

CHAPTER 15

WISE PEOPLE PUT GREAT EMPHASIS ON BIBLE PROPHECY, GOD'S IMPENDING JUDGMENT, AND ETERNITY

*“For the Lord GOD does nothing
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets.
Amos 3:7 (ESV)*

*.....Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed.”
2 Chronicles 20:20(b) (ESV)*

*So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom.
Psalm 90:12 (RSV)*

*Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.
Revelation 1:3 (RSV)*

*And behold, I am coming soon.”
Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.
Revelation 22:7 (RSV)*

*Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint,
but blessed is he who keeps the law.
Proverbs 29:18 (RSV)*

*Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of thy law.
Psalm 119:18 (RSV)*

*Thy word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
Psalm 119:105 (RSV)*

¹⁸ I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book,¹⁹ and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Revelation 22:18-19 (RSV)

*“.....In the latter days you will understand it clearly.”
Jeremiah 23:20(b) (ESV)*

Wise people make the effort to understand the prophecies in the Bible

The angel Gabriel appeared to the prophet Daniel and gave him a lot of information about what will happen in the years leading up to the end of this age, the coming of the antichrist and the return of Jesus Christ. (See Daniel chapters 9-12). Gabriel tells Daniel that the visions he has seen, are for "the time of the end". Thus, they could not be fully understood in Daniel's own day, but will be in the future,

when the end approaches. However, even then, they will only be understood by those who are wise, not by the wicked:

¹"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. ²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

Daniel 12:1-4 (RSV)

⁸I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?" ⁹He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand.

Daniel 12:8-10 (RSV)

So, the things that Daniel was told by Gabriel would not make complete sense until later, i.e. not until after Jesus had come, and the books of Matthew and Revelation, and others, had been written. Indeed, they will not be fully understood until the very end, when the prophesied events are about to unfold. When the time comes, the people of that day will be given the insight and inspiration that they need to make full sense of the prophecies. We are now much closer to those days that Gabriel spoke of.

Therefore it is increasingly open to us to read and understand these prophecies in the Bible. We can do so even now, up to a point. However, as the very end approaches, we will be fully able to do so, provided we are wise enough, and humble enough. In particular we must read the prophetic parts of the Bible with a right heart-attitude and with a correct approach to Bible interpretation. See my Book 3 for a fuller discussion of how to approach the Bible in general and prophecy in particular.

However, the wicked, whether they are outright unbelievers or false religious people, will never be able to understand the prophecies. So, there is a serious warning to us to become wise enough to do so. The need to understand Bible prophecy should matter to us. Indeed, having a heart that sincerely wants to understand the Bible properly, whether the prophetic or non-prophetic parts, is a vital first step to becoming *able* to grasp it. Then you can become one of the people who are capable of seeing what God has revealed to His servants the Prophets:

"For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

Amos 3:7 (ESV)

Wise people think of the long term, and of eternity, not just the present

Wise people emphasise eternity and consider it to be of the utmost importance. They also fear it, because it will go on for ever and ever and ever:

*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.....*

Psalms 145:13(a) (ESV)

If we end up in the wrong place, there will *never* be any way out of it. If that does not scare you, then you haven't understood it. For every genuine believer, eternity will begin with a personal, face to face judgment at which he will be examined and assessed. We all need to fear that Day of Judgment and

take it seriously, even if we are saved. However, we also need to long for what lies beyond that Judgment.

There is going to be an eternity without sin, sickness or death and we will be able to see God face to face and live with Him. That has got to be far more important, and far better, than anything we have now. So, eternity should, quite obviously, be our main focus. This physical Earth that we live on now has been promised to God's people. One day the righteous will inherit it, and live upon it again for 1000 years, whereas the wicked will not. Jesus said so, and He meant it literally:

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth".

Matthew 5:5 (RSV)

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6 (ESV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21:1-4 (ESV)

Also, look at what Job said. He was speaking about his assurance that one day his Redeemer will stand upon this Earth and that he himself would also do so. Moreover, he is plainly not speaking of Jesus' first coming, because Job refers in the passage to himself as having been resurrected after having died. Clearly, that is still in the future, but it is going to happen on this literal physical Earth:

***²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.***

***²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,***

***²⁷ whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.***

My heart faints within me!

Job 19:25-27 (ESV)

Having an eternal perspective gives us greater resilience and also motivates us to be obedient to God's commands and to seek His rewards

The more we can develop an eternal perspective on life and see the reality of what lies ahead in the distant (and eternal) future, the wiser, and more stable and resilient, we will be. Also, the more our present actions and decisions will be affected by the approach we take to eternity, because, as we look forward to what is ahead, it becomes increasingly real to us. That then influences how we choose to live now:

⁵*My deliverance draws near speedily, my salvation has gone forth, and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.* ⁶*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.*

Isaiah 51:5-6 (RSV)

A wise person will give much greater weight and emphasis to what is going to happen to them in eternity than to what may be happening to them now in this life. However difficult our current circumstances may be, they can never be as bad as the Lake of Fire. And, however long our sufferings in this life may last, they are trivial compared to eternity. Once you grasp basic points like those, which most people never even consider, you will become far more willing to give up what you have in this life and even to give up life itself, to gain that eternal life:

²⁵ *He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* ²⁶ *If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him.*

John 12:25-26 (RSV)

A person who has grasped the vital importance of eternity, and reflected on how and where he will spend it, will also be much more willing to “*take up his cross*”, as Jesus commands, and to follow Him wherever He leads. There is no point in gaining things in this present world only to lose those things, and even our very souls, before we enter the next life:

³⁴ *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* ³⁵ *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.* ³⁶ *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* ³⁷ *For what can a man give in return for his soul?* ³⁸ *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

Mark 8:34-38 (ESV)

When it comes to money, possessions, power and status, a wise person will realise that those things are only very temporary. He will focus instead on building up treasure for himself in Heaven. This means living in such a way as to do well and be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. (See my Book 4)

¹⁹ *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal,* ²⁰ *but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

Matthew 6:19-20 (RSV)

If we become Christians and, in particular, if we then go on to become mature and genuine disciples, Jesus will give rewards and positions to those who have served Him faithfully and productively. Therefore, those are the things we should focus on, i.e. *what our position will be in His future Kingdom*, not what we have to eat, drink or wear today:

³¹ *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’* ³² *For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.* ³³ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*

Matthew 6:31-33 (RSV)

A person whose mind is set on eternity and on God’s future Kingdom will have enough understanding and motivation to ensure they enter by the narrow gate and stay on the hard way that leads to life. Most

do not choose to do those things, partly because their minds are so focused on the present that they give no thought to their eternal future:

¹³ *“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

Matthew 7:13-14 (RSV)

If we focus on eternity, we will also have the motivation needed to endure the extra difficulties and persecutions that will come to us for being faithful disciples and for sharing the Gospel with unbelievers. A faithful Christian life will inevitably arouse other people’s hostility and opposition, but it is worth it when one considers what lies ahead of us. I have included a lot of sample passages here to demonstrate how frequently the Bible addresses this theme and to show that I am not over-stating its significance as an issue:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:18 (RSV)

¹⁶ *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²² and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.*

Matthew 10:16-22 (RSV)

²⁶ *“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matthew 10:26-28 (RSV)

³² *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

Matthew 10:32-33 (RSV)

⁷ *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 3:7-14 (RSV)

¹⁷ *Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds*

set on earthly things. ²⁰ *But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,* ²¹ *who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Philippians 3:17-21 (RSV)

⁴ *because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints,* ⁵ *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel*

Colossians 1:4-5 (RSV)

¹*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* ³ *For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* ⁴ *When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Colossians 3:1-4 (RSV)

We cannot claim that we have not been warned in advance of the difficulties and opposition that living as a faithful disciple will generate. The Bible is very plain about all of that. However, it is also very clear about the rewards that await us if we do live faithfully. Therefore, we have every reason to maximise our knowledge and understanding of God's Word, including prophecy.

Wise people are alert and waiting for the rapture of the Church.

We are all expected to take Bible prophecy seriously and to work hard to learn how to understand it. However, we are particularly commanded to be *alert and ready* while we wait for the rapture of the Church. That is when Jesus will return to take away all real Christians, though not mere 'churchgoers'. Then He will begin the judgment of the Church, known as the Judgment Seat of Christ. Look at how strongly Jesus spoke of this:

²⁶ *Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.* ²⁷ *And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.*

²⁸ *“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.* ²⁹ *Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door.* ³⁰ *Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.* ³¹ *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.* ³² *But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.*

³³ *“Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.* ³⁴ *It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert.* ³⁵ *Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—* ³⁶ *in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep.* ³⁷ *What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’”*

Mark 13:26-37 (NASB)

³⁵ *“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning,* ³⁶ *and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.* ³⁷ *Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.* ³⁸ *If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!* ³⁹ *But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into.* ⁴⁰ *You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

Luke 12:35-40 (ESV)

Jesus is not telling us of these things for mere academic interest, but so that we can make ourselves ready for Him. He tells us to “*Be on the alert*” and He is saying that to us *all*, not just to a special few or to a single generation. He wants *all* of us, in *every generation*, to be aware that we could be the generation whose lives are suddenly interrupted by the rapture. That is when Jesus will return, without any prior notice, and take His whole Church away, i.e. the *real* believers, not the fake or nominal ones, to face His judgment.

Then, *years later*, He will return *visibly* to the Earth to take up His place as King of Israel and Judge of all the whole Earth. That is when Jesus’ earthly Kingdom will truly and properly begin. It is because of that fact that the Gospel is sometimes referred to in the Bible as “*the gospel of the Kingdom*”. We are meant to focus on this coming Kingdom which is still in the future. Yet, much of the Church has either never heard of it, or chooses to ignore it.

Instead, the Kingdom that is coming needs to be kept at the forefront of our minds, and also of our presentation of the Gospel message. It is not a mere side issue. See my commentary on Matthew’s gospel for more detail on the gospel of the Kingdom. The timing of *the Second Coming*, which begins the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom, will be possible to work out in advance for those who come to believe in Jesus after the rapture. It can be planned for and awaited. However, the rapture which precedes it will be completely sudden and with no specific build up or advance warning.

Therefore, Jesus wants *every* generation to be ready for the rapture *at all times*, because we can never know when it will happen, so we must remain alert all the time. A wise person takes that command seriously, but most people don’t, not even real Christians in relatively good churches. To ignore Bible prophecy is foolishness, but it is also disobedience to what we are commanded to do. Even so, the fact is that most people do choose to ignore it.

Wise people live their lives ‘judgment focused’, always conscious that everything they think, say and do will be judged, and may even be made public.

The coming judgment is very little known and even less spoken about. It should instead be at the forefront of our minds, regularly occupy our thoughts and inspire apprehension, and even fear. Yet, for most of us, it is not an issue. Can you think of any valid reason why it should not regularly occupy your thoughts and influence your actions? Consider the prospect of *your* private conversations being shouted from the roof tops and of all those who need to know being made aware of what you really said about them behind their backs. How does that make you feel?

¹ *In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.*

Luke 12:1-3 (ESV)

Perhaps you believe this does not apply to Christians and is only of relevance to the unsaved. However, I cannot see how that can possibly be the case. Note how Jesus says, *to His own disciples*, “whatever *you* have said...” and “what *you* have whispered..... Clearly, Jesus is speaking to and about His own disciples. Therefore, He is including them within the scope of what is going to occur at the judgment and how secret things will be revealed publicly. He is plainly not excluding them, or us, from that. This judgment process could be decades away for you, or it could be very soon.

Maybe it will even occur later today, if you are unexpectedly killed. So, whoever we are, we don’t know when exactly we will face judgment. Thus, it would be very foolish to delay any consideration of it until you are older, or even when you face death, on the assumption that that will be in the distant future. The time to be thinking of your death is *now*, while you still have the chance to alter the outcome

of the judgment and the rewards (or rebukes) which you get (or don't get). A wise person is prepared for a rapture (or death) which occurs *today*, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, which may not come until he is an *old man*.

Both are possibilities and they each present their own challenges. Therefore, on the one hand, we need to be ready to meet Jesus now, and to face Him as our judge today. But, on the other hand, we may face the harder test of remaining faithful, and constantly ready, for several decades, during which He does not come. If His coming is delayed, we must stay alert, obedient and watchful *at all times*. We must also pray for the strength to cope with a long 'marathon race' and not to be deceived, or become unfaithful, during those years:

And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them.

Luke 21:8 (ESV)

³⁴ *"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

Luke 21:34-36 (ESV)

To assist you in focusing more closely on the Day of Judgment, consider this series of verses on how it will operate, and why we all need to take it seriously and even fear it. I certainly fear it, and it makes me apprehensive, and with good reason, because we are *meant* to be apprehensive about the Day of Judgment.

The fear of God, and especially of His judgment, is always presented in the Bible as a good thing, not as something negative or unhealthy. Many of these verses which follow refer to the judgment on the unsaved, but I include them to give a fuller picture of how awesome the whole process will be:

Be silent before the Lord GOD!

*For the day of the LORD is near;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice
and consecrated his guests.*

Zephaniah 1:7 (ESV)

¹⁴ *The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter;
the mighty man cries aloud there.*

¹⁵ *A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,*

¹⁶ *a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.*

¹⁷ *I will bring distress on mankind,
so that they shall walk like the blind,
because they have sinned against the LORD;
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.*

¹⁸ *Neither their silver nor their gold
shall be able to deliver them*

*on the day of the wrath of the LORD.
In the fire of his jealousy,
all the earth shall be consumed;
for a full and sudden end
Zephaniah 1:14-18 (ESV)*

*“Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD,
“for the day when I rise up to seize the prey.
For my decision is to gather nations,
to assemble kingdoms,
to pour out upon them my indignation,
all my burning anger;
for in the fire of my jealousy
all the earth shall be consumed.
Zephaniah 3:8 (ESV)*

¹ *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.*

Malachi 4:1-3 (ESV)

Do not imagine that being a Christian means that you will never face God’s judgment. It will simply be done at a different *time*, in a different *place*, on a different *basis* and for a different *purpose* than the judgment of the unsaved. Nevertheless, it will still take place and it will still be awesome and terrifying, even if we have done well, but especially if we haven’t.

When contemplating the impending judgment, a wise person is not quick to consider himself, or others, as being either a success, or a failure, in God’s eyes

It is impossible to assess yourself accurately so as to figure out how well or badly you have done so far, or what Jesus’ overall assessment of you will be. I am convinced that most of us will get it very wrong and will be surprised, in one direction or the other, when we meet Him face to face and hear exactly what He thinks of how well, or badly, we did. However, that does not mean that we should not examine ourselves here and now. Paul tells us to do so, to see whether we are still in the faith:

*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!
2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)*

None of us can accurately weigh up the extent of our own faithfulness and fruitfulness, quite apart from all the other criteria by which we will be judged. We would get it wrong in all sorts of ways and either be too generous, or too harsh, with ourselves, especially when seen in comparison with others. The judgment which Jesus conducts will be infinitely complicated. It will take account of all the many differences in our circumstances, abilities, opportunities and challenges and also the extent to which we were helped or hindered by other people, or opposed by demons, during our time on Earth.

To account for all of that Jesus will have to apply a vastly complex series of multipliers and discounts to increase or decrease our ‘score’, so as to put us all on a level playing field. That will be needed to ensure that the judgment is scrupulously fair and does not favour those who began with more and had greater privileges and opportunities, or prejudice those who did not. Therefore, we should all be very

careful about pronouncing any verdicts here and now and slow to reach any conclusions as to whether we, or others, are doing well or badly.

You just can't do it and if you attempt it you will either feed your pride, or discourage yourself needlessly. The best policy is to make no judgments of those kind i.e. the *kreetace* form of judgement, which we are forbidden to do, but to leave that entirely to Jesus when the day comes. Until then we should examine our consciences and cross-examine ourselves, to establish our real motives and to root out any falseness, pride, hypocrisy or complacency. This is the *diakrino* form of judgement which is appropriate to use, to assess both ourselves and others.

Yet all of that must be done without going to the other extreme, whereby we join in with the demons and become our own accuser and demoralise ourselves instead of growing in motivation and zeal. So, whether you are too generous or too hard on yourself, the demons will be pleased. Indeed, they will look to see which way you are already leaning, and then seek to push you even farther in that direction. They don't mind which direction it is, as both suit their purposes. So, on judgment day, or 'results day' as one might call it, there will be many surprises, in both directions.

Many will be startled by how well they did and many others will be shocked to learn that they did less well than they had assumed. Some who have spent their whole adult life in church leadership may receive little or no reward. Jesus may say that they were cowardly, lazy, unfaithful and did not have the love of the truth, such that they compromised, took the path of least resistance, and were even apostate. Others who were anonymous in this life, and felt insignificant may be richly rewarded and given high places in the Kingdom because they were faithful and true, even though they were never famous.

A classic example of how people can misjudge others is the account of Job and his friends. They see the disasters which have befallen him and leap to the conclusion that God must be displeased with Job and is therefore judging him for his wrongdoings. They also assume their own superiority and see themselves as wise when, in fact, they all get it wrong. God was actually pleased with Job and He only allowed the tragedies and illness to come upon him to show the Devil how *righteous* Job was, not to punish him. Here are some of the unjust accusations they make about Job, which God later says are mistaken:

“Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?

Or where were the upright cut off?

Job 4:7 (ESV)

***⁴ Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you
and enters into judgment with you?***

⁵ Is not your evil abundant?

There is no end to your iniquities.

***⁶ For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing
and stripped the naked of their clothing.***

***⁷ You have given no water to the weary to drink,
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.***

***⁸ The man with power possessed the land,
and the favored man lived in it.***

***⁹ You have sent widows away empty,
and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.***

***¹⁰ Therefore snares are all around you,
and sudden terror overwhelms you,***

Job 22:4-10 (ESV)

***For according to the work of a man he will repay him,
and according to his ways he will make it befall him.***

Job 34:11 (ESV)

Later God expresses His anger at Job's friends for their inaccurate conclusions and for the unfounded accusations they make against him:

⁷ After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

Job 42:7-9 (ESV)

To further prove that He was actually delighted with Job, and not judging him, God restored Job's fortunes. He gave him twice what he had before, except for his children. God did not need to double those because the children who had died were still in existence. They were in 'Abraham's bosom', waiting for Job to be reunited with them when he died:

¹⁰ And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹ Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

¹² And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. ¹³ He had also seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵ And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. ¹⁶ And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

Job 42:10-17 (ESV)

We will misjudge other people's contribution and performance if we fail to take into account the obstacles, and the demonic opposition which they faced

Another common reason why we might misjudge another person's 'performance' in this life, in comparison to our own, is that we might fail to take into account the obstacles and demonic opposition which they faced in comparison to what you or others faced. Imagine that person A, during this life, comes up against 100 units of adversity, demonic opposition, and other difficulties, but he eventually produces 50 units of output or achievement for God. At the same time, person B might produce 100 units of output/achievement, but he only encountered 10 units of resistance, adversity and difficulties.

Can you see how God would very probably see A as having done better than B, even though, in objective terms, so far as we could see, A produced or achieved less? The point is that, in proportional terms, A was far more of an 'overcomer' than B. That is crucial, because one of the key qualities that God is looking for in us is that we should be overcomers. See how frequently overcoming is referred to:

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:21 (RSV)

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7 (KJV)

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Revelation 2:17 (KJV)

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Revelation 2:26 (KJV)

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels

Revelation 3:5 (KJV)

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

Revelation 3:12 (KJV)

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Revelation 3:21 (KJV)

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Revelation 21:7 (KJV)

We will also misjudge other people's contribution or performance if we don't take into account the time when they lived and the circumstances they faced

Another factor which may cause us to miscalculate how well another person has done in God's eyes or how highly He values their contribution, is the *time* at which, or the *circumstances* in which, their work was done. To use a military example to illustrate this point, look at what was achieved by two different groups of men on or near the beaches of France at two different times, June 1940 and June 1944.

On the first occasion, when the British army was retreating from the far larger German army, 50,000 British soldiers were ordered to stay in France and fight to the end, with no hope of evacuation. Their grim orders were to stay behind and protect the beaches so that the rest of the British army could escape via Dunkirk. That group fought valiantly, but were all either killed or taken prisoner. For them, the war was over only a few weeks after it really began. They then played no further part and very few of them ever received any recognition for what they did.

By contrast, the men who went back in and invaded France on D Day four years later have gone down in history as heroes, and rightly so. Yet, if we were to ask which group made the greater contribution to the overall war effort, and thus deserves greater honour, it may well have been the men who stayed behind in 1940 and never got the chance to be evacuated. Their willingness to sacrifice themselves enabled 340,000 *other* soldiers to get away and to form the nucleus of the new, and much larger, British army which was later built around them.

If those men who stayed behind in 1940 had not fought that rear guard action, protecting the evacuation beaches at Dunkirk, the whole war would almost certainly have been lost. So, theirs was arguably a greater victory, as it kept hope alive. Yet, all around the world, it was seen by many as a defeat. The men who fought in that rear guard are rarely even remembered today, let alone given the honour they deserve, whereas those who later invaded Normandy are. In the same way, many of us will be given tasks to perform by God which will not lead to any fame or glory in this life.

They may even be seen as defeats, for example the efforts of the valiant few who have fought, unsuccessfully so far, to reverse the legalisation of abortion. Many of those pro-life campaigners have fought hard for decades, and have paid a high price. Yet they have received little or no recognition and not many would view them as a success. But their apparent failure is mainly due to the time in history at which they had to fight, due to the time at which they lived. Others, who lived at better times in the history of the Church, such as the 18th and 19th centuries in the UK and USA, were able to achieve what seemed to be far bigger.

Yet it may be that a large part of the reason for their greater success was simply the fact of when they lived, and what God was doing at that time, rather than their own merit. Those of us in the West who struggle to preach the Gospel in these bleak days, when very few will repent or believe, may not necessarily be judged to have done less well than those 18th century evangelists like George Whitefield who attracted vast and enthusiastic crowds.

On the face of it, Whitefield seems to have done better than us. But that may not necessarily be Jesus' view when the whole facts are made known and everything is seen in its proper context. That is an encouragement to those who remain faithful in bleak times or places in history, when only meagre visible results are achieved. It is also a warning to those who live in 'better' times, or better places, when the Holy Spirit is pouring out His power and whole nations are in revival.

A final point I would make is that sometimes God subjects certain individuals to sustained and severe testing, for years or even decades, as He prepares them for unusually big tasks that lie ahead. Yet, other people may be tested and prepared for far shorter periods and they are then able to get on with things much sooner and be seen to be achieving things in their teens or twenties. At the same time, some other man is still being tested and prepared, even in his thirties or forties, or later, for a task that is still future and which only God knows about.

If you are the man whom God has allowed to get on with things sooner, don't look down on the man whom God is still preparing for a future task of which you may not be capable. But if you are the man who is still in obscurity, being tested, don't be discouraged. Your hour will come and God may well be pleased with your progress in the years of preparation, even if nobody has heard of you. Let neither man be quick to declare himself either a success or a failure. Consider that to be an open question, and don't even attempt to answer it. It is Jesus's job to decide that.

Wise people do not make this present physical Earth their focus

Instead of being focused on the rapture, the Day of Judgment and the Millennial Kingdom, we are seeing at present an increasingly widespread and obsessive interest, in the physical condition of this planet and its ecology, climate, sustainability etc. There is nothing wrong with caring for the environment. Indeed, it is our responsibility, as part of our stewardship of this Earth, to look after it sensibly. However we are being presented with a barrage of unfounded propaganda about supposed climate change and the alleged role of carbon dioxide emissions in causing so called '*global warming*'.

Concern about this has reached the level of frenzy for many people, even in the churches. This alarmist message is being taught in schools and universities, as if it was proven fact, when it is actually just a very flimsy and entirely unproven theory. As we saw above, the very same people who are now predicting global warming were, until the mid-1980s, predicting a coming ice-age. Now they say the exact opposite, without any mention of their 180° change of mind, let alone an apology for it.

However, for the moment, the issue is whether we should be making the condition of our atmosphere and of the planet's animal and plant life such a central and urgent concern. Should a Christian be focused on those things and should such issues alarm us and grip our attention, as they do with the unbelieving, secular world? Without needing to get into the science of it, or rather the *alleged* science,

we can answer the question more simply by looking at what the Bible has to say about this planet and its future.

We are told plainly that the surface of this physical Earth is going to be *totally destroyed by fire*. The whole world is going to be so thoroughly judged by God that the planet's entire *surface* will be burned up. That is quite separate from the terrible judgment that will also come upon the Earth's *inhabitants* during the Tribulation. Look at what the prophet Isaiah has to say:

¹Behold, the LORD will lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. ²And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. ³The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken this word.

Isaiah 24:1-3 (RSV)

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

Isaiah 51:6 (RSV)

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

Isaiah 65:17 (RSV)

¹⁵ "For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the storm wind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶For by fire will the LORD execute judgment, and by his sword, upon all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.

Isaiah 66:15-16 (RSV)

The prophet Zephaniah also speaks of this:

²"I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

³"I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked.

I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

Zephaniah 1:2-3 (ESV)

"Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day when I rise up to seize the prey.

For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger;

for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.

Zephaniah 3:8 (ESV)

Apostle Peter puts it even more starkly. He tells us that this present Earth, i.e. its *surface*, is going to be utterly burned away, such that *nothing at all* will be left. There will be no remaining soil or vegetation of any kind after this process of judgment is completed:

¹This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder; ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles. ³ First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." ⁵ They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, ⁶ through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

2 Peter 3:1-7 (RSV)

Peter goes on, later in that same chapter, to be even more explicit about what is going to happen to this physical planet when God's judgment comes. In particular we are told that there will be a *new Earth*. But the Greek word used for *new* means *renewed*, rather than *brand new*. This Earth that we live on now will be burned clean, or rather its surface will be. Then it will be made as good as new, the way it was when it was first created. God will not replace this Earth with a different planet. He will cleanse it and make it as it once was, before sin came into the world:

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! ¹³ But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

2 Peter 3:10-14 (RSV)

If you want to know in greater detail what God is going to do to judge unbelievers and how His wrath will also affect the physical Earth itself, and bring it to a condition of utter ruin, then read the whole of Revelation, in particular chapters 6 to 19. There is going to be a series of cataclysmic outpourings of God's judgment on the unbelieving people of the world and also on the planet itself.

These will bring it to the point of devastation, even before the whole surface of the Earth is later burned up. However, the news is not all bad because, when that process of judgment is all over, God will then restore both the Earth's atmosphere and its land surface. We will then have a renewed Earth, perfect in every way, as it was to begin with, before Adam and Eve sinned:

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; ³ and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21:1-4 (RSV)

Isaiah also referred to the new Earth, long before apostle John did:

"For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain.

Isaiah 66:22 (RSV)

As God is going to destroy the entire surface of the Earth with fire, we must not make ecology or alleged climate change our focus

God will destroy the whole of the Earth's surface and its atmosphere with fire. Even before doing that, He will have already destroyed much of it by many other preliminary forms of judgment. However, He will then recreate a perfect renewed Earth which will last forever and never be polluted. What then should our attitude be in relation to the *current* Earth's atmosphere and to the environment generally? Given that God has made us stewards of this Earth, we have a duty to care for it during this current age and not to pollute it or to destroy the wildlife that live on it.

My wife and I go to considerable lengths to care for the birds in our vicinity and feed them regularly with seeds. We also plant a lot of shrubs and trees, especially those which produce nuts and berries of various types, or which host insects for food. We also seek to provide good roosting and nesting areas. Every house we have owned has ended up a better habitat for birds as a result of us living there. To us it is both an interest and a responsibility. Nevertheless, we know that, in the end, every single tree and shrub that we ever plant will be destroyed when God judges this world.

He will wipe it all clean, ready to start again with a renewed Earth in the Eternal State, after the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom is over. Thus, we are not under any illusions that what we are doing now to care for the birds in our area is going to "*save the planet*". That is an impossible and futile objective, as nobody can save the planet from God's judgment. On the other hand, nobody other than God can destroy it either, as the Bible makes clear that *God Himself will destroy it*, not us. Thus, it is foolish to think that we can either cause that ourselves or prevent Him from doing so.

It is even more foolish to make ecology in general, or the control of carbon dioxide in particular, into the focus of our lives, as so many are now doing, even within the churches. A wise person takes seriously the responsibility we have as stewards of the Earth during our time on it. But they also take seriously what the Bible says about the future of this Earth and what *God, not man*, is going to do to it. Every person I have ever heard who is impassioned about environmental issues, and who has made those issues their central concern, seems to have paid no attention to Bible prophecy.

They do not take into account what the Bible says about God's future plans for this Earth. Such wilful blindness is foolish, however well-intentioned it may be. It is based on men's theories and ideas, without any regard to what God explicitly says on this issue. How can it make any sense to focus so much time, energy and money on trying to preserve this planet when God has said He is going to *destroy* it? He will still destroy it, no matter how many trees we plant, and no matter how little CO₂ we emit.

Likewise, how can it be wise *not* to focus upon the new and perfect Earth which God will create when the judgment is over? A wise person will give most of their attention to the eternal rather than the purely temporary. That is what we should do now, instead of becoming wrapped up in the hysteria about alleged climate change. That would still be the case even if it was really happening, and even if the alleged causal link between man-made CO₂ and increased global temperatures were both proved to be true. However, they aren't true, and there is no credible evidence to support either theory.

Indeed, as we saw, there is a worldwide petition, signed by over 30,000 scientists, who state that they *do not* believe there is global warming, or, even if there is, that it is caused by man-made CO₂. No publicity is ever given to that petition by the world's governments or media. They keep saying that "*scientists agree that the evidence is now overwhelming*", without either mentioning the petition, or setting out any evidence in support of their own position. You are supposed to just accept it without questioning it, or even knowing what it is.

Wise people can ‘tell the time’ as to whether it is a time of judgment and whether God’s mercy is still available to the nation as a whole or just to individuals

Nations go through various stages in their history, whereby they are either rising or falling and where God is either using them or abandoning them, and bringing either revival or judgment. Depending on what ‘time’ it is, God makes His mercy available either to the nation as a whole, or only to individuals within it. I refer to this process of identifying what stage a nation is at, and what God is doing with it, as ‘telling the time’, i.e. in terms of God’s prophetic timetable worldwide and also His intentions towards that nation.

In the late 1990s, in the charismatic church we were then part of, there was much talk of God imminently sending a huge revival to the UK. As I look back, I believe they were mistaken as to what ‘time’ it was. It was, in fact, primarily a time for God’s judgment to be poured out on the UK, not His mercy. Of course, *individuals* could still be saved, even in the midst of that judgment. However, the revival which they expected to come to the UK as a whole was simply not going to happen, due to the extent of the sin in our nation and, even more crucially, the extent of the apostasy in the churches.

Sometimes, within a particular nation, it is a time for evil to prevail. At such times, Satan, his demons, the wicked people within the population, and especially their leaders, are given the chance by God to have their own way and to do what they want to do. One such time was when Jesus was arrested and put on trial. It was done by wicked men, under Satan’s guidance. But God permitted it because He had a deeper, wider purpose for allowing the crucifixion to go ahead:

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

Luke 22:52-53 (ESV)

An example from Scripture of two different times or eras in the life of a nation can be seen in God’s handling of Nineveh. As we saw earlier, in the time of Jonah, God was willing to warn the population of Nineveh. Then, when they repented, He had mercy on the *whole nation*. We might call that a conditional warning about God’s judgment. So, *at that time*, mercy was available to the people as a whole, if enough of them would collectively repent. However, just over a century later, at the time of the prophet Nahum, the situation had changed.

It was now a time for judgment, not mercy, and there was no question of Nineveh as a whole being spared from God’s wrath. If we look at judgment in the Bible we can see that it comes in various different ways, depending on how far that nation has gone into sin and rebellion and on whether or not God’s patience has finally run out. So, at the time of the Judges, we see a series of judgments happening in a distinct pattern or cycle, over several centuries.

The people of Israel would degenerate into idolatry and apostasy and then God would bring judgment through the oppression of neighbouring nations. That would cause many of the people to come to their senses and repent. As a result, God would send deliverance by men such as Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson and others. But then, the improved conditions would lead to complacency, a lapse back into apostasy and idolatry, and the resumption of God’s judgment. Anyone living at the time of the Judges, *if they had discernment*, would be able to see where Israel was in that cyclical pattern.

Later, things reached a much lower ebb in the life of the nation. It led to the northern Kingdom being completely invaded by the Assyrians and the people being exiled. We might call that a *judgment by invasion*. The same occurred later when the southern Kingdom was invaded by the Babylonians and the people were exiled. At that time wise people, if they had listened to the warnings and prophecies of Jeremiah and other prophets, rather than ignoring them, could have seen what was about to happen. Then they could have prepared for it, at least as individuals.

Another form of judgment we see in Scripture is '*catastrophic judgment*' as occurred at the Flood in Noah's day and also in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, when the people were all destroyed by fire and sulphur. By contrast, in our personal lives as individuals or churches we can see '*disciplining judgment*'. This is meant to bring us to our senses so that we wake up, repent, and turn back to God. A wise person can discern when such a form of judgment is occurring in his own life and respond to it with repentance.

Another frightening form of judgment, which I believe applies to the UK and the USA today, is what one might call '*abandonment judgment*'. This occurs where God's patience runs out with a nation, especially if it is one which He has previously blessed and given spiritual advantages. It means that God effectively *hands that nation over* and leaves them to get on with the wicked things they have already decided they want to do. He will withdraw His hand of protection, stop sending them warnings, and leave the people to degenerate into decay and eventual collapse.

I believe this kind of abandonment judgment occurred to the UK in the mid-20th century when the nation was judged by God for its rapidly rising sin, the apostasy of its churches, and its betrayal of the Jewish people during the 1920s and 1930's. At that time we had the mandate from the League of Nations to administer 'Palestine', and had also promised in 1917, in the 'Balfour declaration', to establish a homeland for the Jews. But we failed to do so, for fear of offending the Arabs.

As we reach the end of the last days, we will also see what one might call '*apocalyptic judgment*', when God pours out His full wrath on the whole world for its sin, and rebellion. This will assuredly come and will be on a scale not seen since the Flood. The book of Revelation has a lot to say about this, although it is by no means the only book which does so. Many of the Old Testament prophets, and also many of the other New Testament books and letters, address this coming judgment on the Earth. It will be cataclysmic and will bring death and destruction on a massive scale.

As we read the Bible and observe world events in the news it is clear that the end cannot be far away now, as so many predicted events have already occurred and others are moving into place ready to be fulfilled. Last of all, there will be the two main judgments which will stand for all eternity. The first of these is the Judgment Seat of Christ, at which all saved believers will be judged on the basis of what they did since their *conversion* and the extent to which they bore fruit and were faithful.

They will then be rewarded, or not, or possibly even rebuked, for what they did and didn't do in the time they had and with the talents they were given, whether small or large. Later will come the very final judgment at the Great White Throne, when all unsaved, unrepentant, unbelievers will be judged and then sent to the Lake of Fire.

So, if we ask what the 'time' is at present, at least in the Western world, the UK, Western Europe and the USA, Canada and Australia, I would say that we have already entered into the stage that I call '*abandonment judgment*'. By that I don't mean that nobody can be saved, but that these *nations as a whole* cannot be saved. They have simply gone too far, in particular by conducting abortions on an industrial scale, with 8,000,000 babies killed in the UK since 1967 and 58,000,000 killed in America since 1973. That is unprecedented in world history and nobody can say that it is a small matter.

Therefore, as nations, we have crossed a line and there is no way back, *in my personal opinion*, no matter how much we might pray for God's mercy on the UK, USA and Europe. I believe that at this stage in world history these nations are being judged by God and that only individuals can be saved, not the nations as a whole. As countries they will therefore continue to decline morally and spiritually. They will then become increasingly unable even to hear God's convicting voice at all, let alone to turn to Him en masse in repentance and faith.

Only individuals will do so, one here, and another there, but not on any large scale basis, as happened in Nineveh in Jonah's day, though not in Nahum's day. The time we now live in, within the West is one of growing sin, rebellion, folly and apostasy and of a downward spiral into moral bankruptcy and

chaos. We also see this illustrated in the astonishing increase in homosexuality and gender confusion, both of which are primarily the *result* of our nations' abandonment of God, not the *cause* of it. Perhaps the most notable feature of that judgment on the West is the increasing *inability* to respond to the Gospel even when it is proclaimed.

That is because God has been taking away from a large proportion of our populations the *very ability to hear*. Therefore, many of the people have become spiritually *deaf and blind*, so they cannot hear or understand, no matter what we say or write to them. However, their hearts are only being hardened by God because they have already been *hardening their own hearts* now for many years. It is like it was in the days when Amos prophesied a "*famine of hearing the words of the LORD.*"

***"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD,
"when I will send a famine on the land—
not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.
Amos 8:11 (ESV)***