

21. How the World Ends – Part 1

Previously...

Since creation, Yahweh had intended to have a personal relationship with mankind. Yahweh is the all-good God and stands for all that is good. As a good God, when He created spirit beings and mankind, He created them with personal responsible choice. This means that they can freely choose how to relate to Him. They can choose to have a relationship with Him or they can choose to be His enemies.



The Shining Star chose to be Yahweh's enemy because he wanted to be God. Worse, he led other spirit beings to rebel against Yahweh. Thereafter known as Satan (or the accuser), he went after Yahweh's most special creation: mankind. In the garden of Eden, Satan deceived the first man and woman by telling them they could be like God.



Instead of trusting Yahweh's words, the first man and woman chose to trust Satan. They broke their friendship with Yahweh and they and their descendants would now live separated from Him. Being separated from the all-good God means they would die physically and later, be confined to eternal separation from Him in the lake of fire.



However, in His mercy, Yahweh promised to make a way for them and all mankind to be reconciled to Him. Since the time He made the promise in the garden of Eden, Yahweh has intentionally worked in such a way that all people on earth would have an opportunity to get to know Him, be reconciled to Him and enjoy eternal life with Him.



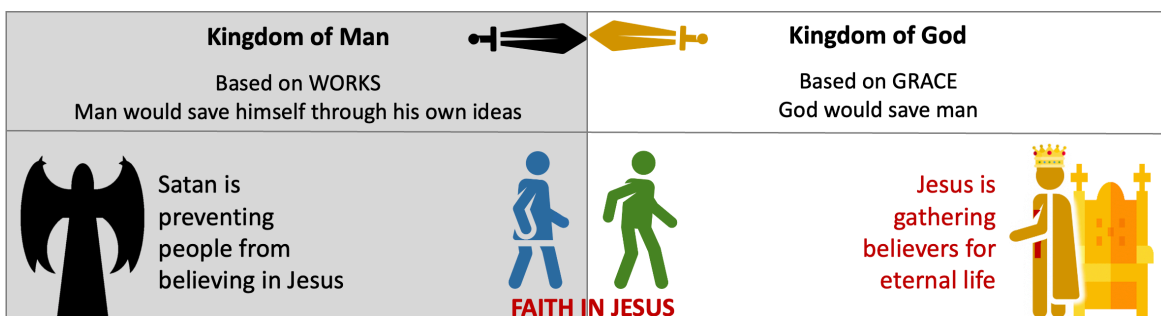
God first worked with the nation of Israel, Abraham's descendants. But when they too, nationally rejected Him, He paused His plan with them and started the church age.



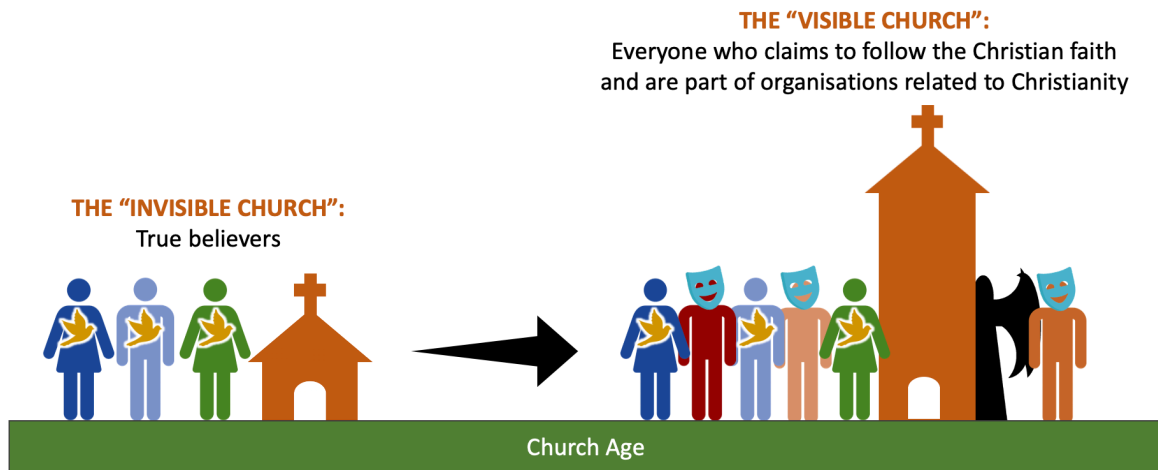
During the church age, anyone who puts their faith in Jesus would be declared righteous and become part of the church.



However, Yahweh did not want believers to be ignorant or naive about the church age. So He warned believers that it would be a time of battle for the lives of people. Jesus, through His church, would gather people for eternal life. But Satan and his demons would do all they can to prevent people from believing in Jesus.



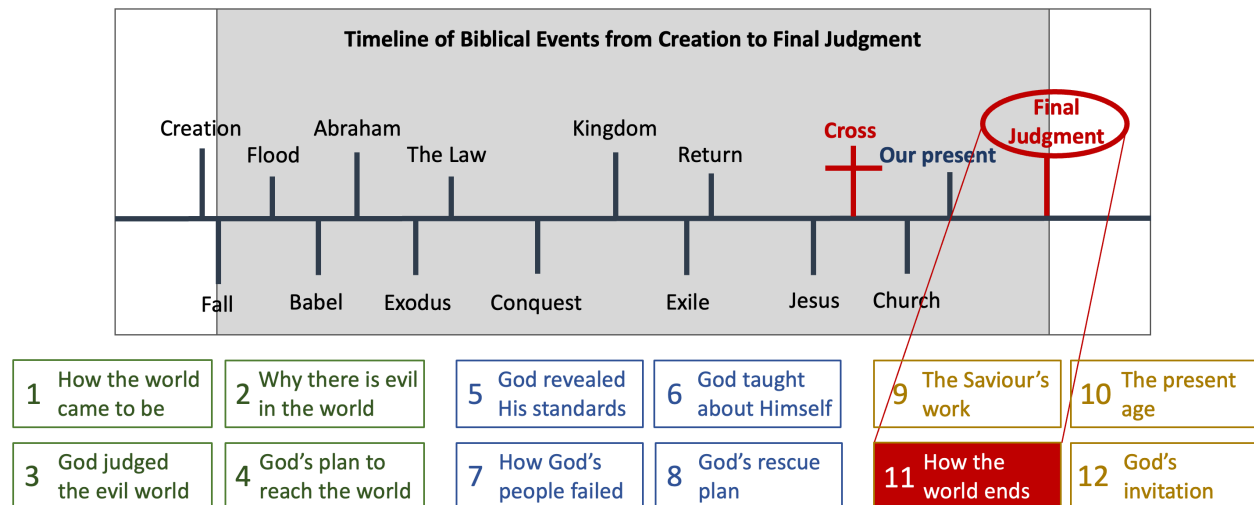
This means that while there will be faithful believers of Jesus during the church age, the Bible warns that there will also be (i) fake believers, (ii) failed believers and (iii) false teachers.



The New Testament portion of the Bible says a lot about what to expect during the church age. However, the church age will not go on forever. Jesus will put a definite end to all of it.



In this lesson, we will look at what the Bible says about how the church age ends.

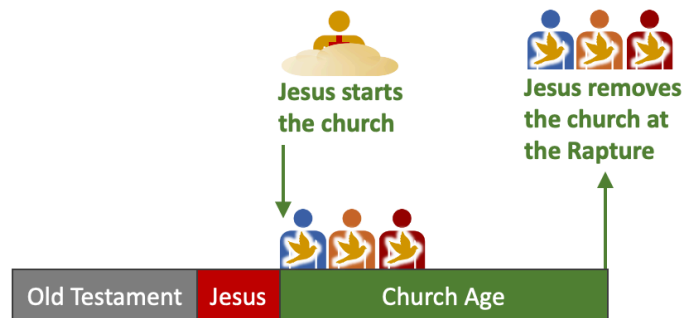


HOW THE CHURCH ENDS

The Rapture

Yahweh says that the church age will end suddenly without any warning. It will end with Jesus coming to remove believers from the earth so that they can be with Him in heaven.

To describe this event, the Bible uses the Greek word “*harpazo*”, which means to “carry off by force” or “to snatch away”. When the Bible was translated into Latin, the word “*rapio*” was used. From this Latin word, we get the English term “rapture”.



At the Rapture, the Bible says that Jesus will come in the air and:

- raise to life all church-age believers who had died earlier on.
- carry away to heaven all living believers from the earth.
- leave unbelievers on the earth.



In explaining this future event, the apostle Paul referred to:

- believers who have already died (he refers to them as “those who sleep in death”) and
- believers who are still alive on the last day the church is on earth.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (NIV)

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Both believers who have already died and believers alive on that future day will be gathered to be with Jesus. This event is for church-age believers, the ones who have the Holy Spirit living in them permanently.

Believers will receive their resurrection or glorified bodies

At the Rapture, all church-age believers will receive their promised resurrection bodies:

- Those who have already died (at any point during the church age) and have been living as souls and spirits in heaven will be given new physical, resurrection bodies. They will be “raised to life” as complete people once again.
- Those who are alive on earth will have their physical, mortal bodies instantly exchanged for resurrection bodies. They will not have to go through physical death.



This is how the Bible explains it.

1 Corinthians 15:51–57

⁵¹ But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! ⁵² It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. ⁵³ For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

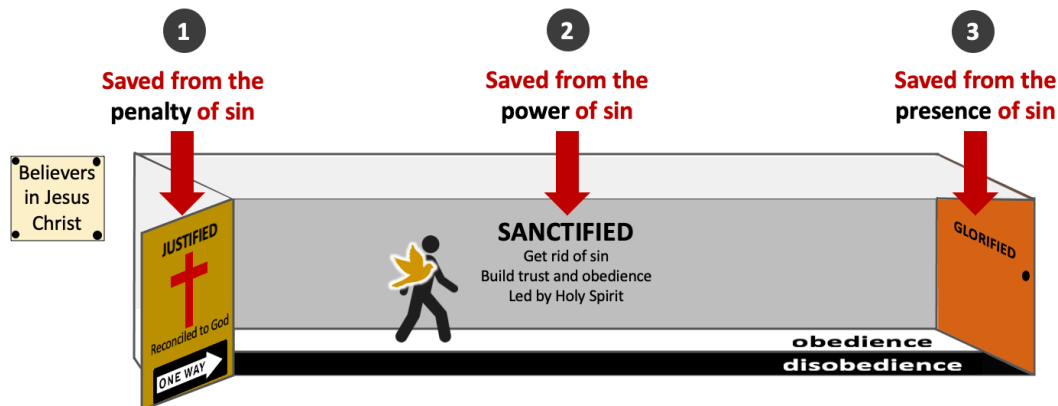
⁵⁴ Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶ For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. ⁵⁷ But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the promise that Yahweh has made: those who believe in Him are justified (saved from the penalty of sin) and they will definitely be glorified (saved from the presence of sin forever). It will happen at this future event for all church-age believers in Jesus.



Believers will temporarily live in heaven in their new bodies

Jesus will take all church-age believers into heaven with Him. While He was on earth, this was what He told His disciples.

John 14:1–3

¹ “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.



Jesus said He was going to heaven to prepare a place for believers. Then at the right time, He would return to get them. This will happen at the Rapture.

Why does He need to prepare a place in heaven? This is because the physical, resurrection bodies that all church-age believers will receive need a physical place to stay. So this place in heaven will be able to house physical bodies.

Believers will face the Judgment Seat of Christ

While in heaven, all believers will come before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ. What is this?

The Judgment Seat of Christ is the event where Jesus will review the life of every church-age believer. Paul explained this evaluation process in these two passages.



Romans 14:10c, 12

¹⁰ Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹² Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)

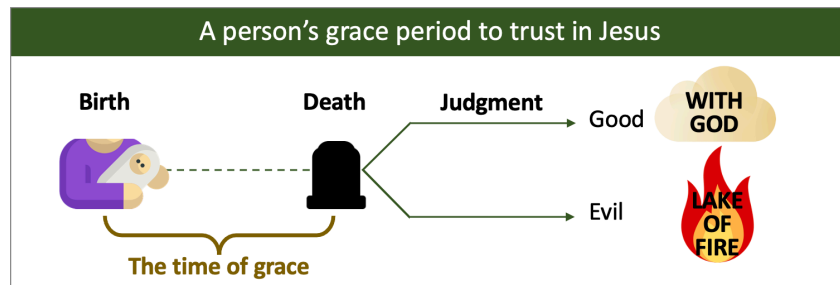
For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The phrase the “judgment seat” is translated from a single Greek word: “*bema*” (pronounced “BAY-mah”).

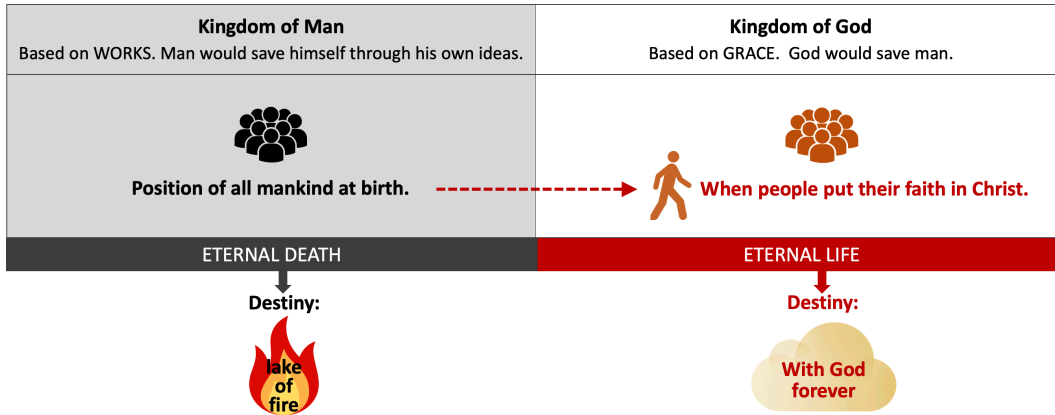


The bema was a raised platform where judges in Greek and Roman times sat to judge cases brought before them.

At Jesus’ judgment seat, He will not be deciding the believer’s eternal destiny. Where the believer will spend eternity would have already been determined based on their decision about Jesus while they were alive on earth.



Once people die, their eternal destiny is already settled. They can no longer change their minds.



Then what is the point of the Judgment Seat of Christ?

It is to reward believers for how they have lived their lives. Have they cooperated with the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to guide their lives so as to live in obedience to Yahweh? Have they done “good work” in their lives and been useful Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

In the following passage, Paul explained the principle of how God will evaluate believers.

1 Corinthians 3:11–15

¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.
¹² Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.

¹³ But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person’s work has any value. ¹⁴ If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

The foundation of the believer’s life is faith in Jesus Christ. Believers can build on that foundation with precious materials: gold, silver and jewels. These represent good works done for God that are valuable.

Or they can build with wood, hay or straw. These represent works that are worthless in God’s eyes.

At the Bema, Jesus will put each believer’s works through a fire to test how valuable they are.

- Gold, silver and jewels will survive the fiery test. Believers will be rewarded for these.
- Wood, hay and straw will be burnt up and believers will gain no rewards for these.



Through this fiery test, Paul says that some believers will suffer great loss as they will have nothing to show for their lives. Though they have no rewards for living poorly, they will still receive eternal life (because that is secured by Jesus).

Note that at the Bema, God will not evaluate believers' lives before they put their faith in Christ. Both their prior sins and "good works" will not be reviewed.

- Their past sins have been forgiven by Jesus.
- And their so-called "good works" were done while still in rebellion towards God so He does not value them.

But what are considered "good works" and what are "bad" or "useless works"? Paul explained:

1 Corinthians 4:5

So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due.

"Good works" are those done with the right motives, attitudes and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are done to please and honour God.

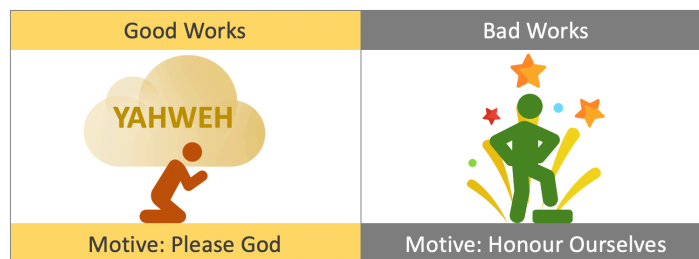
"Bad works" are done with the wrong motives or attitudes, without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are done to please and honour the individuals themselves.

For example, when Jesus was talking to believers about giving to those who are needy, this is what He said.

Matthew 6:1, 4

¹ "Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.

⁴ Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.



The rewards: roles in the future Kingdom of God

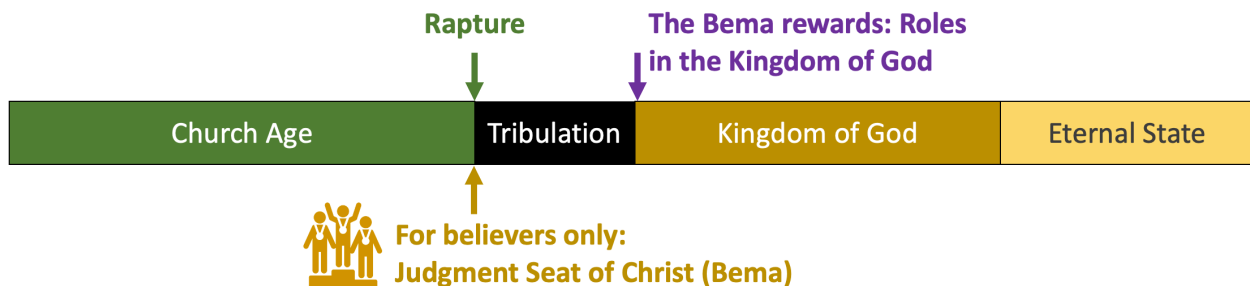
Some people wonder what kind of rewards Jesus will be handing out.

Others think that the Kingdom will be like the utopia promised but never achieved by communism—a state without hierarchy or rank. They think everyone will get the same quantity and quality of rewards.

But the Bible says that Jesus will hand out different levels of rewards and honours, as well as different roles and responsibilities, to believers. These rewards will be based on how they are evaluated by Him at the Bema.

What are the rewards?

They are roles and jobs in the coming Kingdom of God on earth. God wants responsible believers to be in charge of nations, cities, areas of work and more.



Jesus explained this to His disciples when the Jews thought that He was about to restart the Kingdom of God on earth immediately. He told them the Parable of the Ten Servants or Ten Minas.



Let's turn to our Bibles and read Luke 19:11–27.

(The leader reads aloud. For reference, the verses are also here.)

Luke 19:11–27

¹¹ The crowd was listening to everything Jesus said. And because he was nearing Jerusalem, he told them a story to correct the impression that the Kingdom of God would begin right away.

¹² He said, “A nobleman was called away to a distant empire to be crowned king and then return. ¹³ Before he left, he called together ten of his servants and divided among them ten pounds of silver, saying, ‘Invest this for me while I am gone.’ ¹⁴ But his people hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We do not want him to be our king.’

¹⁵ “After he was crowned king, he returned and called in the servants to whom he had given the money. He wanted to find out what their profits were. ¹⁶ The first servant reported, ‘Master, I invested your money and made ten times the original amount!’

¹⁷ “‘Well done!’ the king exclaimed. ‘You are a good servant. You have been faithful with the little I entrusted to you, so you will be governor of ten cities as your reward.’

¹⁸ “The next servant reported, ‘Master, I invested your money and made five times the original amount.’

¹⁹ “‘Well done!’ the king said. ‘You will be governor over five cities.’

²⁰ “But the third servant brought back only the original amount of money and said, ‘Master, I hid your money and kept it safe. ²¹ I was afraid because you are a hard man to deal with, taking what isn’t yours and harvesting crops you didn’t plant.’

²² “‘You wicked servant!’ the king roared. ‘Your own words condemn you. If you knew that I’m a hard man who takes what isn’t mine and harvests crops I didn’t plant, ²³ why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’

²⁴ “Then, turning to the others standing nearby, the king ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’

²⁵ “‘But, master,’ they said, ‘he already has ten pounds!’

²⁶ “‘Yes,’ the king replied, ‘and to those who use well what they are given, even more will be given. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.

²⁷ And as for these enemies of mine who didn’t want me to be their king—bring them in and execute them right here in front of me.’”

Make choices on how to live

Jesus told His disciples this parable to say that, like the nobleman in the parable, He would go away for a time. He was confirming the delay of the Kingdom. He would return later to start the earthly Kingdom.

In the meantime, Jesus explained that this waiting period was a time when they would have to decide how they would live as believers.

Each of the king’s servants was given a sum of money (“minas”). Each mina was worth about a pound (½ kilogram) of silver, or about three months’ pay.

This was a picture of how God gives every believer an area of responsibility to take care of while waiting for the coming Kingdom. A believer’s “mina” could be their family, job, money, community, etc. It would also include sharing God’s history and truth with unbelievers.



The “mina” would also include their “spiritual gift”. What would be a spiritual gift? The Bible says that the moment a person becomes a believer, they would be given at least one spiritual gift, possibly more. This spiritual gift would be specifically given to believers so that they could use it to help and serve other believers.

This was what Jesus' disciple, Peter, explained to believers.

1 Peter 4:10–11

¹⁰ God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. ¹¹ Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

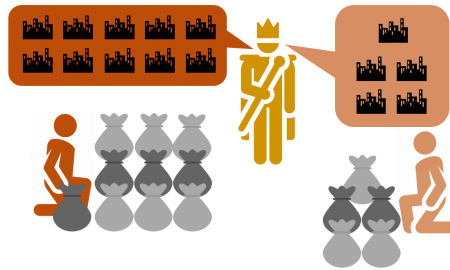


Believers can choose what to do with the “minas” that Yahweh has given them.

Using the parable, Jesus was explaining the different choices they could make.

Good work

The first two servants were a picture of faithful believers who worked hard with the minas that God had given them. They received a good evaluation from the king and their reward was to each be placed in charge of a number of cities.



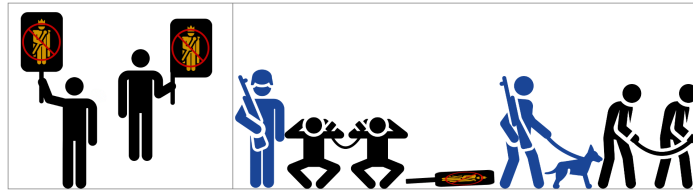
Bad work

The third servant did not do anything with his mina and the king had a very harsh evaluation of him. This lazy servant was still in the kingdom (still saved from the penalty of sin), but he ended up with no reward or role.



Unbelievers

As for the people who rejected the king, they were all killed for rebelling against him.



This parable is both an encouragement and a warning to believers. Will they do the work that God has given to them and be rewarded with responsibilities and privileges in the Kingdom of God? Or will they ignore the work He has assigned and thus lose their rewards?

Yahweh wants all believers to do the work He has given them with diligence and joy. He wants believers to be a blessing to both unbelievers and other believers and then receive the rewards He wants to heap on them.

These are the things that church-age believers will go through at the time of the Rapture. They will receive their resurrection bodies and be rewarded at the Bema. Then they will occupy the rooms in heaven that Jesus has prepared for them. They will remain there while the next event unfolds on earth.

What happens next?

As the Creator-Owner and God of the universe, Yahweh does not intend to let sin, evil, pain and suffering go on forever. In the next lesson, we will look at what the Bible says about the future of the world after the church age.



Bible reading for review

1 Thessalonians 4:1–5:11; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 3:11–15, 1 Corinthians 15:1–58