

The Sleeping Judge

Joel Stephen Williams

Many years ago in England there was a judge by the name of Doddridge who gained the nickname "the sleeping judge." As he would listen to a case before him in court, he would often close his eyes, slump down in his chair, rest his chin on his chest, and give every appearance of being asleep. Many people appeared in his court in hopes that the law would give them justice. They would hope that the rightness of their position would be evident, but their hopes would begin to fade as they looked at this sleeping judge. On the other hand, some would appear in court who were guilty of wrongdoing and would hope that justice would not prevail. As they would observe this sleeping judge, they began to hope that they would escape judgment. Judge Doddridge, though, was not asleep. He was concentrating intently on the evidence being presented before him, analyzing it with his great legal mind, and determining what was just. His legal pronouncements were always sound, for the sleeping judge was not sleeping.

Certain false teachers, with whom the apostle Peter was having to deal, assumed that God was asleep on the judgment bar of heaven. Since Christ had not returned yet, they concluded that he was not returning and judgment could be averted (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Peter, however, declared: "Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping" (2 Pet. 2:3). Only to the foolish person who thinks God must work according to our timetable and agenda does it appear that the judge is sleeping (2 Pet. 3:8). God keeps his appointments. He fulfills his promises, and he will fulfill the promise that Jesus will return and that there will be a general judgment of all mankind. Any further delay in the final judgment is a sign, not of the sleepiness of God, but of the mercy of God: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Do not presume on the judgment of God or take God for granted. "The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?" (2 Pet. 3:10).