

The question many ask is what happens to the soul of a person when he dies. This discussion will attempt to answer that question from the perspective of the righteous. The unrighteous, wicked, will not be discussed other than to say they will ultimately be in a place called “everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angles ” **Matthew 25:41** *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels:*

As we focus our attention on the righteous, it seems that when Jesus was resurrected and ascended back into heaven, the destination of the righteous changed. As I expound on this statement, we will consider two time frames; one pre-resurrection and the second post-resurrection. By that I mean the time before Jesus died and was resurrected and the time after his resurrection.

PRE-RESURRECTION. When a person dies, his physical body decays while his spiritual body (i.e. soul) returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). At that point, the spirit goes to HADES (HELL - KJV) which is defined as the “*unseen or grave.*” According to Luke 16, we learn that this realm of the departed spirits consists of three parts: (1) paradise – the place of rest for the righteous (good part), (2) tartarus – the place of torment for the wicked (bad place) and (3) a great gulf that separated the two. During the interim period between death and judgment, the righteous are in the good part of HADES separated from God and Christ which are in heaven. Such is the state of the “*disembodied spirits*” until the return of Jesus. At this time, the righteous will receive eternal life.

We know this interim place is not heaven because Jesus went there before he went to heaven. Jesus promised the thief on the cross that on that very day, both he and the thief would be in paradise (Luke 23:43). In Acts 2 (vs 27, 31) we learn that Jesus spent time in HADES (paradise) which was some forty days before he ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:3, 11).

After his resurrection, notice what Jesus said to Mary. **John 20:17** *Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father:* This statement to Mary that he had not yet ascended to his Father was some three days after his paradise promise was made to the thief.

Surely great men of God from the Old Testament were in paradise when they died. Men like Abraham, Lazarus, the thief on the cross, and David; yet Acts 2:34 says that David had not ascended into heaven. So clearly paradise is not heaven.

POST-RESURRECTION In light of scripture, it seems that things are different after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension back into heaven. After the resurrection of Jesus, the righteous that die go to heaven and not the grave as did those before the resurrection. Perhaps this is because Jesus ascended back into heaven to prepare a place for the righteous. **John 14:3-4** *And if I go and prepare a place*

for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. Jesus went to his Father and there he prepared a place. Before his ascension, there was no place prepared.

Another reason why there is a difference between the two is that God cannot co-exist with sin, so no one can be around God who is stained with the guilt of sin. It wasn't until the blood of Christ was shed that man's sin could be removed thus making it possible for him to stand before the throne of God.

We have noted that before the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, heaven and paradise were separate, but afterwards they are referred as one and the same when Paul (presumably) looked into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). Whereas paradise was once distinct from heaven, now it is not. **2 Corinthians 12:2** *I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven. (3) And I know such a man (whether in the body, or apart from the body, I know not; God knoweth), (4) how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. ...*

Then we have the expectation of the righteous being with Christ upon death. Paul once wrote: **Philippians 1:23** *"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:"*

2 Corinthians 5:8 *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."* Nothing is said in these verses to lead you to think that he was talking about going to a resting place in the grave as did Lazarus and the rich man. Instead he was anxious to go to where Jesus was; which was the third heaven.

Then we have the scene in Revelation 6:9-11 of the faithful martyrs under the altar dressed in white robes while others remained on earth. Then in chapter 7:9 we read about a great multitude that were dressed in white robes and standing before the throne.

1 Thessalonians 4:13ff gives us a glimpse of what it will be like when Jesus returns. In that description, it suggests that the Christians who have died will return with Jesus. **1 Thessalonians 4:14b** *.... even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* The same thought is expressed in 1 Thess. 3:13. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** *To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.* It seems that when Jesus comes again, he will bring with him the spirits of the righteous to be changed in the twinkling of an eye into a spiritual body that is adapted for all eternity (1 Cor

15:35, 38, 52). This new body will be in the form that God wants. The spirit of man never dies but it will now be housed in a new body apparently to adapt for a new home. The soul of the righteous man will now have a new body; a body that suits God. This will occur in the twinkling of an eye to the dead first and then to the ones alive when Jesus returns.

So, it seems that after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the interim place for the dead is no longer in HADES, but instead in a place called heaven where the souls are in the presence of God and Christ. Since their sins have been forgiven by the blood of Christ, they can stand before the throne of God justified and sanctified. So we have early Christians like Paul wanting to die and be with Jesus which was in heaven. Saints will come with Jesus in the final judgment, and in Rev. 6:9 we have souls under the altar of God. This seems to indicate that when the righteous dies, they go to heaven. Now what?

While we have been talking about heaven, the righteous will not spend all eternity there. By that statement I am suggesting that after the death and resurrection of Jesus heaven is the interim place for the righteous awaiting judgment just as paradise was before the death and resurrection of Jesus. So the question becomes where does the righteous soul go after judgment? Let me suggest to you that the place where the righteous will spend all eternity in a place called a New Jerusalem; a Holy City. Notice that this place is not heaven but “*from heaven.*”

Revelation 3:12 ... “and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

Revelation 21:2 And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.

Let us examine how the writer of Hebrews describes this “*eternal abode.*” He says of Abraham in ***Hebrews 11:10 “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”*** Verse 16 tells us that God prepared such a heavenly city. ***Hebrews 11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*** While we read of such a city, we are not told where this city of the righteous will be? This place called a “city” is to be a “better country.” Peter talks of

such a place and calls it “a new heaven and a new earth.”

After describing the “*day of the Lord*” in which the present universe will be dissolved, Peter speaks of looking for “*new heavens and a new earth.*” **2 Peter 3:13** *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* Peter says that this new heaven and new earth is a place for the righteous. It is this new abode for which we are looking. So how do we reconcile looking for a “*new heavens and a new earth*” mentioned by Peter and looking for “*the city whose builder is God*” as recorded in Hebrews?

The answer is found in the three passages previously mentioned in Revelation 3 and 21. John said in Rev 21:1 that he saw a new heaven and a new earth come down from God out of heaven, and in verse 2, he called it “*the holy city, a New Jerusalem.*” **Revelation 21:1-2** *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.* It is here in this new city that we are told there will be no tears, sorrows, worries, etc. (Revelation 21:4).

To further make a distinction between heaven and the “*holy city*” (i.e. New Jerusalem), let’s consider the throne and temple. While in heaven we see the temple and God sitting on His throne. **Revelation 7:15** *Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.* But in the Holy City there is no temple. **Revelation 21:22** *And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.* While figurative language is used, there seems to be a distinct difference between “*heaven*” and the “*holy city.*”

Jesus said I will go and prepare a place, and God said I will prepare a place. The only thing left is for us to prepare ourselves to go to these prepared places. This will be a new abode created by God as He comes down from heaven (interim place) to prepare a place for all eternity. To live there, one must take on a new body. 1 Cor. 15:52 tells us that we will be changed in a twinkling of an eye. Notice what Jesus says about the righteous. **Matthew 25:46** *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.* He does not say the righteous will receive heaven for all eternity, but rather that they will inherit “*life eternal.*” I’m suggesting that this life eternal is in a place called “*the holy city*” or “*the new Jerusalem.*”

Are you ready for your eternal reward?

Invitation