

# The Four Judgments

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | July 22, 2021



When you hear the word “judgment,” what comes to mind?

Do you think of a judicial process—a courtroom with prosecuting and defense attorneys; a jury of one’s peers; the presentation of eyewitness, circumstantial, and forensic evidence; and a judge who oversees the proceedings? Do you think of a judgment as a legal ruling, with an opinion based on what the written law requires?

This is certainly the typical way people understand judgment, as a ruling rendered by a judge or jury, a verdict of guilty or not guilty, followed by a sentencing. And this understanding is a legitimate and accurate way in which the word judgment can be understood.

But the problem with understanding judgment as a biblical theme is that judgment has multiple meanings in the Bible—and not all of them are judicial in nature. The Bible uses the word to mean many different things, yet almost always, modern Christians have understood the use of biblical judgment only in judicial terms. This has led to terrible misunderstanding of the Scripture and the plan of salvation.

The question we must ask before we examine the four kinds of judgments in Scripture is: How do we understand God’s law? If we understand God’s law to function no differently than human law—that is,

imposed rules that require imposed punishments—then we will automatically interpret the Scripture to teach that judgment is judicial in nature.

But if we understand God as a Creator whose laws are [design laws](#), the protocols upon which He built life to operate—the laws of health, physics, gravity, and the moral laws—then we understand that biblical judgment means something entirely different than a judicial finding in a courtroom. (If you haven't read our three-part blog series [Who Created Whom?](#) on the origin of the god of law and order, I encourage you to do so.)

So, understanding that God is the Creator whose laws are the design protocols upon which reality is built, let's explore the four judgments in the Bible.

## The First Judgment

In Eden, we find the evidence of the first judgment. God created a perfect world; a sinless couple; gave them a paradise, perfect health, dominion over the entire planet; and came to them every day to fellowship. But Satan lied to them about God and what God had said was for their good, and Adam and Eve had to make a judgment: Who would they believe, who would they trust—God or the serpent?

When we are presented with lies about someone we know, someone we love and trust, we have to make a judgment: Do we believe the lies or reject them? Likewise, the first judgment is our judgment of God—do we judge Him to be trustworthy or not? It is that simple.

We see this first judgment at Mount Carmel, when Elijah confronts the 450 priests of Baal and challenges the people:

If the LORD is God, worship him; but if Baal is God, worship him! (1 Kings 18:21 GNT).

The apostle Paul picks up this theme and states it explicitly in Roman 3:4:

Let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when **You are judged**" (NKJV).

Notice the capital "You." It is God being judged.

However, this judgment of God is not a judicial judgment, it is not a courtroom; it is the judgment of reality, the choice every sentient being throughout the entire universe must make in the aftermath of Satan's rebellion.

One of the reasons Christ became human, one of the achievements our Savior had to accomplish, was to reveal the truth about God sufficiently to destroy the lies of Satan so that we and the onlooking angels in heaven could make a right judgment about God.

This is what Jesus was pointing us to when He said, "if you have seen me you have seen the Father"

(John 14:7). It is what He was talking about when He said,

“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.” This he said, signifying what death he should die (John 12:32, 33 KJV).

You will notice that the King James italicizes words that have been supplied by the translators to show those words that don’t actually appear in the original manuscripts. The word “men” here is not included in what John originally wrote when he quoted Jesus, who said He would draw *all* unto Himself—that is, not just humans. Paul confirms that Jesus was indeed talking about more than just humans in his letter to the Colossians:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (1:19, 20 NIV84).

Remember, Satan’s rebellion began in heaven (Revelation 12:7). The father of lies first told falsehoods about God to the angels in heaven, and only later did he spread these lies to this earth, where the deceiver tempted Adam and Eve in Eden.

After Christ’s victory at the cross, the sinless beings in heaven were convinced. The truth Jesus revealed about God settled any lingering questions they may have had. Satan was cast down to the earth, restricted in his activity. Not restricted by God using a force shield but restricted by reality—no intelligent being outside of the earth would listen to anything Satan had to say after the cross. Only on earth would intelligent beings still buy into Satan’s lies about God.

Tragically, shortly after the apostles died, the Christian church began embracing those lies and teaching those lies. The primary lie is that God’s law functions like human law, imposed rules requiring a sovereign to use power to inflict punishment for law-breaking. Christianity became infected with the imperial-law distortion and the word “judgment” came to strictly mean judicial proceedings: Satan, the accuser; Jesus, our defense attorney; and the Father, the judge who decides our destiny and grants rewards or inflicts punishments. But this is a sinful-human law system. It is not the way of God and His heavenly kingdom.

Thus, before Christ returns again, God sends a message that contains the eternal good news about Him as our Creator. We are called to make a right judgment about God, to stop worshiping the imperial dictator of that fallen Babylonian system, and to come out of that imperial legal distortion. It is now time to glorify God by revealing His methods in our lives and by worshiping Him who made all things:

I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because **the hour of his judgment** has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water”(Revelation 14:6, 7).

This means that we understand God’s laws are design laws, the protocols that govern reality, and that

they are not imperial imposed laws that He must enforce externally.

The first judgment is our judgment of God.

## **The Second Judgment**

When we understand design law, we can see that Adam and Eve's sin did not create a legal problem; it created a lethal problem.

They were not loyal, faithful, and holy beings filled with godly love and trust who were now suddenly in legal trouble with God. No—their sin altered them in such a way that without direct intervention from God, they would die. Their condition was terminal, and every human being born since is born with this same terminal condition.

The Messiah, the Remedy to their terminal state, was promised in Genesis 3; the seed of the woman would come to crush the serpent's head. While Adam's sin introduced the death condition, the promised Messiah would bring the cure.

Thus, the entire Old Testament is a record of the battle for human salvation—God working through His agencies to bring Christ, for the purposes of overcoming sin and healing humanity, and Satan working to stop God's plan.

How could Satan prevent Jesus from being born as a human? By getting every human being to harden their heart so that there wouldn't be a single woman willing to be the mother of our Messiah. God would not force a woman against her will, and God would not have Jesus born to a vile, hate-filled woman like Jezebel.

The Bible tells us that at the time of the global flood, there was only *one* righteous man left on the earth. Think about it: An entire planet of people and only one person was still loyal to God. The avenue through which the Messiah would come was almost closed. So God made a "judgment." It was not a judicial judgment. It was a judgment of what was needed to save His precious creation. God decided—judged—that He must protect the family of the one man left loyal to Him so that the Messiah could come, lest every single human be lost. Thus, God sent the flood not as a legal punishment for sin, but as a therapeutic intervention for all humanity, for those who died before the flood (they still needed Jesus to come) and those who have lived since. And also for those who died in the flood.

Noah preached for 120 years, warning of the coming flood and proclaiming God's grace in providing the ark for anyone who was willing to get on board. No one else did. But think of the gracious opportunity the flood provided those rebellious people. The rains and rising waters were evidence that Noah had been telling the truth. Those evidences gave the rebellious people time to repent before their mortal lives were lost and to experience salvation and receive eternal life. They would be like the thief on the cross next to Christ; he had lived rebelliously but, at the end of his life, he accepted Jesus and received salvation even though his temporal death was unavoidable. The flood was a therapeutic act to keep open the avenue for Messiah to save the world, but it was also therapeutic for the people of that time, giving them one final opportunity to repent. What the flood was not was an infliction of judicial punishment for sin. Even for those who insist on believing the lie that God's law functions like Satan's law, I would remind them that even in their false narrative, the judgment for sin is a future event—and

punishment for sin is not inflicted before judgment. Thus, the flood is not judicial in any shape or fashion. It is therapeutic.

We find God's "judgments" throughout history to fall into this category. God's "judgments" on Egypt were His therapeutic interventions to expose the Egyptian gods as false and to turn the hearts of the people—both Hebrew *and* Egyptian—to Him for salvation. We find God's "judgments" in the life of Jonah: When God sent him to Nineveh, and he ran away to avoid it, God sent the great fish; then after the warning was delivered and the Ninevites repented, God "judged" that destruction wasn't necessary. In other words, God's "judgment" was that the most therapeutic action was to send a message of warning, which worked. Further, God knew that Jonah suffered with certain prejudices and that this would be therapeutic for Jonah as well.

There is another aspect of God's healing, therapeutic judgment: His work in the hearts and minds of people. David understood this and prayed:

Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me and guide me in the everlasting way (Psalm 139:23, 24 GNT).

Malachi describes this judgment:

"Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will **come to his temple**; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; **he will purify the Levites** and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. **"So I will come near to you for judgment"** (Malachi 3:1-5 NIV84).

This is the "judgment" of the Great Heavenly Physician, our Creator: examining us, diagnosing what is wrong in us, and determining what is the best therapeutic intervention to bring to bear to heal and restore us. This is the judgment of our High Priest going on in heaven as He examines the people and prepares them for His return, to complete His healing of them so that when He does come, we will be like Him—for "we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2 NIV84). This healing, this transformation, this final work of preparation is what Malachi describes above—the cleansing of our temples, the purifying of the Levites (His people today), is all taught metaphorically in the Day of Atonement rituals. (You can read more about this incredible truth in our [\*Heavenly Sanctuary and Investigative Judgment for the Modern World\*](#) pamphlet.)

Just as with the first judgment, the second judgment is also not a judicial process. It is God's judgment of what is therapeutically needed for the plan of salvation to be realized on both a global and an individual scale.

## The Third Judgment

The third judgment is the judgment that the righteous render during the thousand years after they are taken to heaven and all the evidence of history is before them.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to **judge**. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6 NIV84).

This is also not a judicial process; it is an answering of all the questions people have about the great controversy. It is the assessment, discerning, and settling of minds regarding how God's laws govern all reality. It is the confirmation of what sin does and how salvation occurs—and why some are saved and others are not when God loves all equally, wants all to be saved, and is all powerful.

This judgment by the saints includes more than judging why some of our friends and loved ones are not in heaven; it also includes judging what the angels did and how they possibly could have rebelled: "Do you not know that we will **judge** angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3 NIV84).

In the future, during the Millennium, the saints will review the history of what transpired on earth and the lives of the lost, humans and angels alike, and they will judge that there was nothing more that God could have done. God's design laws and government will stand vindicated, and God will not be falsely blamed for any soul not being in heaven. Without this judgment, doubt about God's goodness would remain in the hearts and minds of those, who like the thief on the cross, were saved near the end of their lives and didn't have time to work through all their doubts and misunderstandings. This is the judgment in which the saved exercise their God-given ability to think, reason, discern and settle all their questions so that sin will never arise again.

The third judgment is not a judicial process but a review of reality, of actual history, of applying our understanding of the design laws of God and making the judgment that all who are lost are lost because that is what they prefer and that there was nothing more God could have done for them.

## The Fourth Judgment

The fourth and final judgment is the judgment that occurs at the end of the thousand years. It is often called the Great White Throne Judgment.

I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. ... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were **judged** according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:11, 12 NIV84).

Surely this judgment must be judicial ... right? No, it isn't.

What is recorded in the books of life? The names of people (Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:15, 21:27). But in Scripture, names are symbolic of one's character. So, what is recorded is our actual characters, which we have developed through our judgment of God—our judgment to trust Him, to open our hearts to Him, to embrace His design laws and methods of truth, love, and liberty or not. Our judgments of God result in whether we open the heart and are reborn—or harden our hearts in selfishness. Our characters develop along whichever line our judgment decides about God, whether we trust Him and His methods or reject them. Thus, we are judged, diagnosed, based on what is the actual condition of our character.

Here's another way to say it: The books record the accurate picture of who we are in heart—they are like medical records. The records don't determine the condition; they merely record the condition.

This is exactly what Jesus taught when He said:

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on **the day of judgment** for every careless word they have spoken. **For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned** (Matthew 12:33-37 NIV84).

What is being described? Character—the actual condition of each heart, a diagnosis of what the reality actually is. God is the God of reality, the builder of all Creation. His laws are the protocols upon which life operates. There has never been a heavenly judicial law court like humans make; the idea that God is an arbitrary judge who is the source of inflicted punishment for sin is a lie from Satan.

The fourth and final judgment is not judicial; it is the final confirmation of the accurate diagnosis of each heart and mind:

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still (Revelation 22:11 NKJV).

I invite you to examine the truth of God's Word and make a right judgment about God, for the hour has come for us to worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the seas, and the fountains of water.