

Did the Early Church Teach That Christians Went Directly to Heaven After Death, While Sinners Went to Hell?

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The early church knew that the dead do not rise until Christ's second coming (Ecc. 3:19; 9:5; Jb. 14:13-14, 21; Ps. 6:5; 30:9; 88:10; Eze. 18:4; 1Cor. 15:12-58; 1Thes. 4:13-17). Therefore, no one is going to either heaven or hell at death, nor will they praise him after death (Ps. 115:17), even though many who claim to represent Christianity make statements to this effect (Ac. 24:15). There are several examples in scripture of individuals appearing after their death, but upon closer examination these are visions and not actual resurrections to eternal life (1Sam. 28:11-16; Mt. 17:3; cf. Jn. 3:13). All those who have died are not in limbo or a state of sleep, but are completely dead (Jn. 11:11-14). There was a one-time event where some people were raised to physical life at the time of Christ's death, but this does not demonstrate that any one continues to live on in heaven or hell after they pass away (Gen. 3:19 cf. Jb. 34:14-15; Ps. 104:29; 146:4; Mt. 27:52-53; Ac. 2:29, 34). Job also understood that all who die remain dead until the resurrection (Jb. 14:14).

The early church taught that the followers of Christ who remain alive until his return will not precede those who are dead in Christ, which means there will not be a secret rapture (1Thes. 4:13-17). Instead, scripture shows that the first resurrection will be orderly (1Cor. 15:22-24; 51-52).

Christ's sacrifice at his first advent was to provide the means of salvation. Christ's second coming as King of kings will bring about a period of judgment (Rom. 14:10-12; Php. 2:9-11; Rev. 19:16). This was pre-figured in the conduct of the

High Priest in Leviticus 16 where he came first to give an offering for himself and his family, followed by a second offering. The second offering symbolized a judgment between two beings (goats, Lev. 16:8-10), picturing two different systems of governing; one in accordance with God's law, the other being rebellious to it. The goat that was banished to the wilderness (Lev. 16:21), portrayed Satan's temporary system of government, which will ultimately be removed as a result of Christ's victory over death, depicted by the first goat that was sacrificed (Lev. 16:15).

We see this period of judgment commences with the church (1Pet. 4:17), which includes the faithful of the OT (Heb. 11:1), all of whom will be resurrected at Christ's return. They will assist him on this earth, not heaven (Rev. 5:10), for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6); after which the balance of mankind and the disloyal host of heaven will be resurrected for the purpose of judgment in the hope of reconciliation to God (Rev. 20:5; 2Pet. 3:9). Logically, a resurrection of the dead makes no sense if a person has already gone either to heaven or hell (Jn. 5:21; Rom. 8:11; 1Cor. 15:13-20; 2Cor. 1:9).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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