

KINGDOM.

LESSON 47

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. *Pray* for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God’s kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> HOSEA 2, JOEL 2, AMOS 5 and JONAH 1
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Hosea 2, Joel 2, Amos 5 and Jonah 1). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSES IN ROMANS]</i> (20) ROMANS 16:17
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Review two by two.

(20) Romans 16:17. I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[THE PARABLES OF JESUS]</i> THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS
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“The parable of the sheep and the goats” in Matthew 25:31-46 is a parable about JUDGEMENT IN GOD’S KINGDOM.

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

This is not really *a parable*, although it contains *elements of a parable*. For example, sheep and goats often intermingle during the day when they graze. But in the evening, when the shepherd calls his sheep, the goats do not respond! The sheep hear the voice of their shepherd and gather around him (John 10:1-6). But the goats have to be driven together.

Matthew 25:31-46 is a dramatic description of the final judgement day, making use of this symbolism.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of ‘the story’ of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Matthew chapter 24 and 25.

It describes the final judgement day. These two chapters consist of Jesus’ teaching on *the last things* (eschatology). The message of these two chapters is that Christians should be watchful in view of Christ’s return when he will judge and reward. The prophecies in these chapters have reference to both events in the near future and to events at the end time.

In Matthew 24, the approaching judgement upon Jerusalem (by the Romans in 70 A.D.) and the final judgement day of the whole world (at the second coming of Christ) are intertwined to form one great teaching on the last things (that is, the last things for Jerusalem and the last things for this world)! Jerusalem's approaching catastrophe serves as a type, that is, as an example that illustrates the tribulation at the end time.

In Matthew 25, the parable of the ten virgins teaches that watchfulness and preparedness throughout every day is required of every Christian, because Christ's second coming is unknown. The parable of the talents teaches that faithfulness and diligence in using their God-given abilities and opportunities is required of every Christian before the final judgement day. At this point, Jesus described the final judgement day in dramatic and frequent symbolic language.

(2) The story is in the form of a description of the final judgement day.

(3) The explanation or application is in the same form.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

The judgement throne. This is relevant, because it is directly related to the final judgement day at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Is the judgement throne on the earth or in the air? Based on Zechariah 14:4, some Christians place the throne on earth. However, Zechariah 14:1-5 does not speak of a throne! Zechariah describes the last things on "the Day of the Lord" in the Old Testament manner, that is, in terms of events happening to the people of Israel in the land of Israel (cf. Revelation 20:8-9).

In the book of Revelation, the throne of God and the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is generally in the upper regions (Revelation 4:1-2; 5:6; 20:11-12; cf. Matthew 19:28-29; 25:31). The throne of judgement probably stands in the air where the true Christians will "be caught up together" or "snatched up" (Greek: *harpazō*) (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Revelation 12:5) in order to meet Jesus Christ with joy at his second coming on the clouds, to welcome him and marvel at him.

Without any biblical warrant some Christians teach that three different judgement thrones at three different occasions must be distinguished:

- They think that "the judgement seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10) is only for the judgement of believers at the so-called rapture or "the first return" (Greek: *parousia*) of Christ, 7 or 3½ years before the so-called second return of Christ. They assume that the judgement seat of Christ is in heaven.
- They think that "Christ's throne in glory" (Matthew 25:31) is for the judgement of all the nations except Israel at the so-called appearance/revelation or "the second return of Christ" (Greek: *apokalupsis*) after which Christ will establish the so-called Millennial Kingdom on earth. They assume that Christ's throne in glory stands on earth (Zechariah 14:4).
- And they think that "the great white throne" (Revelation 20:11) is only for the judgement of all the unbelievers at the end of the so-called millennial kingdom of Christ on earth, (1000 years after the second of the previous two final judgements). They assume that the great white throne is also in heaven.

However, these three different names all refer to the one and only final judgement throne of Christ at his one and only second coming!¹

The Judge. This is relevant, because he is directly related to the final judgement day at the second coming of Christ. Who is this Judge? Is he God the Father or Jesus Christ?

In the outgoing divine works such as creation, providence, redemption and judgement, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity (Triune God) co-operate. Nevertheless, in the present passage it is clear that the honour of judging is conferred on Jesus Christ as the Mediator, as a reward for his accomplished mediatory work (Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 13:41; 16:27; 26:64; 28:18; John 5:22-23,27-29; Philippians 2:9-10). Jesus is called "the King" (John 18:36; Revelation 19:16) and he is clothed with all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 13:3; Ephesians 1:22).

The One sitting on the great white throne in Revelation 20:11 is Jesus Christ (Matthew 19:28; Revelation 5:6), who comes to reap the final harvest (Revelation 14:14). The present earth and sky (of stars) flee from his presence (Revelation 6:14; 20:11). This does not mean that the universe is "annihilated" at the final judgement, but rather that it is totally "restored" (Acts 3:21), "liberated" (Romans 8:21) or "renewed" (Revelation 21:1,5; cf. 2 Peter 3:10).

¹ The different names for Jesus Christ also do not point to different christ!

The angels. They are relevant, because they are directly related to the final judgement day at the second coming of Christ. What are the functions of angels?

They are associated with Jesus Christ in *the end time*. At the second coming, they will form Christ's glorious train and they will have two important tasks to perform:

- After the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:42-49) and the transformation of the still living people on earth (1 Corinthians 15:50-52), the angels will gather God's elected people (the sheep) from every place on earth. All God's elect, that is, all true believers from the Old Testament period and all true Christians from the New Testament period will be "caught up together in the clouds to meet Jesus Christ in the air"² (Matthew 24:31,40a,41a; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) to welcome him, to marvel at him and to glorify him (2 Thessalonians 1:10). These believers are the ones that are immediately "taken" (Greek: *paralambanó*) to meet Christ (Matthew 24:31,40a,41a).
- Later on that same final judgement day the angels will weed out of God's kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil (the goats) (Matthew 13:41), drive them before the judgement throne of Christ in the air for the Last Judgement. There Jesus Christ in co-operation with these angels will assign them a separated place on his left hand (Matthew 13:49; 25:31-33; Jude 1:14-15). These unbelievers are the ones who are first left behind by the angels (Matthew 24:40b,41b), then driven before the judgement seat and after the judgement thrown soul and body into hell (Matthew 13:42,50; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Revelation 14:17-20).

The nations. The nations that are gathered before the judgement throne are relevant, because they are directly related to the final judgement day at the second coming of Christ. Who are these *nations* gathered before the judgement throne?

Some Christians believe that the judgement described in Matthew 25:31-46 is different than the judgement described in Revelation 20:11-15. They say that Matthew 25 describes the judgement of only the Gentile nations according to how they have treated the Jewish nation, and that Revelation 20 describes another judgement a thousand years later, namely the judgement of only the unbelievers and godless. These people will all be non-Jews, because on the basis of Romans 11:26 it is assumed that all Jews would be saved. But Romans 10:12 already makes very clear that since the first coming of Christ there is no difference any more between Jew and non-Jew!

The judgement described in Matthew 25, 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Revelation 20 is one and the same final judgement day. The judgement described in Matthew 25:31-46 is as universal and final as the same judgement described in Revelation 20:11-15! Matthew says "all the nations" and he does not mention the Jewish nation separately. And Revelation says "the dead, great and small" stood before the judgement throne. The writers do not exclude anyone from this general resurrection and final judgement! Moreover, Matthew 19:28 specifically mentions that the Jewish nation will be judged at "the renewal of all things when Jesus sits on his glorious throne"

Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29 and Acts 24:15 teach that all the unrighteous people and all the righteous people on earth will be resurrected and judged at the same time together on the last day in human history on this present earth. The Bible teaches only one second coming of Christ, one resurrection from the dead and one final judgement day of all people who have ever lived! The nations that are gathered before the throne are thus all people who have ever lived regardless of their nationality!

The sheep and the goats. They are relevant, because they are directly related to the final judgement day at the second coming of Christ. Who are the sheep and the goats? See point 5.

"Sheep and goats" are Old Testament symbols. "The sheep" symbolise those people who believe or trust in Jesus Christ and follow him. They are meek and obedient (Psalm 79:13; John 10:3-4,27). "The goats" on the other hand symbolise those people who are belligerent, unruly, and destructive (Ezekiel 34:17-19; Daniel 8:5,7,21).

The least of the brothers of Jesus. On the final judgement day, the manner in which each person has treated "one of the least of these brothers of Jesus" will show whether he is a sheep or a goat. Hebrews 2:11-12 teaches that "Jesus and a brother of Jesus" is "out of one" (the same family, born from above)" and Matthew 12:50 teaches that "a brother of Jesus does the will of God" (cf. Matthew 28:10). Matthew 25 differentiates between Christians and non-Christians (the righteous and the unrighteous) and not between Jews and non-Jews! "The least of the brothers of Jesus" refer to those Christians who are in need of help, like the hungry Christians, lonely Christians, poor Christians, sick Christians and imprisoned (persecuted) Christians. In short, they are the needy Christians.

The sheep represent the righteous people. This is relevant, because it is a direct pronouncement of Jesus on the final judgement at his second coming. Why are the sheep called "righteous"?

The sheep are called "righteous", not only because by their faith in Jesus Christ the righteousness and the holiness of Jesus Christ is imputed (ascribed) to them and they are consequently regarded and treated as righteous, but also because they live a righteous life. It is a question of righteousness imputed, righteousness imparted and righteousness lived! The words with which Jesus welcomes the righteous show that they have lived their daily lives faithfully, showing love, mercy and kindness to others, even to the least among the Christians. These people proved to be disciples of Jesus Christ, not due to spectacular miracles and great accomplishments (Matthew 7:21-23), but due to the ordinary little things in life: food, clothing and attention (Matthew 10:40-42; 25:35-36). These sincere followers of Christ are

² Greek: *hama sun autois harpagmésometha en nefalais eis apantésin* (Matthew 25:6, Acts 28:15) *tou kuriou eis aera*.

pronounced blessed. They had rendered their service spontaneously, humbly, with joy and gratitude which they afterwards had completely forgotten!

The goats represent the unrighteous people. This is relevant, because it is a direct pronouncement of Jesus on the final judgement at his second coming. Why are the goats called “unrighteous”?

The goats are called unrighteous, not only because of their unbelief they have not been justified, but also because they had failed to live righteously. The words with which Jesus condemns the unrighteous show that they are especially condemned for their sins of neglect! Not a single wicked deed is mentioned in this passage, such as idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, etc. but only the sin of neglect. They showed no love, no mercy and no kindness to others, especially not to the least among Christians. Their expression of surprise at the pronouncement of Jesus shows that they had deluded themselves to think that they were not unrighteous, but humanly seen quite “good” people.

The basis of salvation is grace. This is very relevant, because Jesus directly teaches it in relationship to the final judgement day at his second coming. What is the only basis for salvation?

In Matthew 25, even before the righteous deeds in Matthew 25 are mentioned, Jesus emphasises that the basis of their salvation, and hence the basis of all their subsequent good deeds, is the fact that they have been chosen by God to inherit God’s kingdom (in its final phase) from eternity (Matthew 25:34). Whether God has chosen them “before the creation” (Ephesians 1:4) or “from the creation” (Matthew 25:34) makes no difference, because the result is the same! Not the good deeds of the righteous, but the sovereign mercy and grace of God is the foundation of their salvation. Their good works are only the fruit and not the root of grace! Thus, all the glory must be given only to God!

A tree may illustrate the relationship between grace, faith and good works. “The root” represents God’s grace, “the trunk” represents faith and “the fruits” the good works (cf. Ephesians 2:8-10).

The criterion for salvation is faith. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). What will be the criterion for salvation? The criterion for salvation will be faith in Jesus Christ. All people will be judged for their faith in or rejection of Jesus Christ.

The criterion for judgement is works. This is relevant, because Jesus directly implies this in verse 34. “God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). “God will give to each person according to what he has done” (Romans 2:6). “The Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free” (Ephesians 6:8).

The evidence of genuine faith or unbelief will consist in the way people have treated “the least of Christ’s brothers”, that is, in the way they have treated other Christians (Matthew 25:40,45). The good works of the believers, whether many or few, will be the evidence of their genuine faith. The sins of neglect of the unbelievers, whether numerous or sporadic, will be the evidence of their unbelief. On the final judgement day the good works of the believers (as the evidence of their faith) or the neglect of unbelievers (as evidence of their unbelief) will be publicly proclaimed. The criterion for the final judgement will be the works of people.

In the issue of salvation the law can only condemn every person as “guilty” and “lost” (1 Timothy 1:8-11). But in the issue of the final judgement (not the issue of salvation or damnation) the law functions as the measure or standard by which believers will be rewarded and unbelievers and wicked people will be punished. The issue of salvation is determined by a Christian’s relationship to Jesus Christ at the moment he becomes a Christian. Believers are saved, but unbelievers continue to stand condemned (doomed). That is determined at the beginning of his Christian life. But the issue of judgement is determined by the Christian’s works during his Christian life. That is determined at the end history. Righteous living will be rewarded, but unrighteous living will be punished. The righteous people (Christians) will be saved on the basis of their election, which becomes clear in their calling, justification by faith and sanctification of life (good works). The unrighteous people (non-Christians) will only be condemned on the basis of unbelief, unrighteousness and lack of righteousness.

The unrighteous will go away to eternal punishment. This is relevant, because Jesus directly teaches it. What will be the punishment of the unrighteous?

The goats, that is, the unrighteous, will be thrown in hell. There they will forever be separated from God’s loving and caring presence (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). They will suffer everlasting suffering (Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:48; Revelation 14:11; 18:21-23).

The righteous will go to eternal life. This is relevant, because Jesus directly teaches it. What will be the inheritance of the righteous?

The sheep, that is, the righteous, the people who are saved by grace through faith, will inherit the kingdom prepared for them since the creation of the world. The kingdom in this context is God’s kingdom in its final manifestation (form or phase) as the new heaven and the new earth. The righteous people do not have to earn the inheritance of the kingdom of

God nor can they inherit the kingdom of God by anything they are or do. They receive the kingdom of God as God's sovereign and gracious gift (John 3:3; Romans 8:17; Colossians 1:13). They will receive the kingdom as an unshakeable and inalienable possession (Hebrews 12:28). The true Christians, who were already heirs of God's kingdom by right (Matthew 5:3,10,19; John 3:3), will then also become heirs of God's kingdom in fact (Matthew 25:34)! All the promises with respect to complete salvation of soul and body and with respect to the renewal of the universe will then be fulfilled in them progressively and everlastingly! They will inherit everlasting life in God's kingdom in its final phase as the new heaven and the new earth. They will never be hungry or thirsty anymore (Revelation 7:16). They will never again experience death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things on this present earth will have passed away. On the new heaven and new earth God will make everything new (Revelation 21:3-5).

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message (the central theme) of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 teaches about judgement in God's kingdom.

The main message of the parable is the following. "Christians and non-Christians will be judged by Jesus Christ on the final judgement day at his second coming on the basis of their relationship to Christ and their conduct towards Christ and his genuine followers."

The final judgement day is one of the fundamental characteristics of God's kingdom. The genuine people of God's kingdom (the sheep) believe in the final judgement day. They show that their faith in Christ is genuine by the way they treat Christ's followers on earth before the final judgement day. They will certainly inherit God's kingdom in its final form as the new heaven and the new earth.

This final judgement day is necessary for four reasons:

- All people who ever lived on earth must be judged with respect to their works (Romans 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
 - The righteousness of God in his salvation and in his judgement must be publicly displayed, so that God may be glorified in Christ (Romans 3:21-24; 11:36; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 15:3-4).
 - The righteousness of Christ must be publicly vindicated. All people must openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ was no criminal, but the Saviour and the Lord. All people must see him in his full glory together with his people at his second coming (Revelation 1:7; Philippians 2:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).
 - The unrighteous persecution of Christians by non-Christians must be seen by all people in the full light (Revelation 20:12-13).
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5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. What does the Bible teach about the final judgement day?

Read John 5:28-29; Acts 1:11; 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 20:11-15.

Discover and discuss. How many final judgements will there be?

Notes. There are two different views. The first view is not biblical. The second view is biblical.

(1) The final judgement day – a non-biblical view.

Dispensationalism teaches that there are a few final judgement days and these coincide with their view that there are two second comings of Christ (separated by 3½ or 7 years) and two separate resurrections from the dead (separated by at least 1000 years).

- Based on 2 Corinthians 5:10, they teach that there will be a first final judgement of only the believers coinciding with the first return of Christ (the so-called rapture or coming of Christ) (Greek: parousia). The criterion will be faith in Jesus Christ. This notion is wrong!
- Based on Old Testament passages like Joel 3:2,12 and Matthew 25:31-46, they teach that there will be a second final judgement of the Gentile nations coinciding with the second return of Christ (the so-called revelation of Christ) (Greek: apokalupsis), generally 7 or 3½ years or immediately after the so-called first return. The Jews are not included in this judgement and the criterion for judgement will not be the faith of the Gentiles in Jesus Christ, but the way these Gentiles have treated the Jews, whom these people regard as "the brothers" of Jesus (cf. Matthew 25:40). This notion is wrong!

- Based on Matthew 19:28 they teach that there will be a third final judgement of only the Jews at the beginning of the so-called millennial kingdom of Christ. Many believe that all Jews will be saved (their interpretation of Romans 11:26). This notion is wrong!
- And based on Revelation 20:11-15 they teach that there will be a fourth final judgement of only the Gentile unbelievers after the millennial kingdom. Most believe that all these Gentiles will be doomed. This notion is wrong!

Dispensationalism is NOT biblical!³

(2) The final judgement day – the biblical view.

The thousand year period. The Bible does not teach a literal millennial kingdom (thousand years kingdom of peace), but a symbolic thousand year period between the first coming of Christ and his second coming (Revelation 20:1-7).⁴ The number 1000 is a symbolic number and is only found 6 times in one Bible passage. The Book of Revelation is an Apocalypse that makes use of symbols and numbers that must be interpreted symbolically (Greek: sémainó)(Revelation 1:1)! The symbols and numbers refer to literal realities that surpass the literal significance of the symbols by far. The number 1000 is an utterly complete period of time that is determined by God (10 x 10 x 10) and it stretches over all generations (Psalm 90:1-4; 105:8).

The symbolical 1000 years period clearly begins with the binding of Satan at the first coming of Christ (Matthew 12:28-30; Matthew 28:18; Luke 10:18-20; John 12:31-32; Romans 16:20; Ephesians 1:20-22; Colossians 1:13; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 John 3:8; 1 John 5:18; Revelation 12:5-11; Revelation 20:1-3)!

The symbolical 1000 year period clearly ends at the second coming of Christ (cf. Revelation 11:7-18) where the following events take place:

- The Great Tribulation comes to an end with the last war, when the Satan and all his anti-Christian allies are irrevocably beaten and for ever removed from the earth (Matthew 24:21-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and the following parallel descriptions: Revelation 3:10; Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 9:11-21; Revelation 11:7-10; Revelation 13:7-8; Revelation 16:12-16; Revelation 16:17-20; Revelation 17:9b-18; Revelation 18:1-24; Revelation 19:11-21 and Revelation 20:7-10).
- The only resurrection of all the dead (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15 and the following parallel descriptions: 1 Corinthians 15:35-57; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16; 1 John 3:2-3; Revelation 11:11-12; Revelation 20:12a,13-14).
- The rapture of Christians (Matthew 24:29-31,40-41; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).
- The only last judgement of all people in the air (Matthew 25:31-32; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9 and the following parallel descriptions: Revelation 11:18; Revelation 14:6,14-20; Revelation 20:11a,12b).
- The renewal of all things (so that the new heaven and new earth will come about) (Matthew 24:35; Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11b; Revelation 21:1 – 22:6).

The symbolical 1000 year period does not follow the Great Tribulation that is mentioned in Matthew 24:21-25, but ends with Great Tribulation at the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:26-31).

Thus, “the 1000 years is a symbolic number that represents the Messianic Period or the New Testament Period, the period between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ! The Book of Revelation does not teach a literal Millennial Kingdom after the second coming of Christ, but rather an Inaugurated, Realised or Present Millennium in which we already now live!

One second coming.

According to 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, the one and only final judgement day will be at the one and only second “coming” of Jesus Christ (Greek: erchomai in 2 Thessalonians 1:10 and Greek: parousia in 2 Thessalonians 2:1) or “revelation” (Greek: apokalupsis in 2 Thessalonians 1:7) of Jesus Christ. Matthew 24:39-41 speaks of the “coming” (Greek: parousia) while Luke 17:30-35 speaks of the “revelation” (Greek: apokaluptomai). Therefore, there is no difference between “the coming” and “the revelation” of Christ! These words may not be used to pose two different second comings. The believers (Christians) will “be caught up” (Greek: harpazó)(future, passive) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17) just as Jesus Christ was *once for all* “snatched up” (Greek: harpazó) (aorist, passive) to God and his throne at his ascension (Revelation 12:5). The Christians will welcome Christ, marvel at him and glorify him (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

The Bible does not teach two second comings of Christ, but only one second coming (Acts 1:11 and all the parables of Christ)!

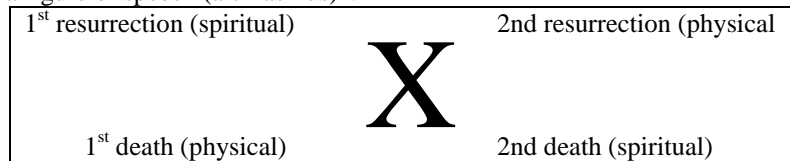
³ Cf. “Dispensational theology and Covenant theology” (supplement) under www.last-biblebook.org – a comprehensive commentary on the book of Revelation.

⁴ Cf. www.Deltacourse.org Revelation 20.

One resurrection.

The Bible does not teach two resurrections from the dead, but only one resurrection from the dead at the second coming of Christ (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)

Revelation 20:4-6 is a figure of speech (a chiasmus)⁵!



- **The first death** (implied) refers to the death of the body.
- **The first resurrection** is a figurative expression, not for the resurrection of the body, but for the resurrection of the spirit/soul, that is, the transfer of the spirit of the person who died on earth into the presence of God/Christ in heaven (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1,8; Philippians 1:23) during the whole period between the first and second coming of Christ. The Greek word “ezésan” (aorist) means: “they lived once for all”, a reference to their literal spiritual life in heavenly glory after their physical death. Their human spirit/soul is “transferred” from the dead body to heaven!
The Greek word “live” has the same meaning in:
 - Luke 20:37-38. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not the God of the (physical) dead (Greek: nekrón), but of (the spiritually) living (Greek: zóntón)(participle, perfect tense, active). In God’s view, the patriarchs are “living” (Greek: zósin) (present tense).
 - John 11:25. Even though he must once die (physically) (aorist), he (his spirit) will surely “live” (Greek: zósetai) (future tense).
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:10. whether we (our bodies) sleep (in death)(Greek: katheudó), we (our spirits) will “live” (Greek: zósomen) (aorist) at the same time (Greek: hama) together with (Greek: sun) Christ (in heaven).
- **The second resurrection** (implied) refers to the (one and only) physical resurrection of the body at the second coming of Christ.
- **The second death** is a figurative expression for a literal spiritual event. not physical death (because that already happened in the past), but “eternal death”, when the body and the spirit (soul) of the unbeliever and disobedient (the unholy and unrighteous) is cast into hell (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 21:8) on the last judgement day.

Compare this figure of speech (chiasmus) in Revelation (of John) 20:4-6 with the Gospel of John 5:24-29 that speaks of “a spiritual resurrection” and “a physical resurrection”! The spiritual resurrection of all believers in Christ takes place from the first coming of Christ until today. Their dead spirits (souls) (Ephesians 2:1) are made alive (Ephesians 2:4), that is, are born again (John 3:3-8). But John 5:28-29 speaks of the physical resurrection of all people at the second coming of Christ and the last judgement. Both the spiritual resurrection and the physical resurrection are literal and real events!

On that day the unbelievers (non-Christians) will go into eternal punishment, excluded from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Matthew 25:41). But the believers (Christians) will welcome, admire and glorify Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:10) and inherit the kingdom of God in its final phase (Matthew 25:34).

One judgement day.

The Bible does not teach several different final judgement days, but only one final judgement day immediately after the second coming and the resurrection from the dead on the one and only day of the second coming (Matthew 25:31-33; 2 Peter 3:3-13; Revelation 20:11-15)!

- **The resurrection.** According to the passages in Matthew, on the day of the second coming of Jesus Christ, the bodies of Christians (that lie in the grave) are resurrected and re-united with their spirits that came with Jesus at his second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:14). The still living Christians on earth at the second coming will be completely changed/transformed (1 Corinthians 15:42-55).
- **The rapture.** Then all Christians are with body and spirit “snatched away” (Revelation 12:5) or “caught up” into the clouds (Greek: harpazó) (1 Thessalonians 4:17) or “taken” (along with the angels) (Greek: paralambanomai) (Matthew 14:31;40a,41a) “to meet (Greek: eis apantésin) the Lord Jesus Christ in the air.” This is the so-called “rapture of the saints or Church”, that will NOT take place 3½ or 7 years before the second coming of Christ, but WILL take place on the one and only day of the second coming of Christ! All these Christians are called “the sheep” (Matthew 25:33), “the wheat” (Matthew 3:12), “the good seed”, “the sons of the kingdom”, or “the righteous” (Matthew 13:36-43). They will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus Christ at his second coming, to welcome him and to marvel at him (2 Thessalonians 1:10; cf. Acts 28:15).
- **The non-Christians.** The non-Christians are first “left behind” on earth (Matthew 24:40b,41b). They will have no part in welcoming Christ. Later on this same day of Christ’s second coming, the non-Christians are driven by angels before the judgement seat of Christ and will be thrown into the fiery oven (Matthew 13:40-42,48; 25:32-33). The

⁵ Chiasme. De tweede frase is een omkering van de volgorde in de eerste frase.

non-Christians are called “the goats” (Matthew 25:33), “the chaff” (Matthew 3:12), “the weeds”, “the sons of the evil one”, or “the ones doing evil” (Matthew 13:36-43).

The correct biblical view is that there is only one final judgement day for everyone (cf. Matthew 25:46)!

(3) The criterion of judgement.

Read Luke 10:20; Revelation 13:7-8; 20:11-15; 21:8.

Discover and discuss. What will be the criterion of judgement?

Notes. According to Revelation 20:11-15, on the one and only final judgement day (Revelation 20:12), all the people who have died in the history of the world “will be given up by death (the state of death) and Hades (the place of dead bodies, the grave)”, that is, they will all without exception be resurrected physically (Revelation 20:13; cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). This will also be the end of “death” and “Hades”, because they will both be destroyed in hell (Revelation 20:14).

Everyone, believers and unbelievers, will be judged according to the books in heaven and the book of life (Revelation 20:12-15). Everyone will be judged according to everything he has done, including the hidden things, whether good or bad (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:10). All these things are recorded in the books in heaven. Thus, people will be judged according to the following:

- their works in relationship to the general revelation of God (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 1:19-20; Romans 2:5-12a,14-15)
- their works in relationship to the special revelation of God (Romans 2:12b-13; Romans 3:10-20)
- their works in relationship to the preaching of the gospel (Romans 3:21-31).

All unbelievers (people who do not believe in Jesus Christ) will be thrown into the lake of fire, because their names are not found written in the book of life (Revelation 20:15). But all believers (people who do believe in Jesus Christ) will inherit the new heaven and the new earth, because their names are found written in the book of life.

(4) The sheep and the goats.

Read. 1 John 1:9-11; 3:4-10.

Discover and discuss. Who are the sheep and the goats?

Notes. According to 1 John 1:9-11 and 3:4-10, there is a clear difference between “the children of the devil” and “the children of God”. The children of the devil are characterised by not being born of God (that is, not being born again), by continuing to live in sin, by neglecting to do what is right and by not loving Christians. The children of God are characterised by being born of God, by not continuing to live in sin, by continuing to do what is right and by loving their Christian brothers. This passage explains that “the goats” symbolically represent the children of the devil and “the sheep” symbolically represent the children of God.

Everyone who is not a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ is a child of the devil. Every genuine child of God loves Jesus Christ (John 8:42)! People may claim to be physical descendants of Abraham, but are still children of the devil when they do not believe in Jesus or in what Jesus taught (John 8:39-47). “If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be (that is, that Jesus Christ is “the I AM WHO I AM” in Exodus 3:14-15), you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24).

(5) The brothers of Jesus Christ.

Read. Matthew 12:50; 28:10; Mark 3:35; John 20:17; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11-13,17; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:16-18; Matthew 10:14-16,40-42.

Discover and discuss. Who are “the brothers” of Jesus Christ?

Notes.

The least of these brothers of Jesus. According to Matthew 12:50 and Mark 3:35, Jesus does NOT call “the Jews” his brothers, but he calls everyone who does God’s will “his brothers, sisters and mothers”. Matthew 28:10 and John 20:17 teach that Jesus calls his own disciples “brothers”. According to Romans 8:29-34, all people who are chosen by God and are therefore have been called, justified and glorified by God, are called “brothers” of Jesus. And according to Hebrews 2:11-13,17, all people that have been made holy, that is, have become children of God, are “brothers” of Jesus. They now belong to his family!

Thus according to Matthew 25:40, “the brothers of Jesus” are all people who have surrendered themselves to Christ and stand in a spiritual relationship and fellowship with him. Only they are genuine Christians. They are the people who are saved by grace through faith, regardless of their race, nationality, social status, etc. Unbelieving Jews and all other unbelievers are certainly NOT the brothers of Jesus!

And “the least of these brothers of Jesus” is a reference to those Christians who are in need of help, as hungry Christians, lonely Christians, poor Christians, sick Christians, imprisoned Christians and persecuted Christians (cf. Hebrews 10:32-34; 13:3). They are the needy Christians. This symbolic description of needy Christians has its parallel in Acts 6:1-2, James 2:1-26 and 1 John 3:16-20. Christians have the responsibility to show their genuine faith and love by helping needy Christians!

The little ones (the ones sent out, the prophets, the righteous, the disciples) of Jesus Christ. And it has its parallel in Matthew 10:40-42. The context speaks of the sending out of Christ's disciples as apostles (which means: sent out ones) to proclaim the gospel. According to Matthew 10:14-16, if anyone will not welcome them or listen to their message, they must shake the dust off their feet and leave those people and their town. On the final judgement day it will be more bearable for the godless and wicked Sodom and Gomorra than for that town. However, he who receives an apostle receives Christ himself and his Sender, God the Father!

Whoever accepts Christian disciples in their true capacity as fully authorised representatives of Jesus Christ accepts Christ himself. When people receive these Christians with their New Testament message in spite of the possible opposition and persecution of their neighbours (the non-Christians, the adherents of other religions), they receive Jesus Christ himself (Matthew 10:40). Anyone who receives a (genuine) prophet (the word means: preacher sent out by the God of the Bible) because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. Anyone who receives a righteous man (means: a person justified by faith, a Christian) will receive a righteous man's reward. Anyone who gives even a cup of cold water to one of these *little ones* (a person sent out, a prophet, a righteous person, a disciple of Christ) because he is a disciple (of Christ) will certainly not lose his reward (Matthew 10:42). In the eyes of the world, this disciple may be insignificant or unknown, but in the eyes of Christ this little person who believes in Christ is "his own disciple". "Whoever helps such a little Christian (who confesses Christ and is dependent on Christ), will certainly not lose his reward.

What reward? The Bible promises that he will already now experience the peace of God (Matthew 10:13). "Peace" is God's wholeness, spiritual prosperity and freedom from fears, agitating passions and moral conflicts. The Bible promises that he will be publicly acknowledged by Christ himself at his return (Matthew 25:34-36). And the Bible promises rewards in accordance with his works (Matthew 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:12-14) that consist of all the blessings that are graciously bestowed on Christians on the final judgement day (Matthew 10:42).

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main teaching or message of this parable of the interceding friend? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) All people must know what God or Jesus Christ is like.

At his second coming, Jesus Christ will come to judge all the people who have ever lived on earth! No one will escape! Everyone will have to give an account of his life to Jesus Christ!

(2) Christians must know what they should be like.

Every person who has ever lived will be judged on the basis of his relationship with Christ and his conduct towards Christ and Christians, no matter how insignificant a Christian may be. He will be judged according to whether during his earthly life he has given evidence of his faith in Jesus Christ, that is, whether he has lived the life of a true believer in Jesus Christ.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to **pray short** to God in response to what you have learned today. Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. **Preach, teach or study** "the sheep and the goats" together with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Micah 5, Haggai 2, Zechariah 14, Malachi 3 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses from the letter to the Romans. (16) Romans 12:16, (17) Romans 12:17, (18) Romans 13:8, (19) Romans 13:14, (20) Romans 16:17.
5. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. Romans 16:1-27. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. **Update your notebook** on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.