

Is the Day of Judgment, the day a person dies?

by Dennis Tucker

I took the liberty of rewording a question recently submitted to me about the Day of Judgment. Based on Luke 16.19-31, Lazarus and the rich man, it appears a person's destiny is sealed at the point of death. Therefore, the Day of Judgment really only applies to those who are alive when Jesus comes the second time.

I like good questions for they show people are thinking and they make me think. On the front page I copied a diagram by Brother Eugene Britnell. To gain a better understanding of the Day of Judgment, we need to understand the difference between being in torment or Tartarus and being in hell or Gehenna.

We are currently in the physical realm. Our spirit is inside a fleshly body. Death is a separation of the body from the soul, James 2.26. The death of this body ends our life here upon earth.

At that point man enters a second realm or state. Hades is the grave or realm of the dead. On the cross Jesus said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit'" (Luke 23.46). Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with Jesus in Paradise, Luke 23.43. He was not speaking of the grave, but the place the spirit of man goes. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter made a distinction between the body and soul of Jesus. "For you did not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2.27). The physical body of Jesus entered the grave, but on the third day it arose. It did not see corruption. The soul of Jesus was not left in Hades, the realm of the dead, but arose.

Luke 16.19-31 reveals to us that man will either be in Abraham's bosom or torment. Going back to the thief of the cross, Jesus said he would be with Him in Paradise. He was not buried in the same tomb as Jesus, but he went to the same place Christ's spirit went after they both died. Before His death, Jesus said He was going to prepare a way for the disciples, John 14.1-3. However, Jesus was not in heaven but in Paradise. After His resurrection, the Son of Man, told Mary, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father" (John 17.20a). Paradise and heaven are not the same place.

It is true that the righteous and unrighteous are separated at death. The ungodly are reserved under punishment for the Day of Judgment, 2 Peter 2.9. It is also true that one can not expect to be in torment while in Hades and then go to heaven later on. Those in Tartarus will be there due to the justice of God. The Day of Judgment is still in the future, while the Hadean world exists now.

The third realm is heaven and hell. When Jesus returns all in the graves will be raised, John 5.28-29. Both the righteous and unrighteous will stand before God. According to 1 Corinthians 15.26, the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. Not one single person will or can remain in the grave, for death will be conquered. 1 Thessalonians 4.13-the righteous dead will come out of the grave first followed by the righteous living, they will then be followed by the ungodly. At the second coming of Jesus, death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20.14.

Certain events will occur on the Day of Judgment that will not happen before, nor will it happen afterward.

When man comes out of the grave he will receive his spiritual body. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15.51-52). Man while in the grave will be without his spiritual body. While walking upon earth, Jesus inhabited a physical body. However, when He returns, we shall see Him as He is, 1 John 3.2. It is hard for us to comprehend what a spiritual body will be like, but it will be suitable for eternity.

All of humanity will appear before God on the Day of Judgment. "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25.32). Just as no one can remain in the grave, no one will escape God's judgment, 1 Corinthians 5.10. This will be the one and only time all of mankind will be together.

Man's eternal state will be settled. This will be the last time many will be in the presence of God. Those condemned to Gehenna or hell will never again see the face of Jehovah. "And these will go away into everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25.46). Going back to our question we need to understand the difference between "held for sentencing" and "being sentenced". I think of "held" as the difference between a stay in county jail for a short time awaiting the day of sentencing. My guilt has already been determined, but on the day of sentencing I stand before the judge and hear my final destiny. The same goes for those in torment. They will spend eternity in hell but they are not there yet.

At that time the books will open and man will be judged. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book will open, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books... And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20.12, 15). The judgment will be based on God's word and our obedience. No one will end up in heaven by mistake or accident. It will be due to God's love for mankind, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and man's faithfulness to His word.