

**Journey to the Center of the Earth**  
Between Christ's Death and Resurrection  
(Ephesians 4:8)

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Jules Verne's "Journey to the Center of the Earth" was a classic film that was released in the year 1959. It was a science fiction adventure film where a group of people, which included geologists, found a passageway that led to the center of the earth. On their journey and adventure, they encountered all kinds of fascinating scenery and creatures, including a lost world of dinosaurs and the various dangers that were associated with the center of the earth.

Of course, this was a science fiction film created by the imagination of man, but the study I am presenting is not science fiction but is part of the inspired record of Scripture. Jesus took a journey into the center of the earth following His death on Calvary's cross. He entered the subterranean underworld to preach to lost spirits doomed for the Lake of Fire and remind them of their defeat and loss. But He also visited the Old Testament saints to reassure them of His victory over the realm of death through His own death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven. In fact, Jesus' victory would become their own victory for He would at the time of His ascension lead them out of their inner chamber in the earth (Hades) and take those, who were once held captive within the lower parts of an earthly paradise, into their new and eternal heavenly paradise.

Jesus taught in Matthew 12:40:

“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”



Jonah was literally swallowed by a great fish and Jesus literally went into the center of the earth.

Some claim that Christ's spirit went directly to Heaven since He declared, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). However, committing oneself to the Father's care, keeping, and will does not indicate that Jesus immediately went to Heaven after His death. It's clear that Jesus literally descended into the heart of the earth between His death and resurrection. But where did He go

and why did He go into the center of the earth? I want to take you on a journey to the center of the earth in this rather intriguing study. In fact, we are going to take a trip to the center of the earth but eventually end up in Heaven as we study the movements of Christ between His death on the cross and ascension into Glory.

Paul confirms this descent and journey of Christ in Ephesians 4:8:

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.”

This verse has baffled expositors through the years and various interpretations and meanings have been assigned to it. However, when talking about the ascension of Christ, Paul seems to be dealing with the deliverance of God's Old Testament saints when quoting and paraphrasing Psalm 68:18 (a messianic psalm of victory), while at the same time reminding us that after Christ's ascension, He also gifted God's New Testament saints, who were now living on earth and part of the Church. The real purpose of this Old Testament quote is to assure that the Church is gifted because of Christ's ascension into Glory. Paul paraphrases Psalm 68:18, applying an important Old Testament event to a New Testament context of Messiah's ascension and the gifting of His Church.

Here is the obvious point. If Christ possessed the authority to release His Old Testament saints from Hades, then certainly He has the authority, as the Head of the Church, to give His saints gifts. Christ is pictured as a military victor leading a

triumphal procession while handing out gifts (the spoils of war). The analogy is clear. Christ, the great victor over death, the devil, hell, and the grave, has the right or authority to give His own people spiritual gifts. This is because He won the victory and is Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18). In one sense, Jesus is sharing the spoils of His victory with the Church.

Two amazing things happened when Christ ascended into Heaven. He delivered the Old Testament saints from Hades (a place within the center of the earth) and He also delivered gifts to New Testament saints (His Church). Paul quoted Psalm 68:18 and used it as an illustration of Christ's ascension, victory, and His gifts (comparing them to the spoils of war) that He gave to the Church. Historically, this is talking about the deliverance of Jerusalem into the hands of David which was under the pagan Jebusite rule: "Thou hast ascended on high (the mountain of Zion upon which Jerusalem was built), thou hast led captivity captive (the Jebusites): thou hast received gifts for men (*referring the spoils of war*); yea, *for* the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell *among them*."

During this time, David and his men captured Jerusalem and called it the City of David (2 Sam. 5:1–9). God gave them the victory and the spoils. Paul is quoting Psalm 68:18, this victory song written by David, but he is APPLYING it to Jesus Christ and the gifting of the Church (Eph. 4:8). David ascended into the earthly Zion as the victor, but Jesus ascended into the heavenly Zion as the great victor! Biblical writers will sometime use an Old Testament quote and make application of it to a present situation, without arguing for an exact and literal fulfillment of the Old Testament passage in relation to the New Testament (Ps. 2:7 with Acts 13:33 and Heb. 1:5; Ps. 110:1 with Acts 2:33). Vincent writes: "The Psalm is Messianic, a hymn of victory in which God is praised for victory and deliverance. It is freely adapted by Paul, who regards its substance rather than its letter, and uses it as an expression of the divine triumph as fulfilled in Christ's victory over death and sin."

Jesus Christ, as the great Victor, conquered His foes with His death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven. As a result of His ascension into Glory at the Father's right hand (Heb. 1:3), He began to gift His Church. This gifting began after His ascension in view of the Day of Pentecost. In fact, Pentecost was the first great display of the exercise of gifts. The Church was born on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Christ's ascension into Heaven is the time when He became Head over the Church and began to gift His Church with various gifts (Eph. 4:8) and also gifted people (Eph. 4:11).

Let's digest what all of this means. I am about to take you on a journey into the center of the earth, but we will eventually end up in the place called Heaven where our great Victor, the Lord Jesus Christ, resides today. I hope you are ready for the ride of your lifetime!

We can easily determine when Christ decided to gift the Church, which was originally formed on the Day of Pentecost. It was when Christ ascended into Heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father ("When he ascended up on high" – Eph. 4:8).

Ephesians 1:20-22 refers to Christ's victorious resurrection and ascension: "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead (*the resurrection of Christ*), and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places* (*the ascension of Christ*), Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named (*the victory of Christ*), not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church" (*the leadership of Christ*).

This reminds us that the Church (the Body of Christ) could not exist prior to this for Jesus only became the Head of the Church with His ascension into Glory. You cannot have a body without a head! This informs us that there was no Church in the Old Testament as Covenant and Reformed Theology teaches. The Church was not an extension of Israel but was a "mystery" (sacred secret) unknown during the Old Testament (Eph. 3:1-5). In short, the truth about the Church was not revealed because it did not exist. It could not exist until Christ ascended to Heaven and officially and uniquely became the Church's Head.



In any event, the time Christ began to gift the church followed His ascension into Heaven. This is when "he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Eph. 4:8). What does the phrase "he led captivity captive" mean? Somehow this phrase is connected to Christ's ascension. Obviously, it is referring to the releasing of a group of people that were in some way held captive. It involved Christ taking them back to Heaven with Himself at the time of His ascension and exaltation. In this case, the "captives" are not Christ's enemies, but His own saints who were once held captive by Satan but have now become the Lord's captives. The specific captives are the Old Testament

saints in Sheol (Hades). Jesus is pictured as taking the souls of believers from paradise (Luke 23:43) to be with Him in the heavenly places.

Some have suggested that the captives are the evil forces or Christ's enemies, spirit beings defeated in Christ's redemptive work. But this does not make sense. Although Christ defeated His spiritual foes when He died on the cross (Col. 2:15), the context of Ephesian 4:8 is that these captives are being led back to Heaven with Christ. Certainly, this cannot be the host of evil forces against Christ. The doubling of the words "captivity, captive" has been variously interpreted. Some interpreters suggest it conveys an Old Testament style of Hebrew poetry and simply expresses that Christ thoroughly defeated and subjugated His foes. But again, this seems to miss the point of Christ leading captives back to Heaven. The sense of this triumphal procession is that those who were once held captive by Satan (Old Testament saints) have now become Christ's captives. Christ has removed them from Satan's authority and brought them under His own realm of authority. The thought of being captives of Christ is a tremendous privilege.

Olyott Stuart correctly observes:

"We are those captives and we are taken, not in chains, but to sit in heavenly places with him. It is to those same captives that the Conqueror dispenses his widely varying gifts. Oh, the grace of God!"

This KJV translators gave us some running commentary (in brackets in your Bible) on how they believed this phrase "he led captivity captive" should be understood: ("Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things"). The idea seems to be this. Before Christ could ascend, He had to descend. Therefore, the KJV translators spoke of the lower parts of the earth as referring to the place of His descent. What is meant by Christ's descent into the lower, earthly regions, or "into the lower parts of earth?" This has been variously interpreted and understood in three ways.

(1) "Into the lower parts of the earth" could refer to Christ's incarnation, His "descent" to the earth. It's assumed that "lower, earthly regions" is another way of indicating the humiliation of Christ in coming to earth. The "lower parts" refer to the lowly, humiliating aspects of His earthly career. In other words, Jesus descended to earth (His incarnation and humility) before He could ascend back to

Heaven (His exaltation) and begin to gift the Church. But this explanation does not make sense for several reasons.

First, leading people back to Heaven (“he led captivity captive”) did not occur at the incarnation of Christ or when Christ became man and descended to earth. Second, leading people back to Heaven does not coincide or make sense with “the lower parts of the earth.” The phrase “lower parts of the earth” is obviously not a reference to the surface of the earth upon which man dwells and lives as portrayed in other Bible passages (Gen. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:5; Rev. 5:13). Third, the incarnation by itself is not seen as Christ’s victory. His death, resurrection, and ascension back to Heaven work together to reveal His provisional victory for His saints.

Lenski is correct when He observed:

What this descent was depends on the meaning of “into the lower parts of the earth.” ... The Incarnation will not do because the psalm describes the supreme Victor, and the Incarnation is not a victory.

(2) Some others suggest that “Into the lower parts of the earth” could reference Christ’s death and His burial in the grave. It is suggested that Christ’s death had won the victory over sin so many people could be redeemed and be given “gifts” within His Church. It is asserted by this view that the Lord Jesus descended from Heaven to Bethlehem’s manger, to His death of the cross, and was then buried in a tomb (the lower parts of the earth). He then rose again and went back to Heaven in victory and all those who believe in Him will one day enter Heaven.

To the credit of this view, Jesus did teach in John 3:13-14:

“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.”

However, this explanation of Christ descending to earth from Heaven to save mankind and take people back to Heaven seems unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, there is nothing in the context that indicates Christ is portrayed as descending from His heavenly position. Second, this interpretation does not give a satisfactory answer to the lower parts of the earth. Third, there is no inference made in this text that Jesus is individually and gradually leading people back to Heaven every time their life on earth ends. Fourth, the leading of the captives suggests an event that

occurs at one specific time and something that was literally fulfilled at Christ's ascension - not following His ascension. Although this view supports Biblical truth, such as the advent, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, along with the heavenly destiny of believers, this is not what is being portrayed in this text. Paul has something else in mind here.

(3) The phrase "Into the parts lower parts of the earth" likely means that Christ literally descended into Hades between His death and resurrection. This seems to be the best interpretation and understanding of the passage. The early church fathers saw in it the work of Christ in bringing the Old Testament saints out of the earthly paradise up to the throne of God. Hades was the place where the dead saints were living prior to the death and ascension of Christ into Heaven. It was a place of paradise for them as they awaited Messiah's entrance into the world, His death upon the cross.

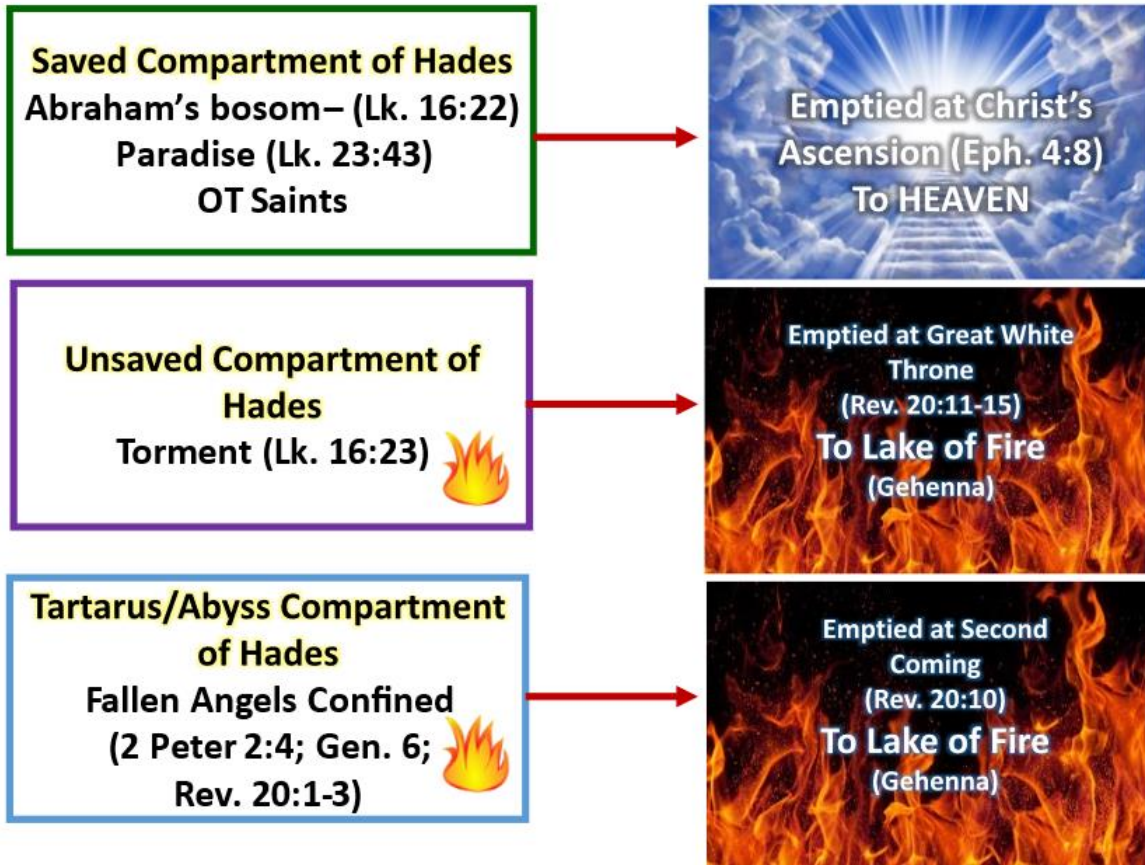
Swindoll states:

"Christ's descent to the spiritual realm known as 'Sheol' or 'Hades' between His death and resurrection is extremely ancient and enduring in the history of the church. In fact, the Apostles' Creed, recited by countless churches worldwide, states that Christ 'was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hades.'"

Here is what we need to know. Between Christ's death and resurrection, He descended into Hades (the lower parts of the earth) to accomplish several tasks.

### **1. Jesus preached to the spirit beings (fallen angels) confined in hades.**

There is an amazing event that occurred between Christ's death and resurrection. When Jesus died on the cross, He entered the inner chamber of the earth (lower parts of the earth) to preach a victory sermon to a host of demonic hordes that were incarcerated within this subterranean spirit world far beneath the earth's surface. The chart below illustrates the three compartments of the Biblical place called Hades and when those dwelling within these individual places of the underworld are removed by Christ. We will study each one of these. For now, our focus is on the third box in the chart.



1 Peter 3:18-19 reveals Christ's descent into Hades:

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison."

This has been viewed as one of the perplexing and puzzling passages of Peter. However, without reading anything into this text, there appears to be a class of demonic hordes who are bound and suffering in a specific compartment within Hades (a place of spiritual confinement in the inner earth). Visiting the confined, demonic spirits in Hades is something that occurred between Christ's death and resurrection from the grave. This text has been made into a pretext for such unbiblical doctrines as purgatory and universal salvation. But these "spirits" are not human spirits, they are demonic spirits bound in a specific compartment of Hades, presumably the same place where Satan will be bound for one thousand years during the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-3).





Peter connects these evil spirits to Noah's time for 1 Peter 3:20 states: "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. These spirit beings were obviously a group of demons that were part of the "sons of God" rebellion found in Genesis 6, during the antediluvian world (before the

Genesis Flood). They tried to overthrow the human race by indwelling a race of giant people and producing a race of ungodly people to keep the Messiah from being born. The perpetrators of this crime were bound and incarcerated in a place within Hades.

2 Peter 2:4 also mentions these same spirit beings:

"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell (Tartarus), and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."

The word "hell" is literally translated as "Tartarus" in the Greek language which was known and portrayed as a gloomy abyss deep under the earth. It was part of the underworld of Hades, perhaps the deepest section of this subterranean world. When Jesus preached to these wicked spirits, he declared the triumph of His cross to them. He basically said, "You guys are losers! You lost in Noah's day and were bound in this place because of your heinous transgression. But you lost again when I died on the cross and brought judgment against you. Through my death on the cross, I have defeated you forever. The cross has sealed your eternal judgment and doom in the Lake of Fire.

Colossians 2:14-15 records Jesus' victory over Satan and His demonic followers:

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And* having spoiled principalities and powers (*Satan and demons*), he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

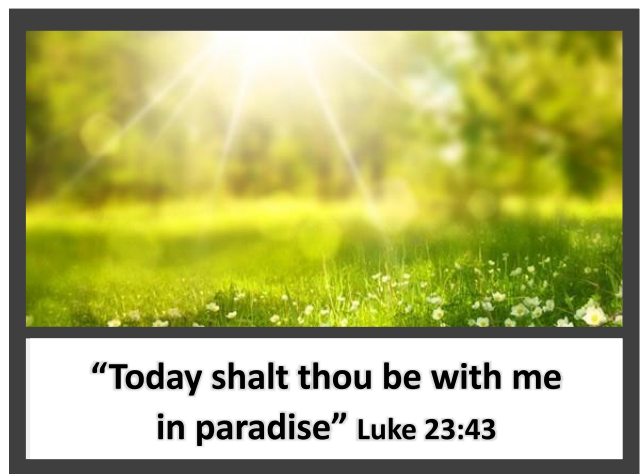
The cross of Calvary was the place where Satan and all other wicked spirits who follow him were defeated (John 14:30; 16:11). They were stripped of their authority and power over God's saints and were also sentenced to judgment (Matt. 8:29). This must have been a hot and fiery sermon that Jesus preached in the realm of the underworld! Jesus was the preacher and the demons of hell were His audience. It was a sermon of victory over Satan and his followers because of Christ's death on the cross. Luther captured the defeat of Satan and his wicked hosts by saying:

“The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure;  
One little word shall fell him.”

## 2. Jesus proclaimed His victory to Old Testament saints living in Hades.

At the same time, when Jesus entered the earth between His death and resurrection, He apparently visited another compartment of Hades where Old Testament saints went when they died, prior to His cross and resurrection. It was a temporary abode for the saved and righteous until they would be transported to Heaven. Being in the heart of the earth for three days and nights is an indication that Christ visited His beloved saints and dwelt with them in this place of bliss and happiness (Matt. 12:40).

Christ also told the thief on the cross that He would dwell with him in this inner paradise within the lower regions of the earth (Luke 23:43). Psalm 16:10 also prophetically speaks of Messiah's descent into the lower regions of the subterranean earth when it states: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (sheol – the place of comfort and bliss where Christ's spirit would reside); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (a reference to Christ's body in the grave). Christ's spirit went into the spirit world while His body remained in the grave.



Some have the viewpoint that Jesus went to “hell” or the suffering side of Sheol/Hades in order to further be punished for our sins. This idea is completely unbiblical and absurd. Jesus suffered and paid the penalty for our sins on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24; Isa. 53:10). Here is my point. There is enough Biblical evidence that allows us to be certain of Christ’s visitation and dwelling with His beloved, Old Testament saints in the netherworld between His death and resurrection (Ps. 16:10; Matt. 12:40; Luke 23:43; Acts 2:31; Eph. 4:8).

Hades was a place where God’s saints were pictured as being held captive by Satan. If Christ were to lead those back to Heaven, who were being held captive (Eph. 4:8) within the lower parts of the earth (Hades), He would have to visit them. He would do so to reassure His beloved, Old Testament children, that He had won the victory over sin, death, and the Devil’s authority to keep His saints bound in the center of the earth and out of Heaven. The victory was assured, paradise was ready to be opened with the resurrection of Christ, and the timing of their departure would be at His ascension (Eph. 4:8; Acts 1:11). When Christ visited the spiritual realm of Hades, He officially declared the victory over Satan’s power or authority to keep God’s people captive in the realm of death (Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15).

Now let’s reflect upon the place of Hades.

Luke 16:22 records the words of Jesus:

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.”

Abraham’s bosom or side apparently refers to a place of paradise for Old Testament believers. Abraham’s bosom became known as the blessed and happy side of Hades. It was the place where Abraham’s spirit went when he died because he expressed faith in God’s revelation about salvation (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3). This chamber where Abraham’s spirit departed was at the center of the earth. It was the place where all of God’s saints, who had placed faith in God’s promise like Abraham, were kept until the triumphant death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (Eph. 4:8). Abraham’s name was used to represent this place because he placed faith in God’s promise of the coming seed and Messiah. It was here where all of God’s saints waited for the promised Seed, the Rescuer, the Messiah, the One who was promised to come (Genesis 3:15, Galatians 4:4). It was here where they waited for the promised Seed, the Rescuer, the Messiah, the One who was promised to come (Genesis 3:15, Galatians 4:4).

Abraham's Bosom was a place of comfort and it was a place of waiting. The sins of Old Testament saints were forgiven by the Levitical system of atonement using the blood of animals. Since this was not sufficient to actually take away sins (Heb.10:4), those who died in faith went to Abraham's Bosom and waited until the time their sins would be paid for completely through Christ's death on the cross and applied to their record (Rom. 3:25-26). Since Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), His sacrifice could be credited or applied to Old Testament saints during the waiting period, prior to Christ's actual death on Calvary (Rom. 4:3). But the actual saving transaction could not occur until Christ died and paid the full penalty for sin on the cross (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25-26).



So, we can conclude that this inner chamber within the earth was apparently a temporary dwelling place where Old Testament saints lived and existed after their death (Luke 23:43; Matt. 12:40) until the victorious death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (Eph. 4:8). Jesus had to defeat death through His own death and resurrection and take over the keys of Hades to release people from this inner chamber (Rev. 1:18).

During the era of the Old Testament, we discover that Abraham and all saints went to the place which in the Hebrew language is translated Sheol. In the Greek language it was Hades. They often appear in the English translation as "hell" but do not always refer to the suffering and judgment compartment of Hades. These descriptive terms reference the world of the dead but for God's saints Sheol of Hades was their place of joyous reunion. The Old Testament repeatedly states that God's saints who lived during the pre-death and pre-resurrection era (before Christ died and rose again) would be "gathered unto their people" in this special place in the inner earth. It was a place where their spirits departed and where they experienced fellowship one with another. The repeated phrase of the Old Testament saint being "gathered unto his people" (Genesis 25:8-9; 35:29; 49:33; Numb. 20:24) and "thy people" in the netherworld (Numb. 27:12-13) informs us of a subterranean place of existence where God's people gathered and lived within their spiritual dimension of existence.

This place within the inner earth was created for God's saints prior to Christ's death and resurrection. It's important to understand that Abraham's Bosom was located "down below" (not above) the heavens in the depths of the earth. Jesus referred to this place as the "heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40) and it was the abode of the righteous dead prior to Jesus' resurrection. Of course, we do read how God took Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5), and how Elijah was caught up into "heaven" when he departed (2 Kings 2:1). Also, Moses and Elijah did appear on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus (Matt. 17:3). But in all these cases, the Bible never confirms that these Old Testament saints were actually taken to dwell with God in the third Heaven (God's abode). Yes, God did unusual things with these people to fulfill His purposes, but He could just as easily bring Moses and Elijah back from Hades (the spirit world) to appear with Him on the mount. God can do whatever He wants to do, whenever He wants to do, with whomsoever He wants to in order to fulfill His decrees.



One should not confuse Hades with Heaven. It must be understood that this subterranean place within the center of the earth is never called Heaven, as in the New Testament, but was actually a heaven-like paradise for God's saints to dwell before the resurrection and ascension of these saints into Heaven.

Luke 23:43 records:

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

When Jesus said that that the thief would be with him in paradise, it does not mean Heaven. At this particular time, prior to Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, paradise was known as a place of bliss in the underworld. Jesus and the saved thief went down to paradise – not up to paradise.

Again, we must understand that prior Christ's death and resurrection, Old Testament saints made their home (abode) in the center of the earth in another

compartment of Hades which was a place of bliss, comfort, and happiness. It was a totally separate compartment from where the unsaved wicked were being judged. Jesus clearly illustrates and teaches this in Luke 16 when speaking about the death of an unsaved rich man and a saved beggar. The saved were separated from the unsaved within the place called "hell" or Hades. A great gulf or chasm existed between the two compartments within the place. One consisted of a blissful place of rest and reunion with God's people, while the other was a place of God's judgment and wrath upon unrepentance and unsaved sinners.

Jesus speaks of the inner chamber of Hades in Luke 16:25-26: "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted (*the compartment within Hades for the saved, OT saints*), and thou art tormented (*the compartment within Hades for the unsaved*). And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed (*a separation between the two compartments*): so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence."



In Luke 16, Jesus describes two distinctly different places, where a person's soul went at death, prior to His death and resurrection. There was an abode for the saved and unsaved. It's clear that God's Old Testament believers did not go to Heaven when they died. They went to this earthly paradise within the center of the earth which existed in the unseen spirit world. It was the place where God's Old Testament saints were held captive (Eph. 4:8) until the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ opened the pathway into God's presence.

Since the saved were led forth from their abode in Hades at the time of Jesus' ascension (Eph. 4:8), there only remains the place of torment within the center of the earth. We often call this place hell which is kind of a universal catchword for Hades (the place of Judgment) and the Lake of Fire. In fact, as the previous chart of Hades revealed, when the saved were taken out of Hades at Christ's ascension, they departed into Heaven to be with Christ. However, at a future time, at the end of history on earth as we now know it, the unsaved will be transported from Hades before a Great White Throne. Their spirits will rejoin a resurrection body that is suited for eternal punishment (Rev. 20:11-15). The references to "death" (the human body) and "hell" (Hades) indicate this within this End Time passage of eschatological judgment.

It's noticeable in the Luke 16 passage that Jesus taught no one could pass from suffering the vengeance of a righteous God in the torment compartment of Hades into the blissful compartment of Hades where God's redeemed and saved people resided. Jesus was very clear about this. The same is true today. When you die and go to hell, you cannot pass over the divide and come into Heaven. One minute after you die, your fate is sealed forever!

Hebrews 9:27

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

You cannot wiggle out of facing God's righteous judgment and damnation in hell if you die with your sins unforgiven and without Christ as your Savior. It has been said that on the doorway leading into hell there is a sign which reads: "Abandon all hope for ye who enter here." Dear friend, there is no hope of salvation and entering Heaven if you die in your sins and go to hell.



On one occasion Col. Robert G. Ingersoll, the agnostic lecturer of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was announced to give an address on hell. He declared he would prove conclusively that hell was a wild dream of some scheming theologians who invented it to terrify credulous people. As he was launching into his subject, a half-drunken man arose in the audience and exclaimed, "Make it strong, Bob. There's a lot of us poor fellows depending on you. If you are wrong, we are all lost. So be sure you prove it clear and plain."

Here is the good news. Christ paid sin's penalty in full when He suffered and died on the cross (John 19:30) and rose from the dead to give believers everlasting life in Heaven (John 6:47). This was certainly true for Old Testament saints even though they died prior to the cross. Jesus died on the cross to give these saints their victory over death and Hades, where they resided within the "lower parts of the earth," within this saved and blissful part of Hades.

You see, God's Old Testament saints had to remain bound in Hades (paradise, Abraham's bosom) until the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ would provide their release from this inner chamber of death. After Christ acquired their victory over sin by paying the penalty for all of their sins on the cross (Gal. 3:10), and providing victory for His saints over Satan, He went into this compartment of Hades. While in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40), Jesus spoke to His beloved saints of His death, resurrection, and ascension back to Heaven. He reassured them that He was the great Victory over death, the devil, and Hades. Therefore, at Christ's ascension He brought God's saints into their heavenly glory. Those who were once held captive in this place, under the realm of Satan's accusations and authority, were bought forth from this inner holding tank in the center of the earth to enter their long-awaited promise of a heavenly destination.

Hebrews 11:10 says this about Abraham:

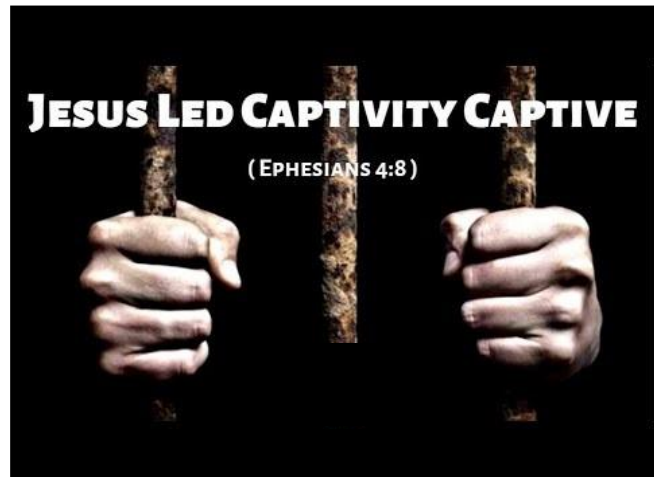
"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God."

We can also look forward to this someday, entering the great heavenly city and the place that Christ has prepared for us (John 14:1-2). However, as New Testament saints, we don't have to wait like Abraham and the Old Testament saints to enter our heavenly destiny (Phil. 1:23). God's New Testament saints enter this heavenly abode immediately and forever, the very moment they die (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8). This is because we look back to the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. The



penalty was already paid for our sins, the victory is already ours, we are forgiven forever, accepted in God's presence eternally through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25; 9:24-26). Therefore, we can know that we will immediately enter Heaven when we die.

Once again, Ephesians 4:8 reveals that Jesus went into "the lower parts of the earth" and "he led captivity captive" (taking God's saints out of this inner chamber in the earth and bringing them into Heaven). The idea is that those who were once captives of Satan were now captives of Christ since they were rescued from the center of the earth and taken inside the gate of Heaven at Christ's ascension. All of this literally occurred because Christ died on the cross and defeated the devil's authority to keep God's saints within the "lower parts of the earth."



Hebrews 2:14 gives us this reminder:

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

The word "destroy" means that through Christ's death the devil's power and authority over our lives was rendered inoperative. In one sense, the devil was put out of business. Of course, this saving transaction only occurs when we place faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26). Through faith in Christ, Satan's power and authority has been canceled out and we must no longer be bound to the power of satanic blindness, authority, accusations, and fear.

There is a sense in which this is true from a *historical perspective*, as it pertains to Old Testament saints residing in the center of the earth, prior to Christ's death. At one point, Jesus died to free these saints from Satan's authority to keep men bound in Hades before Christ's death on the cross and resurrection. But this is also true from a *future perspective* in relation to the lives of all God's saints who would be living after the time of Christ's death. When Christ died on the cross, He broke the

power and authority that the devil had over the lives of His believing saints, resulting in their forgiveness, freedom, and release from Satan's powerful grip.

“He breaks the power of canceled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean;  
His blood availed for me.”

Because Christ died on the cross and paid the necessary penalty or fine for our sins (Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3), we can be reassured that through faith in Christ, the devil's accusations against us, authority over us, and his awful power to ruin our lives has been removed forever. We no longer are condemned to die the sinner's death (Rom. 8:1) but can now live with God in Heaven through the saving merits of Jesus Christ. Satan no longer has any claim on our lives!

Thomas Brooks said:

“Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; He promises honor and pays with disgrace; He promises pleasure and pays with pain; He promises profit and pays with loss; He promises life and pays with death.”

Thank God that through faith in Christ, we have been delivered from a Devil's hell, the Devil's power, and the Devil's blindness (Eph. 2:1-2). Through Christ's death on the cross, Satan's power and authority is broken over our lives. The heavenly Paradise has now been open to us and we are going to Heaven when we die!



As previously stated, from a historical perspective, we know that before Christ's death and resurrection, Satan had the power or authority to keep people (God's Old Testament saints) bound within the center of the earth. Satan's argument and main

accusation was that Christ had not died on the cross and won the victory of sin, death, and hell. Therefore, His saints should be judged and condemned by God for their sins (Zech. 3:1-2; Rev. 12:10). But after Christ's death on the cross and resurrection, Satan had no more authority to keep God's saints in the realm of death and accuse them of their sins. This is true for all who express faith in Christ.

Through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven, He has finally opened the pathway into God's presence.

“Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!  
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!  
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!  
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!”

Today the paradise of God is up yonder in Heaven. The Bible describes paradise as our heavenly destination if we have placed faith in Christ to be our Savior.

2 Timothy 4:18

“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Yes, the heavenly kingdom and paradise will be experienced by all of God's redeemed saints. The best is yet to come!

Revelation 2:7

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”



This is God's heavenly paradise. Paul was given a glimpse or sneak peek of this heavenly place of wonder and amazement. 2 Corinthians 12:4 records Paul's experience: “How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” Praise the Lord! Jesus opened the pathway to Heaven when He died on the cross, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended back to

Heaven as the great Victor! After His death and resurrection, Jesus returned to Heaven in His ascension and provided entrance for every believer.

This is why Jesus said in John 14:6:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

You’ve probably heard this illustration, but it makes the point. A frog fell into a pail of milk and couldn’t escape despite every conceivable attempt. Rather than give up, he did the only thing he could do—paddle. And his efforts brought an amazing result. His incessant paddling in that milk churned it into a pad of butter that enabled him to jump to freedom. The moral of the story is this. Continuous work pays off!

While this is true, there’s a serious problem if we apply this illustration to our salvation. This is because Jesus said that He was the way to Heaven through what He did for us on the cross. How much we paddle along in life and perform good works has nothing to do with our salvation and getting to Heaven (Eph. 2:8-9).

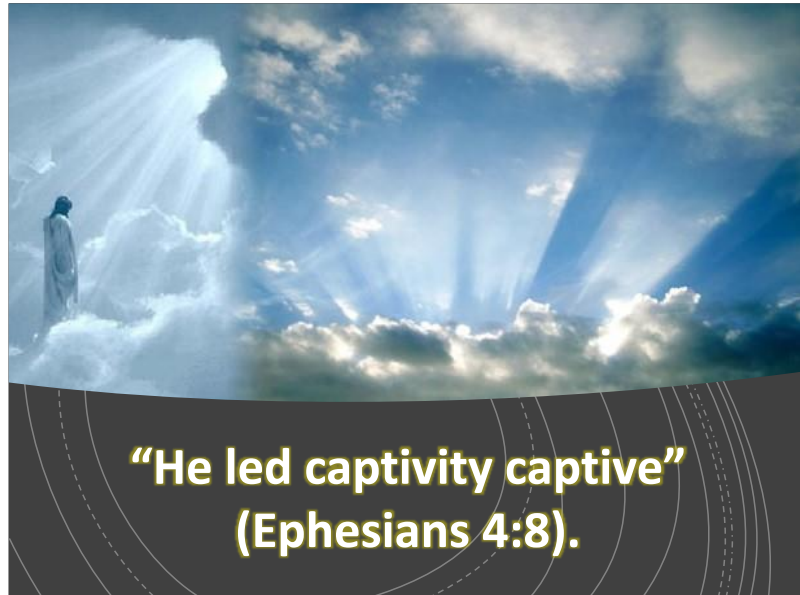
One Bible teacher repeated that story and moralized it this way: “Just keep paddling, keep on working, keep on doing your best, and you’ll make it to Heaven.” Many people think the way to Heaven comes by doing good, working hard, and trying their best. But Jesus throws this theory out! He said I am the **ONLY WAY**, the **ONLY TRUTH**, and the **ONLY LIFE**. There is no hope outside of Jesus Christ.

Someone wrote:

“Relativism (the theory that everything has basic elements of truth in it) can creep into churches, into our doctrine and theology and slowly over time, we are faced with a culture that forces everything, to not only make human sense, but also says no one can be wrong.”

But Jesus stated that He was the only way to Heaven and every other way and everything else, and everyone else is wrong! The point is that Jesus died on the cross, rose again, and ascended back to Heaven opening the pathway and acceptance into God’s presence (Heb. 10:20). This is why after His death (providing the redemptive price for sin) and resurrection (providing the hope of eternal life), Jesus, at the time of ascension, took the Old Testament saints back to Heaven with Him.

It's time to review what we have studied. At Christ's ascension, He emptied out the saved compartment of Hades where His beloved saints were bound, and He brought them into their heavenly glory. This was based upon Christ paying the necessary price for their sins and winning their victory over sin's penalty and Satan's power and authority.



This means that the phrase "he led captivity captive" (Eph. 4:8) portrays that the Old Testament saints who once were held captive by Satan have now been taken captive (captured and rescued) by Christ. Those who were once captives of Satan have now become captives of Christ! This is the story of Old Testament believers (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Gideon, etc.) being rescued from Hades (the center of the earth) and being taken back to Heaven at the time of Christ's ascension. But it's also the story of every sinner who places faith in Christ, who then becomes Christ's captive or slave (Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 7:23), and who will one day be taken to Heaven at the time of his death.



Jesus triumphantly exclaimed in Revelation 1:18: "I *am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys" (*authority*) of hell (*the realm of Hades*) and of death (*the realm of the human body*).

You see, until Christ paid the penalty for sin, Satan's possessed authority over the realm of death. But since Christ died on the cross, rose from the dead and ascended back to Heaven, He now has the keys to death and hell (Hades).

“Up from the grave He arose  
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;  
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,  
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.  
He arose! He arose!  
Hallelujah! Christ arose!”

Christ came to set us free from the realm of Satan’s accusations and authority over our lives. Before Christ died on the cross and paid the necessary judgment for our sins, Satan had the authority to demand that God’s saints remain in the center of the earth and ultimately be judged for their sins. But when Jesus rose from the dead and defeated the realm of death, He stole the keys from Satan and now has the full and official control over the destiny of people. In one sense, Christ unlocked the door of Heaven for us, providing us entrance into the very presence of God!

Jesus is the great victor! Passing through death, He rose again, and passing through resurrection, He ascended back to Heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father (Heb. 10:12; 12:2). He has stripped the devil of all his authority over the realm of death. For this reason, Jesus could empty the Old Testament saints out of Hades and give all of His saints the promise of everlasting life within the heavenly paradise of God.

Let’s not forget about Paul’s real intent behind quoting Psalm 66:18. Ephesians 4:8 declares: “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high (Christ’s ascension), he led captivity captive (*delivering the spirits of Old Testament saints who were bound in Hades*), and gave gifts unto men (*distributing gifts to New Testament saints who were still living on earth*). It’s interesting that all of these things occurred in relation to



Christ’s ascension into Heaven. In talking about the ascension and exaltation of Christ, Paul reminds us about the *deliverance* of Old Testament saints and the *gifting* of New Testament saints. The ascension of Christ was a particularly important event in the plan and purpose of God. The point and parallel between

these two events seem to be this. If Jesus had the authority to deliver Old Testament saints from the realm of Satan's authority, He certainly has the authority as Head of the Church to give gifts unto His people. As the great Victor, He does distribute gifts to His Church.

Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 to illustrate the point that Jesus began to gift the church with gifts and gifted men (leaders) when He ascended on high and began His new work within the Church Dispensation, distributing gifts to His people out of His grace (Eph. 4:7), and giving them a new dynamic for living and service. Jesus not only delivered Old Testament saints but gifted God's New Testament saints. What a day of victory it was when Jesus went back to Heaven and took all His beloved Old Testament saints with Him. And to this very day, when you die and your sins are forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, you can also enter Heaven. You won't have to wait. You go to Heaven immediately and forever.

2 Corinthians 5:8 gives this wonderful promise:

"We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

Are you going to Heaven when you die? You can know for sure if you place your faith only in Jesus Christ to be your Savior. You cannot paddle your way to Heaven, you can go there **ONLY** through Christ. Jesus provided the victory over Satan's power. Satan wants to keep you out of Heaven. If you will place your faith in Christ, you can know that you are going to Heaven. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" which means to be delivered from God's wrath and judgment in an eternal hell.

Jesus gave this promise in John 6:47

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

When Dr. John Broadus was a boy in a little town he was converted to Christ and gloriously saved. After being saved, he was attending some church meetings, and he went to one of his friends, Sandy Jones, a red-haired, awkward chap, the next day and said to him: "I wish you would be a Christian. Won't you become one today?"

And Sandy said, "Well, I don't know, perhaps I will." And sure enough, after a little while, one night in the little church meeting, Sandy Jones believed on Jesus Christ

accepted Him as his personal Savior. Straightway he stalked across that little meeting house, held out his hand and said, "I thank you, John, I thank you, John." Sandy was so grateful that John was concerned about his soul and asked him to be saved.

Dr. Broadus went out from that little town and became a great scholar, a great exegete, a great theological president. Every summer when he went home to that little town, and he hardly missed a season, I am told, this awkward, red-haired old farmer, in his plain clothes, with red sand on his boots, would come up, stick out his great bony hand and say: "Howdy, John. Thank you, John, thank you, John. I never forget, John."

When Dr. Broadus died, with his family around him, he said: "I rather think the sound sweetest to my ears in Heaven, next to the welcome of Him (Christ) Whom having not seen I have loved and tried to serve, will be the welcome of Sandy Jones, as he will thrust out his great hand and say: "Howdy, John. Thank you, John."

Will there be anyone in Heaven that will come up to you and say, "Thank you, for telling me about Jesus and His salvation." As Christians, we need to remember that people are dying all around us and going to hell, because they have never realized that Jesus is the ONLY way to Heaven. We have the answer for them. It's our responsibility to take the message of the Gospel (good news) to those who are lost and headed toward hell.

"Lord, lay some soul upon my heart,  
And love that soul through me;  
And may I bravely do my part  
To win that soul for Thee."