

Christ, the Victor over Death

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The New Testament begins and ends with a promise that Christ shall be a victor over death. When Zachariah prayed for his son, John the Baptist, in Luke 1:78-79, he spoke of the coming Christ as, "The rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace." The shadow of death, spoken of also in Matthew 4:16, had been with man from the Fall: "But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Gen 2:17. Of course, the serpent said in Gen 3:4-5, "You will not surely die." However, God's final word in this discourse placed all mankind under the shadow of eminent death:

19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return." Gen 3:19

Man, the Captive of Sin and Death

Through Adam sin and death came to capture all mankind. In Rom 5:12, Paul explained, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." Death cast its certain shadow over all who live. Paul spoke of this condition in Romans 3, saying first in Rom 3:10, "There is no one righteous, not even one," and saying again in Rom 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Into this context of sin and death for all men, God sent his son. Heb 2:14-15 brings the *Savior* from death and the *saved* from death together in sharing both humanity and death: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

Death and Hades

Death and Hades go hand in hand. Death is the separation of the body from the soul. Even Jesus faced the eminence of this physical death. Heb 5:7 says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Everyone who ever lives will face this same death. Heb 9:27 teaches, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." Death is also a spiritual death—a separation of man from God. Jesus taught in John 5:24, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." John extended the concept of spiritual death and spiritual life to our daily lives in 1 John 3:14-15: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."

Hades is not so easily understood; primarily because of misdirected translations. W. E. Vine sorts these out:

HADES, "The region of departed spirits of the lost" (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the ascension of Christ). . . . It corresponds to "Sheol" in the OT. In the KJV of the OT and NT; it has been unhappily rendered "hell," e. g., Ps 16:10; or "the grave," e. g., Gen 37:35; or "the pit," Num 16:30,33; in the NT the revisers have always used the rendering "hades"; in the OT, they have not been uniform in the translation, e. g. in Isa 14:15 "hell" (marg., "Sheol"); usually they have "Sheol" in the text and "the grave" in the margin. It never denotes the grave, nor is it the permanent region of the lost; in point of time it is, for such, intermediate between decease and the doom of Gehenna. For the condition, see Luke 16:23-31.

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Christ, the Victor over Sin, Death, and Hades

Christ declared that his church would withstand Hades, and by implication, sin and death in Matt 16:18-20: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." To accomplish our freedom from Hades, Christ offered himself. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." This victory over death was first accomplished by Christ himself, as Peter explained in Acts 2:23-24: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

Although Hades could not hold the Christ, it remained for him to accomplish the resurrection for the faithful of mankind. Paul explained that the Lord's last enemy to be conquered was death in 1 Cor 15:23-27:

23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet."

1 Cor 15:54-57 explains the complete disarmament of sin and death:

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The End of Death and Hades

And so it was that Christ could say in Rev 1:18: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." He truly is the one with power over death and Hades: "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Rev 20:14-21:1.

Conclusion

The question is that since Christ is the victor over death, where will we be in that last day? "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done." Rev 20:13. Christ gave us victory over Sin and death, but we must all take advantage of his gift to us by the grace of God.

Study Question

1. What is death? _____
2. What is Hades? _____
3. Who has the keys to Hades? _____
4. What will be the end of Hades? _____
5. Who else will end up in the lake of fire? _____
6. What is man's state without the Blood of Christ? _____
7. What is the sting of death? _____
8. What has been swallowed up in victory? _____