

The Correspondent



SUNDAY

Bible Study 9:30 AM
Worship 10:30 AM & 1:30 PM

WEDNESDAY

Bible Study (Adult) 1:30 PM
Bible Study (All Ages) 7:00 PM
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For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth... in every place. (1 Thessalonians 1:8)

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Where Do We Go When We Die? Part One

-Renn Ferguson

Where we go when we die has always been a subject of much discussion. Ultimately, we know that we will either be in heaven or hell. Passages such as Matthew 25:31-46 make that point very clear. That is not really the area of debate. Though there are some who believe that we will be on a renovated earth that is not what we are here to discuss. Where most the debate comes from is whether or not we will go straight to heaven or hell or will we go to a place commonly called the place of waiting. Within the place of waiting there are two parts. Hades, or torment, and Abraham's Bosom, or paradise. In this article and the next we will look at these two opinions to see which one has the most support from the scripture. We will start with the opinion that we go straight to heaven or hell when we die.

One passage that is often used to teach this is 1 Peter 3:18-22. I encourage you to turn and read that passage in its entirety before continuing. Those who use this verse to teach this say that after his ascension, Christ went to preach to those in Sheol. Once he preached to them he called them all out of paradise or torment and sent them straight to either heaven or hell. Therefore, paradise and torment no longer exist. However, there are a few issues with this. First of all no where in this text is there an indication that he called all of the souls out of Sheol and into an eternal abode. Those who say such read that into the text, there's no support from Peter for that conclusion. Second, notice the language used in verse 19, "by whom also he went [past tense] and preached to the spirits in [present tense] prison" continue on to verse 20, "who formerly were disobedient [past tense], when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (ESV). What Peter is saying is that during the days of Noah Christ, through the Holy Spirit, preached to the lost world of Noah's day. Where are those people now? In prison. The Syriac actually translates that word prison as Sheol. According to Peter those people, even all the way back to Noah's day, were still in "the place of waiting".

Another passage used to support this doctrine are Philippians 1:23 where Paul states, "I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." Many use this passage to say that Paul, upon death, would immediately be with Christ. However, I do not think Paul is making a statement about where we go when we die. He is simply expressing his desire to leave this world and be with Christ. The same desire that all faithful members of the body of Christ have.

There are other passages to consider when looking at this topic from this point of view. However, for the sake of space we have to will leave it at those two.

I would like to emphasize that I do not think that anyone who holds the above view is in any sort of danger. Though I do not necessarily agree with this view, it does not pervert the truth of the gospel, steps of salvation, worship, and Christian living. I believe one could hold this view and be in right standing with God. Ultimately, we all want to be in heaven. Some of the details of what happens after we leave this world may be difficult to understand or not given at all. However, if we are faithful to God and to the church, we will have a home with our God.