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# Messianic Perspectives®

*God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.*

# THE EIGHT JUDGMENTS OF THE LAST DAYS

## PART TWO

BY GARY HEDRICK



In this study, we're looking at the "last days" judgments—that is, the eschatological judgments. There are at least eight of these events, including one that occurred two thousand years ago and seven others that are yet in the future. These judgments are often overlooked when believers study prophecy—and that's unfortunate because they are an integral part of God's plan for the end times. In fact, virtually every future, prophetic event is associated, either directly or indirectly, with one or more of these divine judgments. What follows is Part Two of three.

### 3. THE JUDGMENT SEAT (*BEMA*) OF MESSIAH

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).*

The third of the eschatological judgments is known as the Judgment Seat of Messiah. The Greek word for "judgment seat" here is *bema* (βῆμα). It refers, literally, to a "step up" to an elevated platform. That was where a judge could render a verdict in a legal dispute, a government official could give a speech to an assembly, or a sports official could bestow an award on an athlete. *Bema* is used in two different ways in the New Testament, so it's helpful to determine which one comes into play here.

### The Judicial Bema

Pilate, for example, was seated on a *bema* when Yeshua (Jesus) was brought before him in Jerusalem prior to the Crucifixion (John 19:13). On that occasion, Pilate wanted to exonerate Yeshua (vv. 4, 12)—but the local Judeans wouldn't have it (v. 15). And as they say, the rest is history.

Paul, likewise, was brought before a judgment seat in Achaia, where he had been preaching and teaching God's Word for a year and a half. Some local Jewish leaders were troubled by Paul's work there, so they initiated an action against him which the Roman proconsul, Gallio, heard with some annoyance and summarily dismissed (Acts 18:12–16).

When a local official was seated on the judgment seat, he was regarded as speaking with Caesar's authority. The ancient remains of one such municipal *bema* have survived in the ruins of ancient Corinth.<sup>1</sup>

### The Laudatory Bema

There was another type of *bema*, however, with a different purpose. It was the place where judges in ancient athletic contests (like the Olympics, Pythian, or Isthmian Games) would sit and recognize the achievements of competitors.

The remains of the municipal Bema ("Judgment Seat") have been excavated in the ruins of ancient Corinth in Greece.



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This second bema is the type of judgment seat Paul has in mind in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Its purpose wasn't to render a verdict in a judicial (legal) proceeding, but rather to bestow awards and recognition on the winners of an athletic competition. In the NT, Paul is fond of using illustrations from the world of sports to make a point. He mentions competitions like running (1 Cor. 9:24) and boxing (v. 26), for instance. He compares the Christian life to a race in which the contestants must discipline themselves, and keep their eyes on the goal, to win the prize (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:24–27; cp. Phil. 3:12–15; 1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:6–8).

So, then, Paul's teaching about the Judgment Seat of Messiah draws on ancient athletic, rather than judicial, imagery. Competitors in ancient Greece did not come to the bema to be castigated or condemned, but rather to be recognized and rewarded.

Think of the Judgment Seat of Messiah as a sort of personal audit—a review of your life to see how you did and reward you accordingly.

While it's true that there are passages in the Bible that don't seem to differentiate between the judgments of believers and unbelievers (e.g., Dan. 12:1–3; Matt. 16:27; Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:5, 16), there are other passages that clearly do:

- Romans 14:10–12—Here, Paul addresses weak believers who are being judgmental toward fellow believers (v. 10). He admonishes them not to judge each other, knowing that all believers will stand someday before the Bema to be judged by the Lord (vv. 10, 12). There is no indication here that unbelievers are in view. Paul treats the Roman believers' self-righteous judgmentalism as an internal, family matter. Unbelievers aren't involved.
- Ephesians 6:8—Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that the Lord will reward us for whatever good we do. The context here is all about categories of believers in the congregation (children and parents, servants and masters). No unbelievers here, either.



## A Judgment Seat in Jerusalem

Stone platform: judge can be seen/heard

Pilate held Jesus' trial here (John 19:13; Matt. 27:19)

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The Morning Judgment (Le jugement du matin)  
James Tissot

## One Judgment or Several?

Not everyone agrees with us about the Bema Judgment being for believers only. As we noted in Part One of this study, most amillennialists and postmillennialists conflate the various judgments (including this one in 2 Corinthians 5:10) into just one judgment—that is, a single, general judgment for everyone at the end of the age. At this final, universal judgment event, they say saved and lost people alike will stand before the Judge of the universe. To them, the Bema Judgment is merely another name for this coming judgment of both believers and unbelievers at the end of the age.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 3:1–17—The Apostle says that “each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it” (v. 13). The “Day” here is the prophetic Day of the LORD, of course. It begins with the Tribulation Period on earth, the timeframe during which we believe the Bema Judgment of believers takes place in Heaven after the Rapture.<sup>3</sup>
- 2 Corinthians 5:10—“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah,” the Apostle says. “We” is clearly a reference to the Family of God—believers only. Again, there is nothing in the context that even hints at the inclusion of unbelievers in this judgment.

So, what we have in Scripture are some passages that treat the whole gamut of judgments like they are a single event at the end of time, while other passages differentiate between several judgment events. This doesn't mean one approach is wrong and the other is right. Truth is, they're both right. So, how can that be?

The reason is that the two approaches are simply different ways of looking at the same thing. Bundling all the judgments into one is good for an economy of words—after all, who wants to take the time to delineate the various judgments every time the topic comes up? So, we just talk about God's coming "judgment," as if it were one event. But the bundled package doesn't negate the individuality of the various judgments.

We see something like this in the computer world, where programmers, for purposes of convenience, sometimes compress enormous amounts of data into a single "block file." Later, someone might have to go into that large block file and parse its data back into the individual records. So, one could think of passages like Daniel 12:1–3, where judgments for believers and unbelievers are treated as one event, as a sort of compressed "block file." In this simile, passages like 1 Corinthians 3:1–17 and Revelation 20:11–15 could be seen as data files that have been extracted from a "block file," of sorts, when it was parsed out into its differentiated, individual records.

In the premillennial timeline of the Eschaton (that is, the "last" days), the Bema Judgment is one of a series of judgments that will take place in connection with the earth-shaking Day of the LORD (Joel 2:1-3), over a period of a thousand years or more.<sup>4</sup>



## The Battle for Grace

Why is it important to distinguish between believers and unbelievers with respect to the judgments? Well, one reason is that lumping them together can pull us into the dangerous, black hole of legalism—that is, thinking we can earn God's acceptance by doing good deeds rather than by simply placing our faith in His Son. It's the all-important difference between (1) insisting that we can pay our own way (and earn a place in Heaven) or (2) acknowledging our complete inadequacy and casting ourselves entirely on God's mercy and grace.

This misleading idea about the weighing of our good deeds versus our bad deeds on judgment day is nothing new. In ancient Egypt, for example, they had a concept known as the "weighing of the heart." It meant that after someone died, Osiris would judge that person based on the weight of their good deeds during their lifetime. This is how the Egyptian deities determined a person's worthiness for a place in the Afterlife.



Chapter 125 of the Egyptian mythological Book of the Dead depicts the weighing of the heart of a deceased person under the watchful eye of Osiris, ruler and judge in the realm of the dead.

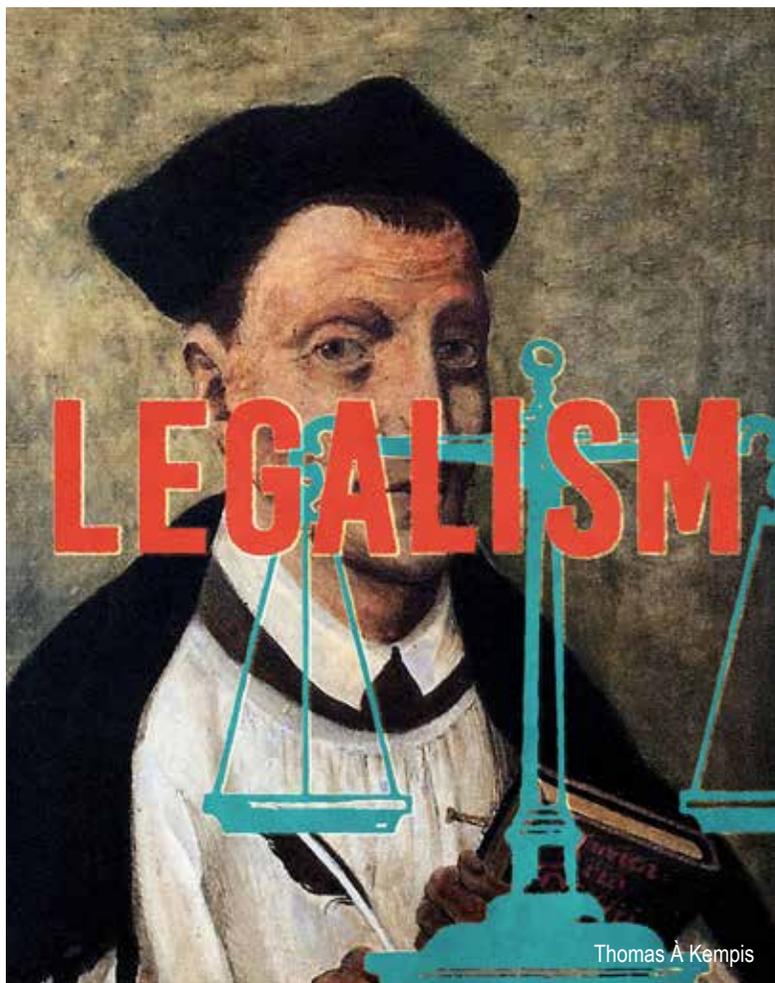


In the seventh century, the Muslims adopted a similar concept. The Quran (c. 631) teaches that every person's deeds will be weighed in the afterlife on the scales of Allah's justice—and not even the weight of a deed as small as a mustard seed will be overlooked:

We will set up the scales of justice on the Day of Judgment, so no soul will be wronged in the least. And even if a deed is the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And sufficient are We as a vigilant Reckoner (Quran 21:47).

And the weighing [of deeds on] that Day will be the truth. So those whose scales are heavy – it is they who [in the afterlife] will be the successful (7:8).

You see, legalism has the effect of essentially doing away with the distinction between believers and unbelievers. Everyone is judged the same way—that is, upon the basis of their earthly works. In other words, at the final judgment, our good works are placed on one side of the scale and our bad works are placed on the other. If the good outweighs the bad, we have earned our place in Heaven. That’s the idea. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. The Bible tells us that salvation cannot be earned by human effort: ***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us . . .*** (Titus 3:5, emphasis added).

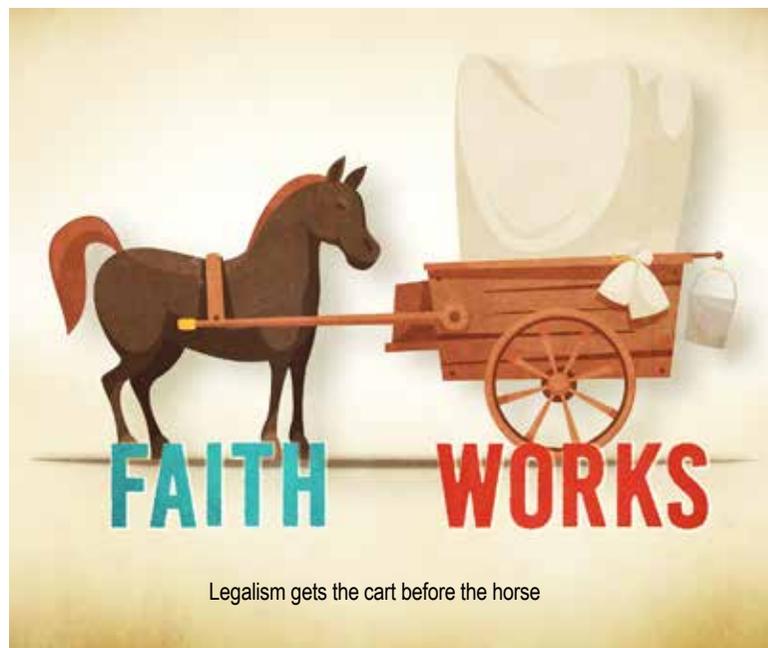


Nonetheless, this “tipping scales” model of salvation has been promoted by some of the most notable names in church history. The eminent Catholic theologian Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), for instance, said: “You can be certain of this: when the Day of Judgment comes, we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken, but how well we have lived.” These are compelling words, certainly, and they may sound convincing; however, they reflect a grave error. When lost people stand before God, He won’t ask them how well they lived. Rather, the sole criterion will be whether their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.<sup>5</sup>

à Kempis, of course, is best known for his book *The Imitation of Christ*, in which he suggests that the highest form of spirituality is imitating the virtues of the Messiah and living like He lived. With all due respect, however, he was wrong about this. His “be certain” statement above only works if he’s talking about the Bema Judgment of believers—but he’s not. He believed and taught a general judgment for everyone, rather than different judgments for believers and unbelievers.<sup>6</sup>

Let’s get right to the point: *When an unbeliever stands to be judged at the Great White Throne, the primary issue will not be how well he lived, but rather whether his name is written in the Book of Life* (Rev. 20:12, 15). And how does one get his name recorded in the Book of Life? In the parlance of Revelation, this is accomplished by one’s becoming an “overcomer” (3:1–5). And how do we become an overcomer? Not by trying to imitate the life of Jesus, Mary, or any other godly person, but by placing our faith and trust in Yeshua the Messiah, God’s Son: *For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith* (1 John 5:4). We overcome by faith, not by works or human effort.

Does this mean works are not important? Not at all. Works are very important—once you’re a believer in Yeshua. The relationship between salvation and works is like a horse pulling a cart. According to James 2:18–26, the horse (i.e., salvation) pulls the cart (good works). That is, salvation comes first, followed by good works. This is because true salvation makes us *want* to do good works. Legalism, however, reverses the order: It says good works (like imitating Yeshua’s actions and trying to be more like Him) come first and produce spirituality—and ultimately, salvation. But that is putting the cart before the horse. Salvation produces good works, not vice versa.



For centuries, works-oriented religionists like Pelagius (AD 355–420) have fought tooth-and-nail to promote various legalistic systems of salvation. They are offended by ideas like free, undeserved grace, as well as human inability and dependence. Even today, the battle for grace continues to be fiercely fought. Much of mainstream, liberal Christendom these days misrepresents grace and promotes the “tipping scales” model of salvation. People stubbornly insist that they can perform well enough to earn a place in Heaven. They ignore the Bible when it says, *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away* (Isa. 64:6, emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>

This is why it’s important to distinguish between believers and unbelievers when it comes to God’s judgment. The Bema Judgment is only for believers. It’s where our lives will be audited by the great Judge of the universe, Yeshua the Messiah, and we will be rewarded according to our earthly works (1 Cor. 3:12–15).

## Really? A Judgment for Believers?

Some people object to the idea of believers facing a future judgment. After all, God has cast our sins as far away from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12)—and we are thankful for that!<sup>8</sup> So, why should we expect to face further judgment?

It is certainly true that our justification was secured at the Cross long ago—two thousand years ago, in fact. It was a legal transaction in which our sins were imputed to the Lord and, in return, His righteousness was imputed to us (Rom. 4:23–25)—something known in theology as “the great exchange” (2 Cor. 5:21).<sup>9</sup> The only role we played in the transaction was believing in Him and accepting His gift of salvation by faith. Jonathan Edwards reportedly said, “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.”

When God forgives our sins, however, the earthly consequences of those sins don’t magically disappear. For instance, if you robbed a bank before you got saved, that sin has been forgiven, as far as your indebtedness to God’s Law is concerned; however, you will still have an indebtedness to the bank (and to human law). Just because God has forgiven you doesn’t mean the bank has!

The Judgment Seat of Christ	
What does it involve?	Only believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The “great white throne” judgment described in Rev. 20:11-15 is for unbelievers.
What is it?	At his judgment seat, Jesus will determine a believer’s faithfulness to Him and reward each person appropriately (see 1 Cor. 3:11-15). This will not be a determination of one’s eternal destiny; that issue is decided the moment a person believes in Christ.
Who will preside?	The risen Christ.
Where will it occur?	Heaven (5:8)
When will it occur?	The Scriptures do not specify when this will occur. It is obviously at a time when all Christians are gathered in heaven.
What is the nature of these eternal rewards?	Some commentators consider the various “crowns” mentioned in the New Testament as the rewards (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10). These will eventually be placed before the throne of God (Rev. 4:10). Others point to the parable of the minas in Luke 19:11-27 and see the prospects of serving and ruling in eternity as being directly tied to our faithfulness on earth. We do not know the exact nature of the “new heavens and new earth” or “the kingdom of God.” But the Scriptures do seem to imply that eternity will involve serving and reigning (Matt. 25:21, 23; Rev. 22:3, 5).
Why is this doctrine significant?	Knowing that in the future we will stand before Jesus Christ and face a review of our lives should motivate us to live righteously and faithfully in the present.
How can we prepare for our eternal “audit”?	Walk by faith, not by sight (5:7). Develop a longing for heaven (5:8). Make it our chief aim in life to please the Lord (5:9). Keep the judgment seat of Christ in view (5:10).
Chart taken from <i>The NKJV Study Bible</i> (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 1830. Used by permission.	

Talking about this always makes me think of my old biker friend Larry. Back in the 1980s, Brother Larry was a big, burly man in our congregation in Illinois. He and his brother had been members of a motorcycle gang in their younger, wilder days, before they came to the Lord. Two of Larry’s front teeth were badly chipped one night when someone slapped him across the face with a big, heavy iron chain during a gang war. (Larry was always smiling, so those broken teeth were very conspicuous!) You see, even though the Lord had forgiven Larry’s sins, and his *heavenly* status was secured forever (i.e., he was justified, or “declared righteous”), he still had to live with some of the *earthly* consequences of those sins.

I once asked Larry why he didn’t have a cosmetic dentist fix those unsightly, broken teeth. He said he wanted to leave them that way as a daily reminder of his previous life—a life from which God had “gloriously” (his word) delivered him.

Believers’ earthly works, then, will be thoroughly vetted at the Bema Judgment—not for salvation (that is, justification), but for rewards (based on qualities like faithfulness and soulwinning). The Apostle Paul explains that although our sins (with respect to our salvation) were judged on the Cross, our earthly works, both good and bad, will be examined at the Judgment Seat to determine our “reward” or “loss”: *Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

At the Bema, the result can be positive (“reward”) or negative (“loss”). Some believers will be rewarded for their faithful service, while others will “suffer loss” due to their inconsistency, carnality, or other failures (v. 15). Sadly, some believers will learn too late that their priorities (and their hearts) were in the wrong place during their lifetime. However, even the believer who receives no reward will still have a place in Heaven—saved by the skin of his teeth (“yet so as through fire”), as it were, if he truly trusted the Lord in the beginning.

Paige Patterson says the Bema Judgment “is for Christians only and transpires immediately after the translation of the Church into Heaven. . . . This judgment is not to determine salvation or eternal destiny but to determine rewards.”<sup>10</sup> He goes on to adduce the following five facts about the Bema Judgment which are derived from the passage in 1 Corinthians 3:11–17:

1. Only those who have the proper spiritual foundation upon which to construct a life will be able to appear at the *Bema*. That foundation is Christ (v. 11).
2. Once the foundation has been laid, believers build a superstructure throughout the years that God allows. That superstructure may consist of the valuable and lasting—gold, silver, precious stone—or the worthless and fleeting—wood, hay, stubble (v. 12).
3. On the day of Christ’s return, all works will be declared and “revealed by fire.” This latter expression probably refers to the penetrating, purging, and discerning gaze of Jesus [at the Bema] (cf. Rev. 1:14; 2:18).
4. Those Christian works which are of permanent value abide and become the basis for reward (v. 14).
5. Those works which are worthless in themselves or which are improperly motivated are destroyed in the fire of Christ’s gaze. Consequently, reward may be limited, but the man himself is saved (v. 15).<sup>11</sup>

It is obvious, then, that there is a relationship between faith and works. Saving faith is a faith that works! Paul Barnett makes the point that internal saving faith should work its way outward in the form of godly living:

The teaching about the judgment seat before which all believers must come reminds us that we have been saved, not for a life of aimlessness or indifference, but to live as to the Lord (5:15). This doctrine of the universality of the judgment of believers preserves the moral seriousness of God. . . . The sure prospect of the judgment seat reminds the Corinthians—and all believers—that while they are righteous in Christ by faith alone, the faith that justifies is to be expressed by love and obedience (Gal 5:6; Rom 1:5), and by [a desire to please] the Lord (v. 9).<sup>12</sup>

## The Nature of the Rewards

What are these rewards that faithful believers will receive? One of the metaphors used to describe these heavenly rewards is that of “crowns.” The NT mentions several of these crowns:

1. The Imperishable Crown (1 Cor. 9:25)—Awarded to believers who run the race of life with determination and discipline (athletic metaphor)
2. The Crown of Life (James 1:12)—Awarded to those who steadfastly endure and resist temptation
3. The Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19)—For those who lead others to Yeshua (evangelism and soulwinning)
4. The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8)—For those who anxiously await the Lord’s return and arrange their priorities accordingly
5. The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4)—For those who have served faithfully as pastors/elders, caring for God’s people in local assemblies

## The Martyr’s Crown

In church tradition, there’s yet another crown—one that’s not mentioned by name in the NT. In extra-biblical sources, it’s called the Crown of Immortality (or the Crown of Martyrdom). It’s the reward of steadfast believers who are martyred for their faith, whether during the current Church Age (which included the ancient imperial persecutions, up to the persecutions of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries) or during the future Tribulation. One of the first martyrs in the NT was Stephen, a believer who was “full of faith and power” (Acts 6:8–9; 7:59). He was killed by a mob of unbelieving Judeans (c. AD 36) after one of his stinging sermons.

Ignatius of Antioch, when he was about to be thrown to the lions in Rome (AD 107), reportedly said he didn’t want to be rescued because it would rob him of “the crown of immortality.”<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian, during the murderous reign of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (AD 212), had this response to the emperor’s threats: “The greater our conflicts, the greater our rewards. Your cruelty is our glory.”<sup>14</sup>

# “LET US DIE, THAT WE MAY LIVE” THE FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTE (ARMENIA)

Governor Agricola of Armenia was confronted with mutiny. Forty soldiers professed their faith in Jesus Christ and refused to offer the sacrifice ordered by Emperor Licinius. The forty who stood before him that wintry fourth-century day in Sevaste were fine specimens of manhood. They radiated an aura of courage and strength. Agricola was determined to make them see reason.

But the soldiers were adamant. They refused to sacrifice to false gods. To do so was to betray their faith in the Messiah.

Governor Agricola confronted them: “But what about your comrades?” He continued, “Consider—you alone of all Caesar’s thousands of troops defy him! Think of the disgrace you bring upon your legion!”

“To disgrace the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is more terrible still,” replied the leader of the forty. Exasperated, the Governor threatened to flog and torture them. The soldiers stood firm, although they knew he would surely carry out his threat. With unflinching boldness, their captain answered, “Nothing you can offer us would replace what we would lose in the next world. As for your threats—we despise our bodies when the welfare of our souls is at stake.”

The weather was biting cold, a holdover from the harsh winter. So, the guards dragged the forty men into the frigid, outside air, where they were tied to posts. The guards took five men at a time, strafing their backs with leather whips and tearing their sides with iron hooks. Still, the forty refused to surrender.

Next, Agricola had the believers chained in his dark, underground dungeons, where the sickening stench of blood and death hung in the air. The following afternoon, when the dungeons had no effect overnight, he finally commanded that

they be stripped naked and driven onto the ice of a frozen pond nearby.

The rebels did not wait for the sentence to be imposed. They tore off their own clothes and ran to the pond in the raw March air. “We are soldiers of the Lord and fear no hardship,” one of them cried out. “What is death for us but an entrance into eternal life? Let us die, that we may live!” On this day, March 9, AD 320, singing hymns, these brave men stood shivering on the pond as the sun sank below the horizon.

Baffled, the Governor ordered hot baths placed in a circle around the frozen pond. Surely the warm water would lure the men off the ice! But the crisp night air carried a prayer to all ears: “Lord, there are forty of us engaged in this battle; grant that forty may be crowned and not one be wanting from this sacred number.”

After a few hours, however, one of the men lost his nerve. Shivering and ashamed, he crawled slowly toward one of the baths. He died of shock within moments after his frigid, frostbitten body slid into the hot, steamy water.

This was just too much for one of Governor Agricola’s guards. He had been watching all of this intently while the light from the torches flickered in the icy wind. To everyone’s astonishment, the guard quickly laid down his sword, then stripped off his garments, marched out onto the ice, and took the place of the man whose lifeless body now floated in a nearby tub of hot, steamy water.

The next morning, when their frozen bodies were found, huddled together as one, there were forty of them—just as they had prayed: Lord . . . grant that forty may be crowned!

*Several versions of this account exist in various Christian traditions around the world. Their general agreement, however, suggests that they may be based on a core of historical fact. The event reportedly took place in early March of AD 320, in what is today Turkey. These forty soldiers were the ancient equivalent of elite, modern special forces. They were attached to the legendary Roman 12th Legion, founded by Julius Caesar in 58 BC and later named Fulminata (the “Thunderbolt” Legion) by Emperor Marcus Aurelius.*

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In AD 250, the Emperor Decius made a decree that everyone in the Empire must offer sacrifices to the Roman gods, under penalty of death. The only exemption was for adherents of Judaism. Therefore, Gentile Christians were subject to the new law. When Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, heard about it, he responded, “The Lord desired that we should rejoice and leap for joy in persecutions. For when persecutions occur, then are given the crowns of faith. Then the soldiers of God are proved. Then the heavens are opened to martyrs. . . . We should not fear to be slain, for we are sure to be crowned when we are slain.”<sup>15</sup>

Some commentators link the martyr’s reward to the Crown of Life (number two in our list): *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life* (Rev. 2:10, emphasis added).

## What Are the Crowns?

Finally, what exactly are these “crowns” we’ve been talking about? We’ve already said they’re most likely not literal crowns that we will wear on our heads while we’re strolling down Heaven’s golden avenues. Rather, they are metaphors. But what do they mean?

There are two Greek words in the NT for “crown.” The first one is *diadema* (διάδημα), which is a *royal* crown (Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 19:12).<sup>16</sup> The other Greek word, *stephanos* (στέφανος), signifies a victor’s reward—like the wreath that was placed on the head of the winner of a race. This wreath is the one Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 9:25: *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown [stephanos], but we for an imperishable crown [stephanos].* And again, it’s important to remember that the Bema Judgment is about rewards, not about salvation. Salvation is a gift; it’s not something we can earn by doing good works: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast* (Eph. 2:8–9, emphasis added).



So, then, if these rewards aren’t literal crowns/wreaths that we will wear on our heads in Heaven, what are they? The term “crown” likely represents rulership and responsibility in the future Kingdom of God. As we’ve said, salvation isn’t earned; however, responsibility is. That is, our position in the eternal Kingdom will be something we have earned. It will be determined by our faithfulness now, during our earthly tenure. The Lord himself mentions this principle of kingdom rulership in some of His stewardship parables (e.g., the Parable of the Pounds in Luke 19:11–27).

## Bema: A Time for Shaming?

Many years ago, I participated in a prophecy conference where one of the preachers dealt with the topic of the believer’s Bema Judgment. His idea was that when we get to Heaven, millions of us will be seated in a big arena, perhaps something like an IMAX theater, complete with Dolby sound, and together, we will watch the graphic details of each other’s personal lives—good and bad—played out on the gigantic screen in front of us. The point he was trying to make was that we shouldn’t do anything now that we wouldn’t want to see displayed in technicolor later with millions of other believers watching. The textual basis for this teaching, according to this well-meaning brother, was the phrase “made manifest” in 2 Corinthians 5:11 (KJV). To him, the words “made manifest” meant that everything about our lives will be revealed openly to everyone at the Bema. As I recall, he pointed out that the New English Bible (NEB) translates verse 10 like this: “We must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ.”

This idea about shaming at the Bema is pure nonsense because it twists the meaning of the passage. For one thing, the NEB doesn’t say our lives will be “laid open **before everyone.**” It says our lives will be “laid open **before the tribunal of Christ.**” That’s a big difference!

Note that the word “manifest” here relates (1) to God (and possibly angels) and (2) to each individual conscience: *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made **manifest unto God**; and I trust also are made **manifest in your consciences*** (KJV, emphasis added). Nothing in the text indicates a wider audience than that. The Bema Judgment is a personal matter between God and His child—and no one else.

This being the case, then, where does this idea of shaming come from? It comes from the fountainhead of all lies—that is, from Satan, the master shamer. He’s the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). The shamers are the legalists and the religious manipulators, but not God. After discussing the failures of the Corinthian believers, Paul said, *I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you* (1 Cor. 4:14).

I believe I speak for most of us when I say that I have no interest—none whatsoever—in watching IMAX movies of other believers’ failures and missteps. I prefer to leave that judgment with the Lord. He can handle it. He isn’t in the business of shaming or embarrassing His children. He knows all about us and still loves us. Our accounts with Him will be settled at the Bema Judgment, when He calculates our reward (or, in some cases, our “loss”). We won’t take any liabilities with us into eternity.

*Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand* (Rom. 14:4).

*Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way* (v. 13).

## 4. THE JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL

*“I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD”*  
(Ezek. 20:37–38)

Here, nestled in Ezekiel’s ancient prophecy about the approaching Babylonian Captivity (which was finalized in 586 BC with the destruction of the Temple), is an oblique statement that sticks out like a sore thumb because it doesn’t fit the sixth-century BC context.

In these verses, the Prophet describes a future time when Israel will be completely cleansed of all idolatry and impurity. There will be no more rebels, and no unbelievers among them. First, Ezekiel says God himself *will* (in the future) number them as His elect (that is, making them “pass under the rod” as He counts His flock) and bring them into “the bond of the covenant” (v. 37). Israel had already bound herself to the older Sinai Covenant centuries earlier (Ex. 19:4–6) but had ultimately broken it (Jer. 31:32), so Ezekiel (from his sixth-century BC perspective) is looking forward, not backward in time. He’s talking here about something God will do in the future.



Ezekiel’s vision coincides beautifully with Isaiah 1:24–28, a wonderful Messianic prophecy that looks forward to a future time when God will:

- Rid Himself of all His adversaries (v. 24);
- Refine and purify His people (v. 25);
- Restore judges and counselors to Israel and make her “the faithful city” (v. 26); and
- Redeem “Zion . . . with justice” (v. 27).

So far, nothing like this has happened in Israel’s long history. It didn’t happen in 538 BC, when Israel *partially* returned home after the Babylonian Exile (most of them remained behind in Babylon). Neither did it happen in 1948, when the modern State of Israel was born. Even today, in the twenty-first century, millions of Jews remain in the worldwide Diaspora—and Israel still has enemies in the Middle East and elsewhere.

What is in view in Ezekiel 20:37–38, then, can only be the future “Day of the LORD,” when He will intervene dramatically, and Israel will be restored both *physically* (to her entire inheritance of Land) and *spiritually* (to her Lord and Messiah, Yeshua) under the terms of the New Covenant described in Jeremiah 31:31–33.<sup>17</sup>

### Past or Future?

Some commentators nonetheless insist that Ezekiel 20:37–38 is talking about the return from the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century BC—and not about anything in the future. Charles H. Dyer, however, explains why the fulfillment of the restoration prophecy in these two verses must be yet future. He says the reason is rooted in history. The conditions of the prophecy “were not fulfilled in the Babylonian exile. Those who returned were not the purified nation that this passage describes. God’s process of purification means only those faithful to Him will enjoy the covenant of blessing.”<sup>18</sup>

Professor Dyer elaborates:

As the sheep will pass under the rod of the Great Shepherd, those who do not belong to Him—unbelieving Israelites who rebel against God—will be removed. God will not allow those sheep to enter His land. God’s process of purification will mean that only true sheep will enjoy the covenant of blessing. This scene described by Ezekiel is yet future. At the end of the Tribulation God will regather Israel to the land of promise for the Millennium (cf. 36:14–38; 37:21–23). But first the Israelites will be required to stand before the Lord for judgment. Those who have placed their trust in Him will be allowed to enter the land and participate in His kingdom (cf. John 3:3). Those who are rebels will be judged for their sin and banished to everlasting punishment.<sup>19</sup>

John MacArthur follows this same line of reasoning about Ezekiel 20:37–38 when he says:

The promised regathering in Messiah’s earthly kingdom is to the very same land—literal Palestine—from which they were scattered (v. 41), expressly the land given to their fathers (36:28; Gen. 12:7). They will “all” be there, repentant (v. 43) and saved (Rom. 11:26–27), serving the Lord wholeheartedly, a united nation engaged in purified worship (cf. 27:22–23; Isa. 11:13).<sup>20</sup>

Messianic Israeli commentator, David Stern, concurs:

[Ezekiel] 20:33 **“I myself will be king over you.”** God would one day rule Isra’el, but only after a future time of severe judgment. This future restoration will be initiated by judging Isra’el in the desert (v. 35), purging the rebels, and entering into a new covenant (vv. 37–42).<sup>21</sup>

The preponderance of the evidence, then, indicates that these two verses (i.e., Ezek. 20:37–38) foreshadow a yet-future time when the Jewish people will (1) be gathered to their Land and (2) receive Yeshua of Nazareth as their Messiah and Savior.

There are traditional rabbinic sources who agree with us here. One example is Rashi (1040–1105), the highly-revered French rabbi and commentator. He translates the first part of Verse 38 like this: “And (I will) separate from among you the rebels. . . .” Then he supports the idea of a yet-future fulfillment when he suggests that “this ‘separation’ [of the rebels from Israel] will come about by means of **some final testing in a future wilderness**.”<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the Book of Revelation mentions a believing remnant of Israel that will separate from the unbelievers during the Great Tribulation and flee into the “wilderness” for refuge (Rev. 12:6, 14).

So, there will be a judgment of Israel near the conclusion of the coming Tribulation. That’s why this seven-year period is known not only as the Tribulation, but also as “the Time of Jacob’s [or, Israel’s] Trouble” (Jer. 30:7).<sup>23</sup> This will be the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dealing with His earthly people Israel. Notice that it’s not the time of Israel’s destruction or demise, but the time of her “trouble.” He will be lovingly applying pressure, and “troubling” His earthly people, to acknowledge His Son, Yeshua of Nazareth, as their promised Messiah-King.

As Yeshua himself prophesied two thousand years ago, *Am Yisrael* (the “People of Israel”) will eventually respond to that divine pressure. Their eyes will be opened and they will cry out to Him, *Baruch HaBa BaShem Adonai* (“Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the LORD”; Matt. 23:39).

This will be the long awaited spiritual awakening the Apostle Paul foresaw in this classic passage:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

**And so all Israel will be saved**, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

“For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins”

(Rom. 11:25–27, emphasis added; cp. Jer. 31:31–36).



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Part Three of this three-part series will continue in the next issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

<sup>1</sup> See Ben Witherington, “A Closer Look: Roman Jurisprudence” in *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Millard Erickson, in his text that’s been widely used in evangelical seminaries, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), takes the position that 2 Corinthians 5:10 refers to “The Final Judgment” of both believers and unbelievers (pp. 1101–1104, Kindle edition).

<sup>3</sup> Technically, it could be said that the Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers, at the conclusion of the Millennium, is also included in the prophetic “Day of the LORD.” That is true. However, this third chapter of First Corinthians is clearly addressed to believers, whose works will be audited (and rewards given out) at the Bema Judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). Nothing in the context points to unbelievers.

<sup>4</sup> The “Day of the LORD” (Heb., *Yom-Yahweh*; יום-יהוה) isn’t a literal, 24-hour day. Rather, it’s an idiomatic expression that points to an extended period in the future when God intervenes supernaturally and disruptively in human affairs. Some Messianic commentators equate the Day of the LORD with the seven-year Tribulation—that is, they say the two are one and the same. However, Robert Chisholm, Jr., has another view: “The day of the LORD’ will be a lengthy time period including both judgment and . . . blessing. It will begin soon after the Rapture and will include the seven-year Tribulation, the return of the Messiah, the Millennium, and the making of the new heavens and new earth” (Robert Chisholm, Jr., “Joel” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Minor Prophets*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, eds. [Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2018]), 212.

<sup>5</sup> The purpose of judging the unbelieving dead “each one according to his works” at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:13) is not to decide salvation, but to determine the degree of their punishment in Hell.

<sup>6</sup> À Kempis taught that emulating the example of godly people (foremost of whom, according to him, were Jesus and Mary) enables us to become more deserving of salvation. He wrote: “Who will remember you when you are dead? Who will pray for you? Do now, beloved, what you can, because you do not know when you will die, nor what your fate will be after death. Gather for yourself the riches of immortality while you have time. Think of nothing but your salvation. Care only for the things of God. **Make friends for yourself now by honoring the saints of God, by imitating their actions, so that when you depart this life they may receive you into everlasting dwellings**” (*The Imitation of Christ* [Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017], p. 62, emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> Note that Isaiah doesn’t say, “All our **sins** are like filthy rags.” Instead, he says, “All our **righteousnesses** (that is, the very best we can do) are like filthy rags.” On a scale from one to ten, then, the Prophet rates the likelihood of our being able to perform well enough to earn God’s favor and acceptance as a one.

<sup>8</sup> See judgment number one in Part One in the previous issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

<sup>9</sup> The term “justification” refers to God’s legal verdict declaring that we are “not guilty” of our sins because Yeshua took our sentence upon Himself (Rom. 4:5). We have been acquitted because of His substitutionary sacrifice on Calvary. From the standpoint of justification, the same sin(s) wouldn’t need to be paid for twice. So, our sin-debt is completely and eternally forgiven because of our acceptance of what Yeshua did on our behalf. A good way to remember the meaning of “justification” is to think of it like this: JUST-AS-IF we had never sinned, JUST-IF-ication.

<sup>10</sup> This and the following material are adapted from Dr. Paige Patterson’s comments at 1 Corinthians 3:13 in *The Criswell Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 1347.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians—NICOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 277.

<sup>13</sup> Collin Garbarino, “Resurrecting the Martyrs: The Role of the Cult of the Saints” (2010). LSU doctoral dissertation accessed at digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\_dissertations/1349.

<sup>14</sup> *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, David Bercot, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013), 433 (Kindle Edition).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The term “diadem” is used only three times in the Greek NT—and all three of those references are in the Book of Revelation. In 12:3, seven diadems belong to the devil (a false king). In Revelation 13:1, the false messiah (i.e., Antichrist, the Beast who comes from the sea) is wearing ten diadems. In Revelation 19:12, *Adon Yeshua*, our King of kings and Lord of lords, has “many diadems” on His head. At that point, following the final conflict, He is the only King left standing.

<sup>17</sup> See our explanation of the term “Day of the LORD” in endnote number three.

<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Dyer with Eva Rydelnik, “Ezekiel” in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1233.

<sup>19</sup> Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Major Prophets* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2018), 312 (Kindle Edition).

<sup>20</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1178.

<sup>21</sup> David H. Stern, *The Complete Jewish Study Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 738.

<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, *The Book of Ezekiel / A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1977), 336. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob’s name was also “Israel” (Gen. 35:10). So, “the Time of Jacob’s Trouble” is also “the Time of Israel’s Trouble”—the future Tribulation Period (Matt. 24:21).

# Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger



## Open Doors

**Diann Parkas, CJFM representative (New Jersey)**, rejoices that God has opened a door for her to teach a course on “Forms of Worship in the Bible” to a group of people from Asia who are now living in the USA. Most of them are not yet believers. One of the individuals said that he became interested in the Bible because he sees that Bible prophecy is truly relevant to current world affairs. Another said that he expects to better understand America by learning about Christianity. Diann asks that we “please pray for these two men, and others in the class, that they will not just grow in their understanding but that they will receive the priceless gift of salvation.”

## A God Thing!

Diann writes: “Ten years ago, my late husband, Peter, and I met an 11-year-old Jewish boy and his Jewish mother. He had been having dreams about Jesus, and his mother was listening to Christian radio. One day they decided to go to church. Guess who was there? That’s right, Peter and me! Soon after that we went to their home and led them both in a sinner’s prayer. Now jump forward to the present! I am overjoyed to report that the young man is now pursuing his calling for ministry and is enrolled in residence at the Word of Life Bible Institute. Please pray that he will continue to grow in faith and that he will be guided very clearly in the Lord’s direction for his life.”

## Oanh (On) Fire for the Lord!

**Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas)**, shares how he is blessed by Oanh, his wife and co-partner in ministry, and how God has been using her, especially on the campus outreach at UNLV. Out of the total 36 salvations they’ve had in the last two months, Oanh has led 18 of those to the Lord. Rich writes: “We know that it is the Lord drawing these students, through His Holy Spirit, to Oanh. They are ready to be saved, and Oanh is leading them right to Jesus. Please pray for the spiritual growth of these new believers, as with the busyness of school, work, and life, many are not staying in touch. Many who prayed to receive the Lord are recognizing that there is no hope as they see what is happening around the world and are now seeing the great hope we all have in Jesus.”

## The Watchmen

“The Watchmen” is the title of a new TV show on Christian Television Network (CTN) focusing on the Jewish roots of God’s Word. Rich will be teaching the historical and prophetic aspects of the Spring Feasts. If you don’t have CTN, please check his website: [bethyeshualv.org](http://bethyeshualv.org).

## Showtime!

The OffPrice Show, the largest apparel trade show in the country, takes place in Las Vegas twice a year. There are hundreds of vendors, and you need a pass to attend. Many Jewish merchants sell their apparel at this show. Thanks to a friend, Rich and his team were able to go. They wore their “I Love Israel” and “Jesus Loves You” (written in Hebrew) T-shirts, which attracted a lot of attention. As a result, they had the opportunity to share the Good News with seven Jewish individuals and five Gentiles. Many were from New York City, where Rich was born, and thus had an instant connection. A young Orthodox man was especially interested in the possibility of Yeshua being the promised Messiah and engaged in a lengthy dialogue. He even took one of CJFM’s tracts, “Chesed” (Lovingkindness), which shares the Good News from a Jewish perspective. Please pray that the seeds which were planted may come to fruition.

## God-Appointed Encounters

**CJFM representative, Debby Dubin (Florida)**, shared an interesting account of what happened upon arriving at a restaurant with her friend, “Ilene,” a Jewish unbeliever. Deb noticed that several of the ladies at the table next to them were praying before their meal. When they were finished, Deb engaged them in a brief conversation, and they invited her and her friend to their Bible study. Ilene thanked them, but Deb accepted the “church invitation card” they handed her. She attended the Bible study the following week and learned that the 20 ladies in attendance were studying the book of Romans, specifically Chapters 9-11. What a perfect time for a Jewish believer to join them!

During their discussion on “God’s Chosen People and the Remnant,” Deb raised her hand and confessed that she was one of them. After the study, they invited her to join them for their monthly lunch, at which she had an opportunity to share how she came to faith and her “work” as a missionary. The women were very warm and engaging and asked a lot of questions. They even invited her to come back, and Deb now attends the weekly Bible study. One of the women shared that her sister converted to Judaism prior to marrying her Jewish fiancé. She has been praying that God would help her to engage with his side of the family and now believes that Deb is the answer to her prayer. In the meantime, this woman joined Deb and Larry Dubin’s Tuesday night Bible discussion group. Please pray for the Lord to bless these God-appointed encounters.

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”*  
(Psalm 119:105)

## IN THIS ISSUE

### The Eight Judgments of the Last Days Part Two

by Gary Hedrick  
Page 1

### Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger  
Page 11

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