wilderness to die (Leviticus 16:20-22).

This ceremony on the yearly Day of Atonement cleansed the sanctuary from sin. The people regarded it as a day of judgment because those who refused to confess their sins were considered unrighteous and were "cut off from [God's] people" (23:29).

What the High Priest did symbolically once a year, Jesus does once for all time as our High Priest (Hebrews 9:6-12). In the great judgment day He removes from the sanctuary the confessed sins of all who have accepted Him as their Saviour. If we have confessed our sins, He will forever blot out the record of our sins at that time (Acts 3:19). This ministry is the work of judgment that Jesus began in 1844.

In 1844 when the hour of God's judgment began in heaven, a judgment hour message began to be preached throughout the world (Revelation 14:6-7). A future DISCOVER guide will deal with this message.

6. FACING YOUR LIFE RECORD IN THE JUDGMENT

Since 1844 Christ, as Judge, has been investigating the record of each person who has ever lived to confirm who will be among the saved when Jesus comes. As our Judge, Jesus "wipes out" all of the sins of the righteous from their life record in heaven (Acts 3:19).

When your name comes up in judgment, it will be easy to face your life record-IF you've accepted Christ as your Substitute. And when the judgment of the righteous is finished, Jesus returns to earth to reward them (Revelation 22:12, 14).

Are you ready for Jesus to come? Or is there something you've been hiding from Him? Do you have an open and honest relationship with the One who promises:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." -1 John 1:9.

Confession simply means agreeing to face our sins, accept God's forgiveness, and acknowledge our need of His power and grace.

While visiting a prison in Potsdam, King Frederick William I listened to a number of pleas for pardon. All the inmates swore that prejudiced judges, perjured witnesses, or unscrupulous lawyers were responsible for their imprisonment. From cell to cell the same story of wronged innocence continued.

But at one cell the inmate had nothing to say. Surprised, Frederick joked, "I suppose you are innocent too."

"No your Majesty," the man answered, "I am guilty and richly deserve all that I get."

The king turned to the guard and called out loudly, "Come and release this rascal quickly, before he corrupts this fine lot of innocent people."

How do we prepare for the judgment? How do we get ready for Christ to come? Simply by an honest confession of the truth: I richly deserve the penalty of death for my sins, but Another has taken my place and given me a wonderful pardon.

Make a commitment right now that whatever happens, you'll keep your relationship with Christ eye-to-eye honest and heart-to-heart sincere.

At the end of the 2,300 years, "the sanctuary will be cleansed."

7 times 70 weeks, equals 490 years, "cut off" for the Jewish people.

B.C. 457 A.D. 27 A.D. 31 A.D. 34 A.D. 1844

7 times 69 weeks, equals 483 years, until Messiah comes.

7 weeks or 7 years

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