

INTERMISSION

So far, we¹ have been discussing Jesus' and His apostle's teachings about eternal life, salvation, and the Judgment. In the first four chapters I developed a conjecture that *salvation* in general does not refer to escaping hell, but instead describes present spiritual liberation and strengthening. Salvation is thus effected by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit — the new covenant relationship in which God counsels us in righteousness and empowers us to be faithful. This indwelling is what Jesus often means by **eternal life**.

In other words, our salvation addresses the problem God faced throughout the entire Old Testament: *How can I have a faithful people with a heart for Me?* rather than the nowhere-mentioned problem *How can I get people into heaven?*

The immediate (for purposes of reading this book) benefit of entertaining this notion of salvation is that it allows us to discuss Judgment as a separate topic from salvation. We can take a sober, penetrating look at what scripture says about this event without constantly worrying *What does this say about Christ?* or *What does this imply about salvation?*

Much of what we're told about the Judgment comes from our assumptions that tie salvation to it. Once we remove those assumptions, we can bravely affirm truths that earlier might have left us feeling conflicted.

So, as we look into the Bible's teaching on God's Judgment, please try to keep at bay the "what would this mean about..." concerns. The last portion of this book is devoted to addressing those ramifications. I may tear down your mansions, but you will not be left an orphan.

¹And by *we*, I mean *I*.

Preview

The specific content of the next three chapters:

Chapter 5 How does the standard understanding of the Judgment compare to scripture?

Chapter 6 What is a more biblically consistent understanding of the Judgment?

Chapter 7 Jesus promises that those with genuine faith are assured a positive outcome at the Judgment; what does “faith” mean in this context?

If you have not done so already, you may wish to read through the nineteen problems listed in the topical index found on page 173.

**Judgment —
Tearing Down Mansions**

-V-

A CHAIN OF BROKEN LINKS

Imagine you are Abigail, a Jewish mother in Galilee fifty years before Christ. You keep the Torah and look forward longingly for the Messiah to appear and redeem Israel. You have a daughter, Gomer, when you are 30 and die in 7 BC.

Your daughter also lives as a reverent Jew looking forward to the Messiah. She has a child, Mary, and dies in AD 27 never having heard Jesus teach because He had not begun His ministry. Mary, also a reverent Jew, gives birth to a daughter, Rachel, in AD 10.

Rachel grows up and leaves Jerusalem in AD 29 to wed a Jewish man in another land. She lives until AD 60, but none of the apostles visit her city to share the gospel, so she never hears of Jesus at all.

After Rachel leaves, Mary hears Jesus' answer to the scribe in *Luke 10:25–28*. She takes this to heart and lives her final days loving God and her neighbor as best she can. However, she does not live long enough to find out Jesus is the Christ.

So, we have four Jewish women, none of whom could have faith in Jesus as a savior or any of the other standard beliefs of Christianity. To summarize:

| Woman | Situation |
|---------|--|
| Abigail | Right place at wrong time |
| Gomer | Right place and time, didn't hear message |
| Mary | Right place and time, only heard Jesus' moral message but obeyed |
| Rachel | Wrong place, right time |

Which of these women pass the Judgment?

"None" would be the simplest answer, except we know from *Luke 13:28–29* that those who came before Jesus are not so easily dismissed. Once it's clear

some non-believers are accepted, a whole can of worms explodes in your face, for you have to explain why people in 1st century BC who never heard of Christ might pass the Judgment while those who never heard in 1st century AD cannot.

If “believing in a coming savior” is the criterion, then all the Jews in the last several centuries before Christ make it in (including those who stoned the prophets God sent) while Rahab, Job, and Noah are left in hell.

Jews did not begin believing in a unique savior until after David’s reign. And the idea of looking for “a savior to reconcile God and man” shows up nowhere in their history. The Messiah shown in the prophets clearly comes as a military/political leader to vindicate God’s people over the nations that oppressed them. The Jews looked forward to a savior who would *turn* Israel back to God, not *reconcile* Israel to God — certainly not one to reconcile *the world* to God. The Jewish mindset about what Jesus came to do *for Israel* is illustrated by Zechariah before Jesus was born (*Luke 1:67–75*), by Jesus while He lived (*Matthew 10:5–6; 15:22–24; Luke 5:32; 19:9–10*), and by the apostles after He died (*Luke 24:21*).

The question of how those who came before Christ can “make it” is one of many problems for evangelicals. This chapter probes the logic behind their dogma, which resembles a chain:

1. God, as an infinitely good and perfect being, cannot tolerate unrighteous creatures in heaven.
2. Any sin is enough to make someone unrighteous in God’s eyes, so we have all disqualified ourselves.
3. Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice so God could transfer/forgive our sin.
4. Those who believe are no longer in danger of condemnation because their sins have been removed/forgiven.
5. Those who do not believe do not receive forgiveness. Sins cannot be forgiven “for free” without compromising God’s perfect justice.
6. Those lacking faith cannot repay God for their unforgiven sin. So, they are cast into eternal suffering as objects of God’s wrath.

Your church, or the Christians who have preached to you, may have only emphasized some subset of the above or explained some parts differently, but the discussion here is likely applicable to whatever version you’ve heard.

We’ll examine each link to find this chain of logic comes from human philosophy rather than biblical evidence. This chapter is not designed primarily to explain how the Judgment works. Its point is to show how it *doesn’t*.

Link 1: No Unrighteousness in God's Presence

There is no passage supporting the idea that unrighteousness cannot exist in God's presence.¹ People just take it as a given based on their understanding of God. That's dangerous reasoning from the start, basing an entire theology about heaven and hell on a principle the Bible never claims.

But the situation is more dire than mere silence. Satan is as *unrighteous* a creature you could hope to find, yet God not only allows him an audience, but Satan stays in heaven with his angels until the resurrection of Christ.

In Job, Satan comes and presents himself to God. The Lord does not come looking for him. When God asks **Where have you come from?** in *Job 1:7*, Satan's answer **From roving about on the earth, and from walking back and forth across it** certainly does not sound like Satan is still on the earth.

Revelation 12:7–12 is even clearer. We are told there is **no longer any place found in heaven for him and his angels**. Satan is accusing people **before God** and is **cast down** to the earth. The timing is definitely upon Christ's resurrection. The angels defeat Satan **by the blood of the lamb**, and only *after the ruling authority of His Christ* has come. This ruling authority came when Christ accomplished what God had set before Him to do (*Philippians 2:9–11* and *Hebrews 2:9*). And, obviously, Satan can hardly be accusing **our brothers** in heaven if this is somehow a picture of his pre-creation defeat.

Regardless of our take on Satan, *John 8:44* and *1st John 3:8–10* indicate that the devil can hardly be considered righteous. If Satan is allowed in God's presence, one is hard-pressed to say God is *incapable* of tolerating the unrighteous.

But what counts as *unrighteous* in God's eyes? That's the next link.

Link 2: One Sin Enough — All are Unrighteous

No passage says a single sin destroys our righteousness.² Evangelicals make that claim based on their belief about how God should be. This philosophy is applied to a few verses Paul writes that are taken out of context to suggest all people start off condemned to hell.

¹Some give the Garden of Eden as support, but a close reading of *Genesis 3:22* shows God expelled Adam and Eve not by necessity but rather by choice.

²In fact, we should probably stop using the term "righteousness" because it has gained a connotation somewhat afiel from the meaning of the word. The meaning the word has attained colors our reasoning as we read the Bible.

Lucky for us, the whole Bible portrays the nature of God's Judgment, and it violently opposes the notion that all are unrighteous and belong, by nature, in hell. Of course all have sinned, but the culture Paul addresses does not think absolute, lifelong perfection is required to be righteous and/or have a place in the coming kingdom, nor does the Bible make such a claim. *Ezekiel 18:27* and *33:19* condemn the modern view: **But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them.** This exposes two problems at one stroke. First, the scripture would be meaningless if living righteously before God were impossible. Second, it gives the lie to the idea that a single sin condemns us.

Furthermore, scripture verifies that this righteousness comes from doing God's will. Is that not what *Luke 1:6* says about Elizabeth and Zechariah? **They were both righteous in the sight of God, following all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly.** This doesn't mean they are *perfect* as we modern Western Christians would use the term. Then again, Luke is not a modern Westerner. [For an example of this Jewish understanding, consider the question posed to Christ in *Matthew 19:16*, **Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?** If the Jews think absolute perfection is required to be righteous and/or have a stake in the *O'lam Ha-Ba*, there would be no debate about how much is "enough."]

We simply *must* get out of our heads the definition of righteousness the modern church has hammered into our skulls if we are to understand the Jewish writers of the New Testament.

It's instructive to look more deeply at these two aspects (Are all unrighteous? Does God judge by a perfect standard?) to see how clear the Bible is. You may also want to look up "righteous" in an online Bible search and see how the modern take would make much of the Bible nonsensical.

All Unrighteous?

King David murdered a man out of adulterous lust, yet for centuries God showed mercy to Judah based solely on David's worth in God's eyes.³ In *1st Kings 9:4*, God refers to David as one who **walked in uprightness** and had a **heart of integrity**. This example is doubly important because the key passage (*Romans 3:10–18*) Christians take as suggesting all are worthy of hellfire is a quote by David. In reality this quote is a confirmation that the Law had not kept (or made) Israel faithful. Paul is indicting the Jews with their own scripture (the psalms Paul quotes), hence the wordplay in *Romans 3:19* — ... **whatever the**

³*2nd Chronicles 21:7* is one of many examples.

law (Torah) says, it says to those under the Law (the Jews). The Law that had defined Israel's covenant had not produced a faithful nation (even at its height, during David's reign), so how could Jewish Christians possibly think to force circumcision and other aspects of the Mosaic law on Gentile believers? Having begun in the Spirit, how could they believe the Law of Moses was the way to continue their journey into Christ's righteousness? (*Galatians 3:3*)

According to *Genesis 6:9*, **Noah was a godly man; he was blameless among his generations. He walked with God.** Does that mean Noah never sinned? No. It just means perfection is not the baseline for judgment by God, who tells him in *Genesis 7:1*, **I consider you godly among this generation.**

Enoch and Elijah, who were taken directly to God, represent a significant problem for evangelical theology. (The Reformed Presbyterian Church's official stance is that these two were taken to the edge of heaven but had to wait outside!) Daniel, Noah, and Job are called righteous in *Ezekiel 14:14*.

Jesus references **righteous** people from Old Testament times in *Matthew 13:17*, and Cornelius (who was not a Jew and did not believe in Christ) finds favor with God in *Acts 10:3–4*. In *2nd Peter 2:9*, after a long discussion of exclusively Old Testament personages who were not even in Abraham's covenant, Peter refers to God separating the **godly** from the **unrighteous**.⁴

Matthew 25:37 is particularly hard to dismiss, for not only does Jesus call people **righteous**, but it is clearly based on their own actions. Is Jesus a liar? Or does He just not know of what He speaks?

One Sin Enough? How does God Judge?

Furthermore, God repeatedly shows a Judgment that is relative to the enlightenment one is given, not an absolute one. The support for this is truly massive. Throughout the Bible, God judges based on five factors:

- Judgment by Comparison: God judges based on what other humans did. (E.g., *Matthew 11:21–24; 23:29–33; Luke 11:31–32; and Romans 2:27*)
- Judgment by Enlightenment: The more understanding of God you have, the more is expected. *Matthew 23:29–33* is an interesting illustration, where Jesus places the guilt of past generations on the Pharisees, who should have learned from their mistakes. *John 15:22–24; Isaiah 65:12;*

⁴Other verses you might like to investigate in this regard: *Genesis 15:6; 26:4–5; 2nd Samuel 22:20–27; 1st Kings 15:3,14; Isaiah 1:21; 3:10; Jeremiah 2:2; 11:16; Jeremiah 24:5; Ezekiel 18:5–13; 19:20; Micah 7:2; Malachi 2:6; Luke 1:6; Luke 2:25; 1st Peter 2:19; and James 5:16.*

Jeremiah 36:31; and *1st Samuel 3:13* are other cases. The book of Zephaniah appears devoted to this idea. *James 3:1* gives a post-resurrection example demonstrating not all people will be judged by the same standard.

- Judgment by Conscience: *Genesis 20:5–6*; *Romans 1:18–19*; *1st Corinthians 8:10*; and *James 4:17* illustrate how people are judged (or not) based on their own understanding of right and wrong.
- Judgment of Hypocrisy: People are judged by the same judgment they use for others. *Luke 6:37* casts this in very general terms — **Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven.** Other examples are *James 2:13*; *5:9*; *Matthew 7:2*; *John 9:41*; and *Romans 2:1*.
- Judgment by Depravity: Occasionally God judges people for being so depraved that they have lost their understanding of right and wrong. (E.g., *Jeremiah 6:15*)

The “one sin makes you unrighteous” axiom is doomed for two separate reasons. First, God’s Word and Christ both call many people **righteous**, though they were guilty of sin. Secondly, the “one sin equals unrighteousness” philosophy claims God holds all to the same standard. Scripture utterly rejects that.

Paul’s letters often contain long arguments meant to address very specific issues. We cannot rip short snippets from their larger context without respect for the particular purposes Paul had in mind and apply them as universal truths, especially when they conflict with acres of scripture.

Link 3: Christ’s Sacrifice and God’s Justice

Christ was definitely a sacrifice, just not in the way (or for the reason) indicated by evangelicals. They use a very small set of verses to claim the core of the gospel involves Jesus as a sacrifice in response to God’s need for justice at the Judgment, but he was far from the focus or claims of the first several centuries of Christianity. There are only two verses in the New Testament that even *use* the Greek word for atonement, so it’s a tough case to make this the nucleus of the gospel.

Chapter 11 elaborates on how Christ was a sacrifice and the relationship between that and God’s mercy. It also engages several verses used to support the modern gospel. For right now, I’ll just point out two major flaws:

- Very few descriptions of the Judgment include any notion of forgiveness of sins, let alone suggest this is the prevailing issue.
- The legalistic transfer of sin from believers to Christ is generally supported by an analogy Paul uses in *Romans 4*. However, there is no discussion whatsoever of *sin* or *guilt* being transferred or forgiven. The foundational example Paul uses is Abram from *Genesis 15:6*, yet in the whole story of God affirming Abram based on faith, there is no transferral of punishment, *nor any place to transfer it*. If justification is through transfer of sin, then how could God justify Abram without any sacrifice or mention of forgiveness? Paul uses the same argument in *Galatians 3:6*, and once again gives no hint of sin, guilt, or punishment being transferred or forgiven. If Abraham's justification was based on the blotting out of his past iniquity, you'd never know it from any account by Paul or Moses.

Link 4: Persistent Forgiveness for Believers

Hebrews 10:24–27 indicates that Jesus' sacrifice does not deal with deliberate sin done after one receives enlightenment. Christians are challenged by this passage, and many turn it into a warning against "falling away." (Though if you don't think losing faith is possible, that presents an altogether different problem.)

But this passage is not about unbelief — not in the sense most people would use the term. It would be pretty surprising if this refers to falling away when the author quotes the Old Testament in *Hebrews 10:30*, saying **The Lord will judge His people**. (They aren't *His* if they've fallen away.) Rather, the author is rebuking certain Christians for hiding their Christianity due to fear of persecution. That isn't unbelief by most standards. When I chose not to tell Danielle (you remember, the Danielle from the first page of chapter one) that I was a Christian, it wasn't because for 15 seconds I no longer believed in Christ — at least not in the way we normally use the term — I was just a coward.

We have to read the text for what it says. It commands people to continue meeting publicly, even in the face of persecution (*10:25*) and encourages them to spur each other to righteous living (*10:24*) because Christ's sacrifice does not work forgiveness for deliberate sins of believers (*10:26*). It must refer to believers, for the writer speaks (*10:29*) to those who have been **made holy**.

This does not mean that those who deliberately sin are hopelessly damned. Recall the whole notion of perfection (of one sort or another) being necessary to escape hell is a crock. That is, after all, the point of this chapter.

This example is not unique. I've already given several passages where Jesus and Paul indicate believers are just as endangered by sin as non-believers are. A particularly potent example is *Matthew 7:23*, where believers who had enough faith to exorcize demons do not escape the consequences of their sin on the day of Judgment. But other, less obvious problems arise when the Bible is read attentively. Consider *James 5:15*. Why on earth is a believer needing forgiveness of sins? And if he is not a believer, how can the prayers of others save him?

Link 5: No Forgiveness Outside the Cross

Those who claim only belief in Christ grants forgiveness would have better luck finding support from the back of a Cracker Jack™ box than from scripture.

It is true that faith in Christ is the **only** way for someone to achieve *regeneration* through the Spirit, but the Bible gives several other means of forgiveness:

- By forgiving others (*Matthew 6:14*)
- By repenting (*2nd Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 55:7; Jeremiah 36:3; Ezekiel 18:27; 33:14–16; and Luke 3:3*)
- By the Church's intervention (*Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; and 2nd Corinthians 2:10*)⁵
- By having someone else pray for us (*Numbers 14:20; 2nd Chronicles 30:18–20; Acts 7:60; and 1st John 5:16*)
- By confessing our sin (*1st John 1:9*)

The point is that God is the One who *chooses* to forgive sins. There are things we can do to provoke this forgiveness, but in the end God will forgive whomever God wishes for whatever reason God wishes, and it really isn't any of our business! If the Lord chooses to forgive someone who rejected Christ, so be it. As we'll discuss later, the question of what really constitutes rejection of Christ is rather a fuzzy one in any event.

A common explanation of the above is that Christ's sacrifice is really the only way God has the ability to forgive sins, and the examples listed are not sufficient for forgiveness themselves but merely "opportunities" for God to grant the forgiveness Christ secured. The problem with this reasoning (other than obviously reading into a raft of scripture a message found nowhere) is the same

⁵These must be taken with a grain of salt. In particular, the first three use a verb tense whose meaning, quite frankly, we simply are not sure of.

as the problem I presented in chapter 2. *Anyone* who believes in God can repent. It requires no knowledge of Jesus, the gospel, or anything else to repent. *Anyone* can be prayed for. *Anyone* can forgive others. The evangelical claim is that only those who believe in Christ have access to forgiveness, yet we see Stephen praying for the Jews who are stoning him after rejecting the gospel.

To claim these promises of forgiveness are valid only for believers contradicts scripture and calls Jesus a liar. If faith in Christ were required to receive forgiveness, one has to wonder how Moses' intercessions for the Israelites (who were busy worshipping a golden calf because their faith had run out!) succeeded (*Exodus 32:9–14*) and God's forgiving of Abimelech (who obviously had no gospel to look forward to, not even being a son of Abraham) in *Genesis 20:17* would be quite puzzling indeed.

Throughout the Old Testament we see several examples where forgiveness, mercy, pardon, or aversion of wrath are accomplished, prophesied, or offered for reasons having nothing to do with sacrifice, often to people who could have nothing akin to *faith in Christ*. In addition to the examples in Exodus and Genesis described above, I would cite *Genesis 18:24–32*; *Numbers 14:19–20*; *16:46–47*; *1st Kings 8:47*; *2nd Kings 5:18–19*; *8:19*; *2nd Chronicles 30:18–20*; *32:25–26*; *Jonah 3:10*, and *Jeremiah 5:1*. The reasons given for this forgiveness/atonement/mercy/pardon are rather diverse, as are the situations. The example of Naaman in *2nd Kings 5* is particularly interesting. He was not a Jew, had no understanding of the gospel, had barely any understanding of God, and asked for forgiveness for a sin *he had not even done yet*.

When I have discussed these examples with evangelicals, their last-ditch defense has been that forgiveness of one or two sins is not going to save someone from hell — only forgiveness of every sin can do that. Thus, these isolated cases are irrelevant. This effort at diversion fails for three different reasons (at least):

- If forgiving a single sin really makes no difference in the end, one has to wonder why Stephen went to the trouble of praying for those who were stoning him.
- The entire conservative evangelical view on salvation is based on God's inability to forgive *any* sin except by appeal to Christ's blood. Obviously, these examples show that to be a false claim unless believers and non-believers alike have access to forgiveness through Christ's blood, which would similarly break the standard reasoning here.
- Two of the means (general repentance and forgiveness of others) do not refer to forgiveness on a sin-by-sin basis anyway.

Christians often cite *John 14:6* (**No one comes to the Father except through me**) and *John 8:24* (**For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins**) to support exclusivity. These refer to regeneration rather than deliverance, both being tied to Jesus' cryptic remark **Where I am going you cannot come**. See chapter eleven for a discussion.

Link 6: No Way to Repay

Evangelicals assume eternal suffering is the only way for God to justly punish us. They do not accept purgatory because it has no basis in their Bible.

Why can't we bear the punishment for our sins during our own lives? This does not mean those actions disappear from the books. We can still be *judged* based on our actions, even if we have paid for them (much as an employer might consider an ex-convict's previous crimes when deciding employment).

The Bible claims that God's wrath is indeed exhausted or spent by suffering in the present. Examples include *Judges 1:7*; *2nd Kings 9:26*; *Isaiah 10:25*; *Lamentations 4:11*; *Jeremiah 51:6,56*; and *Ezekiel 5:13*; *6:12*; *7:8*; *13:15*; *20:8,21*. The two Hebrew terms used in most of these passages highlight the idea of God's wrath not merely being manifest but actually being exhausted or "used up" in these passages. One of those words is the word **shalom**, generally meaning peace, and the other term (**kalah**) is actually the word for ending, ceasing, finishing, completing, or being consumed.

This idea of people bearing the punishment for their sin in their present lifetime is a recurring theme on an individual basis as well. It is, in fact, what is meant by Jesus' words to the Pharisees in *John 8:21* when He warns them **you...die in your sin**. This phrase, meaning to die as the punishment for sin, is found in *Numbers 27:3* and *Ezekiel 3:20*. Other examples of people bearing the punishment of their sin in the present are *Leviticus 20:20*; *22:9*; *Numbers 18:22;32*; *2nd Samuel 12:13*; and *Ezekiel 18:24*.

Thus, since God is able to repay people in their own lifetimes for their sin, the idea that God *must* send all sinners to hell because of "unpaid debt" is lacking in any biblical support.

Silent Assumptions

In addition to errors in these explicit links, there are silent assumptions in evangelical logic that should be exposed.

First, they assume the Judgment bears the likeness of a courtroom where only our guilt for crimes is being investigated. That isn't the picture of the Judgment we see in the Bible. A simple reading of the passages discussing the Judgment shows all our deeds, not just our failures, are considered.

If the Judgment is like a courthouse, it's a rather odd one. The penal code is so strict that all are guilty, the punishment is worse than death and the same for all convicts, but full pardon is given to those who believed a message proffered by a political institution with a history of corruption, hypocrisy, and terror.

Second, while there are passages linking sins to the Judgment, it appears God is concerned not with our individual sins but rather the disposition they suggest. When Jesus says in *Revelation 21:8* that **cowards, unbelievers, the detestable, murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars** will have a place in the **lake that burns with fire and brimstone**, He does not mean "those who have ever been cowards," "those who have ever murdered," etc. David murdered, Moses murdered, Peter was a coward, Rahab was sexually immoral, Abraham lied, and Joseph practiced divination.

This same point is found in *John 3:16–21*; *7:16–17*; and *8:42–44*. John describes that some people naturally walk toward the light and others naturally shy away. Our faith, like our deeds, demonstrates who we really are. If we genuinely want to do God's will, Jesus' commands make sense to us, and we follow them. If we do not, we find a reason not to follow Christ. The condemnation in these verses is based on the logic that our faith or lack thereof in Christ speaks to our desire to be faithful to God. No mention is found of an artificial righteousness, where God merely "declares" us to be safe by putting our sins on Jesus.

The third silent assumption is that the Judgment is best seen as the last act of this era. Based on the Jews' understanding of the end times (and *Revelation*, for that matter), it is just as appropriate (if not more so) to see the Judgment as commencing the next era, or rather a bridge to it.

The finale of our present era is better seen as the devastation prophesied at its end. I mean here the physical *wrath* that Paul and others frequently refer to, the global wrath we see depicted luridly in the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apocalypse.

Summary and Final Notes

If even one of these links were disproved, standard evangelical dogma would be defeated. In fact, we find none have clear support, and most have little else backing them while being refuted by multiple passages.

We have manufactured a Judgment that suits our psychological needs rather than God's attributes and designs. We have our eyes so much on immortality that we've made the Judgment the end of the game. We see it as a wrap-up session where God's sense of justice (or, rather, *our* understanding of that justice) must be served. But the Judgment and its aftermath are not God's opportunity to balance a budget of wrath at the end of the fiscal year.

We've turned the Judgment into a courtroom scene where the purpose is for God to balance accounts, as though every sin is a debt that comes due on the final day. That's not at all the version shown in the Bible, so it is unsurprising that the logic used by evangelicals runs into problems.

Modern doctrine appeals to believers because it gives us a sense of security and superiority. It also effectively prompts evangelism. After all, who would not want to save others from hellfire, especially when the solution is so simple?

It's worthwhile to point out that the Jews for many centuries were *confident* in God's love for them and had faith in the coming Messiah to save them. And it was exactly this confidence that made them ignore and stone the prophets who told them that they really did need to turn from evil and do good or else they, God's beloved, would face the wrath of the Almighty.

God's covenant with them, and even the special love given to David, did not preserve them when they failed to bear fruit. Paul's warns Gentile *believers* to take a lesson from this very act in *Romans 11:20–22*:

Granted! They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but fear! For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps He will not spare you. Notice therefore the kindness and harshness of God — harshness toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in His kindness, otherwise you also will be cut off.

A longer reading of this passage and the prophets shows that the "unbelief" here, while manifested in the Jews' general (but not total) rejection of Christ, was actually due to their previous history of wickedness. (c.f. *Matthew 13:13*).