

Paradise

Let us now discuss what has been considered by some to be that half of Hades which houses the spirits of the “good” people who have died where they wait until the resurrection. If Paradise is *in* Hades then we must have some scriptural evidence saying or necessarily inferring that claim. This should be fairly easy since the Greek word παραδεισω (paradise) is only used three times in the New Testament:

2 Corinthians 12:1-4 | Being guided that he must prove his apostleship, Paul continues his proof by saying in verse 1:

*I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows. And I know that this man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— was caught up to **paradise**. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.*

Revelation 2:7 | At the end of the letter to Ephesus, John says:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Luke 23:43-46 | Jesus answered the thief on the cross by saying:

I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Is this "paradise" a third place (neither Heaven nor Hell) for departed spirits of the righteous to reside? Since *paradise* is only used in these three verses, if it is a third place (not Heaven or Hell) we must find the evidence in these three verses. Can we find the evidence to establish *paradise* as a third place in any of these verses? Or is “paradise” just a synonym for a place of great wonder, excitement, peace and happiness ... such as heaven? Before we look at these verses individually let us check the Greek lexicons under παραδεισος (paradise):

Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich Lexicon: "a place of blessedness above the earth Luke 23:43. ... More fully ο παραδεισος του θεου [the paradise of God]..."

This lexicon lists the other two references (2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7) without making any distinction between the three usages.

Thayer's Lexicon: "3. that part of Hades which was thought by the **later Jews** to be the abode of the souls of the pious until the resurrection: Luke 23:43, cf. 16:23 sqq. **But some [e.g. Dillman ...] understand that passage of the heavenly paradise.** 4. An upper **region in the Heavens: 2 Corinthians 12:4** (where some maintain, other deny, that the term is equivalent to ο τριτος ουρανος [the third heaven] in verse 2); with the addition of του θεου, genitive of possessor, **the abode of God and heavenly beings, to which true Christians will be taken after death, Revelation 2:7.**" (emphases added. - cb)

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Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT): The TDNT has eight full pages on the history and historical use of the word. Only two quotes are given here:

- 1) From V. 5 p.769 "In its present concealment [as opposed to the visual one of the Garden of Eden - **cb**] Paradise is according to Luke 23:43 the abode of the souls of the redeemed in the intermediate state between death and resurrection." [This quote gives us no information about whether paradise is in heaven or somewhere else. - **cb**]
- 2) V. 5 page 771 "The New Testament consistently represents fellowship with Christ after death as the distinctively Christian view of the intermediate state. ... **When he** [Paul - *cb*] **does speak of the intermediate state, however, fellowship with Christ is its sole content.** (emphases added. - **cb**)

The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised: "a park ... A garden of various kinds; used in the LXX for the Garden of Eden; in the N.T. The celestial paradise, Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7."

In this lexicon all three references are listed together as referring to the same place.

Vine, V. III, page 158: "In Luke 23:43, the promise of the Lord to the repentant robber was fulfilled the same day; Christ, at his death, having committed His spirit to the Father, went in spirit immediately into Heaven itself, the dwelling place of God. Thither the Apostle Paul was caught up, 2 Corinthians 12:4, spoken of as 'the third heaven' ... The same region is mentioned in Revelation 2:7."

According to the preponderance of above testimony all three uses of the word "Paradise" have the same meaning, i.e. Heaven. In the absence of contrary evidence, we must agree with these lexicons.

Now we will look at these three passages individually to see if the individual contexts alter this conclusion.

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows. 3 And I know that this man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— 4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

In trying to understand the meaning of Paradise (παράδεισος) in these verses we need to look at verse 2. Paul tells us this man was caught up to the "third heaven." Then when he repeats the description of the ascension, the second time he says "paradise." So all we have to do is to decipher the expression "third heaven" and we will know what Paradise is.

The word for heaven here is οὐρανοῦ. In the New Testament it is used in three senses:

- 1) Meaning the space above the earth, i.e. the atmosphere in which birds fly. In Matthew 6:26 (translated "air" in the NIV) and Acts 10:12 (translated "air" in the NIV) the Greek word in both cases is οὐρανοῦ (heaven).
- 2) The second sense in which our word is used is in the sense of the space outside the earth where the stars and planets are. Mark 13:25 *the stars will fall from the οὐρανοῦ* (translated "sky" by NIV). Hebrews 11:12 *...as numerous as the stars in the οὐρανοῦ* (translated "sky" by NIV).

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3) The third sense in which the word “heaven” is used is as the home of God, Matthew 5:16; 6:9, 1 Peter 3:22, Hebrews 8:1, etc. This is the place Jesus came from, John 3:13, where our citizenship is, Philippians 3:20, where our inheritance is, 1 Peter 1:4.

The expression “third heaven” (τρῖτου οὐρανοῦ) is used only once in the New Testament. Based on the three meanings of the word “heaven,” it is only reasonable that “third heaven” must mean that heaven which is the home of God, the third “place” from the earth. The first “place” being the earth’s atmosphere, the second being outer space. Paul was taken up into paradise, which he called “**the third heaven**” in verse 2. The question is settled:

Paradise = heaven where God and Christ and the angels dwell

This conclusion is strengthened by what happened to Paul when he got there. He *heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell* (cf. *Revelation 10:1-4*). From whom would he hear such things if not from God or Jesus? Verse 1 tells us these revelations are from the Lord *I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord*. This meeting with the Lord occurred at the place where God is, unless you can make a case for God moving to the first or second heaven to meet Paul there. Don’t forget that all the lexicons agree that the **third heaven** in the place where God lives.

Revelation 2:7

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

In chapters 2 and 3 of his book of Revelation John writes a letter to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor. To each church he finishes their letter with an admonition to “overcome” the trials and temptations of life and makes a promise to all those who are successful in “overcoming.” Each promise seems obviously to be effective in the afterlife after “overcoming”. The promise given to those who overcome:

in Ephesus: *the right to eat from the tree of life;*

in Smyrna: *will not be hurt at all by the second death,*

in Pergamum: *I will give some hidden manna ... [and] a white stone with a new name written on it,*

in Thyatira: *I will give authority over the nations ... [and] the morning star,*

in Sardis: *will be ...dressed in white ...will acknowledge his name before my Father and His angels,*

in Philadelphia: *will make a pillar in the temple of my God ... And I will also write on him my new name,*

in Laodicea: *I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.*

Each of these promises is to take place in the presence of Jesus and/or God in heaven. Further explanation of the location is given in the letter to Ephesus as “**the paradise of God.**” It seems that there is no credible evidence that the location could be any other than heaven, the dwelling place of God. This is the second example of the use of “paradise” in the New Testament where we find a clear description of heaven by the superlative “paradise.”

Luke 23:43-46 | Jesus answered the thief on the cross by saying:

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I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Is Jesus here planning to meet the thief somewhere other than heaven? Where is the soul of Jesus going? Look at verse 46. The last words Jesus spoke while in his earthly body was *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*. Where was (is) the Father? His home is always spoken of as being in heaven, Matthew 3:16, 5:16, 6:9, Acts 7:55-56, Romans 1:18, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Hebrews 9:24, etc. Therefore, Jesus was planning for His spirit to be with God in heaven.

Just before His arrest, Jesus prayed to His Father, in John 17:13, *I am coming to you now*,.... The Greek word "νυν" (now) is in all the Greek manuscripts with no variant readings. The context of this passage can be seen from these four verses in chapter 17:

John 17:1, 5, 7, 13

*I These things spake Jesus; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, Father, the **hour** is come; glorify thy Son, that the son may glorify thee: ... 5 And **now**, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. ... 7 **Now** they know that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are from thee: ... 13 But **now** I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves.*

This context (please read the whole chapter) seems clearly to describe His death, which was to follow the next day. This also is compatible with Jesus' last statement in Luke 23:46 *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*. The verb used here, παρατιθεμαι (first person singular, present tense, Indicative mood, middle voice of παρατιθημι) means "to entrust someone to the care or protection of someone" (BAG page 623, Thayer agrees page 486). Note that the verb is in the present tense. Can anyone reasonably extend the present tense of this verb for forty days until His bodily ascension? This extension must be done if we conclude that Jesus did not go to Heaven immediately after the cross.

This verb is to put Jesus' Spirit before God for God's care and protection, (see TDNT V. viii, page 163). Notice in Luke 23:46 Jesus says "*into your hands I commit my spirit,*" not including his body which would, of course, be in the tomb. This expression cannot refer to His ascension because at the time of His ascension His new body was reunited with His spirit. It would have been incorrect to give only His spirit into God's hands for God's caring because at the time of His ascension His new body accompanied Him into Heaven.

This evidence also agrees with Stephen's statement in Acts 7:56,59 where he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God and said, *Lord Jesus receive my spirit*. implying that Stephen expected his spirit to go where Jesus was, that is, at the right hand of God, in heaven.

To postulate a place other than heaven for the meaning of paradise in Luke 23:43 is hardly consistent with all the above evidence. Consider also that the heavenly realm is referred to by several different phrases:

- a. Christ calls it His "Father's house," (John 14:2)
- b. It is called "paradise," (2 Corinthians 12:4, Revelation 2:7)
- c. "The heavenly Jerusalem," (Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 12:22, Revelation 3:12)
- d. The "kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 25:1, James 2:5)
- e. The "eternal kingdom," (2 Peter 1:11)

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- f. The "eternal inheritance," (1 Peter 1:4, Hebrews 9:15)
- g. The "better country," (Hebrews 11:14,16)
- h. The blessed are said to "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and to be "in Abraham's bosom," (Luke 16:22, Matthew 8:11)
- i. If we endure we will also "reign with Christ," (2 Timothy 2:12)
- j. Give diligence to enter that "rest," (Hebrews 4:10,11.)

Because of these many descriptions of heaven it seems plausible to follow the evidence and conclude that "paradise" is just another way of referring to heaven. This is especially true since the two other uses of the word "paradise" in the New Testament have been demonstrated to refer to Heaven.

The actual words of Jesus to the thief were *today you will be with me in paradise*. Jesus was promising the thief the comfort of knowing that Jesus would be at his side in his new home. The thief would have the peace of mind of knowing that Jesus would be there. They would be together. Do we, today, have this same comforting thought? When we die must we go to Paradise, a place without Jesus? The traditional view is that every other Christian that has ever died arrived in Paradise, without the presence of Jesus. Were they alive and alert? Yes. Comforted? Yes. But without Jesus, if the traditional view is correct. Doesn't the scripture say that God is no respecter of persons, Acts 10:34? If the traditional view is correct, the thief gets special treatment. But, if Paradise is the same as Heaven then there is no problem.

But, how can Luke 23:43 be referring to heaven where God is, when in John 20:17 Jesus, after his resurrection, talked to Mary and says that He has not yet ascended to heaven?

Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned [Gk. "ascended"- cb] to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning [Gk. "I ascend"- cb] to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'

The difficult part to understand is the reason given by Jesus for this instruction. "*For I am not yet ascended to the Father.*" As if it would be all right to cling to Him after He ascended to the father, which could only be when Mary sees Him in heaven. The consensus seems to be that Jesus means "no need to cling to me, I haven't left you yet, I'll be around for a while, now go tell the apostles that I am going to my father and your father, my God and your God."

Prerequisite 8 for understanding the Bible (see website cliffbaird.wordpress.com article "*Hermeneutics for us common folks*") says that all words are to be understood as literal unless there is sufficient evidence for an unusual or figurative meaning. Look again at the actual words of Jesus: *...for I have not yet ascended to the Father*. Is there a difference between the word "I" in this verse and the words "my spirit" in Luke 23:46? Can we usually understand the word "I" to mean the same thing as the words "my spirit?" Notice, we did not ask "does the word 'I' *include* the idea of 'my spirit'." Of course it does. But we must remember the regular, usual, normal meaning of the word "I" also includes the physical body of the person speaking, unless there is contextual evidence that an unusual meaning is necessary.

For example, in Luke 16:24 the rich man says *I am in agony*... Here the context makes it clear that the pronoun "I" excludes the body because his body had died and was buried, verse 22.

Also, In Matthew 18:20 Jesus says, *For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them*. Does this personal pronoun include His body? Is Jesus saying that every time two or more Christians gather in His name that "He" (including His body) was with them? Is His body visible every time we meet for worship?

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Or does the broader context imply that Jesus is with us in spirit only, but His body (His new resurrected body) stays in heaven with the Father?

These are but two examples that show that sometimes the personal pronoun has an unusual or a figurative meaning. But that is exactly the point! The context makes it clear that the normal, usual, regular meaning does not apply in a particular case. This is a perfect example of the exception proving the rule. Without the contextual evidence to support an **unusual** meaning, the usual meaning must prevail.

When Jesus said "I" He meant His spirit and His body, His new glorified body which He had just received at this resurrection. If Jesus had meant "my spirit" He would have said so, as He did in Luke 23:46 *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*. In John 20:17, Jesus was just implying **I, with my new body, have not yet ascended to the father ...** But for the traditional view to be correct we must understand the pronoun "I" to mean "my spirit, **exclusive** of my current resurrected body." This conclusion is reached without any contextual evidence. Reaching a conclusion without any evidence is an example of blind faith, is contrary to good hermeneutics and is totally unacceptable for a Christian who loves the truth. Remember, we will have to explain this decision to God one day since we will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word we have spoken, Matthew 12:36.

To summarize this idea:

- 1) On the cross Jesus said "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," note "my spirit", excluding the body because the body was going to the grave.
- 2) When He was talking to Mary, He had a new resurrected (glorified) body. When Jesus said "I have not yet ascended..." the "I" included both His spirit and His new resurrected body.
- 3) Therefore, He was simply saying "I, with my new body, have not yet ascended to the father."

We can only disagree with this conclusion by denigrating or ignoring Prerequisite 8 for understanding the Bible. If we do this, then we can give any word any of its valid meanings in any context causing the Bible to be chaotic, offering little help for the world!

The very next sentence in John 20:17 (ASV) Jesus says "...I ascend unto my Father..." Would His new body accompany Him to His father? Did the second sentence use "I" with a different meaning than the "I" of the first sentence? Or does Ockham's razor imply that both uses of the pronoun have the same meaning, i.e. both body and soul?

Therefore this statement of Jesus has nothing to do with where His spirit had spent the previous three days, during His bodily entombment. This conclusion is the simplest explanation and harmonizes with all the other evidence.

But other scriptures say Jesus spent some time in Hades after his crucifixion, Acts 2:27,32; 1 Peter 3:19-20, 4:6; John 5:25,28,29; Ephesians 4:7-10 These verses will be discussed in detail on website see website cliffbaird.wordpress.com article *Jesus in Sheol/Hades*.

We must never forget one of the rules in hermeneutics is to let the simple passages explain the difficult ones. There are several scriptures about the afterlife which are much less obtuse and will help us to understand John 20:17.

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For example, Luke 16:19,

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell [Greek. = Hades, cb], where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

Is this saying of Jesus a parable or is He recounting an actual event? Consider the evidence, repeated here for emphasis.

Romans 3:25-26

*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice **at the present time**, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

This says that God left the sins committed beforehand (before the death of Jesus) unpunished. When Jesus told this story in Luke 16 about Lazarus He (Jesus) had not yet died. Therefore the sins of the rich man could not have been punished in Hell (NIV) or Hades (ASV) in some literal past experience.

Hebrews 9:15

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance —now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

This verse says the sins committed under the first covenant were not forgiven until Christ died. Since Christ is relating the story about Lazarus before He (Christ) died, the reward of Lazarus and the punishment of the rich man could not have taken place in the past. Therefore, this story must be a parable. Please read the article *Luke 16:19 ff.* on website cliffbaird.wordpress.com for a complete discussion of this parable.

In Luke 16 the rich man died and was in Hades. When Lazarus died he was carried by angels to Abraham's side, a place of comfort. At first reading a person would think that "Abraham's side" represented heaven, since it is contrasted with Hades and Lazarus was taken there by angels.

Since Abraham is depicted as being in heaven (Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:28) and in this verse Lazarus went to be with him, we can only conclude that Lazarus did indeed go to heaven. This conclusion is strengthened in light of the previous discussion on the use of the word "paradise," where we demonstrated that the word meant heaven. We would need some very strong evidence to support any other view.

Paul also discusses this theme of the afterlife. In his letter to the Philippians, the first chapter, starting at verse 21 he says:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

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When Paul dies he is expecting to go and be with Jesus. Since Jesus is at God's right hand in heaven, Paul is expecting to go to heaven when he dies, not a third place somewhere or somehow in between heaven and earth.

Again when Paul writes his second letter to Timothy, chapter 4, verses 6-8, we have:

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Paul will receive his "*crown of righteousness*" from the Lord "*on that day.*" Which day? In context it is the day of his departure when he is expecting to be with Jesus. It seems like the "*crown of righteousness*" represents his reward after or at judgment. And this expectation is not just for Paul, but for all faithful Christians. The Lord is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God from whence he will give us our reward. Once again, in context, there is no intermediate place and no time lapse between his death and his reward.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Paul's only contrast here is between being "*in this tent*" or in our "*heavenly dwelling.*" And that if we are "*at home in the body,*" then we are "*away from the Lord.*" Again, we "*prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*" Verses 9 and 10 say we always try to please Him because we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. When will we "*appear before the judgment seat of Christ*"? Since verse 10 begins with *for*, implying an explanation of the previous verses it seems plain that, in context, the appearance at *judgment seat of Christ* will take place before we "*are at home with the Lord.*" This means that the judgment will take place immediately upon death.

All of these contrasts between the living and after death with no mention of any place other than here or heaven and with no time lapse between death and the judgment.

It has been suggested by some that the immediate judgment at death is like a court decision and the *final judgment* at the end of time is like the sentencing of a criminal maybe several weeks after the verdict by the jury. This is an effort on the part of some to maintain the traditional view that we will all be judged at the same time at the second coming. This analogy cannot be applied to our spiritual judgment for two reasons:

1) In a criminal case it is true that many times the sentencing is unknown at the time of the jury verdict. This is not true when we die and go to heaven or hell (paradise or tartarus) because we know our sentence as soon as

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we know our verdict, it is permanent!! No possibility of change, no crossing over the *great chasm*, Luke 16:26. The sentencing is at the same time as the verdict.

2) When the jury verdict is innocent you walk out a free man! No waiting for a sentencing. This leaves us with an immediate judgment with no sentencing for the innocent, or an immediate judgment/sentencing for the guilty. Therefore no implication of a two step process for our spiritual progress after death.

We must also consider that when Christ comes again God will bring with Jesus those who have died as faithful Christians.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Jesus is coming from heaven to meet all the saved in the air. God “*will bring with*” Jesus those who have previously died as faithful Christians. If words have meaning then the souls of the faithful Christians will accompany Jesus on this journey. This implies they were with Him in heaven, which agrees with all the previous evidence.

Of course it is theoretically possible that Jesus, on His way down from heaven, could stop by the third place (paradise, if not in heaven), pick up the souls of “*those who have fallen asleep in him,*” and then proceed on toward the earth. Besides the lack of evidence to support this stop-by-and-pick-up scenario, it also produces difficulty with Revelation 6:9, 7:9, 15:2 and 20:1-4:

6:9 *the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God... (cf. verse 10)*

7:9 *a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. ... (14) These are they who have come out of the great tribulation;*

15:2 *those who had been victorious over the beast and his image... (They were in heaven before the last plagues were delivered to the earth. 15:5 - 16:21)*

20:1 *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. 4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

All these verses mention the saved being in heaven before the second coming and the general resurrection. It therefore supports our conclusions that the dead in Christ are in heaven.

From all this evidence it seems that we have proven beyond a reasonable doubt that Paradise, as used in the New Testament, is just another way to describe Heaven.

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Summary

The word παραδεισω is only used three times in the New Testament. Two of these (2 Corinthians 12:1-4 and Revelation 2:7) are clearly referring to heaven. Only Luke 23:43 is seen by some as less clear, but upon detailed examination we find that the only sustainable position is that it too refers to heaven.

This, along with the many verses that talk about going directly to heaven without any intermediate stopping off place, the souls of those who "have fallen asleep in him" coming **with** Christ at His return, all the verses in Revelation saying the saved are in heaven before the second coming and the absolute absence of any New Testament passages supporting the existence of another place, causes us to conclude that when we die, we will go directly to heaven or hell.

If you can't accept this evidence as sufficient to conclude that those faithful Christians who have "died in Christ" are now with Him in heaven then you must produce stronger evidence to support any other position, or **else you are guilty of accepting a position with less evidence than the alternative**, and accusing God of supporting the truth by less evidence than a false alternative.

We simply cannot follow the world's current viewpoint that theory is the same as truth nor can we accept possibility as reality, nor fantasy as fact, nor supposition as evidence. As Christians we must pay the price. We must spend the required time and make the necessary effort to find and evaluate the evidence if we are ever to know the truth and experience the confidence that God wants us to have in our study of His word.

Having done this, we can now confidently say that we have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that Paradise is just another word for Heaven.