

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE JUDGMENT

Am I right to believe that the righteous dead will be raised from the dead first, then later, the unrighteous, and then God judges everyone at the White Throne Judgment?

People do not go to heaven or hell before the Judgment, do they?

ANSWER

The Bible does indeed speak of judgment for sin. That's why we have John 3:16 which speaks of God's desire to rescue all people.

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

It is important to note that Jesus went on to say that the wrath of God is ALREADY on all people (John 3:18 & 36) until they receive forgiveness through the sacrificial atonement of Christ. Anyone who dies lacking the salvation that God has provided through Christ will face certain judgment in the afterlife. God's wrath remains on them. Also, see Ephesians 2:1-5.

When believers die they leave their bodies behind and go to be with the Lord. They are not asleep or unconscious, but in a living relationship in spirit. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Jesus will not be unconscious in the afterlife, neither will the believer who is with him. Paul wrote of his desire to depart and be with the Lord in Philippians 1:21-24. Paul also addressed this issue in 2 Corinthians 5:6-9 that he "would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

Believers live forever with the Lord. "Forever" starts the moment we are born again. However, we will not receive our new bodies until the end of the age at the second coming of Christ. The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 goes into great detail concerning our resurrected bodies. Also, see 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11.

Many Christians differ as to the exact timing and some of the details and specific facts regarding the rapture (the catching away) and the thousand year reign of Christ. However, one thing is certain: the believer is secure in Christ for all eternity. Other secondary issues can be lovingly debated until we all see Jesus face-to-face.

Unbelievers who die DO NOT go to be with the Lord. They lived separated from God in relationship on earth and will die the same way. Their bodies go to the grave and their spirits go to the place where nonbelievers go. The place of the dead in Hebrew is called “Sheol” and in Greek it is called “Hades.” Sheol and Hades, the place of the non-believing dead, should not be confused with place that Jesus named “Gehenna.” No one is in Gehenna at this time.

Gehenna is a shortened form that refers to “the valley of the sons of Hinnom.” (“Ge” in Hebrew is valley). This valley was used in ancient Israel for despicable activities (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31-32). It later became a place to dump unclean things and became a place where there was always something unclean burning. Jesus used this term to refer to the place of final judgment (Matthew 5:22). The “lake of fire” is also a term used for this same place of final judgment (Revelation 20:14).

Often, the terms Gehenna and Hades (which are two distinctly different places) get translated with the same word: “hell.” This has been the cause of much confusion over the years. It is very important to make a clear distinction between the two.

Conclusion

Believers go to heaven (without their bodies) immediately upon death to be with the Lord forever. Believers will receive a new body at the end of the age.

Unbelievers go to Hades (without their bodies) immediately upon death to await final judgment. Unbelievers will receive a new body at the end of the age and then be cast into the lake of fire (Gehenna). This is called the second death in Revelation 20:14.