

## **“TO DEPART AND BE WITH CHRIST”**

by Bryan Matthew Dockens

Brethren sometimes feel compelled to correct one who speaks of a deceased Christian having “gone to be with the Lord” or who is “in heaven now.” They insist the departed saint is in hades, awaiting the judgment, but not yet in the Lord’s presence in heaven. This is pedantic.

While hades is the immediate destination of the dead (Acts 2:27; Luke 16:23), including both a place of torments in flame (Luke 16:23-24) and a place of comfort in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22-23), and will eventually yield the dead to judgment (Revelation 20:13), and itself be destroyed (Revelation 20:14), it does not require mention whenever a believer speaks of the hereafter.

Paul spoke in this way: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:21-23). The apostle identified two possibilities: either living or dying and being with Jesus. He made no reference to anything between death and the presence of the Lord. This is not to say that such a realm does not exist, but it does prove that mentioning it is not always necessary.

In similar fashion, the same inspired man wrote, “We are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. 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). Again, Paul spoke of nothing between occupying a body of flesh and enjoying the presence of Jesus. And, again, this does not mean that hades doesn’t occupy a place between earth and heaven, only that it does not require mention on every occasion.

Truly, there is “one hope” (Eph. 4:4), and hades is not it! While that way station of the soul is not denied, neither is it one’s goal or destination. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ... receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:3-9).

Moreover, the comfort side of hades can, accurately, be called “heaven.” Paul wrote of one “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2), saying “he was caught up into Paradise” (4). Of course, “Paradise” is the immediate destination of the righteous dead (Luke 23:43). Using the language of Scripture, it is right to conclude that, on the day of death, the spirit of the saved goes to heaven, also called Paradise, Abraham’s bosom, and comfort.