

# **Do The Saints Go To Heaven When They Die?**

## **The Question Scripturally Considered**

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### ***Do the Saints Go to Heaven When They Die?***

What a question! Does anyone doubt the doctrine?

Yes: thousands doubt it; and their number is increasing every day. But have they any good reasons for doubting it?

Yes: many good reasons, a few of which are given below.

#### *1. It subverts the doctrine of a future resurrection.*

Paul makes the resurrection indispensable to a future life. Without it they who are “fallen asleep in Christ as perished” (1 Cor. 15:18). How perished if in heaven? He adds, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (v. 19). Such argument is void if we can have a future life without a resurrection. Hear Paul again: “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage it me if the dead rise not?” (v. 32). The force of this argument is destroyed if saints go to heaven when they die. Certainly that would be advantage enough without any resurrection. The apostles gave great stress to the doctrine of a future resurrection; but multitudes in our day feel little or no interest in the doctrine; and some have lost sight of it altogether. No wonder! If the saints can live in glory without a resurrection what need is there of one?

#### *2. It ignores a future day of judgment.*

If men go to heaven and hell at death, a future day of judgment would be a solemn farce. If men are consigned to their eternal destinies at death, then decision has been made, and is already being carried into execution. And this nullifies any future judgment. No tribunal ever institutes a second trial, unless there is some doubt as to the justness of the first. God will never begin to execute a doubtful decision. When God decides he decides right. Neither will he execute a decision before it is rendered. When will it be rendered? Ans. He “shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:2). John the Revelator places “the time of the dead, that they should be judged,” under the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15-18). The dead are raised before they are judged (Rev. 20:12).

#### *3. It gives the prophets and the saints their reward before the time.*

Rev. 11:18 reads: “The nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou (God) should give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great;” and this is placed under the seventh trumpet by John (v. 15). What right have we to outrage God’s revealed plan by teaching that the saints get their reward “before the time” (1 Cor. 4:5). “Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). “The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27).

#### *4. It takes the saints to their reward instead of Christ’s bringing their reward to them.*

“Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

#### *5. It makes the place of reward in heaven, while the Scriptures make it on earth.*

“Behold the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth” (Prov. 11:31). Read Ps. 37:9-11, 22, 27; Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10; 11:15.

#### *6. It contradicts the Bible doctrine that the dead are unconscious.*

“The dead know not anything” (Eccl. 9:5). “Their love and their hatred and their envy is now perished” (v. 6). “In that very day his thoughts perish” (Ps. 146:3, 4). “In death there is no remembrance of thee” (Ps. 6:5).

7. *It contradicts the Bible doctrine that the dead are asleep.*

“David fell on sleep” (Acts 13:36). “Some are fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:6). “Fallen asleep in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:18). “The first fruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). “Concerning them which are asleep” (1 Thess. 4:13). “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; I go that I may awake him out of his sleep” (John 11:11). “Many that sleep in the dust” (Dan. 12:2). “And when he had said this he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60).

This sleep is broken by the resurrection. “I go that I may awake him out of his sleep” (John 11:11). “Awake and sing ye that dwell in dust” (Isa. 26:19). “I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness” (Ps. 17:15). “Many of the bodies of the saints that slept arose” etc., etc. The Bible is full of the sleep of the dead.

8. *It makes Christ’s coming to receive his people utterly needless. Christ makes it needful.* “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” (John 14:3).

9. *It makes death a friend and the “gate to glory.”*

Paul calls death an “enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). Hezekiah calls it “the gate to the grave” (Isa. 38:10). God calls the realm of death “The land of the enemy” (Jer. 31:16). God is going to “swallow up death in victory” (Isa. 25:8). And this will be brought to pass at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:54). If death is indeed a friend, why do good men so vigorously resent it? “You treat no other friend so ill.”

10. *It is positively denied by Christ and his apostles.*

Jesus says: “Where I go, thither ye cannot come” (John 7:34; 13:33, 36). Yet some teach that they got there nearly as quickly as he did, and that the thief got there just as quick; and that some even got there before he did. John writes: “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). This is spoken to negate some one’s doctrine. Whose is it? Not even Enoch and Elijah have gone to that heaven where God dwells. Jesus is the only man who has ever gone there, and he is more than man. He now dwells in “light which no man can approach unto” (1 Tim. 6:16).

11. *It contradicts the word of God as to where men really do go at death.*

God told Adam where he should go when he died: “Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19). Webster says that “thou” is the pronoun used in addressing persons. “His breath goes forth, HE returns unto his earth” (Ps. 146:3, 4). “Man lies down” (Job 14:12). “Thou takes away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (Ps. 104:29). “All go unto one place; all are of the dust and all turn to dust again” (Eccl. 3:20). “There is no work, nor knowledge, nor device, nor wisdom, in the grave wither thou goes” (Eccl. 9:10).

If you will read the Scriptures carefully you will discover that the words which denote the personality are always applied to the physical man, and never to the breath or spirit of life. Hence we must conclude that the physical man is the real man, and that the spirit of life from God, is that which causes him to live.

12. *It sanctions Satan’s falsehood by teaching that man does not surely die.* “Man, thou shalt never die.” —R. H. Dana. “Thou shalt not surely die.” —Satan (Gen. 3:4)

### ***Scriptures Supposed to Teach It***

1. Gen. 15:15—“Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace.” This did not mean go to heaven, for Abram’s fathers were idolaters, hence were not in heaven—on any supposition. Genesis 49:29 explains this passage. It reads: And he charged them, and said unto them, ‘I am to be gathered unto my people, bury me *With my fathers in the cave* that is in the field of Ephron.’”

2. Gen. 35:18 and 1 Kings 17:21—“Soul was departing,” “Soul came into him again.” Soul sometimes means life, and as such is the attribute of “every living thing” (Job 12:10). Nothing about going to heaven here. The Hebrews word *nephesh* here rendered *soul* is translated *life* and *living* about 120 times in the Old Testament Scriptures.

3. 1 Sam. 28:19—"Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." This is a part of a conversation between King Saul and a certain "spirit of divination" (see 1 Chron. 10:13), or "familiar spirit," acting or speaking through the witch of Endor, and assuming to be the prophet Samuel. That Samuel himself was not there is evident:  
First, because Samuel was dead and "the dead know not anything." Secondly, the person seen was "like gods coming *up out* of the earth," which is not a good description of a soul *coming down out of heaven*. Thirdly, he was described as an *old man* with a *mantle*, a poor description of an immortal soul, if such is meant. Fourthly, he said, "Why hast thou disquieted me to *bring me up*?" Strange talk for one who has just *come down from heaven*, if such be true. Fifthly, Samuel could not promise heaven to wicked men, and such were Saul and his sons.
4. 2 Sam. 12:23—"I shall go to him." David is now in the grave with his child. Peter testifies thus: "David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:34).
5. 1 Chron. 17:11—"Thou must go to be with thy fathers." Acts 13:36 explains this. "David fell on sleep and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption." Do saints see corruption in heaven?
6. Eccl. 12:7—"The spirit shall return unto God who gave it." This is evidently the same spirit of which Job speaks in chapter 27:3: "The spirit of God is in my nostrils." Was Job's immortal soul in his nostrils? Certainly not. The margin reads, "That is the breath which God gave him (Gen. 2:7)" "The breath of life is the element which causes men to live. See Job 33:4. It is not a personality, for it is found in the nostrils of beasts as well as men (Gen. 7:21, 22). Spirit also sometimes denotes a condition of the mind, but never an immortal soul, capable of living apart from the body. It sometimes means supernatural in contrast to the natural (1 Cor. 15:44, 45), and in this sense is applied to God, angels, the Holy Spirit, Christ, and the resurrected *bodies* of believers.
7. Matt. 10:28—"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." We cannot destroy the principle of life, even though we can kill the man. But the principle of life, here called soul, is no more the man, than the life of the beast is a spirit beast. When the word soul is used to denote a person it means the whole person, not a part of him. God can destroy both life and body in *gehenna*, hence from the "second death" there can be no resurrection. The original Greek word here rendered *soul* is rendered *life* and *lives* about forty times in the New Testament. It is rendered *soul* 59 times, and is also translated *mind, us, you, heart*, and is twice applied to the beasts that perish.
8. Matt. 17:1-9—"There appeared unto them Moses and Elias." That this is a vision verse 9 affirms, and a vision is not a reality. Read Acts 12:9. The vision foreshadowed the glory and majesty of Christ at his coming. See 2 Peter 1:16-18. Nothing about going to heaven here. If indeed this was a real manifestation, and not a supernatural vision, then we must conclude that since Elias or Elijah was translated and never died, that he must have been there bodily if at all, and if he was there bodily so was Moses, and so Moses must have been temporarily resurrected for the occasion. See Jude 9.
9. Luke 16:19-31—The rich man and Lazarus. This is not a literal history, but a parable, as the best commentators agree; and a parable cannot prove any doctrine in the face of direct testimony to the contrary. It is one of those cases where inanimate objects are personified and represented as occupying conditions and performing work which would be impossible in a literal sense. In this manner trees and other inanimate things are made to walk, talk and perform other impossible acts. Read Judges 9:9-16 as an example. Space forbids a full exposition here, but a few thoughts may be suggested.  
The "rich man" has been regarded as representing the Jewish priesthood, which indeed was "clothed in fine linen and fared sumptuously every day." The poor man or Lazarus represents those social and moral outcasts of Israel, who were excluded from the temple worship and were regarded as fitting associates for the Gentile "dogs," as they were called. Jesus was censured for receiving and eating with this same class of Jews (see chap. 15). Christ responds by a series of parables, of which this is one. The parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver and the prodigal son represent the return to the favor of God of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The parable of the unjust steward hinted the collapse of the Jewish priesthood and their attempt to retain their position by fraud. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus represents by the figure of death and burial the total collapse of the Jewish priesthood, while the poor man undergoes a figurative death unto sin and is received into the very bosom of the Abrahamic covenant. The subsequent wailings of the Jewish priesthood, while rejecting Christ, yet pleading for mercy, or rather hoping for recognition through

their relation to Abraham, while they are separated from the Abrahamic covenant by the gulf of unbelief, is fitly represented in the language of the parable: and this same gulf of unbelief places them beyond the reach of those who would otherwise help them, and becomes an insuperable barrier to the rest of the Jewish family, who having “Moses and the prophets,” hear them not.

10. Luke 23:43—Christ’s promise to the thief on the cross is thought to prove that saints go immediately to heaven at death. It is usually quotes thus: “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

The *Curetonian Syriac*, the oldest known version of the New Testament, renders the passage thus: “Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in Eden’s garden;’ making it mean as if he had said, “I give you a present assurance, now, today, that when I shall come into my kingdom, you shall be with me in paradise.” This makes it harmonize with the thief’s request, which was to be remembered when he should *come* (return) into his kingdom, not when he went away to receive it (Luke 19:12). Latter translations place the comma after “today,” which of course changes the meaning. We like the old punctuation the best, as it makes the passage harmonize with the uniform teaching of the word of God. Put the comma after “today” and all is plain.

Punctuation is a modern invention, and is not inspired. Webster says: “The ancients were unacquainted with punctuation; they wrote without any distinction of members, periods or words.” Hence it is our duty to punctuate the Scriptures according to their true sense and harmony. A very learned author, M. Grant, lays down this rule: “When the verb in the sentence is in the indicative mode, present tense, first person singular, the adverb qualifies the verb it *follows*.” This rule makes the adverb *today* qualify the verb *say*; and hence requires the comma after “today,” as in the *Curetonian Syriac*. The word “today” is here used for emphasis, and when thus used is a term of assurance, and is well illustrated in Deut. 28:1, 15; 30:18, 19; 32:46.

That the common understanding of this text is erroneous is evident from the following considerations: First, Christ did not go to heaven that day, but three days afterward said: “I am not yet ascended” (John 20:17). Secondly, if Christ went to heaven that day, then he must have “come again,” in order to be here on the morning of the third day, which would put his second coming in the past. St. Paul put it in the future (Heb. 9:28). Thirdly, his soul came from *hades* at his resurrection and not from heaven (Acts 2:31).

11. Phil. 1:23 and 2 Cor. 5:8—Paul’s desire “to depart and be with Christ” was not a desire for death, but for immediate translation to the presence of Christ. True, to die was “gain,” for he was going to *magnify* Christ in his body, whether by life or death. If he lived this would be the fruit of his labor; but if he died a martyr for Christ he would thus magnify him in his death. In either case he would *gain* eternal life. See Matt. 10:39. As between a life of anxious toil and labor on the one hand, and death as a martyr on the other, Paul had no choice. “I am in a strait betwixt two,” he said; “what I shall choose I wot not.” What Paul did choose was neither life in this present world, nor death, but something far better than either, viz., “to depart and be with Christ.” He so yearned for the present of Christ, that if possible he would at once be translated to his presence. But he knew that his desire could not be granted (v. 25). Besides, it was more needful for the church that he abide or remain with them (v. 24). Yet he was “willing rather to be absent from” them and by translation “to be present with the Lord.”

2 Cor. 5:8—“Absent from the body,” that is, from the church, for the church in this present world is “the body of Christ.” (See Rom. 12:4, 5; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18, etc.) It is sometimes objected that the church is not meant in 2 Cor. 5:7, 8, because that when Christ comes again to raise the dead Paul will be at home in the church and present with the Lord, too. The answer is two-fold: First, the church militant is called the body of Christ, while the church triumphant *never* is.

Secondly, the logic of this argument is fatal to the position that the physical body is meant, for when Jesus comes and raises the dead, then Paul will be at home in his body and present with the Lord, too; a condition positively denied in the words: “While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.” But if we understand the body to be the “church militant,” all is plain.

12. 2 Cor. 5:1—“If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” To suppose that “our earthly house” here means our physical bodies, involves many absurdities. We will notice a few: First, our “earthly house” is contrasted with one “*not made with hands*,” which implies that the earthly house is made by the art of man, which is not true of our physical bodies. Secondly, if the physical body is meant, then we have other bodies in heaven awaiting our arrival there, which would make heaven a storehouse of soulless bodies. Now who is willing to swallow this?

Thirdly, our house “not made with hands” is “eternal.” What will God do with the *eternal* bodies of those who backslide and never get to heaven to occupy them? Fourthly, when this mortal is raised, and puts on immortality (see 1 Cor. 15:42-54), what will we do with the extra body? Won’t we have one body too many?

Fifthly, if we get an eternal body at death, what need is there of a resurrection? Will we need two eternal bodies to make us happy? Let us now consider what Paul really meant. This is not the only place where Paul has spoken of these things. In Heb. 9:11, while contrasting the old covenant and its service with the new, he says: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, but a greater and more perfect *tabernacle, not made with hands.*” We pause to ask, what does Paul mean by the phrase, “not made with hands”? Does he mean anything? Yes, let him explain. “By a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, *not of this building.*” There can be no doubt that Paul refers to the temple at Jerusalem when he speaks of “this building” in contrast to the one “not made with hands,” which temple answered to the former tabernacle reared in the wilderness.

Now hear Paul again: “Christ is not entered into the holy places *made with hands*” (Heb. 9:24). So we see that Paul means something by the words “not made with hands,” and that he uses the expression to distinguish between God-made things and man-made things. Paul was a Jew, and hence could speak of the temple at Jerusalem—so soon to be destroyed, as “our earthly house of this tabernacle,” which he in Hebrews calls “this building,” and a “worldly (earthly) sanctuary.” It was soon to be dissolved, or taken down, but what of that! We have a “more perfect tabernacle” wherein Christ has entered for us, and where we may enter by him, and as we have been clothed with the benefits of the earthly tabernacle, we may be more completely clothed with the heavenly tabernacle in the reception of greater blessings, even life and immortality. And when the new Jerusalem comes down (Rev. 21), “the tabernacle of God” will be with men and we shall then be fully invested with “our house which is *from heaven.*” Thus mortality will have been “swallowed up of life;” and then “there shall be no more *death* neither sorrow nor crying.” \*

13. Rev. 6:9-11—The souls under the altar. We inquire: First, who are they? They are the souls or persons of those who were beheaded for Christ in the great papal persecution. “Soul” often means person. See Lev. 17:12, 15. Secondly, where were they seen? Not in heaven, but on earth—“under the altar.” Thirdly, what was their cry? It was a prayer for vengeance, as they lay weltering in their blood. Divine vengeance was called for. Their cry was like that of Abel. Said God to Cain, “The voice of thy brother’s blood cries to me out of the ground.”

Fourthly, what were the white robes? They were “the righteousness of saints” (Rev. 19:8). The white robes are “given” to them, implying imputed righteousness. Thus were they committed to the earth, in humble trust, to “rest” until earth’s persecutions are past; when they will “awake to eternal life” (Dan. 12:2).

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voices of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

“Surely I come quickly. Amen. *Even so, come, Lord Jesus*” (Rev. 22:20).

\* We wish to notice in passing that instead of “we” in the first line of 2 Cor. 5:4, Wilson translates “those,” which seems to better express the original.

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