

Do Christians Go Directly To Heaven At Death?

There are some who argue Christians go directly to heaven when they die. They say Hades was broken up at the resurrection of Christ, Paradise was transported to heaven, and now only the wicked go to Hades to await the resurrection. If this seems strange to you, there is good reason--the Bible does not teach it.

The statements of the Lord in reference to the rich man and Lazarus ought to settle the matter. He said the wicked go to torments, the righteous to Abraham's bosom, and they are separated by a great, impassable gulf (Lk. 16:19-31). But, again, some say Hades was torn apart at the resurrection of Christ. The Bible says Hades will give up the dead at the judgment (Rev. 20:11-14).

Moreover, Jesus said,

When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just (Lk. 14:12-14).

Repayment, reward, is given at the resurrection. When will the resurrection take place? When a person dies or when the Lord returns? Obviously, when the Lord returns (1 Cor. 15:20-24). This cannot be answered by those who believe Christians go directly to heaven at death.

Further evidence of this comes from Paul. He said,

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the incorruptible crown for which we strive, will be given "on that Day," at "His appearing," not before (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Paul said, "Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels" (2 Thes. 1:6-7). "Rest" will be given to the faithful child of God "when the Lord Jesus is revealed." That is the second coming, "when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thes. 1:10). The Lord will not be revealed before "that Day."

Peter also teaches that eternal salvation is not enjoyed until the judgment. He said there is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:4-5). "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

Finally, hear Peter on Pentecost: "For David did not ascend into the heavens..." (Acts 2:34). This is true even though Christ came forth from the grave and ascended into heaven. Those who say Christ's resurrection broke up the Hadean world, and that He took Paradise with Him to heaven, contradict the words of Peter. David, no doubt in Paradise, is not in heaven.

The idea that Hades is broken, that Jesus took Paradise with Him to heaven, is pure fantasy. There is no evidence in the book of God for it. That is why it sounds so strange to our ears.

We want to examine two passages used to advocate the idea that Christians are now in heaven.

First, Paul said, "For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). It is argued that Paul said he would be with Christ when he died. Well, the Hebrew writer said, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Does this mean we face the judgment individually at the time we die? Will there be billions of days of judgment? No. There is one judgment day (cf. Jn. 5:28-29). This passage simply gives a summary about what will happen, death then judgment (they are sure to come). Likewise, Paul mentions he will be with Christ after death.

Second, Paul said, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thes. 4:14). It is

pointed out that this means "those who sleep in Jesus" are in heaven with Jesus and will come back with Him on the last day. Why, then, will they come back if they are already in heaven? All this says is that those who are dead in Christ will come back when Christ does. He will bring them out of the Hadean world, give them a new body fit for eternity (cf. Jn. 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:42-54).

Do Christians go directly to heaven when they die? No. They go to Hades, to "Abraham's bosom" and await the resurrection of the dead (Lk. 16:19-31; Jn. 5:28-29).

Steven F. Deaton