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WITHOUT EXCUSE

How God Judges Every Person Fairly, Even Those Who Never Heard

A Continuous Jubilee Calendar Study

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” — Genesis 18:25 (KJV)

Author’s Note on Terminology: This paper uses the traditional Christian terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament” for clarity. The author recognizes that the books of the Old Testament are the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, which Jewish tradition holds as complete Scripture in its own right, and quotes them with respect for that tradition.

> ***A note on what follows.*** *The interpretation in this paper is my best understanding of Scripture, reached by following its own examples and patterns. It is held to one rule above all others:*
>
> ***Rule 1: No Scriptural conflicts.*** *No conclusion here may contradict any passage of Scripture. Where Scripture does not settle a detail, I say so plainly.*

Scripture is quoted from the King James Version. Pronouns for God and Christ are capitalized in the author’s own words; KJV quotations are left as written.

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1. The Question

It is one of the most honest questions a person can ask about God. What about a child born in a faraway land, raised inside a strict religion, who never held a Bible and never heard the name of Jesus? If salvation comes only through Christ, how can God judge that person by the same standard as someone raised in church, with a Bible on every shelf?

Some answer that such people are simply lost, through no fault of their own. Others answer that it doesn't matter what anyone believes, since God will accept everyone in the end. Scripture accepts neither answer. It shows a God who is perfectly just and deeply loving at the same time, and it explains how both can be true.

In this paper I follow Scripture's own explanation, step by step. It rests on four truths:

- God has never left any person without a witness.
- He measures every person by the same two witnesses, His Spirit and His Word.
- Each person answers only for the light he or she was given.
- The final judgment is open, so that every person will see that God was fair to them.

Put those together, and Paul's words make sense: all people are "without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Not because everyone had the same amount of light, but because everyone had some, and everyone chose what to do with it.

2. God Has Never Been Silent

Long before any missionary arrives, God has already been speaking. Scripture names three ways He speaks to every person who has ever lived.

He speaks through what He made. Paul writes, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20). Notice who did the showing: "God hath shewed it unto them." Creation is not a riddle people must solve on their own. It is God's own message, sent to everyone.

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David says the sky preaches day and night, in every language on earth: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). Job says even the animals teach it: “But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee… Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?” (Job 12:7, 9).

He speaks through His daily kindness. When Paul preached to people in Lystra who had never known the God of Israel, he told them God had been speaking to them all along: “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Every harvest, every meal and every moment of joy is God saying, “I am here, and I am good.”

He placed every person where they could seek Him. In Athens, speaking to people surrounded by idols, Paul explained that God planned every nation’s time and place with one purpose: “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:26-28).

No one was born in the wrong place by accident. God set each person where they could “feel after him, and find him.” He is “not far from every one of us.”

3. The Law Written on the Heart

God also speaks inside every person, through the conscience. Paul writes about Gentiles who never had the law of Moses: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another; In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Romans 2:14-16).

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Every culture on earth knows that murder, theft and betrayal are wrong, and that kindness, honesty and faithfulness are right. No one had to hand them a scroll. God wrote it in their hearts. And notice what Paul says the conscience does: it is “bearing witness,” and their thoughts are “accusing or else excusing” them. The conscience is a witness that will speak on the day God judges “the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.”

4. The Light That Lights Every Person

Behind creation and conscience stands a Person. John begins his Gospel by telling us who made the world and who gives light to every human being: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:3-5). Then he says how far that light reaches: “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9).

Every man. Not every churchgoer, and not every person who owns a Bible. Every person born into the world receives light from Christ, whether or not they ever learn His name.

Jesus Himself explained what decides a person’s judgment. It isn’t how much light they had, but what they did with the light that came to them: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

That is the whole matter in Jesus’ own words. Some people turn toward the light they are given, and some turn away from it. “He that doeth truth cometh to the light.”

5. The Two Witnesses

God’s law set a rule for every court in Israel: no one could be condemned on the word of a single witness. “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established”

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(Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus honored that rule about His own testimony: “It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true” (John 8:17).

God holds His own final judgment to the same standard. My reading of Scripture is that every person is measured by two witnesses: **the Holy Spirit**, who speaks to a person from within, and **the Word of God**, which comes to a person from outside. Jesus named both witnesses together: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness” (John 15:26-27). Peter said it plainly before the council: “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5:32). The Spirit testifies, and His people carry the Word.

The Spirit: the witness within

Jesus said the Spirit would speak to the whole world, not only to believers: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). The world. The Spirit pleads with every heart, in every land, in every religion. He was already doing it before the flood, when God said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3). The Spirit strives with people. He pleads, He presses, He waits.

No one comes to God on his own. God Himself draws every person who comes: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44). And Jesus stands knocking at every door: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). Any man. The knock comes to every heart.

The Word: the witness from outside

Jesus Himself named the Scriptures as a witness: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). The Word reaches people in very different amounts: a whole Bible for some, a single sermon or a single verse for others. But God promises His word never goes out for nothing: “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth... So shall my word

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be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Paul explains why God sends messengers: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace" (Romans 10:13-15). And before the end comes, the Word will reach every corner of the earth: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). John saw it go out: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6).

The Word written on every heart

Someone may ask: what about a person who never received any part of the written Word? God's law requires two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15), and God Himself provides both. Scripture calls His law a witness: "Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee" (Deuteronomy 31:26). The tablets of stone were "two tables of testimony" (Exodus 31:18). And the whole law rests on two commandments of love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37, 39-40). That law of love is the core of God's Word, and He has written it on every heart: "the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Romans 2:15). "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light" (Proverbs 6:23).

So even a person who never held a Bible has both witnesses: the Spirit pleading within, and God's law of love written on the heart. The conscience is where the two meet. Everyone who receives the written Word is given still more light, and with it, more responsibility.

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The two witnesses in Revelation

Revelation shows these same two witnesses at work in the last days: “And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth” (Revelation 11:3-4).

Scripture explains its own symbols here. Zechariah saw a golden candlestick fed by “two olive trees by it” (Zechariah 4:3), and the angel explained what the olive trees’ oil means: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). Revelation says that “fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies” (Revelation 11:5), and God explains that fire too: “I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them” (Jeremiah 5:14). And again: “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29).

So in this research’s reading, the two witnesses are the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, speaking through God’s faithful servants, just as Jesus promised: “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matthew 10:20), and “ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). (For the full study of the two witnesses, see “The Shepherd’s Gathering.”)

The same two witnesses that call the world to repentance will stand at the judgment. Every person will be measured by them: by what God made known to them of His Word, and by how they answered the pleading of His Spirit.

6. People Outside Israel Whom God Reached

Scripture doesn’t leave this as theory. Again and again, it shows God reaching people who were born outside His covenant people, with very little light, and it shows them answering.

Melchizedek. Long before Moses or the law, a king outside Abraham’s family already knew the true God: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed

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him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:18-19).

Jethro. Moses' father-in-law was a priest of Midian, raised outside Israel. When he heard what God had done, he confessed: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods" (Exodus 18:11).

Rahab. A woman of Jericho had only heard reports of the Red Sea and Israel's victories. That was all the light she had, and she answered it: "for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11). Scripture lists her among the heroes of faith: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not" (Hebrews 11:31).

Nineveh. A whole pagan city heard one short sermon from a reluctant prophet. "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them... And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:5, 10).

Naaman. A Syrian army commander was healed and declared: "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

Cornelius. A Roman soldier "feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway" (Acts 10:2). He didn't yet know the gospel, but God saw how he was answering the light he had: "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). Then God sent Peter to bring him the Word.

The Ethiopian. An official from far-off Ethiopia was reading Isaiah, and he couldn't understand it: "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:31). So God sent Philip running to his chariot.

Look at the pattern. Those who answered the light they had were given more. God sees every honest seeker, and He finds a way to bring them the Word. Jesus promised it: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth" (Matthew 7:7-8). God said the same through Jeremiah: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

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7. Measured by the Light Given

Here God's fairness shines brightest. He does not hold anyone responsible for a Bible they never had. Jesus taught it plainly: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48).

He said the same to cities that had seen His miracles with their own eyes: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you" (Matthew 11:21-22). More tolerable. The judgment is measured by how much light each place received.

Jesus even said that people from pagan lands will stand in the judgment as witnesses against those who had more light and ignored it: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (Matthew 12:41-42).

To the religious leaders who had every advantage, Jesus said: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41). And: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin" (John 15:22). Paul agrees: "where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). James puts it in one sentence: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

So the person raised in a faraway land is not judged by what he never heard. He is judged by what he did with what he did hear: the voice of creation, the voice of his conscience, and the pleading of God's Spirit in his heart. Peter learned this at Cornelius's house: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35).

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8. Saved Only Through Christ

None of this means there are many roads to God. Scripture is clear that every person who is saved is saved by Christ alone: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

How, then, can someone with little light be saved by a Savior whose name they never heard? Scripture answers with the faithful people of the Old Testament. Abraham, Moses, Rahab and David never heard the name “Jesus,” yet they are saved by His blood. Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). Hebrews says of them all: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them” (Hebrews 11:13). They trusted the God who would provide, and Christ’s sacrifice covered them. Revelation calls Him “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

Hebrews gives the one thing every person must have, whatever their light: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). A person may know very little, but he can believe that God is, and seek Him. Christ is the One who saves, whether a person knew a great deal about Him or only felt after Him in the dark. And God, who will “judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16), knows exactly which hearts were seeking Him.

9. Why No One Is Without Excuse

This is why Paul could say all people are “without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Not because everyone had the same amount of light, but because everyone had some, and everyone made a choice with it.

Paul describes the turning point in the very next verse: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened”

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(Romans 1:21). They knew enough to turn toward God, and they turned away. A few verses later: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind” (Romans 1:28). God gave them what they chose.

The same thing happens at the very end. Those who are deceived are not forced into it. They choose it: “because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). They refused the truth and took pleasure in what was wrong, and God respected their free choice.

So when every person stands before God, no one will be able to say, “I never had a chance.” Every mouth will be closed: “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19). That’s the same measure for every person on earth: one standard, two witnesses, and each person weighed by the light they were given. That’s what “equal” judgment means. It doesn’t mean the same opportunity for everyone. It means the same fairness for everyone. “For there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:11).

10. A Judgment With Nothing Hidden

God’s final judgment is not a closed-door verdict handed down without explanation. Scripture says everything will be brought into the open: “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Daniel saw the court of heaven sit: “the judgment was set, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:10). John saw the books opened for every person: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12).

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And God's people will see it all. Paul says, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). John saw them seated: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them" (Revelation 20:4). As I understand Scripture, during the thousand years Jesus reviews each life openly, with His people as witnesses. They will see why each person who was lost refused the light they were given, and every question we carry today will be answered. When the Book of Life is finally opened, the names God wrote by His perfect foreknowledge (Romans 8:29) will match Christ's judgments exactly. God will be shown to be just and loving, and to have respected every person's free will, never a tyrant.

God never wanted anyone lost: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). And in the end, every person will confess that He was right: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

The redeemed will sing it out loud: "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Revelation 15:3-4). "Thy judgments are made manifest." Shown openly, so all can see they are right.

11. Conclusion: What This Means for Us

So how does God judge a person who never heard the name of Jesus? Scripture's answer holds together without a single conflict:

- God has never left anyone without a witness. He speaks through creation, through His kindness, through conscience, and through Christ, "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9).

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- Every person is measured by the same two witnesses: the Spirit who pleads within, and the Word of God, whose law of love is written on every heart and whose gospel is carried to every nation.
- Each person answers only for the light they were given: “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48).
- Everyone who is saved is saved through Christ alone, by faith in the God who “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).
- No one will be without excuse, because everyone had light and made a choice with it.
- The judgment is open, so every person will see that God was fair.

This truth doesn’t make the gospel less urgent. It makes it more urgent. God has chosen to send His Word through His people: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Every person who hears it receives more light, and with it, a clearer call to come home.

And if you are reading this, you are not one who never heard. The Word has reached you, and the Spirit is speaking to you right now. “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7-8). “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Sources and References

Scripture: all quotations are from the King James Version (KJV).

Larry Wilson: “The Two Witnesses #2,” wake-up.org (Revelation 10-11). Wilson’s study identifies the two witnesses as God’s law of love and the Holy Spirit, and teaches that every person is judged by how they answered the truth they knew. It prompted the section “The Word written on every heart.” This paper reads the second witness more broadly, as the Word of God, of which the law of love is the core.

Related CJC papers

- The Shepherd’s Gathering — What Scripture Teaches About the Timing of the Rapture and the Last Trumpet
- Fear Not the Second Death — What Scripture Teaches About the Thousand Years, the Book of Life, and the End of Sin

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- The Jubilee Calendar and the Story of the End — A Bible Prophecy Timeline

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