



“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” I Corinthians 15:57.

The Rapture and the Judgments

Lesson Aim: To study Articles 23, 24, and 25 of our Doctrinal Statement.

L324. Date: December 1969. **Text:** I Corinthians 15:12-20; Revelation 21:1-8. **Topic:** Christ; Return of; Doctrine: Studies In; Judgment; Of Men.

INTRODUCTION—The second coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth will start a series of events which will bring an end to the world system as it is now known.

These events included the rapture of the saints, the great tribulation, the judgment seat of Christ, the millennial kingdom, the resurrection of the unsaved, the great white throne judgment, and eternal destiny. Today's study deals with four points in this chain: resurrection of the saved, resurrection of the unsaved, eternal destiny of the saved, and eternal destiny of the unsaved.

This is a very important subject of study. Matters of eternal destiny should receive most careful attention. The reader is encouraged to search his heart as he reads to make sure that he is ready for the Lord Jesus to come and for these events to transpire.

Today's study sets forth a great challenge: be prepared for His coming. It states an urgent plea: be ready lest He come today. It holds a blessed hope: “Your labour is not in vain in the Lord,” I Corinthians 15:58.

This is a study in which you are personally involved. One day your body will be raised from death whether you are saved or unsaved. You will experience eternity somewhere—in heaven or in hell. (Your spirit is immortal and so will never die.) This study is a warning to be sure your soul is saved and ready to meet God. Now, praying the prayer of the Psalmist, let us approach the Word saying, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law,” Psalm 119:18.

EXPOSITION

1. THE RESURRECTION

1. Meaning. — The theme of the resurrection of the physical body, including the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is given more space in the Bible than any other subject. Resurrection means the restoration to life of that which has been dead.

The term is used in two senses in the Bible. There is a “spiritual resurrection” which is salvation. It is spoken of in passages like Ephesians 2:1 where “quicken” is really “resurrected.” Those dead in trespasses and sins are brought into spiritual life on such an occasion, Colossians 2:13.

But resurrection is also applied to the physical body. This is seen in resurrection miracles performed by Jesus (as in John 11:25, 43-44) and in clear statement in the Word, John 5:28. It is evident, therefore, that the Bible teaches a literal resurrection of the physical body from the grave.

2. Fact. — The doctrine of the resurrection is taught in both Old and New Testaments. Examine passages like Job 19:25-27; Genesis 22:5 with Hebrews 11:19; Isaiah 26:19; I Kings 17; II Kings 4:32-35; 13:21; John 55:28-29; 6:39-40, 44, 54; I Corinthians 15; I Thessalonians 4; Revelation 20:4-6; John 11; Matthew 28; and others. What do these say about the fact of the resurrection?

In figure, in prophecy, in prediction, and in actual instances of resurrection of a dead person back to natural life, the Bible assures us that resurrection is possible. Let us not doubt it because we have never seen it. There are many things which are true that we have not yet seen and do not now understand. 3. Basis. — Christian hope of the resurrection is based upon the fact that Jesus is risen from among the dead. In I Corinthians 15:13-19 there are five tragic consequences attendant if Jesus is not risen. (1) Our preaching is vain--empty and meaningless. (2) Our faith is vain; we trust a dead Saviour. (3) We are false witnesses of God; we say He has raised Jesus from death. (4) We are still in our sins because though we are redeemed by His death we are saved by His life; a dead Saviour is not a Saviour at all. (5) Those who have died with faith in Jesus have perished if He lives not. But, praise God Jesus has risen!

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man after his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming,” I Corinthians 15:20, 22-

23.

We rejoice in His promise, "**because I live, ye shall live also,**" John 14:19. We need no more proof than the word of the One who lives within our hearts today.

4. Separation. — All men shall be raised up from death—the righteous and the wicked. The Bible says it this way, "**. . . there shall be a resurrection of the dead both of the just and the unjust,**" Acts 24:15. But these resurrections will be separate.

Believers will share in the "first resurrection" which will come when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first," I Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 20:4. But concerning the unsaved dead the Bible states, "**But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished,**" Revelation 20:5.

The clear and evident meaning of these passages is that there will be a period of at least 1,000 years between the resurrection of the saved and of the unsaved.

Daniel 12:2 speaks at this point also. Read it in your English version. Then observe that many Hebrew scholars insist this passage could be correctly translated: "And (at that time) many (of thy people) shall awake (or be separated) out from among the sleepers in the earth dust. These (who awake) shall be unto life eternal, but those (who do not awake at that time) shall be unto contempt and shame everlasting."

Yes, there will be a separation between the righteous and the wicked. Will you be in the "first" resurrection? "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years," Revelation 20:6.

5. Manner. — What will the resurrected bodies look like? Philippians 3:21 briefly states that they will be "fashioned like unto his (Christ's) glorious body." So the question becomes, "What was the nature of Christ's resurrection body?" The Scriptures make it clear His body, after the resurrection, was a real body (Luke 24:39); it was recognizable (Luke 24:31; John 20:16); it was a powerful body (John 20:19). And when He comes again and our resurrection bodies are given us, they will be glorious as well. For He will come in great glory.

First Corinthians 15 gives the best description of the believer's resurrection body. (1) It is not a mere flesh and blood body for such cannot inhabit the Kingdom, verses 50-51. And yet, it is a real body, Luke 21:39. (2) It is incorruptible and no longer subject to sickness, pain or decay, verse 42. (3) It is a glorious body like the Lord Jesus' at His resurrection, verse 43;

Matthew 17; Revelation 1:13-17. (4) It is a powerful body without weakness and lassitude so common now, verse 43. (5) It is a spiritual body because the Spirit will be its life, verse 44. (6) It is a fitted-for-heaven body, verses 47-49.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is,” I John 3:2. But what kind of body will the unsaved have? The Bible does not say! It is evident that their bodies will be immortal since they will suffer eternally, Revelation 20:10, 14-15. Their bodies will be sensitive since they will be tormented in hell, Revelation 20:10, Their bodies will be subject to all sorts of ill since “the worm dieth not,” Mark 9:44, 46, 48. They share none of the hope of glory or redemption of the body because they rejected the Lord Jesus while here in the world.

6. Time. — When will the resurrection occur? It is said to be in “the last day” in John 6:39-40, 44. Since “day” means a period of time, this is not conclusive in setting a time. First Corinthians 15:23 and I Thessalonians 4:14-17 make it clear that the resurrection will occur when Jesus appears in the air. Then the believers will be raised “out from among” the dead. The resurrection of the unsaved does not come until at least one thousand years later, Revelation 20:5. Then will the end come with eternal destiny.

II. HEAVEN

The term “heaven” is used in three senses in the Scriptures. First, it means the atmosphere where the birds fly, Genesis 1:20. Second, it means the area of outer space where the sun, moon and stars are, Genesis 1:14-15. Third, it means the place of God's dwelling, Psalm 11:4. We will discuss heaven as the place of God's special presence and the home of the redeemed.

1. Where is heaven? The Bible does locate somewhat that place where God is. In Isaiah 14:12-14 it is said to be “above the stars of God” and “in the sides of the north,” This idea is repeated in Psalm 48:2. The term “north” is significant. We say the North Pole is the “top” of the earth. So we say “Up North” and “Down South.” The North Pole points to the North Star. Many astronomers believe the North Star is the center of the universe that every planet revolves around it. So somewhere to the north is heaven.

2. What is heaven like? It is a place of complete deliverance from all sin. As we are delivered from sin's penalty in salvation and from sin's dominion in sanctification, so in heaven we will be delivered from sin's presence, Revelation 22:15.

It is a place of unhindered fellowship with God. This is why “to depart and be with Christ” is far better, Philippians 1:23. Not just because we leave earthly trials behind but because we are “forever with the Lord,” I Thessalonians 4:17.

It is a place of freedom from natural evil. Because there is “no more curse” (first pronounced in Genesis 3:14-19) there will be no more sorrow, sickness, death, nor separation, Revelation 22:3. Because these “former things are passed away,” God will once and forever wipe away all tears from their eyes, Revelation 21:4.

It is a place of ceaseless service to God: “. . . **the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him,**” Revelation 22:3. There is no information about what kind of service saints will render Him. Do you think there is some light to be found in Genesis 2:15 and Revelation 5:13 at this point?

It is a place of endless development. Eternally we shall know our Lord God better and marvel the more and more at the splendor of His divine person.

3. Who will be in heaven? God will be there. He is, “. . . **our Father which art in heaven. . .**” Matthew 6:9. Jesus will be there. For He is there now. The heavens have received Him until the times of restitution of all things, Acts 3:21. He has entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us,” Hebrews 9:24. The angels will be there, Matthew 20:30; Luke 15:7, 10. Believers will be there for they will be with Jesus where ever He is, John 17:24; I Thessalonians 4:17.

But no wicked person will be there—not one! “**And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life,**” Revelation 21:27.

But the thing which makes heaven so wonderful is the presence of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. As someone has said so beautifully, “The light of heaven is the face of Jesus; the joy of heaven is the presence of Jesus; the melody of heaven is the name of Jesus; the harmony of heaven is the praise of Jesus; the theme of heaven is the work of Jesus; the employment of heaven is the service of Jesus; the fulness of heaven is Jesus Himself!” Amen!

III. HELL

“Hell” is the term used to designate the final spiritual state and destiny of the ungodly. In the New Testament the word is used to translate

“gehenna” which came from the Hebrew word “ge-hinnom” (valley of Hinnom, II Kings 23:10). This was the garbage dump of the city of Jerusalem in ancient times. The final indignity offered an executed criminal was that his body was flung into Gehenna, Matthew 5:22. So it is used to describe the final spiritual state of the ungodly, Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43.

1. Certainty. — There will certainly be a hell for the impenitent. The Bible distinctly says so. In fact, there are more references to hell than to heaven in the New Testament. Examine references such as Matthew 5:22, 29; 10:28; 18:9; Mark 9:43, 45; Luke 12:5; Revelation 20:10-15; et. al.

Our own sense of right and wrong, of justice and fair play, demands that there be a time of judgment and punishment of evil. There is a hell because there is sin. So certainly is sin to be punished that in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament the same word may be translated “iniquity” or “punishment.” The very nature of sin is such that it would dethrone God if it could. God must punish sin or abdicate His throne. That is why there is a hell.

2. Nature. — What is hell like? It must be a terrible place. It is called “the hell of fire,” “the lake of fire,” and “the second death” to indicate its awfulness.

(1) Hell is a place. It has been “prepared” for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41) just as the mansions in the Father's house have been “prepared” for believers, John 14:1-3. Hell is a localized place just as heaven is.

(2) Hell is a place of punishment. Those who go to hell enter “everlasting punishment,” Matthew 25:46. They shall be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord,” II Thessalonians 1:9. According to Romans 2:8-9 this punishment includes wrath (the settled mind of God toward the persistently wicked, John 3:36), indignation (the outbreak of wrath at the day of judgment), tribulation (severe affliction), and anguish (torturing confinement in a strait place without relief). This is “the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation;” it involves torment “with fire and brimstone,” Revelation 14:10. How tragic that even one person should suffer thus.

(3) Hell is endless. It is a place of “everlasting punishment,” Matthew 25:46. There will be a “lake of fire” there which is described as “everlasting burnings,” Revelation 20:10; Isaiah 33:14. Luke 16:26 makes it clear that the “great gulf” which separates the righteous and the wicked in eternity will never be crossed. As one's death finds him, so shall eternity find him. The same word used to describe the state of blessedness of the redeemed (“eternal” life) is used to describe the punishment of the unredeemed

("eternal" punishment), Matthew 25:46. See Hebrews 6:2; Jude 7; Mark 3:29.

(4) Hell is the opposite of heaven. Heaven will show no night at all while hell is marked by outer darkness, Revelation 21:23; 22:5; Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 25:30. Heaven will know peace and joy while hell will know agony and pain. Heaven will be blessed by the presence of God where hell will be banishment from His presence. Heaven is to be sought but hell is to be shunned. Heaven is associated with hope but hell is associated with hopelessness.

(5) Hell is a place of fire and brimstone. Many have bothered about whether the fire in hell is literal fire and if so how could a physical body last eternally in it. It is significant that there is no deviation from the term "fire" in all the Bible. It is called "unquenchable" (asbestos) fire in Matthew 3:10; a furnace of fire in Matthew 13:42; a lake of fire and brimstone in Revelation 20:10; and fire which is not quenched in Mark 9:44, 46, 48.

"But," someone objects, "this is all figurative language." In Matthew 13:36-43 a parable is given of future judgment under figures of harvesting wheat and tares. Jesus interprets the parable by explaining the figurative use of the field: seed, tares, sowers, enemy, harvest, and reapers. But He makes no reference to a figurative use of fire. Instead, He says, **"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world . . . (the angels) shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth,"** Matthew 13:40, 42. And even if it were a figurative use of "fire," the reality is always stronger than the figure. What kind of punishment is here described!

3. Inhabitants. — The devil will be in hell for God will cast him into "this place prepared for him and his angels, Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10. All fallen angels will be there for they have been "reserved in chains of darkness, reserved unto judgment" (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6). And with them will be all wicked men who have rejected the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour, Psalm 9:17. Whoever has not his name written in the book of life will be cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone, Revelation 20:15; 19:20. What a terrible fate! Make sure you do not go to hell. Make sure not one of your loved ones goes to hell. Make sure you are a witness for Jesus Christ.

4. Extent. — There will be degrees of punishment in hell. Even the best will be terrible but the deeper one's sin the more grievous will be his punishment. Examine this concept in the light of Matthew 11:20-24 and Luke 12:47-48.