

**Do the Righteous
Dead Go Straight
to Heaven?**

Dave Miller

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By Dave Miller

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DEDICATION

To Deb—
whose positive influence on
my life has been inestimable,
profound, and eternal.

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INTRODUCTION

Only the Bible can inform mankind concerning afterlife. No other source on Earth is of divine origin and, hence, capable of providing the truth about existence beyond this life. What does the Bible teach regarding where people go the moment they die? Do they go straight to heaven or hell? Do they become extinct or annihilated? Are they conscious?

Perhaps the prevailing view among Christian peoples is that a person goes immediately to heaven or hell upon death. The depiction given by Jesus in Luke 16 describes an intermediate realm identified as “Hades.”¹ This realm contains two separate realms — one for the righteous and one for the unrighteous. Some contend that this realm (at least the portion known as “Paradise”²) was terminated and eliminated once the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus occurred. The righteous dead that inhabited Paradise were then transferred to Heaven. Hence, it is believed, that since Jesus’ return to Heaven, saved people go directly to their ultimate eternal abode when they die. Consider the following difficulties with this viewpoint.³ [The reader is urged to take the time to read the Endnotes while progressing through the following evaluation where several additional clarifications are provided.]

THE SPIRIT REALM

No doubt because we humans are finite beings who are fully fused into a time-space, material realm, we are virtually incapable of conceptualizing a non-physical realm where space and time do not exist. We inherently think in terms of **places**—here versus there, this location versus that location. God has certainly accommodated this limitation in His efforts to characterize the afterlife for us, but the fact is that our limitations prevent us from grasping the essence of the spirit realm. No doubt when we exit the physical realm and enter the spiritual realm, completely different circumstances prevail. God can only give us brief glimpses and vague indicators of this realm—as, for example, when Jesus stated forthrightly to His disciples, “a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:39), or as John sought to reassure us, “**it has not yet been revealed what we shall be**, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him **as He is**” (1 John 3:2), or Paul’s perplexing description of the resurrection, including the words, “Just as we have borne the **image of the earthy**, we will also bear the **image of the heavenly**” (1 Corinthians 15:49, NASB). Such brief, ambiguous, incomplete allusions only serve to generate many more unanswered questions. Indeed, God has not chosen to satisfy our yearnings for clarification—since the accelerated existence beyond the grave is completely beyond our present, earthly ability to comprehend.

Such being the case, we encounter verses that can only “telescope” or compress these ethereal complexities for our finite minds. For example, Paul stated: “For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire **to depart and be with Christ**” (Philippians 1:23).⁴ He also explained: “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from

the Lord.... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to **be present with the Lord**" (2 Corinthians 5:6,8). And Solomon announced: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, **and the spirit will return to God who gave it**" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). To make sense of such passages, we simply must recognize the distinction that the Bible makes between the temporal and the eternal, the physical and the spiritual, reminding ourselves that, as finite beings, **we think and experience spatially**. Being enmeshed in a time-space continuum, we are not in a position to conceptualize fully the eternal, spiritual realm that is non-physical and not subject to time as we know it.⁵

2 Corinthians 12:2?

What about Paul's description, perhaps of himself, when he said: "I know a man in Christ who...was caught up to the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2)? The "third heaven" in scriptural thought is the spirit realm where God and other celestial beings "reside" (Deuteronomy 10:14; 26:15; 1 Kings 8:27,30). It often is referred to as the "heaven of heavens"—a Semitism wherein the genitive is used for the superlative degree—meaning the highest or ultimate heaven (cf. "Song of songs," "King of kings," "Lord of lords"). In Scripture, the "first heaven" is the Earth's atmosphere/air—the "sky"—where the birds fly (Matthew 6:26; Genesis 1:20; 8:2; Isaiah 55:10; Luke 13:19). The "second heaven" is "outer space"—where the Sun, Moon, and stars are positioned (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; Deuteronomy 4:19; Nahum 3:16). Hence, the "third heaven" refers to the spirit realm, encompassing the spiritual, eternal realm in **general** or any **part** of it in particular. Therefore, Hades is there, Paradise is there, Tartarus is there, and

both Heaven and Hell are there.⁶ Context must determine which portion of the “third heaven” is being referenced.

Ephesians 3:15?

What about Paul’s statement to the Ephesians? “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom **every family in heaven** and on earth derives its name” (Ephesians 3:14-15, NASB). Doesn’t that verse suggest that some of God’s family, i.e., Christians,⁷ were already in heaven? Interestingly, this passage has elicited considerable discussion over the last 2,000 years—centering primarily on the meaning of *patria* and its relation to *pateir* (“father”). A host of scholars and commentators maintain that the term *patria* rendered “family” is a broad term that can refer to far more than what a “family” is generally conceived to be.⁸ Most insist that the portion of God’s family that is even now in Heaven consists of the celestial hosts, i.e., the angels.⁹

Indeed, God is frequently declared to be the “LORD of hosts.”¹⁰ As such, He has an army of celestial beings ever in His presence. The prophet Micaiah alluded to this group in his response to Jehosaphat and Ahab: “Then Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all **the host of heaven** standing by, on His right hand and on His left” (1 Kings 22:19). Koehler, et al. refer to this “host” as “the heavenly entourage of Yahweh.”¹¹ The Levites addressed God in the presence of the returning exiles: “You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. **The host of heaven worships You**” (Nehemiah 9:6). And recall the occasion when the angel appeared to the shepherds to announce Jesus’ birth: “And suddenly there

was with the angel a multitude of **the heavenly host** praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!’ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them **into heaven...**” (Luke 2:13-15).

Scripture has much to say about this innumerable company of beings that compose God’s heavenly family—having come forth from Him as their Creator and, as such, are “**sons of God**” (Psalm 29:1; 89:6; Job 1:6; 2:1). In that sense, He is their Father as well as ours. They are intimate and integral participants interwoven into the bringing to fruition of God’s scheme of redemption, culminating in the cross. Read, for example, Matthew 26:53, Mark 1:13, Luke 20:36; 24:23, Hebrews 12:22, 1 Peter 1:12, et al.

Hence, Ephesians 3:15 may well be referring to the angelic occupants of Heaven coupled with the saints on Earth, together forming God’s family—as delineated by Bloomfield in his *Greek Testament*, “saints and angels are incorporated into one family or society, of which he is the Head.”¹² As Salmond explained:

The sense, therefore, is “the Father, from whom all the related orders of intelligent beings, **human and angelic**, each by itself, get the significant name of *family, community*.” The various classes of men on earth, Jewish, Gentile, and others, and the various orders of angels in heaven, are all related to God, the common Father.¹³

Ellicott agrees: “[T]he *reference* must be to those larger classes and communities into which...the celestial hosts appear to be divided, and to the races and tribes of men.”¹⁴ Or as Arthur Peake, Ryland Professor of Biblical Exegesis in the University of Manchester, stated succinctly: “**every family**: i.e., angelic or human.”¹⁵ Irish scholar and educator, who chaired the departments of moral philosophy, biblical Greek, and Hebrew at Trinity College, T.K. Abbott observed: “By the *patriai* on earth are doubtless meant the nations, with the fundamental division into Jews and

Gentiles; by those in heaven, **angels regarded as belonging to certain groups or ‘tribes’.**¹⁶ A lengthy listing of additional scholars and commentators through the centuries could be assembled that support this same viewpoint.¹⁷ John Wesley well summarized the point: “*Of whom*—The Father, the whole family of angels in heaven. Saints in paradise, and believers on earth, is named: being the children of God...and depending on him as the father of the family.”¹⁸ To summarize: angels—in heaven; deceased saints—in Paradise (i.e., Hades); living believers—on Earth. These constitute God’s “family in heaven and on Earth.” This verse gives no indication of deceased saints in heaven.¹⁹

Hebrews 12:23?

But who are “the spirits of just men made perfect” mentioned in Hebrews 12:23? Are these deceased saints who have entered into Heaven? The context consists of the Hebrews writer’s admonition to his recipients not to revert to their Jewish religious roots. He contrasts Mt. Sinai in the Old Testament with Mt. Zion in the New Testament. In sharp contradistinction to the frightful events that accompanied the inauguration of the Mosaic system at Mt. Sinai (vss. 18-21), the writer reassures his Jewish audience:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous²⁰ made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24, NASB).

Five of these descriptive expressions refer specifically to the Church of Christ which plays such a preeminent role in God’s scheme of redemption: (1) Mount Zion, (2) city of the living God, (3) heavenly Jerusalem, (4) church of the firstborn ones, and (5)

spirits of the righteous ones. In addition to these five, God, Jesus, and Jesus' blood are noted, as well as the angels. All together, these items depict elements of God's plan of salvation—with the Church of Christ being the receptacle of the saved. The Church—the saved—consists of Christians who have obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9). They constitute Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church on Earth—which is composed of the spirits of the righteous made perfect, i.e., spiritually complete, by Jesus' blood.²¹ "Spirits" is accentuated since it is the human spirit—not the body—that the blood of Christ cleanses. Observe that nothing is said about these spirits being in Heaven. Thompson notes: "Jewish writers spoke of a waiting place of the dead. The author appears to assume that the dead have a present existence in which they await the end. This is the view also of Revelation 6:9,10, where the righteous dead cry out for vindication."²²

The saved are said to be "**enrolled in heaven**"—but not said to be **in** heaven. All saved Christians are "registered in heaven"—though still on Earth. The Bible frequently refers to those who are in the Book of Life—no doubt a figurative allusion to the ranks of the saved—**even while they are yet on Earth**. Jesus explained to the 70 when they returned from their successful mission: "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because **your names are written in heaven**" (Luke 10:20; cf. Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 21:27; 22:19). Indeed, Jesus frequently alluded to **the church on Earth** as the "kingdom of **heaven**" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 16:19, et al.)—which the Hebrews writer insists his audience on Earth was receiving (12:28).²³ A.R. Fausset summarizes: "So *spirit* and *spirits* are used

of a *man* or *men in the body, under the influence of the spirit, the opposite of flesh*” (John 3:6).²⁴

Let us suppose, however, that the author of Hebrews, in fact, intended to refer to the saved who have already died and left the Earth. Did he intend for us to understand that they are **in heaven**? He does not say so. If by “spirits” he means disembodied saints, he does not specify where they are situated. As we have already noted, the Bible can use the term “heaven” generically to refer to the eternal, spirit realm, without intending to pinpoint precisely which “portion/facet” of that realm. If Paul can use the expression “third heaven” to refer to “paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:2,4), and Jesus can use the term “paradise” to refer to Hades (Luke 23:43), then Paul can use “heaven” in Ephesians 3:15 to refer to Paradise in Hades. In either case, Ephesians 3:15 does not prove that deceased Christians are already in heaven.²⁵

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF DEITY

A second Bible doctrine must also be weighed when considering whether the saved go directly to Heaven at death. We must consider the divine attribute of the **omnipresence** of Deity, again, to the extent that our finite existence and mental capacities permit us to do so. Though we cannot fully fathom the concept, we can nevertheless understand the Bible's forthright affirmation of the fact that God possesses this attribute and thus is not confined or bound by space, time, distance, and physical location. The psalmist articulated this principle as well as it can be expressed for limited human beings:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, **You are there**; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, **You are there** (Psalm 139:7-8, NASB).

Indeed, if God knows the exact number of hairs on every human head on the planet (Matthew 10:30), if He knows exactly what every human being is thinking (Psalm 94:11; Matthew 9:4), if He knows the name, number, and movements of all the stars in the Universe (Psalm 147:4), He most certainly is not confined to an isolated location.²⁶

No wonder that, at the dedication of the Temple, Solomon asked: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, **heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You**. How much less this temple which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). That is why God declared through Jeremiah: "'Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?' says the LORD; 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:24). If He fills heaven and Earth, He most certainly fills "the third heaven"—the eternal realm (cf. Revelation 14:10).

Job told his “friends” concerning the omnipresence of God: “Sheol is naked before Him, and Destruction (*Abaddon*) has no covering” (Job 26:6). Solomon likewise stated: “Hell (*sheol*) and Destruction (*Abaddon*) are before the LORD; so how much more the hearts of the sons of men. (Proverbs 15:11). In His furious remarks concerning the punishment due to Israel, God declared: “Though they dig into Sheol, from there will My hand take them; and though they ascend to heaven, from there will I bring them down” (Amos 9:2, NASB). There’s nowhere you can go to remove yourself from His omnipresence.

So when the Bible speaks of humans going “to be with the Lord,” or the spirit returning to God, or a visit to the “third heaven,” these references are not intended to make sharp distinctions between spatially defined locations, separated by time and space, in the same way that we limited humans conceptualize them. The Bible does its best to represent afterlife to us, but the fact is that the spirit realm is unlike the physical realm in which we live. Since we are limited and confined by both time and space, we must understand that the physical features that characterize a material Universe composed of matter **do not exist beyond this world**. The psalmist plainly affirms that whether you are in the Hadean realm (Sheol²⁷) or in Heaven itself, you are not separated from the presence of God. Being in Hades—and not in Heaven—does not mean being completely disconnected from the omnipresence of God.

Recall the occasion when Stephen was being stoned to death and was permitted by God to gaze into Heaven and see the glory of God, and see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. The request that Stephen directed to Jesus—“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59)—does not prove that Stephen was about to be

ushered into Heaven itself and into the very presence of Jesus. Jesus had been receiving disembodied spirits of deceased human beings throughout the millennia of time on Earth. In fact, Jesus Himself made a similar request while He was on the cross—a request that was addressed directly to God: “Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit’” (Luke 23:46).²⁸ **Did Jesus go immediately into the presence of the Father at His death?** He did not. He entered the Hadean realm (not Heaven) and remained there for three days before exiting (Matthew 16:18; Luke 23:43,46; Acts 2:31). The term “Paradise” in Luke 23:43 is used as an equivalent expression for “hades” in Acts 2:27,31—not Heaven.²⁹ So Stephen’s request that Jesus receive his spirit does not prove that he entered into Heaven upon his death. Observe the sequence that Jesus experienced:

- 1) Jesus died on the cross.
- 2) His body was taken to a tomb outside Jerusalem while His spirit went directly to the Paradise portion of Hades (Luke 23:43).³⁰
- 3) Three days later, He experienced resurrection, i.e., He exited Hades (not Heaven) to reinhabit His physical body which was still located in a tomb outside Jerusalem (cf. Matthew 16:18).
- 4) After 40 days on Earth in His physical body, He experienced His Ascension, leaving the Earth, entering Heaven, and assuming His throne in Heaven at the right hand of God. If Jesus went straight to Heaven when He died on the cross, **then the Bible teaches two Ascensions** and, perhaps, **two Enthronements**.

So, even Jesus did not go straight to Heaven upon His death. He made that very point to Mary: “Stop clinging to Me, for **I have not yet ascended to the Father**; but go to My brothers and say

to them, ‘**I am ascending** to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God’” (John 20:17). He plainly conveyed to the women that His death and three-day absence from them did not mean that He had returned to Heaven, though He soon would do so.

2 Corinthians 5:8?

Similarly, Paul’s remarks in 2 Corinthians 5 have led some to maintain that when we vacate our earthly bodies at death (James 2:26), we are then immediately “at home with the Lord.”³¹ Apart from a failure to take into account the omnipresence of Deity and the Bible’s accommodative language for we time-bound beings, this conclusion does not consider the fact that Hades is a realm of **disembodied** spirits. That is, those in Hades have not yet received their spiritual bodies which they will receive at the Judgment. Paul explained to the Corinthians in his previous letter to them that no humans will receive their incorruptible body until the General Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42). If the righteous in Hades have already gone into Heaven, and all righteous individuals who have died since Christ’s ascension have also gone to Heaven, all those individuals are either still in their **disembodied** state or they have **already** obtained their resurrection bodies. But the “house” that Paul says we will occupy in Heaven—a “house not made with hands” (vs. 1)—and our “longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” (vs. 2, ESV) will not be realized until the General Resurrection. Hence, no argument may be made that the righteous dead are already present with the Lord in Heaven on that basis.

Further, our inherent entanglement with time and space is seen in the contention that the reason pre-cross saints were required to remain in Hades until Jesus offered His blood was

because “no imperfection or unremitted sin can stand accepted in the presence of God.”³² But this thinking confuses the **place** (Heaven) with the **person** (God). It is certainly true that God’s righteous character is at odds with the sinful imperfection of His created beings. But His omnipresence and omniscience dispel the notion that God cannot be in close proximity to sin—again, as if He is subject to the limitations of space and time. After all, Satan is about as sin-ridden, unforgiven, and imperfect as one can get—yet on the occasion when Satan received permission to attempt to subvert Job, he **came into the presence** of the LORD/Jehovah (Job 1:6,12; 2:1,7). It follows, then, that pre-cross saints were not confined to Hades on account of God’s inability to tolerate them in Heaven until Christ’s blood was offered—as if He, too, were confined to the restraints of time. After all, Jesus is “the Lamb slain **from the foundation of the world**” (Revelation 13:8). Instead, in God’s grand scheme of things, the occupants of Hades were/are confined there for a completely different purpose: to await the Judgment Day (Hebrews 9:27).³³ [See the section on “Judgment Day” on p. 34.]

JESUS “LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE”?

Some have concluded that the elimination of Hades is described in the following words:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, **He led captivity captive**, and gave gifts to men.” (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:7-10).

Observe that Paul here alludes to the fact that Jesus entered Hades after His death on the cross, but then came forth to ascend into Heaven. Some contend that upon His ascension, the righteous dead in Hades came forth and accompanied Him into Heaven:

They could not go into the immediate presence of God till made perfect. They could not be made perfect till the atonement was made. Hence their abode in paradise in hades was a necessity till Christ removed their disabilities and dedicated heaven by the blood of atonement.³⁴

Notice, however, that Paul quoted from Psalm 68, using figurative language to characterize the victory/triumph that Christ’s death and resurrection represented, i.e., His conquest over death and the power of Satan. Hence, “captivity” does **not** refer to the righteous in Hades, nor even to the unrighteous in Hades. Those in Paradise are said to be in a state of bliss (“comforted,” Luke 16:25)—not imprisonment, subjugation, or captivity as if held hostage. They were awaiting the Judgment—not the cross or ascension.

Rather, “captivity” refers to the institution of death that was ushered into the material realm beginning in Eden as the result of sin and Satan’s influence (Genesis 3). Through His death Jesus “taste[d] **death** for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9) and “destroy[ed] him who had **the power of death**, that is, the devil” (Hebrews

2:14). He “**abolished death** and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10; cf. Romans 8:2). Jesus “cinched” the potential for every human to transcend death and the consequences of one’s own sin via His work on the cross. The captivity that Jesus led captive was the inescapable bondage perpetrated upon mankind by Satan and sin.³⁵ Hence: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might **destroy the works of the devil**” (1 John 3:8). Jesus eliminated the power of Satan and sin to hold us captive permanently. Numerous biblical scholars verify these facts.

Clarifications/Confirmations

Prominent theologian and Professor of Biblical Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary during the mid-nineteenth-century, Charles Hodge, noted that, “The Messiah is represented by the Psalmist as a conqueror, leading captives in triumph, and laden with spoils which he distributes to his followers. Thus Christ conquered.... He conquered Satan. He led captivity captive.”³⁶ Nineteenth-century exegete Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, considered by many scholars to be an “Exegete Extraordinaire,”³⁷ largely due to his 16-volume, highly acclaimed *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, noted that Jesus “has brought in as captives enemies that have been vanquished by Him upon this triumphal march.”³⁸ These captives are “not the redeemed,” nor “the souls delivered by Christ from Hades,” but “the enemies of Christ and His kingdom, the antichristian powers, including those of hell.”³⁹ He explained:

By His resurrection and exaltation they have been rendered powerless, and subjected to His victorious might; consequently they appear, in accordance with the poetical mould of our passage, as those whom He has vanquished and carries with Him

on His procession from Hades into heaven, so that He, having gone up on high, brings them in as prisoners of war. Not as if He has really brought them in captivity to heaven, but under the figure of the triumphator, as which the ascended Christ appears in accordance with the prophetic view given in Ps. lxxviii, the matter thus presents itself, namely, **the overcoming of His foes displaying itself through His ascension.**⁴⁰

He further notes that this vanquishing will continue until “the resurrection on the last day.”⁴¹

Prominent among the so-called early church “fathers,” John Chrysostom identifies the “captivity” as being “that of the devil; for He took the tyrant captive, the devil, I mean, and death, and the curse, and sin.”⁴² Martin Luther defined the concept: “that is sin, death, and conscience, that they may not seize or keep us.”⁴³ Scottish theologian and biblical critic, John Eadie, known for his production of a four-volume set of commentaries on the Greek text of four of Paul’s epistles, explains:

The prisoners plainly belong to the enemy whom He had defeated, and by whom His people had long been subjugated.... [H]aving beaten His foes, He makes captives of them.... The enemies of Messiah are Satan and his allies—every hostile power which Satan originates, controls, and directs against Jesus and His kingdom. The captive, therefore, are not merely Satan, nor simply death, nor the devil and sin.... [T]hey include **Satan, sin, and death.**⁴⁴

Distinguished English theologian, academic, and churchman who served as Professor of Divinity at King’s College in London as well as Hulsean Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, Charles Ellicott, agreed that “the enemies of Christ” referred to are “Satan, Sin, and Death,” and offered linguistic reasons why the captives cannot be “the souls of the righteous in Hades.”⁴⁵

T.K. Abbott agreed that the enemies spoken of are Satan, sin, and death, noting that “the figure is general, that of a triumphant conqueror leading his conquered enemies in his train.”⁴⁶ He

alludes to Colossians 2:15 as a comparison passage: “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” and adds, “These enemies are not yet finally destroyed,”⁴⁷ noting 1 Corinthians 15:25 as verification. He then explains why the captives cannot be the redeemed who had been taken captive by the devil:

[T]his does not agree with the construction by which the αἰχμαλωσία (captivity/group of captives—DM) must be the result of the action of the verb. Besides, the captives are distinguished from ἄνθρωποι (men—DM). The same objections hold against the view that the captives are the souls of the righteous whom Christ delivered from Hades.⁴⁸

Salmond agrees: “Neither in the Psalm nor in Paul’s use of it (“captives”) here is there anything to warrant the idea that the captives are the redeemed, or men in the bonds of sin on earth, or souls detained in Hades.”⁴⁹ Instead, “the captives are the enemies of Christ.”⁵⁰ One of the most influential Anglican theologians of the 19th century, and chaplain to Queen Victoria and King Edward VII, Charles Gore, agreed: “And the ‘captives’ of Christ, to St. Paul’s mind, are no doubt **not men**, but the hosts of Satan reduced to impotence.”⁵¹

But Death Continues

Observe, then, that though Jesus has already “led captivity captive,” that glorious, “technical/legal” achievement did not mean that physical death on Earth was eliminated. Death continues to this day—as does the receptacle God created to receive the dead until death itself is finally and permanently vanquished. Jesus was simply “the forerunner [Who] has entered for us” (Hebrews 6:20), our predecessor, in His exit from Hades, demonstrating that it can and will be done at the last day. Since Jesus “loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be

held by it” (Acts 2:24), we, too, will be empowered to escape its grasp. When will that occur? Not at the death, burial, resurrection, or ascension of Christ. Rather, the last enemy to be destroyed—death—will not occur **until the General Resurrection at Christ’s Second Coming**, as Paul cogently argued in his inspired masterpiece on the resurrection:

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The **last** enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24-27).

Paul stressed that all things have not yet been put in subjection—which will not happen until the Second Coming. Observe the following grammatical indicators in Paul’s discussion, with special attention to the bolded words:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who **are** asleep (in Hades) (vs. 20, NASB).

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all **will be** made alive (vs. 22, NASB)—in the future, not at the ascension.

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, **after that** those who are Christ’s **at His coming** (vs. 23, NASB)—not at His ascension (which shows that no one else has been resurrected and will not be until Christ’s Second Coming). Hence, the deceased remain in their disembodied state in Hades/Paradise.

Since not all will die, “but we will **all** be changed...at the last trumpet” (vss. 51-52, NASB), then those saints who are allegedly already in Heaven will not have received their changed, incorruptible, immortal bodies. But until we all have been given our immortal bodies, “the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory’” (vs. 54, NASB) **has not been accomplished**.

Summary

Consider two well-worded summaries of Paul's remarks concerning the work of Christ when He "led captivity captive." First, G.G. Findlay, Professor at Headingley College, Leeds, provides a fitting summary of the work that Jesus did for us:

He came, the Good Shepherd, to seek lost sheep. He came, the Mighty One of God, to destroy the works of the devil, to drive out "the strong one armed" who held the fortress of man's soul. He had a war to wage with the usurping prince of the world. In the temptations of the wilderness, in the strife with disease and demoniac powers, in the debate with Scribes and Pharisees, in the anguish of Gethsemane and Calvary that conflict was fought out; and by death He abolished him who holds the power of death, by His blood He "bought us for God."⁵²

Second, John Eadie also well-summarizes Christ's incredible accomplishment:

Christ's work on earth was a combat—a terrible struggle with the hosts of darkness whose fiercest onsets were in the garden and on the cross—when hell and death combined against Him those efforts which repeated failures had roused into desperation. And in dying He conquered, and at length ascended in victory, no enemy daring to dispute His right or challenge His march; nay, He exhibited His foes in open triumph. He bruised the head of the Serpent, though His own heel was bruised in the conflict. As the conqueror returning to his capital makes a show of his beaten foes, so Jesus having gone up to glory exposed His vanquished antagonists whom He had defeated in His agony and death.⁵³

GOD, REMISSION, AND THE TIMING OF JESUS' DEATH

As briefly noted, another factor to consider is the fact that, as finite beings, we are completely tied to time. We cannot even conceptualize existence without our conceptions being characterized by the transpiring of time. But such is not the case with God. God is not subject to time. He exists outside of time and is the Creator of time. Indeed, He is “the High and Lofty One Who inhabits **eternity**” (Isaiah 57:15). As this divine attribute relates to the question of salvation, God did not have to wait until the literal, physical crucifixion of Christ in order to forgive pre-cross peoples on the basis of Christ’s blood. The fact that pre-cross saints could not be forgiven without the blood of Christ did not mean that they were in some sort of spiritual limbo and unsaved until the cross. They could be saved at the time they lived on Earth—as subsequently made clear by their being placed in Paradise in Hades.

Indeed, to speak of “the **righteous** in Hades”⁵⁴ is an admission that they were **saved**. The mere fact that they were in Paradise demonstrates that they were **already** redeemed by Jesus. In fact, why have two separated areas—one for the righteous and one for the unrighteous—if both were yet unforgiven? Hebrews 11:40 stresses that their salvation was not disconnected from the salvation that those **after** the cross would receive. They were tied together based on the same divine sacrifice. Indeed, while the faithful were alive on Earth long before the cross, God reckoned them “righteous,” “pleasing to God,” “an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith,” and “looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:4,5, 7,26).

Critical verses that clarify this concept may be seen in Romans 3:25-26 and Revelation 13:8. The first passage, referring to Jesus,

reads: “whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had **passed over** the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness.” In other words, God did not have to consider pre-cross saints **as lost** because He was able to forgive them, based on the blood of Christ, since His sacrifice was an inevitability. Neither Satan himself nor anyone else could thwart the eternal purposes of God. No wonder, then, as earlier noted, that Jesus is described as “the Lamb slain **from the foundation of the world**” (Revelation 13:8; cf. “before time began”—2 Timothy 1:9). Atonement, so far as God was concerned, was a “done deal” since He is not subject to time constraints. His eternality places Him above time and He could reckon forgiveness to the faithful even before the earthly, physical mechanisms were brought to fruition.

God used the physical hemoglobin that flowed through the physical body that He “prepared” (Hebrews 10:5) for Jesus to inhabit as the means by which He could count people forgiven—but that forgiveness occurred **in God’s mind**, not on a wooden cross in first century Palestine. Neither the wooden cross and nails nor the physical hemoglobin possessed any intrinsic saving power—even as the waters of baptism do not. Yet Scripture declares that **both** “save.” But in what sense? Only in the sense that, in harmony with His perfect, infinite nature, God designates them as components of His plan to redeem people. Hence, “passed over” in Romans 3:25 does not mean they remained **unforgiven**. It means God forgave them based on the timeless, eternal sacrifice, thus demonstrating His justice in allowing them to be saved prior to the actual sacrifice. If, on the other hand, they remained unforgiven until Jesus died on the cross, then they should have been in

the torment “compartment” of Hades and not in the Paradise portion. The timeless nature of God in handling man’s redemption is further seen in the fact that if Jesus’ blood could be shed for countless people yet unborn and sinless without regard to actual timing, why not also for those before the cross?

Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews provides crucial clarifications regarding what was needed to atone for sin, and that the blood of bulls and goats would not do it (10:4). But these technicalities were not divulged nor understood until the New Testament era. Old Testament saints could not have known these subtleties (1 Peter 1:10-11). **Nor did they need to.** But what they **did** need to know was that, if they manifested “obedient faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26), they were saved (which is precisely what Hebrews 11 elaborates). Consequently, God provided ample reassurance to those who predated the cross of Christ that they were in a **saved** condition. Here is a small sample of such indications:

- ✓ Leviticus 4-5 uses the expression “**it shall be forgiven him/them**” eight times to describe the condition of those Israelites for whom animal sacrifices were made.
- ✓ Numbers 15:25-26 states twice that the sin offerings would enable the “whole congregation” of Israel to **be forgiven.**
- ✓ In Psalm 103:12, David insisted: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He **removed our transgressions** from us.”
- ✓ The prophet Micah declared: “Who is a God like You, **pardoning iniquity** and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our

iniquities. You will **cast all our sins into the depths of the sea**" (Micah 7:18-19).

Perhaps a comparable, though admittedly inadequate, illustration would be the way we "pay our bills" every month. When, for example, we receive an electric/utility bill in the mail. We either sit down and write a check for the required amount, or we go online to the electric company website to pay the bill with a credit card. If we write a check, we place that check in a provided envelope, place a stamp on the envelope, and place it in a mailbox for the mailman to retrieve—who then takes that envelope to the central Post Office for sorting in order to redirect that envelope to the electric company. Upon arrival, a machine or employee opens the envelope, retrieves the check, and enters your payment into the system for you to receive credit for paying your bill. At that point, the check is again redirected (physically or electronically), this time to your bank, in order for the electric company to receive the actual funds that are represented by the check that you wrote on your bank account. The bank must then transfer those actual funds from your bank account to the electric company. Once the electric company receives those funds, your bill is **actually** paid. If you pay the bill online at the electric company website, you enter your bank account number from which the electric company draws your payment—a process that delays you receiving **actual** credit for having paid the bill.

Carefully observe that throughout this time-laden process, **technical** payment of your bill is not achieved until all the actions in the chain of events leading up to that payment come to fruition. Yet, when you wrote the check and placed the envelope in the mailbox, and your spouse asks you, "Did you pay the bills?," you answer in the affirmative. Did you lie? Of course not. So far as **you** were concerned, you implemented the actions required on your

part to fulfill your responsibility to pay the bills. You literally **did all you can do** to achieve that objective. And so it was with Old Testament saints. When they lived a life of “obedient faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26; Hebrews 11) before God, they were in a **saved** condition. That assured condition was based—**in God’s mind**, on the blood of Christ—regardless of the time frame and technicalities that God brought to fruition in His own ways and own time (cf. Romans 3:25; Galatians 4:4). All of the righteous—both alive and dead—are eagerly awaiting the Second Coming at which time we will receive the salvation for which He offered Himself: “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but **to save those who are eagerly waiting for him**” (Hebrews 9:27-28, ESV).

To summarize: God did not have to wait for the actual, historical occurrence of the cross on Earth to forgive pre-cross saints. Hence, there is no reason to suppose that once Jesus died on the cross, God could or would remove them from Paradise and transfer them to Heaven. The assumption has no Scriptural basis.

“WILL BY NO MEANS PRECEDE”?

But, of course, that does not mean that those in Hades are simultaneously in Heaven. We must be content to allow the Bible to state **where** various individuals are in the afterlife—even if physical dimensions do not characterize the eternal realm. Hence, Heaven at present contains Deity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as well as a host of celestial beings.⁵⁵ However, it would appear that no humans have entered there. As Jesus explained: “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13).⁵⁶ This was precisely Peter’s point on the day of Pentecost when he quoted Psalm 16:10 [“For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption”] and declared: “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29). Peter was pressing the concept of **resurrection** by pointing out that the prophet David had not been resurrected and so was not speaking of himself in Psalm 16. David will not come out of the Hadean realm until—like all other humans—his spirit is removed from Hades by Jesus to be resurrected/reunited with his changed body. When Peter noted that David’s body was still in the tomb, he likewise implied that—unlike Christ—David’s spirit was still in Hades, not Heaven. What would be the point of assuring the Jews on that occasion that David’s body was still in the tomb—if his spirit was in Heaven? If David’s body was still in the tomb, then David’s spirit had to still be in Hades.⁵⁷ The point of Psalm 16 is that **neither** David’s soul **nor** his body had been resurrected and taken to Heaven.

Or as Paul explained to the Christians in Thessalonica:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so **God will bring with Him** those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will **by no means precede** those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise **first**. **Then** we who are alive and remain shall be caught up **together with them** in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Observe carefully that the Christians were distraught by the fact that some of their loved ones had already died and, hence, would not be present when the Lord returned to take to Heaven His saints. They obviously did not believe that their loved ones were already in Heaven with God. Indeed, they were fearful that since their loved ones were deceased, they would miss out on going to Heaven and that those still alive when Jesus returns would enter Heaven without those loved ones. It would have been a simple matter for Paul simply to inform them that their loved ones were **already** in Heaven!

In stark contrast, however, he explained to them that **before** those who are alive on Earth at the Lord's return ascend to meet Jesus in the air in order to be with Him forever, **first** deceased Christians would be resurrected so that both living and deceased could ascend **together** to meet the Lord in the air. One will not precede the other. This passage plainly teaches that some 25 years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the deceased Christians of Thessalonica **were not in Heaven**. They were obviously in Hades awaiting the return of Christ. Their resurrection will be timed to coincide with the living saints' rising in the air to meet

Jesus. They did not precede the living saints any more than the living saints will precede the deceased saints. Until then, deceased saints—the righteous dead—are not depicted as being in Heaven in the presence of Deity; rather, they are described three times as being “asleep”⁵⁸ (vss. 13-15; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:18,20,51)—an apt description of existence in the Hadean realm of the dead and surely not what Heaven is like. Raymond Kelcy explains:

Those saints who are living at the time of the Lord’s coming **shall be caught up...to meet the Lord in the air**. But they shall have no precedence over those saints who are dead, for they, having been raised, will accompany them **as they are caught up**. Those who are alive at the time of the Lord’s return **shall be caught up together with them**. Thus the saints who are living at that time and the dead who have been raised will **simultaneously go together** to meet the Lord.⁵⁹

Observe Kelcy’s use of the word “simultaneously,” suggesting that both the rising to meet the Lord as well as being with Him will be new occurrences. Conversely, if the righteous dead are already in Heaven, they will simply **repeat** what they have **already** experienced—being caught up to the Lord and being with Him in Heaven.⁶⁰

“God Will Bring With Him”

Another important aspect of these verses to consider is the meaning of the phrase “God will bring with Him.” One must not **assume** that the phrase automatically designates the location from whence He will bring them. These verses do not specify that the deceased saints will come **from Heaven**. To assume they will be brought from Heaven is an unwarranted assumption. They could just as easily be brought from Hades.

But consider that the use of the term “God” is not a reference to Jesus, but to God the Father. Look again at the verses, noting

the bracketed clarifications of Who is being referenced:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God [**the Father**] will bring with Him [**Jesus**] those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord [**Jesus**], that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord [**Jesus**] will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord [**Jesus**] Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God [**the Father**]. And the dead in Christ [**Jesus**] will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord [**Jesus**] in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord [**Jesus**] (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

If God the Father is the One Who will supply Jesus with the deceased saints, we are not specifically informed from whence or by what means these saints will come. But other passages clarify the matter. They indicate that all the deceased—both righteous and unrighteous—will be raised from the dead at the same time and changed bodies given to them. If they are to experience resurrection, why would they come from Heaven? Will they not be returned to their bodies (though changed) which they vacated on Earth at death? The “straight to heaven” viewpoint has deceased saints already in the air with Jesus—but they then return to the Earth to be **raised** with a new body so they can then rise back into the air to meet Jesus.

But the location of where resurrections have and will occur is repeatedly flagged in the New Testament as taking place **on Earth**—not Heaven or in-between Heaven and Earth. Consider these verses:

- ✓ Matthew 27:51-53—“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and **the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming**

out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”

- ✓ John 5:28-29—“all who are **in the graves** will hear His voice and come forth.”
- ✓ John 11:44; 12:17—Lazarus returned to the physical body he inhabited—**on Earth**.
- ✓ Jesus returned to the physical body He inhabited **on Earth** (Matthew 28:6).
- ✓ 1 Corinthians 15:23—“those who are Christ’s **at His coming**” (in the air above **the Earth**)
- ✓ Revelation 20:13—“**The sea** gave up the dead who were in it”—**on Earth**.
- ✓ 1 Samuel 28:14—“An **old man** is coming up, and he is covered with a **mantle**.’ And Saul perceived that it was Samuel.”
- ✓ Matthew 17:3—“Moses and Elijah **appeared** to them, talking with Him.”

The Bible consistently depicts the resurrection of human beings as an Earth-bound occurrence—which consists of the spirit of an individual returning from Hades to be reconnected to the body on Earth. Hence, for God to enable the deceased saints to be present at Jesus’ Second Coming, He will bring them out of Hades—in the sense that His voice will call them forth (John 5:28-29)—resurrect them **on Earth**, so that they, too, will be “with Jesus.”⁶¹ Paul was reassuring the Christians in Thessalonica that, **in combination with** Jesus’ return, their deceased loved ones would also come forth via resurrection and, thus, not miss out on getting to rise to meet Jesus in the air. To repeat: when Jesus returns, the General Resurrection will occur with the resurrected saints coming out of the graves and their bodies being changed, and then they will rise into the air simultaneous with the living saints—so that they are “caught up together.”⁶²

One Grand Homecoming?

A final thought regarding Paul's remarks in 1 Thessalonians 4. His emphasis upon making sure that the Christians in Thessalonica did not think that they would have an advantage over their deceased loved ones suggests that it would have been unfair for God to have some people to precede others in their opportunity to meet Jesus and enter into God's presence in Heaven. Indeed, such favoritism would be a violation of God's divine attribute of impartiality (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11).

But this is exactly what would be the case if people go straight to Heaven at death. They are **already** experiencing what the faithful on Earth are being denied. Yet the biblical doctrine of the Judgment stresses the fact that everyone will receive their just outcome **at the same time**. The "holding cell," i.e., Hades, is not and was never intended to be that outcome. One of the thrilling anticipations of Judgment Day is the expectation that all of the saved may enter into God's glorious presence **together**, at the **same** time, in one grand, indescribable homecoming.

"Saints"?

These observations are relevant to Paul's remarks one chapter earlier: "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ **with all His saints**" (3:12-13). Some have suggested that "saints" in verse 13 refers to the deceased righteous persons who are presently in Heaven with Jesus and who will be brought by Him at His Second Coming. As has already been explained, we cannot assume that these individuals are in Heaven rather than in Hades.

However, there is another factor to consider. Though the majority of English translations render the term “saints” in verse 13, its use causes the English reader automatically to construe its meaning as **saved humans**. But the plural Greek term *hagiais* (ἁγίαις) simply means “holy,” with the noun meaning “holy [ones].” So in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, the more literal rendering of the Greek is “holy ones” as rendered by a number of English translations.⁶³ One cannot assume that the term refers to human beings, since it can just as easily refer to angelic beings. As a comparison, consider Jude’s remarks in his little epistle:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His **saints**, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 14-15).

The majority of English translations render the term—not “saints” as the NKJV—but “holy ones.”⁶⁴ Several render the word as “holy angels.”⁶⁵ Other renderings include “holy myriads,”⁶⁶ “holy messengers,”⁶⁷ “angels,”⁶⁸ “holy thousands,”⁶⁹ and “saintly myriads.”⁷⁰ Indeed, if 1 Thessalonians 3:13 refers to deceased saints, one cannot help but wonder if **all** deceased saints from throughout the thousands of years of Earth history will be included.

Since the term used in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 can mean non-human “holy ones,” does Scripture elsewhere give us any indication what beings will accompany Jesus at His Second Coming—whether humans, nonhumans, or both? As a matter of fact, several passages weigh in on the matter:

Matthew 13:41-42—“The Son of Man will send out **His angels**, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire.”

Matthew 13:49-50—“So it will be at the end of the age. **The angels** will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 16:27—“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father **with His angels**, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

Matthew 25:31—“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and **all the holy angels with Him**, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.”

Mark 8:38—“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father **with the holy angels**.”

Luke 9:26—“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of **the holy angels**.”

2 Thessalonians 1:7—“...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven **with His mighty angels**, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God.”⁷¹

The figure on the next page compares the nine passages that clarify the meaning of “saints” as referring to angels rather than to humans:

Those Who Will Accompany Christ at His Return: Humans or Angels?					
1 Thess. 3:12-13	Lord Jesus Christ	at the coming	with all His saints		
Matthew 13:41-42	Son of Man	will send	His angels	gather out of kingdom	cast into furnace
Matthew 13:49-50			angels come forth	separate the wicked from just	cast into furnace
Matthew 16:27	Son of Man	will come in glory of His Father	with His angels		reward acc. to works
Matthew 25:31	Son of Man	comes in His glory	holy angels with Him	will sit on His throne	
Mark 8:38	Son of Man	comes in glory of His Father	with the holy angels		
Luke 9:26	Son of Man	comes in His & Father's glory	and of the holy angels		
2 Thess. 1:7	Lord Jesus	revealed from heaven	with His mighty angels		taking vengeance
Jude 14-15	The Lord	comes	with ten thousands of His saints		execute judgment & convict ungodly

Observe that such passages strongly accentuate the prominent role that angels will play at the Second Coming, while they are strangely silent regarding the alleged presence of hundreds of thousands of righteous human beings. It makes more hermeneutical sense to interpret the ambiguous allusion in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 in light of the several explicit allusions to accompanying angels. Indeed, when one reads the above verses, one cannot help being reminded of Jesus' bold statement directed to Peter when a great multitude came to the Garden to arrest Him: "But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with **more than twelve legions of angels?**'" (Matthew 26:52-53). It is more than fitting for Jesus, at His magnificent return, to be accompanied by thousands upon thousands of blazing angelic beings. Both deceased and living saved and unsaved will undoubtedly be completely dazzled and overwhelmed by the mere sight of such a celestial throng hovering in the atmosphere—with the magnificence of Jesus Himself overshadowing all others.

“JUDGMENT DAY”

Still another facet to consider is that the Bible provides a seamless, consistent portrait of the fact that **all** human beings will face God on a single day known as “the Judgment”:

“Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in **the day of judgment** than for that city!” (Matthew 10:15).

“But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in **the day of judgment** than for you.... But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in **the day of judgment** than for you” (Matthew 11:22,24).

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in **the day of judgment**” (Matthew 12:36).

“The men of Nineveh will rise up in **the judgment** with this generation and condemn it.... The queen of the South will rise up in **the judgment** with this generation and condemn it” (Matthew 12:41-42).

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 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 25:31-32).

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the **resurrection of life**, and those who have done evil, to the **resurrection of condemnation**” (John 5:28-29).

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in **the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**” (Romans 2:5).

“For we shall all stand before **the judgment seat of Christ**” (Romans 14:10).

“For we must all appear before **the judgment seat of Christ**, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

“[I]t is appointed for men to die once, but after this **the judgment**” (Hebrews 9:27).

“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [*tartarus*] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for **judgment**...then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for **the day of judgment**” (2 Peter 2:4,9).

“But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until **the day of judgment** and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in **the day of judgment**” (1 John 4:17).

“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for **the judgment of the great day**” (Jude 6).

“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute **judgment on all**, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way” (Jude 14-15).

“[W]hen the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 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 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

“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 Timothy 4:6-8).⁷²

These, and other passages (e.g., Ecclesiastes 12:14), make clear that a singular “Day of Judgment” will occur at which time life on Earth as we know it will come to an end, and **all** people, **all** nations (and even angels) will stand before God and Christ in judgment. No wonder Paul declared before Governor Felix (long after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension): “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be **a** resurrection of the dead, **both of the just and the unjust**” (Acts 24:15). It makes no sense, then, to view deceased saints in Heaven already experiencing the eternal status that Scripture repeatedly depicts as occurring **after** the Day of Judgment.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Keeping in mind that the book of Revelation is an apocalypse and, accordingly, filled with figurative language not intended to be literal, nevertheless, we are presented with a portrait that contains some literal features. It reads:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second

death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Whatever may be said about the literal/non-literal nature of the throne, the Book of Life, and even the lake of fire, other items in the passage are clearly literal, including “the dead,” the institution of “Death” (though personified), and most certainly Hades. The “sea” surely refers to the location where many human beings throughout human history have been “buried at sea”—keeping in mind it was their physical bodies that were committed to the deep. Their spirits had entered into Hades.

Two observations are apparent from this passage. First, both the physical death of human beings as well as the receptacle of the dead, Hades, continue to exist until the Judgment Day. Second, **all** the dead throughout history are gathered on that singular occasion—just as the host of verses just examined indicate. It is also evident that these dead, “both small and great,” are not just the **unrighteous** dead, that is, the **righteous** dead will also be present. This conclusion follows from the fact that “anyone not found written in the Book of Life” were cast into the fire—which implies that some **were** found in the Book of Life. If only the unrighteous were gathered, it would be superfluous to announce that only those not found in the Book were consigned to hell—since that would be the case with **all** of them. Hence, when this passage informs us that both “Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them,” one can only conclude that both the righteous and unrighteous were included in that delivery—which means the righteous could not have vacated Hades at the ascension of Christ.

The Purpose of Judgment Day

But if people in Hades already know where they will spend eternity, what’s the point of the Judgment? The answer to this

question lies in the fact that the Judgment will not be for **ascertaining** guilt or innocence. Every person knows their spiritual condition immediately upon their death. Rather, Judgment Day in Scripture is the time for **passing sentence**—a day of reckoning and the dispensing of justice—before and in anticipation of being consigned to one’s **final** eternal abode.⁷³ The notion that a person goes directly to Heaven or Hell at death short-circuits and preempts this feature of the afterlife.

While Hades contains both comfort and torment, neither condition compares with the bliss of heaven or the suffering of Hell. Hades is nothing more than a prelude to the ultimate **eternal** consignment. Hence, Jesus stated: “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and **then He will reward** each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). No matter how comfortable the Paradise portion of Hades is, it does not compare with the “reward” that Jesus will bestow in Heaven. This verse also proves that the reward of Heaven is not given **until** Jesus returns with His angels. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life” (Matthew 25:46). Obviously, then, the Hadean realm was not intended to contain “everlasting life” or “everlasting punishment.”

If for no other reason, existence in Paradise cannot be compared to Heaven since direct fellowship with Deity will not occur until the inhabitants of Hades are taken to Heaven. The reader is urged to read the spectacular apocalyptic scenes from Revelation chapters 19-22 with their focus on the absolute, mind-boggling majesty of the presence of Deity, as well as the intimacy that saints will experience, that are not now being experienced in the Hadean realm, including:

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and **He will dwell with them,**

and they shall be His people. **God Himself will be with them** and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).

Even in Hades prior to Christ’s redemptive work, those with Abraham **knew** that they were saved, and those in torment **knew** they were lost. If Hades was created to retain those who were **not yet qualified to be forgiven**—since they lived prior to the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ—then all the verses that repeatedly affirm that they **were** forgiven prior to the cross are misleading, if not outright untrue. If, on the other hand, they **were** forgiven prior to the cross, then Hades was not created to provide a place to await the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Indeed, **that was not its purpose**. Then what was its purpose? Hades was divinely intended to be equivalent to a “holding cell.” That is, it was never intended to be a **permanent** receptacle, but rather an intermediate receptacle **while** life for all human beings is lived until life on Earth is terminated for the totality of humanity. Its purpose is comparable to the detainment of criminals in our justice system where they await trial, sentencing, and ultimate consignment.⁷⁴ Such detainment is not intended to be finally penal in nature or punishment. While Hades certainly incorporates both comfort and punishment, its temporary purpose is intended **to anticipate Judgment Day**, at which time all persons will receive their **ultimate**, eternal consignment.

If, on the other hand, deceased human beings have already gone to Heaven (or Hell), they have already experienced and are now in possession of their full and complete eternal reward. But if Hades remains intact for **everyone**, it properly serves a temporary purpose **until** God brings human history, life on Earth, and

humanity's probationary period to a complete and final termination. God will mark this grand culmination by a tremendous, all-encompassing, all-pervasive **Judgment Day** that will serve to vindicate His handling of human existence and demonstrate His justice, as well as His love, by His consignment of **everyone** to their just, earned, self-chosen, ultimate, and final destiny. On **that** Day—and not before—He will bring to fruition His eternal intention to have the objects of His perfect love brought into His very presence for all eternity. Having the righteous prematurely vacate Hades 2,000 years ago circumvents and partly thwarts God's eternal intention regarding Judgment Day. Indeed, if the saved are already in Heaven, they have received their eternal reward **before** sentencing.

THE KEY TO HADES

One final observation: In the first vision reported in the book of Revelation, John sees “one like the Son of Man” (1:13). An unmistakable allusion to Jesus, the figure identifies Himself as “the First and the Last” (1:17; cf. 2:8; 22:13) and then declares to John: “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And **I have the keys of Hades and of Death**” (Revelation 1:18).

John is believed to have received the Revelation in the last decade of the 90s A.D.⁷⁵ Dating questions aside, these remarks by Jesus to John occurred—at the very least—30 years **after** Jesus’ ascension. Why, then, would He inform John that He was at that time in possession of the key to the Hadean realm? If the righteous had already vacated the Paradise portion of Hades, and if all who remained in Hades in John’s day were the wicked dead in torment,⁷⁶ what possible reassurance could John receive from Jesus informing him of the fate of the deceased wicked? Why would Jesus’ key to that realm be of any concern or need for explanation for the living faithful?

CONCLUSION

Are we as Christians to be saddened or discouraged if we do not go straight to Heaven at death? Surely not! The Hades to which Lazarus was transported is described as a place of “comfort” (Luke 16:25). For Jesus to tell the thief that he would be in Paradise that very day (Luke 23:43) was surely a reassurance that bliss awaited him. Being a temporary receptacle, the anticipation of being resurrected and permitted to meet Jesus in Earth’s atmosphere at His Second Coming surely urges the inhabitants of Paradise to exercise patience in view of that great day.

Though God has not chosen to divulge answers to all our questions, nevertheless, when gathered together, the verses that address the end times⁷⁷ lead to the following sequence of events:

1. All those who have died on Earth—both the righteous and unrighteous—are in the Hadean realm awaiting the end of time and the return of Jesus.
2. At some point in the future—known only to deity (Matthew 24:36), and with no signs by which we can determine its imminence (Matthew 24:39)—Jesus will return in flaming fire accompanied by His mighty angels (2 Thessalonians 1:8).
3. He will hover among the clouds without setting foot on Earth (Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:17).
4. All humans will be resurrected from the dead (John 5:28-29), i.e., the inhabitants of Hades will come forth and be changed (1 Corinthians 15) while those still alive on Earth will also be changed.
5. The righteous (both living and dead) will rise to meet Jesus in the air.
6. All people will be gathered before God in Judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10).
7. Everyone will then be consigned to only one of two eternal abodes: Heaven or Hell.
8. The physical realm—heaven and Earth, the Universe—will be dissolved (2 Peter 3:7ff.).

Acknowledging the imagery of apocalyptic language, a good summary of these eight points is provided in the Revelation:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

The Earth and material heavens having “fled away,” the singular final Judgment to which the Bible repeatedly refers will involve **all** who have died and entered Hades. Once the receptacle of disembodied spirits is vacated, both the institution of death, as well as the location where the dead awaited the Judgment, will be destroyed. Those found written in the Book of Life will go to Heaven, while those not found written in that book will be consigned to Hell.

Additional relevant passages merit attention.⁷⁸ However, these observations and considerations are sufficient to suggest the conclusion that the righteous do not go straight to Heaven at death.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

English Translation Abbreviations

APPENDIX B

Scriptures Cited

APPENDIX C

Additional Resources & Class Materials

APPENDIX A

ENGLISH TRANSLATION ABBREVIATIONS

ASV—American Standard Version
CSB—Christian Standard Bible
CEB—Common English Bible
CEV—Contemporary English Version
DARBY—Darby Translation
DLNT—Disciples’ Literal New Testament
EHV—Evangelical Heritage Version
ERV—Easy-to-Read Version
ESV—English Standard Version
EXB—Expanded Bible
GNT—Good News Translation
GW—God’s Word Translation
HCSB—Holman Christian Standard Bible
ICB—International Children’s Bible
ISV—International Standard Version
KJV—King James Version
LEB—Lexham English Bible
LSB—Legacy Standard Bible
MEV—Modern English Version
MOUNCE—The Mounce Reverse Interlinear New Testament
NABRE—New American Bible (Revised Edition)
NASB—New American Standard Bible
NCB—New Catholic Bible
NCV—New Century Version
NET—New English Translation
NIRV—New International Reader’s Version
NIV—New International Version
NKJV—New King James Version
NLT—New Living Translation
NLV—New Life Version
NOG—Names of God Bible
NRSV—New Revised Standard Version
NTFE—New Testament for Everyone
RSV—Revised Standard Version
TLB—The Living Bible
VOICE—The Voice Bible
WE—Worldwide English (New Testament)
WEB—World English Bible
WYC—Wycliffe Bible
YLT—Young’s Literal Translation

APPENDIX B

SCRIPTURES CITED

Old Testament

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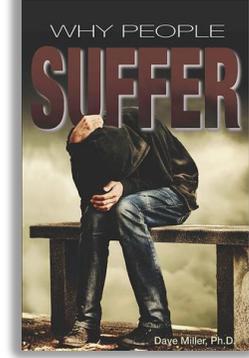
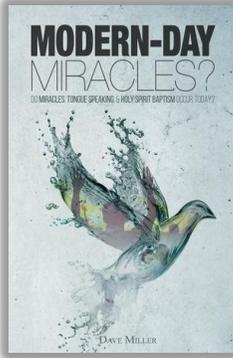
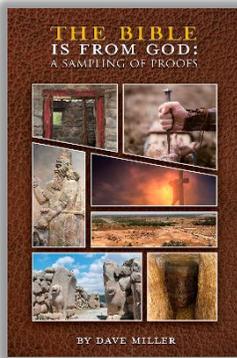
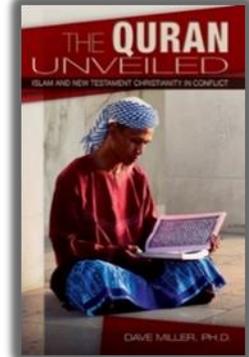
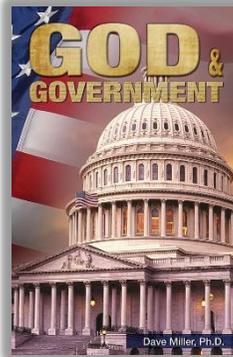
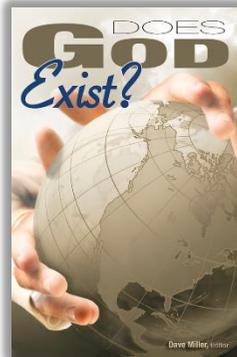
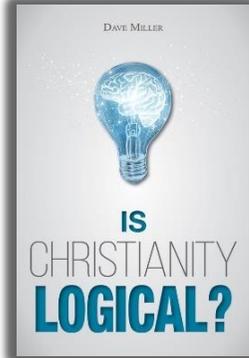
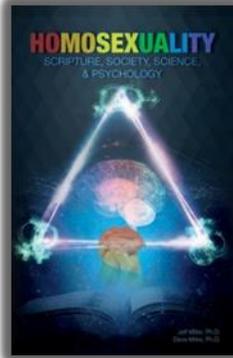
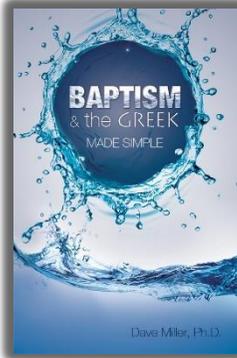
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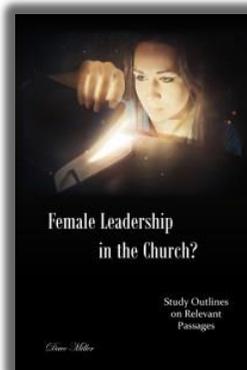
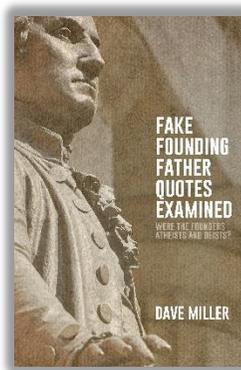
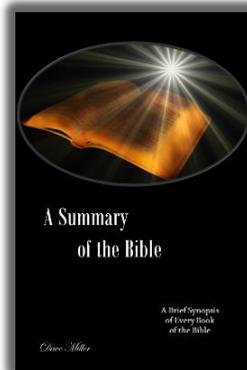
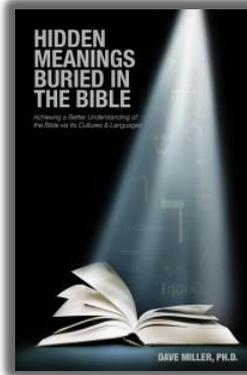
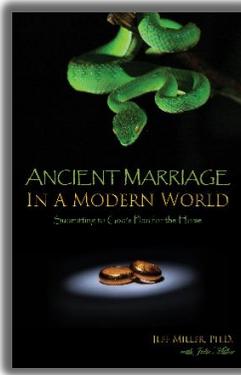
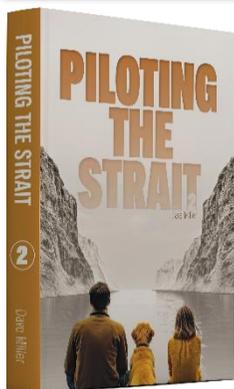
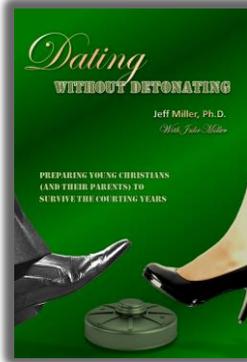
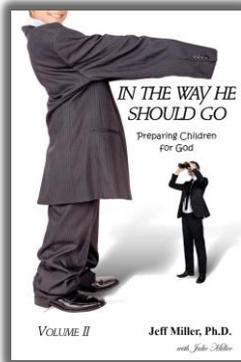
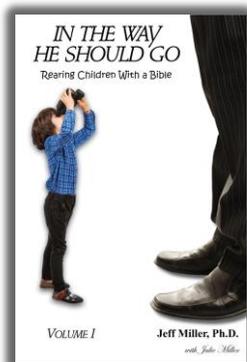
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ENDNOTES

¹ For a specific discussion of the Hadean realm, see Dave Miller (2002), “One Second After Death,” Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/one-second-after-death-1188/>.

² The viewpoint under review presumably maintains that the unrighteous in Hades remained there when the righteous vacated and went to Heaven. A semblance of consistency requires this contention since, in Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15, Jesus issued a scathing rebuke of the moral and spiritual condition of the inhabitants of Capernaum. He declared that they would be brought down to Hades for their conduct. But if Hades was about to be eliminated, at the most, in three years when Jesus would be resurrected and ascend, how could the inhabitants of the city **all** be brought down to Hades? The lifespans of the citizens would have differed greatly due to age and health, causing some to die within the next three years and go down to Hades, but surely Jesus was not suggesting that the entire population would die in the next three years! If, however, Jesus was anticipating the continued spiritual degradation of the bulk of Capernaum’s population, it would make sense that over the next several years, they would be brought down to the Hadean realm—which would continue in existence long after Jesus had ascended into Heaven.

What’s more, the theory that the righteous go directly to Heaven at death is characterized by confusion in its effort to clarify the means and moment of atonement. If atonement was achieved at the cross—when Jesus announced, “It is finished” and the Temple veil was torn asunder to so signify (John 19:30; Mark 15:38)—why didn’t the Paradise side of Hades empty at that point? Or why not at the **resurrection** of Christ—which is specifically said to be the point at which He overcame death (Acts 2:24; Hebrews 2:9,14; Revelation 1:18)? The theory appears to place the removal of the occupants of Paradise 40 days **after** the crucifixion at the **ascension**.

³ The author considers this subject to be one of those matters on which Christians can differ with each other without jeopardizing either their unity or their salvation status. In the late 1800s, among churches of Christ, F.G. Allen expressed in writing his conviction that the Paradise portion of Hades was eliminated and its occupants transferred to Heaven at Christ’s ascension. However, the majority of Bible scholars among churches of Christ have rejected the “straight to heaven” viewpoint, and maintained that both areas of Hades remain intact, including among many others: Hugo McCord [(no date), *Fifty Years of Lectures* (Atwood, TN: Atwood Church of Christ), 2:401-403]; Guy N. Woods [(1976), *Questions & Answers Open Forum* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College), pp. 339-344]; Moses Lard [*Lard’s Quarterly*, December 1863]; Alexander Campbell [*Popular Lectures & Addresses*, p. 441]—“Hades...[is] the condition of all human spirits from death to the final resurrection”; Jack Lewis [(1988), *Exegesis of Difficult Passages* (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications), p. 194—“[I]t seems obvious that Jesus rejected the view that the righteous go directly to heaven”]; Thomas B. Warren [(1993), *Whatever Happened to Heaven and Hell?*, ed. Terry Hightower (San Antonio: Shenandoah Church of Christ), p. 276—“For Paul to depart was for him to be ‘with Christ’ (actually in Hades until the resurrection)”; J.W. McGarvey [(1863), *Original Commentary on Acts* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation), p. 35—“As long as men entertain the idea that their spirits enter into final bliss and glory immediately after death, they can never be made to regard the resurrection of the body as a matter of importance”]. McCord agreed: “The idea that Paradise has been transferred to Heaven makes nonsense of the teaching about ‘the resurrection of the just’” (p. 402).

⁴ While we have a **desire** to leave this life and be with Christ, it does not follow that when we do depart, we will immediately be with Deity in Heaven. Suppose I have a desire to depart my home in Alabama and be with my brother Laakea in Hawaii. Such a statement does not mean that I would be instantaneously in Hawaii when I exit my home in Alabama. I may have to stop off at a location along the way where I must transact some business before proceeding on to my **ultimate** destination. We have lots of desires that cannot be immediately realized. So Paul's declaration that he **desired** to be with Christ does not prove that he believed that he would be transported instantaneously into the presence of Jesus in Heaven the moment he died.

⁵ God does not exist in time. He is not subject to time. Eternity is not marked by time. God invented time for humans when He commenced to create the physical realm in Genesis 1:1. But He, Himself, exists outside of time. Read Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8. Second Corinthians 5:6-8 gives no timeframe. It does not say that the moment we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. Furthermore, the omnipresence of the Lord clarifies how a person could go to Hades rather than Heaven and still be "with the Lord." What's more, no matter where we may be—in this life or thereafter—we remain "with the Lord" in the sense that we remain in his care and keeping, His watchful eye ever upon us.

⁶ Observe, once again, that we spatial-oriented, time-laden beings must inevitably speak of the eternal, spirit realm as physical locations that are "here" or "there." Again, Scripture must accommodate our inherent limitations as finite beings while at the same time depicting the after-life in accordance with God's intended representations. Another example is seen in Lazarus' shift from Earth to Hades. That transference is described in these words: "So it was that the beggar died, and was **carried by the angels** to Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). Compare Jesus' use of the term "place" in John 14:2. Further, observe that "third heaven" must be a generic expression for the spirit, eternal realm **in general**—and not necessarily Heaven itself **in particular**—since the Jews used "Sheol" as an equivalent to the Greek "Hades"—and neither one refers specifically to the throne room of God in Heaven (e.g., Psalm 139:8). See Endnotes 27 and 29.

⁷ Some translations include in verse 14 after "Father" the words "of our Lord Jesus Christ." This has caused some to argue that those being referred to in Heaven must be deceased **Christians** who derive their **name** from Christ. However, (1) apart from the fact that the words constitute a textual variant in which they were added to the Colossian letter by later scribes [see Bruce Metzger (1971), *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies), p. 604], and (2) apart from the fact that, if the saved go straight to Heaven, Old Testament saints would certainly be included in that number, though they had not become Christians, (3) grammatically, "from whom" in vs. 15 harks back to the "Father" in vs. 14. Further, the KJV rendering of the verse reads: "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." The verse does not say that individuals are "named in heaven" nor that they are "in heaven." Rather, all beings—human and angelic—have been designated by God as belonging to Him—regardless of their location.

⁸ James Moulton and George Milligan (1929), *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 498. Such "groupings" can even include families of angels. See Fredrick Danker (2000), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago), third edition, p. 788.

⁹ Glimpses of the host of heaven—God's celestial family—may be seen throughout the Bible, in its scattered allusions to cherubim, seraphim, principalities, powers, and other beings that surround the throne of God and do God's bidding (Psalm 103:20-21; 148:2; Ephesians 1:20-21;

3:10; Colossians 1:16; 2:15). For an excellent discussion of the angelic hosts in the Bible, see Travis Quertermous (2002), *The Host of Heaven* (Henderson, TN: Hester Publications).

¹⁰ The expression occurs 300 times in the Old Testament, including 1 Samuel 1:3,11; 2 Samuel 6:2; 1 Kings 18:15; 2 Kings 3:14; 1 Chronicles 11:9; Psalm 24:10; Micah 4:4; Nahum 2:13; Habakkuk 2:13; Zephaniah 2:10; Isaiah 1:9,24; Jeremiah 6:6,9; Haggai 1:2,5; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 1:4, et al. New Testament occurrences include Romans 9:29 and James 5:4. See Frank Gaebelein, ed. (1988), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 4:732; F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs (1907), *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), p. 839.

¹¹ L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M.E.J. Richardson, & J.J. Stamm (2000), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, electronic ed.), p. 995. John McClintock and James Strong (1981), *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 362—"the celestial armies"; James Orr (1982), "Host of Heaven," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2:768—"[T]he angels are regarded as forming Yahweh's army"; William Gesenius (1984 reprint), *Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 699—"the host of angels that stand round the throne of God."

¹² S.T. Bloomfield (1845), *The Greek Testament* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans), 2:309.

¹³ S.D.F. Salmond (1903), *The Epistle to the Ephesians* in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 312, italics in orig., emp. added.

¹⁴ Charles Ellicott (1859), *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: John Parker & Son), p. 68, italics in orig.

¹⁵ Arthur Peake (1920), *A Commentary on the Bible* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack), p. 865, emp. in orig.

¹⁶ T.K. Abbott (1902), *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), p. 94, emp. added.

¹⁷ Including the following: "To the angelic hosts and the tribes of men alike, God is Father. There may be a suggestion of the different ranks or grades of angels, as principalities, thrones, powers, etc. See verse 10"—Marvin Vincent (1946), *Words Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 3:383; "Paul seems to mean that all the various classes of men on earth and angels in heaven get the name of family from God the Father of all"—A.T. Robertson (1931), *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press), 4:532; "There is but one relationship which ought to be reckoned, both in heaven and on earth, both among angels and among men."—John Calvin (1854), *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society), p. 260; "a plurality, as well of angelic as of human patriai.... God is certainly characterized as *universal Father, as Father of all angel-classes in heaven and all peoples upon earth*"—Heinrich Meyer (1880), *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon*, trans. William Dickson (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark), pp. 175-176, italics in orig.; "May not the holy Angels be bound up in spiritual patriai?"—Henry Alford (1980 reprint), *Alford's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 3:109; "...the oneness of the family union of saints and angels under the Eternal Father of Spirits"—H.C.G. Moule (1886), *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Cambridge: The University Press), p. 95; "Now Scripture speaks also of *sons of God*; and these

of two chief orders. There are those ‘in heaven,’ who form a race distinct from ourselves in origin—divided, it may be amongst themselves into various orders...forming a ‘family in heaven.’... We, the sons of Adam, with our many tribes and kindreds, through Jesus Christ our Elder Brother constitute a new family of God.... Thus the Church of believers in the Son of God constitutes the ‘family on earth named’ from the same Father who gave His name to the holy angels.... Every order of creaturely intelligence acknowledges God for the Author of its being, and bows to Christ as its sovereign Lord”—G.G. Findlay (1892), *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), pp. 185-186, italics in orig.

¹⁸ John Wesley (1853), *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (New York: Carlton & Phillips), p. 495, italics in orig.

¹⁹ Schrenk makes this astute observation: “If *πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς* [“every family in heaven”—DM] is referred only to the perfected community of salvation and not to the angels, we miss the significance of creation and redemption for heaven and earth according to Colossians and Ephesians. The heavenly and the earthly are constantly inter-related, and there is **express emphasis on the angelic powers**”—Gottlob Schrenk (1981 reprint), *πατριὰ*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 5:1018, emp. added.

²⁰ Most English translations have “men” after “righteous.” The Greek term *δικαίωv* is an adjective and means “righteous ones”—which would include male and female.

²¹ The term rendered “made perfect” means “to *perfect* a person, *advance* a person to a *completeness* of its kind, which needs no further provision”—William Mounce (2006), *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 1289. Hence, “For by one offering He has **perfected** forever those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). Though Christians on Earth engage in a constant process of sanctification, they have, nevertheless, already been “made perfect” in the sense that Jesus has imparted once and for all the means of salvation (Hebrews 9:12,26-28; 10:2,10), enabling Christians to live in a state of ongoing forgiveness (cf. 1 John 1:7). Hence, the Hebrews writer, having recounted an impressive array of faithful Old Testament characters, summarizes: “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should **not be made perfect apart from us**” (Hebrews 11:39-40). And Clarke notes: “The spirits of the just men made perfect, or the righteous perfect, are the full-grown Christians; those who are justified by the blood and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ”—Adam Clarke (1832), *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour* (New York: J. Emory & B. Waugh), 2:744.

²² James Thompson (1971), *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Austin, TX: R.B. Sweet), pp. 172-173.

²³ “The description in these verses does not refer to a *heavenly state*.... *The heavenly Jerusalem*... means the church of the New Testament”—Clarke, 2:743.

²⁴ A.R. Fausset (no date), *A Commentary Critical & Explanatory: 1 Corinthians to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 478, italics in orig.

²⁵ A further consideration on Ephesians 3:15 is Schrenk’s observation that “in heaven” precedes “on earth:” “If this did not come first, and if the angelic powers were not so expressly noted in Colossians and Ephesians, one might ask whether this was not just a ‘polar mode of

expression.’ In this case heaven and earth would mean ‘everywhere,’ and one need not ask concerning the precise meaning of either”—p. 1018.

²⁶ Jesus’ divinity was on display when He said to Nathanael, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Such omnipresence and omniscience that transcends space and time caused Nathanael to declare, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:48-49). Cf. Matthew 6:4,6,18.

²⁷ The Hebrew term *sheol* and the Greek term *hades* are roughly equivalent terms. The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew) renders *sheol* as *hades* in 61 of its 65 occurrences in the Old Testament. See Koehler, et al., p. 1368; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, pp. 982-983. For a further discussion of this realm, including its inclusion of Paradise, Tartarus, and Abaddon, see Endnote 1.

²⁸ Jesus was quoting Psalm 31:5, even as He quoted Psalm 22:1 while on the cross (Matthew 27:46).

²⁹ The term “paradise” is of Persian derivation, and referred to “a grand enclosure or preserve, hunting-ground, park, shady and well-watered” (Joseph Thayer (1901), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977 reprint), p. 480). The Jews used the term as “a garden, pleasure-ground, grove, park,” and came to apply it to that portion of Hades that was thought “to be the abode of the souls of the pious until the resurrection” (p. 480). With this linguistic background, the word is used in three different senses in the Bible: (1) it is used in the Septuagint (Genesis 2:8,9,10,15,16; 3:2,3,4,9,11,24,25), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to refer to the literal Garden of Eden on Earth where Adam and Eve lived [Lancelot Brenton, trans. (1998 reprint), *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek & English*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), pp. 3-5]. It normally is translated “garden” in English versions; (2) it is used one time, in a highly figurative New Testament book, to refer to the final abode of the saved, i.e., Heaven (Revelation 2:7); and (3) it is used in connection with the Hadean realm. As already noted, the Hebrew Old Testament term for this waiting place is *sheol*, and the New Testament term is *hades*. One must not assume that the allusions in the Revelation to “paradise” (2:7) and the “tree of life” (22:2), as well as Paul’s allusion to the “third heaven” and “paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:2,4), prove that the term “paradise” must refer to Heaven. Keep in mind that Revelation is a self-declared book of symbols (1:1,3). Hence, “tree of life” is nothing more than a symbolic (not literal) application of the literal tree that existed in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9; 3:22). Both “Paradise” and “Tree of life” in Revelation are no more literal than are the other symbols used in conjunction with them: “garden,” “city,” “street,” “river,” “fruits,” “leaves,” “robes,” “gates,” “dogs,” etc. (22:1ff.). Rather, they are non-literal apocalyptic images that convey a sense of wonder, reassurance, security, protection, and provision that God provides. As noted earlier, the “third heaven” is a broad reference to the eternal realm, with “paradise” referring to one facet of that realm.

³⁰ On the day of Pentecost, Peter verified this fact by quoting from Psalm 16 and applying it to Jesus: “For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27). Jesus’ spirit went to Hades while His body went to the grave where it would experience no corruption/decay. Lest we misunderstand this fact, Peter explained the proper application of Psalm 16: “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke

concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that **His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption**” (Acts 2:29-31). Jesus’ soul went to Hades where He awaited His resurrection three days later. Jesus did not go to Heaven first but, rather, entered Heaven and sat down on His throne **after** His resurrection. Further, Peter made it abundantly clear that the words of Psalm 16 written by David did not apply to David. Peter claimed that since David’s body was still in the tomb, he had not come forth from Hades as Jesus did. No wonder Jesus declared concerning His impending establishment of His church: “. . .the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). In other words, Jesus would go to Hades upon His death, but His spirit would not remain there. The entranceway into Hades would not prevent His exit, enabling Him to be resurrected and establish His church 50 days later. Jesus’ words concerning the gates of Hades are equivalent to Peter’s words on Pentecost: “. . .it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:24)—“it” referring to death, i.e., the separation of His spirit from His body. J.W. Fradersdorff (1875), “Death,” *A Copious Phraseological English-Greek Lexicon* (London: Rivingtons), p. 141—“death is the separation of the soul from the body”; E.A. Sophocles (1914), “Thanatos,” *Greek Lexicon of the Roman & Byzantine Periods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 569—“the separation of the ψυχή from the σῶμα.” W.E. Vine (1966), *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming Revell), p. 276—“the separation of the soul (the spiritual part of man) from the body (the material part).”

³¹ F.G. Allen (1886), “The State of the Righteous Dead” in *The Old-Path Pulpit: A Book of Original Doctrinal Sermons* (Covington, KY: Guide Printing & Publishing Co.), 1:274.

³² *Ibid.*, 1:280. Allen assumes that pre-cross saints remained in a state of “unremitted sin.” This assumption is simply untrue. See the section of this article “God, Remission, and the Timing of Jesus’ Death.”

³³ Observe that if some saints have already gone to Heaven, then Hebrews 9:27 ought to read, “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this some (the righteous in Hades) will go on to Heaven, followed gradually and intermittently by all other righteous people who die in the interim, and then they will be brought back out of Heaven for the Judgment.”

³⁴ Allen, 1:280.

³⁵ The “bondage” of Hebrews 2:15 from which they were released was not Hades—but the bondage of sin: “Our Lord . . .defeated the evil one, thus making possible the release of those held in his power”—Avon Malone (1994), *The Purpose and the People* (Nashville, TN: 21st Century Christian), p. 62. See also James Coffman (1977), *Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation), p. 202; David Lipscomb (1960), *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate), pp. 74-75.

³⁶ Charles Hodge (1856), *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: James Nisbet), p. 152.

³⁷ “Heinrich Meyer: Exegete Extraordinaire” (2020), <https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/heinrich-meyer-exegete-extraordinaire.104123/>.

³⁸ Heinrich Meyer (1880), *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon*, trans. William Dickson (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark), p. 209.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 210, emp. added. The psalmist declared: “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory” (Psalm 24:7-10).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² John Chrysostom (1845), *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, and Homilies on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: John Henry Parker), p. 223. Additional “church fathers” that understood the term to refer to “the devil and those things connected with him, death, condemnation, and sin” included Theophylact, Beza, and Calovius. See the footnote in Meyer, p. 211.

⁴³ As quoted in Meyer, p. 211.

⁴⁴ John Eadie (1861), *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers), p. 295, emp. added.

⁴⁵ Charles Ellicott (1859), *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: John W. Parker & Son), p. 84. See also Michael Weed (1971), *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and Philemon* (Austin, TX: R.B. Sweet), p. 160—“The host of captives should be distinguished from the men receiving gifts (Christians).”

⁴⁶ Abbott, p. 113.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁹ Salmond, p. 324. See Salmond’s excellent discussion of the meaning of the phrase “the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4:9), whether a reference to the life of Christ on Earth, or a reference to His descent into Hades (pp. 326-327). He concludes: “For these reasons we conclude that the phrase... means the *earth* as a scene of existence, lower than His native heavens, to which Christ descended” (p. 327, italics in orig.). Gore agreed: “I do not think St. Paul need refer to the descent into Hades. ‘The lower parts of the earth,’ Is. xlv. 23, may also refer not to Hades... but to ‘the earth beneath’”—Charles Gore (1900), *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: John Murray), p. 146.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gore, p. 147, emp. added. Hodge noted that identifying the “captives” with Satan, sin, and death is “more consistent with the figure” that Paul draws from the Psalms as well as the parallel passages of Hebrews 2:14-15, Colossians 2:15, and Luke 11:21-22 (p. 152).

⁵² G.G. Findlay (1892), *The Epistle to the Ephesians in The Expositor’s Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 235.

⁵³ p. 296.

⁵⁴ Allen, pp. 273,276.

⁵⁵ Verses that allude to this enormous population include 1 Kings 22:19, 2 Chronicles 18:18, Nehemiah 9:6, Matthew 26:53, Luke 2:13, and Revelation 5:11. See also Endnote #9.

⁵⁶ While commentators have differed in their understanding of what Jesus meant when He said “no one has ascended to heaven,” the most plausible approach is to take Jesus’ words literally. No humans have ascended into the presence of Deity in the heavenly realm. They have all been ushered into the temporary receptacle of Hades where they await the Judgment and final disposition to their eternal reward. Consider these observations: A. Tholuck (1836), *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Boston, MA: Perkins & Marvin), p. 115: “No one has ever been able to go out of humanity and ascend up to heaven to examine the mysteries of God except He who from a higher state of existence entered into humanity.” W. Milligan and W. Moulton (1898), *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark), pp. 34,35: “No one can tell the heavenly things unless he has been in heaven, and no one has been in heaven and come down to earth save myself.... indeed, **no one has been in heaven save He that came down out of heaven**, the Son of man.” Alfred Edersheim (1917), *The Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co.), p. 387: “To that spring of being **no one could ascend** but He that had come down from heaven.” J.C. Ryle (1874), *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers), p. 151: “**Man has not, and cannot ascend into heaven**. But that which man cannot do, I the Son of man can do.” Heinrich Meyer (1884), *Critical & Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of John* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls), p. 129: “No one *has ascended* into heaven except,” etc.; and thus the εἰς οὐρανὸν refers to an *actual existence* in heaven,” italics in orig.; Matthew Henry (1961), *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 1519: “Nicodemus addressed Christ as a prophet; but he must know that he is greater than all the Old Testament prophets, for **none of them had ascended into heaven**.” Observe that if Jesus merely meant to communicate that no one has come down from Heaven to divulge spiritual information, He surely would have said so. Instead, He states plainly that no one has actually gone there—into the presence of Deity—to receive such information. Indeed, all divine communication for the previous 4,000 years was revealed to humans via human prophets or angels. They received their information via inspiration: “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). In stark contrast, God Himself came to Earth in the person of Jesus to give directly God’s Word to man. Further, keep in mind that these words spoken by Jesus were not committed to writing by John until near the end of the first century. Jesus had ascended to Heaven many years earlier. Hence, with the exception of Jesus Himself, no one else had ascended to Heaven during the intervening years.

⁵⁷ The same may be said for other deceased saints. Though Enoch was “taken away so that he did not see death” (Hebrews 11:5; cf. Genesis 5:24), no justification exists to add the words “to heaven”—“God took him **to heaven**”—since the point is that he did not have to experience death on Earth like virtually everyone else. Instead, God translated him directly to Hades without him having to experience the event of death on Earth. We are informed in 2 Kings 2:11 that Elijah was placed in a chariot of fire with horses of fire which then transported him by a whirlwind **into heaven**. However, as noted previously, the plural word “heaven/heavens” (שָׁמַיִם) has different meanings—including the physical heavens (Genesis 1:1), i.e., the sky, atmosphere, and even outer space. The incident is clearly reported with Elisha’s vantage point in mind since Elijah promised him a “double portion” of his “spirit” if Elisha visibly witnessed Elijah’s departure. Hence, Elijah would have simply risen in the air and passed upward through the heaven, i.e., the sky, and passed “out of sight” (like Jesus in Acts 1:9). [Cf. Zophar’s parallel construction equating “heavens” with “clouds” (Job 20:6). Natural phenomena that came from “heaven/the heavens” in Bible history included “rain” (Deuteronomy 11:11), “dew” (Deuteronomy 33:28), “snow” (Isaiah 55:10), “frost” (Job 38:29), “showers” (Jeremiah 14:22), “bread/manna” (Exodus 16:4), “fire” (2 Kings 1:10), “brimstone and fire” (Genesis 19:24), “hailstones” (Joshua 10:11), et al.

While Elijah was on Mt. Carmel, “the heavens grew black with clouds and wind” (1 Kings 18:45, ASV). None of these phenomena came from God’s spiritual dwelling place, but rather from the **atmosphere/sky**. For more discussion regarding the usage and meaning of the Hebrew term “heaven(s)” see L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M.E.J. Richardson, & J.J. Stamm (1994-2000), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, electronic ed.), pp. 1559-1562.) Nothing more is stated as to Elijah’s **final** destination—which, like all others, would have been Hades where he, too, is awaiting Christ’s second coming. Two additional incredible incidents are conveyed in Scripture that likewise harmonize with the viewpoint expounded in this article. Samuel, at the behest of Saul, was supernaturally/miraculously permitted to come out of Hades briefly to reconfirm God’s Word regarding Saul’s imminent demise. When Samuel informed Saul, “tomorrow you and your sons will be with me,” he could not have meant Heaven, since it is unlikely that Saul was saved. However, if Samuel was saved, his remark makes sense, since Hades “houses” both the saved and unsaved awaiting Judgment. Read 1 Samuel 28:15ff. Likewise, Elijah and Moses were permitted to temporarily leave Hades on the occasion when Jesus was transfigured (Matthew 17:3; Mark 9:4). Luke informs us that the “two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:30-31). C.K. Barrett (1978), *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster), p. 212, noted, “nor did Moses and Elijah ascend on high.” Or as Ryle explained concerning Jesus’ remark in John 3:13—“He reminds him that no one has ever ascended literally into that heaven where God dwells. Enoch, and Elijah, and David, for instance, were doubtless in a place of bliss, when they left this world, but they had not ‘ascended into heaven.’”

⁵⁸ The notion of “soul sleep” taught by some religious groups is not taught in Scripture. The word “sleep” is used metaphorically to refer to death, likely due to the fact that, from the human/Earthly perspective, the deceased appear to be sleeping. See John 11:11-13.

⁵⁹ Raymond Kelcy (1968), *The Letters of Paul to the Thessalonians* (Austin, TX: Sweet), p. 103, ellipses and emp. in orig.

⁶⁰ It is interesting to consider the fact that no human beings are in Hell. Satan, himself, has not entered Hell but is on Earth “walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8; cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; Ephesians 4:27; 6:11). Rather, Hell is “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41)—some of whom are already in the intermediate Hadean realm (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Satan will be consigned to Hell once he has served the purpose for which God has allowed him to exist in his rebellious state. Cf. Revelation 20:10.

⁶¹ According to the leading Greek lexicon, the underlying Greek word “with” (σύν) has three primary nuances: (1) a marker of accompaniment and association, (2) a marker of assistance, and (3) a marker of linkage. The use in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is the third meaning. Hence, deceased saints will be brought forth “with” Jesus in the sense of “in combination with”—Danker, p. 962. In other words, at the same time that Jesus is returning from Heaven to the Earth, the deceased saints will be resurrected so that they, too, can participate in the meeting of Jesus in the air together with saints that are still alive when the Lord returns.

⁶² To repeat: If the righteous deceased are already in the air with Jesus at His return, they could not be “caught up together” with the living righteous who are still on Earth.

⁶³ DLNT, EXB, NABRE, NCB, NCV, NIRV, NIV, NTFE, VOICE.

⁶⁴ ASV, CSB, CEB, CJB, EHV, ESV, HCSB, ISV, LSB, LEB, MEV, MOUNCE, NABRE, NASB, NET, NIRV, NIV, NLT, NLV, NRSV, NTFE, TLB, WEB.

⁶⁵ CEV, ERV, GW, GNT, ICB, NCV, NOG.

⁶⁶ DARBY, DLNT, RSV.

⁶⁷ VOICE.

⁶⁸ WE.

⁶⁹ WYC.

⁷⁰ YLT.

⁷¹ See also Psalm 89:5-7; Zechariah 14:5; Joel 3:11; Psalm 103:20-21.

⁷² Observe that Paul's departure was **near**, but he would not receive the crown at his departure from Earth. He would not receive that crown until "**that Day**" when the "righteous judge" gives it to "all" who will likewise receive it. "Appearing" (vss. 1,8), "kingdom" (vs. 1), and "that Day" (vs. 8) all refer to the Second Coming of Jesus and the ensuing Judgment. Paul cannot now be in Heaven—which would mean he was already in possession of the crown of righteousness. Paul does not say that he would receive his reward when he died—but rather on "**that day**" when Jesus would return. Similarly, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared concerning the Judgment: "Many will say to Me in **that day**, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22-23; cf. 16:27). Likewise, concerning Onesiphorus, Paul wrote: "The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in **that Day**" (2 Timothy 1:18). "That day" in Scripture is a singular expression that denotes the Day of Judgment at which time **all** human beings will be judged in anticipation of their eternal abode.

⁷³ The Greek words for "judging" and "judgment" (*krisis*, *krima*, *krino*) include the idea of passing a judicial sentence, whether for reward or punishment—Matthew 23:3,14; Mark 3:29; Luke 23:40; 24:20; John 3:19; Romans 2:2; 5:16; 13:2; 1 Timothy 5:12; James 2:13; 3:1; et al. See Danker, pp. 567-569; Samuel Bagster (no date), *Bagster's Analytical Greek Lexicon* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons), p. 241; Thomas Green (1890), *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament* (New York: John Wiley & Sons), p. 106.

⁷⁴ Mosaic penal procedures included the use of just such a feature solely as a **temporary holding or detainment cell before trial**, until guilt or innocence could be established (Exodus 21:18-19), and before sentencing (Numbers 15:32-34; Leviticus 24:10-12).

⁷⁵ Some date the book as early as the 60s.

⁷⁶ Why would the Tartarus side of Hades continue after Jesus' resurrection? The inhabitants certainly were not awaiting Christ's atonement! In fact, if the saved were only delayed entrance into Heaven until Jesus could atone and ascend, there was no reason for Hades even to **include** a region for the lost, let alone be within sight of the righteous (Luke 16:23). Why did God not simply send them on to Hell? If one says, "So they could await the Judgment," the same would apply to the saved. If the saved could go on to Heaven and then be brought back out of Heaven at the Judgment—even so the unsaved could go on to Hell and then be brought back out at the

Judgment. The fact is that the “straight to Heaven” viewpoint throws a host of passages into chaos and confusion.

⁷⁷ See Dave Miller (2023), *The End Times* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

⁷⁸ Consider seven additional passages that are germane to the discussion:

(1) In John 5:28-29, Jesus stated that “all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.” The Greek word rendered “come forth” (ἐκπορεύσονται) has the Greek preposition “ek” as its prefix, which literally means to “come out of.” Hence, it appears that **all** the inhabitants of Hades will return to the grave sites occupied by their bodies (or the contact point where their bodies were when they died) so that they can “come **out** of” those grave locations. If Christians are already in Heaven, they are **already** hearing Jesus’ voice **and have been since their death**. Yet both the “good” and the “evil” are represented as “coming forth” at the same time—as if coming from the same location. If all come from Hades, Jesus’ words make sense. But if some come from Heaven and some from Hades for resurrection, the ones from Heaven will not be **with** Christ when He returns, but will only see Him when they come out of the grave/are resurrected and then gathered with the living to meet the Lord in the air.

(2) Before leaving the Earth, Jesus told His disciples: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). Though there were many “rooms” in Heaven, Jesus insisted that His return there was necessary to prepare for their arrival. But when would they arrive in Heaven? When they died? No, Jesus said: “I will come again”—an unmistakable allusion to His Second Coming. He would retrieve them and enable them to enjoy the “many rooms” at the Second Coming—not at the moment they died on Earth.

(3) Revelation 14:13 reads: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’” Observe that this verse gives no indication that saints go straight to Heaven when they die. Since Hades is a place of comfort, they can rest from their earthly labors just as easily in Paradise. Indeed, Lazarus was at ease near Abraham, resting from the unpleasant things he had endured in his lifetime on Earth.

(4) Philippians 3:20-21 indicates that our citizenship is in Heaven—which does not mean that Christians are already in Heaven, as two key indicators in these verses demonstrate. First, we “eagerly wait for the Savior.” So while our citizenship is in Heaven, as we are members of a heavenly kingdom, i.e., the church, nevertheless, we are on Earth while our Savior is in Heaven. Second, He will “transform our lowly body”—which will not happen until He returns at the Second Coming.

(5) In his treatise on the Resurrection, Paul informs us: “Then comes the end, when **He delivers the kingdom to God the Father**, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Of course, “the kingdom” is a reference to the church of Christ, specifically, **all** the saved. If Jesus is going to deliver the kingdom to the Father at His Second Coming, **then the kingdom is not already in Heaven**. But if the majority of those in the kingdom who have died in the last 2,000 years, are already in Heaven, then Jesus will bring them from Heaven and turn right around and take them back to Heaven in order to deliver the kingdom to the Father—even though they were already in His presence the moment they died. Further,

Paul's quotation of Hosea 13:14—"O Death, where is your sting? O **Hades**, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55) refers to the inhabitants of the Paradise portion of Hades at the General Resurrection—at which time they will come out of Hades, not before.

(6) Among Job's expressions of grief, we encounter these words: "But man dies and is laid away; Indeed he breathes his last and where is he? As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep. Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!" (Job 14:10-13). Keeping in mind that Job was experiencing deep suffering and that we cannot know the extent to which God revealed to him features of the afterlife, nevertheless, Job's remarks match what later revelation divulges. He notes that a man lies down and does not rise—a reference to the body. But people will be roused from their "sleep" of death at the time that the heavens are no more. Job further uses the term "Sheol" as the place where he wishes God would place him until His wrath had passed. Observe that these remarks coincide with the realities that are plainly taught by additional revelation that was to come: People remain in Hades/Sheol until the heavens are no more, i.e., until the time of the dissolution of the Universe as described in 2 Peter 3.

(7) What about the souls "under the altar" in Revelation 6:9? Isn't this verse proof that the righteous deceased have already gone to Heaven? As a matter of fact, being a self-declared apocalypse (1:1), the book of Revelation is literally saturated with apocalyptic language—symbols and figurative allusions that are not necessarily intended to specify literal locations. For example, allusions to specific locations in the book of Revelation are largely non-literal. Hence, the use of the terms "Egypt," "Sodom," "Babylon," "Jerusalem," the "Euphrates," and the "Hill of Megiddo" does not refer to those actual geographical locations. Rather, the terms are used to spotlight the symbolic significance associated with those locations. One, therefore, must be very cautious about assuming a precise, literal location with reference to entities mentioned in proximity to God.

Keep in mind that much of the imagery is drawn from the Old Testament. Old Testament imagery is brought forth and assigned New Testament meaning. Such is the case with the altar. The allusion to the altar in 6:9 harks back to the Altar of Burnt Offering in Leviticus 4:7 and 17:11 where the sacrificial blood was poured out at the foot of the altar. The "souls" (ψυχάς) in Revelation connects to the "life (ψυχῆ) in the blood." The persecuted Christians in Asia Minor in John's day were being offered as sacrifices to God. But the altar of 8:3 shifts meaning to the Altar of Incense (Leviticus 4:7,18; Hebrews 9:4). In 11:1, the altar is depicted with the "temple of God," both of which are not in Heaven, but in "the holy city" (vs. 2), which is rocked by "a great earthquake," killing 7,000 people. As is typical throughout the Revelation, when one examines every allusion to the altar in Revelation (6:9; 8:3,5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7) it becomes evident that the altar is no more intended as a permanent fixture of the heavenly realm than are the golden censer, incense, smoke, fire, trumpets, temple, and sickle. It is a precarious hermeneutical methodology that draws from the imagery of Revelation and assigns to the objects and locations literal meanings. Indeed, images in Revelation can change and shift to accommodate the intended message being conveyed, again, without intending the reader to literalize the image in such a way that the reader conceptualizes actual locations on Earth or in Heaven—rather than simply the **meanings** conveyed by the imagery. The imagery cannot be stretched to prove that deceased saints are already in Heaven.