

Does Hebrews 12:23 prove that deceased saints are in heaven today?

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In Hebrews 12:22-24, the writer of Hebrews (whom I believe to be the Apostle Paul) paints a glorious picture for the recipients of this God-inspired letter. In these verses, he says:

HEBREWS 12

²²But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, ²³To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of Abel*.

Many are quick to point to this passage as Scriptural evidence that deceased believers are in “heaven” today. They accurately assert that this passage is a description of the “city of the living God” and they point to verse 23 and what Paul describes as being in that city:

HEBREWS 12

²³...the spirits of just men made perfect...

Does the Scripture’s description of “the spirits of just men” being in “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” teach that deceased believers are in heaven today? Indeed, for most people, to say one’s “spirit” is “in heaven” is to say that the person is literally “in heaven.”

I used to see it that way...but I do not see it that way anymore. I cannot find anyplace in the Scripture that teaches that concept. The following is how I would now approach the logic of those who believe this passage teaches men are in heaven today:

According to the Bible, Man is not a “spirit”

Abraham, we know from Scripture, was a “just man” (Gen. 15:6, Rom. 4:3). David was another “just / righteous man” (Rom. 4:6-7). Thus, if the “spirits of just men” being “in the heavenly Jerusalem” means that the individuals themselves are in heaven, then it would stand to reason that Abraham would be “in heaven”...and David would be “in heaven,” would it not?

But the Scripture plainly states that “David is NOT ascended into the heavens.” (Acts 2:34). The Scripture plainly states that “David” (the individual) is “both dead and buried.” (Acts 2:29). Christ said “NO MAN is ascended into heaven.” (Jn. 3:13). When David died, we know from the Scriptures that his spirit returned to God (in heaven) who gave it (Eccl. 12:7). Then, according to Acts 2:29 and Acts 2:34, David’s “spirit” is not what the Scripture calls “David!” The Scripture clearly associates “David” with the “dust” of his body...the dust that returns to the ground from whence it came...(see Acts 2:29, cf. Gen. 3:19).

“David” is dead and buried (Acts 2:29). “David” is NOT ascended into the heavens (Acts 2:34).

His spirit may be "with God," but that - according to the Scriptures - does not mean DAVID is there.

Is Christ the FIRSTborn from the dead...or just one who followed many?

Christ, as Hebrews 12:23 says, can be identified as the "FIRSTborn" from among the dead. This is because Christ's spirit (i.e., the "breath of life" given to His human body) was the FIRST spirit to be united with an eternal resurrection body. Upon His death, Christ's spirit had returned to God in Heaven for three days (Eccl. 12:7, cf. Luke 23:46). But then He was risen from the dead in resurrection, having a real body that could be touched and handled (Luke 24:39), an eternal *physical* body that could eat fish (Luke 24:43). This is why Christ is the FIRSTborn, the only one (at this time) to partake in the "permanent" resurrection!

Abel, for example, is not "in heaven" (i.e., he has not been resurrected), or HE would have been the "FIRSTborn" from among the dead. It stands to reason, then, that Abraham cannot be in heaven yet either. And the Scriptures plainly state that David is not "ascended into heaven." No matter how faithful these other believers were, they CANNOT precede Christ in resurrection! Christ was the FIRSTborn!

Christ, who became fully man, tasted death just the same way other believing men experience it. While Christ was dead, His spirit was committed to the Father in heaven (Eccl. 12:17; cf. Luke 24:39), but "HE" was buried (1 Cor. 15:4). Christ's spirit was "in heaven," but HE was "in the heart of the earth" for 3 days and 3 nights (Matt. 12:40). Christ's spirit was "in heaven" with the Father, but death had "dominion" over HIM for 3 days (Rom. 6:9. It no longer has dominion over Him now, but this verse indicates that it did while He was dead). Christ became the FIRSTborn from among the dead when His spirit was reunited with His body - His resurrection body...a body which *still bore the imprints of the nails* (Luke 24:39).

Thus, when someone would attempt to assert that Hebrews 12:23 "proves" that PEOPLE/INDIVIDUALS are "in heaven" at this moment, I would first use the Scriptures above to show that a "spirit" does not equal the person. While GOD is a "spirit" (Jn. 4:24), nowhere does Scripture call MAN a "spirit." The Scripture very plainly calls man "dust". (Gen. 3:19, Ps. 103:14). Tradition sometimes blinds us up so much that we cannot see something that Scripture very plainly teaches!

But I have come to see even more in Hebrews 12:23 that contributes to what I now believe about these things...

Understanding the phrase "...spirits of just men made perfect..."

The phrase "spirits of the just men made perfect" in Hebrews 12:23 is a part of a picture that the writer of Hebrews (Paul) is trying to paint. He is trying to spur the Hebrews on to a stronger conviction of the new message that has been delivered to them about Christ. I would try to summarize my interpretation of this passage as follows:

In Hebrews 12:14, Paul admonishes the Hebrews to pursue "peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." He then says that the way to follow "peace with all men" and "holiness" is "look diligently [to the Lord]"...and it is this diligence that will guard against failure in that pursuit of holiness.

A lack of diligence will let a "root of bitterness" spring up that will cause defilement (v. 15)...a lack of diligence will give a window to let in fornication (v. 16)...and a lack of diligence will let the Hebrews consider profane actions which will lead to the loss of inheritance (v. 16-17).

It is then - in this context - that Paul tries to reinforce his call to the diligence of the Hebrews by giving an illustration. I believe it is like Paul says, "Think back to the history of our Hebrew nation and the moment when we previously received a message that was profoundly presented, gravely serious, and extremely demanding on every aspect of our lives! Remember how serious...and terrifying it was then? Remember how the Hebrew fathers would not even initially THINK about disobeying that message because disobedience of that message could result in instant death?"

Paul says, "For you [Hebrews of today] are not come unto the mount [Mount Sinai] that might be touched [and cause death] and that burned with fire [to show the unapproachable aspect of God's holiness] nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest [which descended upon the mountain showing the presence of God and potential wrath to come on the disobedient] And the sound of the trumpet [which announced God's presence] and the voice of words; which voice [that terrified them so much that] they that heard [begged] that the word should not be spoken to them anymore (for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart; and so terrible was the sight that Moses [himself!] said 'I exceedingly fear and quake'..."

Paul is saying "You Hebrews *of this time* are not confronted with all of that! You Hebrews have an extremely DIFFERENT calling upon you...one that is more GLORIOUS....one that is more GRACIOUS!"

Paul says, "They [the former Hebrews] were confronted with that [Mount Sinai in the past]....but YE (you Hebrews of TODAY) are come unto Mount SION..."

Now I believe it is very important to stop here for a moment. We need to stop here and realize that Paul is creating an analogy. The Hebrews to whom Paul was writing were not LITERALLY "come unto Mount Sion." These particular Hebrews being addressed were living *at the time of Paul* and - I firmly believe - they were living in the region of Galatia. I think that, at bare minimum, regardless of where we believe those Hebrews to whom Paul wrote were living, we can safely say that they were NOT literally at "Mount Sion!"

...However, Paul introduces this section by saying, "But Ye are [figuratively now, and will eventually really be] come to Mount Sion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels...."

Not only aren't the Hebrews literally in "Mount Sion, the city of the living God" but I think we can all be pretty certain that the Hebrews who received this letter could not literally SEE any angels....even though they were described as "innumerable!"

There is a contrast being built here between what has gone before....and what is in the present (i.e., at the time of Paul). What has gone before (at Mount Sinai) was real...it was tangible...it was literal. The mountain could really be touched. The voice could actually be heard. The darkness could be seen/perceived with the eyes. "...The sight was terrible..." And the REAL, the

PHYSICAL, could and did lead to FEAR and real DEATH. That is the picture that Paul paints of the previous message sent to the Hebrews...one that was PHYSICAL and one that led to DEATH...

The picture that Paul is painting about "Mount Sion" is representative of the message that is proclaimed today! It is a message that must be taken on FAITH. It is NOT about what you can literally SEE...it is not about what you can literally HEAR or EXPERIENCE. The former message was glorious and powerful and binding, but this message is much more glorious and much more powerful! And it puts a much greater calling on our lives! THIS message - in complete contrast to the old one - is a message that shows the promise of LIFE instead of the threat of DEATH...!

Paul says "Ye have [figuratively and will someday assuredly] come to Mount Sion, unto that city [which is now in heaven but will someday come down - Rev. 21:2] in which YOU have a place! [How do we know this?] There is the testimony of innumerable angels [whom you cannot see now, but bear witness to this fact!]"

In this context, in his effort to "paint the scene" of the future "Mount Sion," Paul says the Hebrews [of HIS day] had come to the "general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written [*apogegrammenon*] in heaven. The Hebrews had come to, essentially, the massive church which is literally "registered" in heaven (i.e., they have their written "reservation")...(cf. Luke 10:20, where Christ told those physically alive on the earth that their names were already written in heaven).

The Hebrews of Paul's day, by "coming to Mount Sion," had also come "...to God the judge of all," they had come to "the spirits of the just men made perfect"...and they had come "...to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant..."

First, everyone of these things mentioned cry out for FAITH. While the Israelites could see the Mountain, could see the fire, could hear the trumpet, and could sometimes see the dead bodies of those who disobeyed, the Hebrews cannot (today) see the assembly of angels. They have to take it on FAITH that there are innumerable angels looking in on their walk of faith. They have to take it on FAITH that the church of the firstborn is already registered in heaven among those angelic beings. They have to believe that God, the judge of all, is real and that someday he will judge all mankind. They have to believe that the "spirits of the just men made perfect" are there...and will be there. And they have to believe that Jesus is risen from the dead...and that He is there / will be there too! All of these witnesses to this new testimony, this NEW message, are testimonies taken on FAITH.

The presence of each one of these individuals (or groups of individuals) is mentioned solely to motivate the Hebrews of Paul's day to further diligence in their faith. The fact that these things REALLY will be present on "Mount Sion" WITH THEM should spur the Hebrews of Paul's day on to greater heights in their walks...

If we truly believe the multitude of angels are witnessing our stand for our faith, our faith will be that much greater! If we truly believe the multitudes of believers have their names reserved to be there in Mount Sion, we will rejoice that we will be there too (despite our individual circumstances)! If we truly believe that God the Judge is witnessing our actions, we will want to be honoring to Him so we are not ashamed when we get to be there with Him! If we truly believe

that the "spirits of the just men made perfect" are there in heaven, we will be encouraged that we will be there too (more on this later)! And - if we truly believe our Lord and Savior is there - in a place we will eventually, someday, physically be - we will very much do our diligence to be as worthy as we can when we get there!

The believers of today (whether Hebrew or Gentile) do not approach a Mount of Death (Mount Sinai), we approach a Mount of LIFE (Mount Sion)! This is not a mountain in the wilderness, this is the "City of the Living God!" This is not an earthly Jerusalem which has been repeatedly besieged, this is the "heavenly Jerusalem," part of a Kingdom that will never end! And those in this place bear testimony to it's glory and reflect it's call on our lives!

Now, for the purposes of this paper, we want to focus on the "spirits of the just men made perfect." They are but one of five motivations for diligence that are set forth in this scenario for all who will eventually come to "Mount Sion":

1. The innumerable multitude of Angels
2. The General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn (which members are written in heaven)
3. God the Judge of all
4. The spirits of the just men made perfect
5. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and His blood that speaks of better things than Abel's

The thing to take note of in regard to this list is the fact that the Church is already mentioned (#2) before we get to the "spirits of the just men made perfect" (#4). The description of Mount Sion begins with the "innumerable company of Angels" and then it talks about the "General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn, whose names are ALL written in heaven.

Here is the question I initially pondered: Doesn't the "General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn" include ALL of us? ALL of the saved? Wouldn't the "Church of the Firstborn" include Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? Of course! Wouldn't "the Church of the FirstBorn" include you and I, believers in the FIRSTBorn from among the Dead? Yes! Praise the Lord, OUR names (and the names of the Hebrews to whom Paul wrote) are written up there along with Abraham's name, along with Isaac's name, and along with Jacob's name!

Why, then, does Paul add "the spirits of the just men made perfect" to the list? If the church has already been mentioned as a motivating factor to those looking forward to our eventual destination on Mount Sion, why mention them again? Is this repetitive?

I don't think so.

After considering this passage at length, I believe that - while Paul is setting forth the entire "church of the Firstborn" as a witness and motivation in "Point #2", I do NOT believe Paul means the entire church when he sets forth the "spirits of the just men made perfect" in Point #4...

Who are these "just men made perfect?" I believe that the specific WORDS and CONTEXT answer this question...

The large treatise of the entire letter to the Hebrews is an exercise in getting the Hebrews to set aside the former covenant and grasp on to the new and better covenant established by Christ. To

initiate this argument, Paul spends two chapters (Heb. 1-2) contrasting Christ to....the angels; the angels who administered the Old Covenant (Heb. 1:14, 2:2) and were revered by the Hebrews. I believe it is significant, then, that the first "attendees" who are mentioned as being at "Mount Sion" were an "innumerable company of angels!" They will ALL be there!

The great assembly, like those who gathered at the bottom of Mount Sinai, will be there! They, and the entire "church of the FIRSTBorn" will be there! Their NAMES are there now, written down...which guarantees that they themselves will be there in the future!

And it is important to note that God THE JUDGE will be there. Not "God the Father" or "God the Creator," but God the JUDGE. This, of course, all looks towards the future, when "Mount Sion" will be in Israel, when the holy city, the "New Jerusalem" will come down from heaven and rest upon the earth! (Rev. 21:12) It is THEN, and not until then, that God will judge the world!

As we focus on all the topics Paul covers in the letter to the Hebrews, he exalts Christ as "better than the Angels." He exalts Christ as the ultimate High Priest, the one who does away with the old covenant priesthood, the one who will stand before "God the Judge" for ALL the people, for the "General Assembly" and the "Church of the Firstborn." That high priest will have with him the blood that "speaks better things than that of the blood of Abel." This, of course, is the only reason we will be permitted on "Mount Sion!"

Our Lord, our Priest, has the right to be our mediator this because, as Hebrews 5:7-9 says, **He suffered** and was "**made perfect**" (Gr. teleioo - 5048) by *that which he suffered...*

HEBREWS 5

⁷[Christ], in the days of his flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; ⁸Though he were a Son, yet learned He obedience BY THE THINGS WHICH HE SUFFERED; ⁹And BEING MADE PERFECT [teleioo – 5048], He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him...

Constantly throughout the book of Hebrews, this principle of suffering and this work of being made **perfect** / complete (teleioo - 5048) through suffering is mentioned. Christ suffered for His faith. Through his suffering, He was "made **perfect**" (teleioo, complete).

This word occurs 9 times in Hebrews. The first references are about Christ being made "**perfect**" (teleioo - 5048)...

HEBREWS 2

¹⁰For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect [teleioo – 5048] through sufferings...

HEBREWS 5

⁹And being made perfect [teleioo – 5048], He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him...

HEBREWS 7

²⁸**For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, *maketh* the Son, who is consecrated [teleioo / “made perfect” – 5048] for evermore.**

Other references are about how the law, the old covenant, did NOT make people **perfect** / complete (teleioo - 5048):

HEBREWS 7

¹⁹**For the law made nothing perfect [teleioo – 5048] ...**

HEBREWS 9

⁹**Which *was* a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect [teleioo – 5048], as pertaining to the conscience...**

HEBREWS 10

¹**For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect [teleioo – 5048].**

And then, in the later parts of the book of Hebrews, Paul begins to talk about the believer IS made **perfect** (teleioo - 5048). First, it is how judicially Christ has **perfected** us before the Father:

HEBREWS 10

¹⁴**For by one offering he hath perfected [teleioo – 5048] for ever them that are sanctified.**

Then, in Hebrews 11, Paul goes through the great Cloud of Witnesses, those who, like the Lord they serve, suffered because of their faith. They endured through the suffering. Abel was murdered like Christ was murdered. Noah had to survive a global flood. Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son. And they endured because they looked past their circumstances and looked forward to that future city "whose builder and maker is God!" (Heb. 11:10)

Some "quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword...waxed valiant in fight..." (Heb. 11:34), but others "were tortured....had cruel mockings and scourgings....[and] bonds of imprisonment...." (Heb. 11:35-36). They "were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented...." (Heb. 11:37)

And what does Paul say in summary at the end of this list?

HEBREWS 11

³⁹**And these all, having OBTAINED A GOOD REPORT through faith, received not the promise: ⁴⁰God having provided some better thing for us, that they [who suffered] without us should not be made perfect [teleioo – 5048].**

The goal of these exemplary believers was (and our goal, then should be) to be made **perfect** (teleioo - 5048).

These exemplary believers in Hebrews 11 suffered and they "obtained a good report." In that sense, they were made "**perfect**" through what they suffered, just like the savior they served.

Paul here, in verse 40, offers a word of encouragement to ALL believers in that - even these who suffered for their faith, "obtained a good report," and were made "perfect" in their walk, have not been made completely, totally **perfect**....not yet....

Even they, the great heroes of the faith, will not be made completely **perfect**....without us. In other words, all those who do suffer and obtain a "good report" will have their ultimate perfection completed *at the same time*.

They may have become **perfect** in their walk with the Lord. But we all - they and us - will not be totally "made **perfect**" until the end...

It is in this context, that Paul brings up the next reference where he uses the word "**perfect**" (teleioo - 5048):

HEBREWS 12

²²**But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,** ²³**To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men MADE PERFECT** [teleioo – 5048], ²⁴**And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant...**

IN THIS CONTEXT, who/what are the "spirits of the just men **made perfect**?" Would it not be the spirits of that portion of the "church of the FirstBorn" who have been "**made perfect**" through what they suffered? Would this not be the spirits of the men who gave their lives for their faith, who suffered to bring about the condition that the Scripture calls being "**made perfect**?" Wouldn't this be the spirits of the "Great Cloud of Witnesses" - and those since that time - who have suffered like they have?

I think, in the context of what has gone before, this makes perfect (no pun intended) sense!

Remember, Paul is trying to spur the Hebrews on to further diligence, to a deeper commitment to their faith regardless of the circumstances they may face. Like he has done all through the book of Hebrews, he draws a contrast between the Old and the New to motivate the Hebrews to grasp on to the doctrines of Christ. He says "this isn't like Mount Sinai, this is Mount Sion!" While Mount Sinai represented punishment for disobedience, Mount Sion represents reward for your diligence!

"ALL the Angels will be there at your ultimate destination! The Great Assembly of Israel and the entire church of the FirstBorn will be there! Their NAMES are written there now, guaranteeing they will be there in the future!"

God the Judge will be there, a judge who will expect a blood sacrifice to atone for sins - just as He demanded in the past.

And what about all of those who have suffered and paid the ultimate price for their faith? What about those who were "made **perfect**" by what they suffered? They get a special mention! They will definitely be there in the future! Their SPIRITS are there now! Their SPIRITS returned to God who originally gave those spirits (Eccl. 12:7)...and those spirits are a testimony to the fact that God will definitely NOT forget those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in their service for Him! (see Rev. 6:9-11, where the "spirits" of those slain during the tribulation are told to "rest" a while longer until the end. Their blood, like Abel's blood, cries out for justice...and God assures us that he has heard that cry!).

And - most important of all - Christ will be there, the one who will minister for us, the one who will present His blood as the sacrifice before God the Judge of All! He will be on our side - and His blood will speak so much more than the blood of Abel did!

This, then, is how I personally interpret the "spirits of just men made perfect." I believe that this phrase refers to the "Great Cloud of Witnesses" (and those like them) who, like Christ, were made **perfect** through what they suffered for their faith.

Still looking for that city...

Because I interpret the "spirits of just men made perfect" in this way, it reinforces the idea that Hebrews 12:23 is NOT talking about men being "in heaven" right now. If this phrase is referring to those who were "**made perfect**" through their suffering, if it is referring to individuals like those Paul just mentioned in Chapter 11 of Hebrews (and I believe it is), then the answer to the question of "men in heaven" is very clear...

Abraham was one of those who was "made **perfect**" by that which he suffered. He was put to the ultimate test, being asked to sacrifice his own dear son upon the altar. In this way, Scripture tells us that his faith was made **perfect** (teleioo - 5048):

JAMES 2

²¹**Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? ²²Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect** [teleioo – 5048]?

In my mind, then, Abraham is definitely one of the "just men made **perfect**." (teleioo - 5048) in Hebrews 12:23!

And it is very clear from the Scriptures that Abraham did NOT get his reward:

HEBREWS 11

¹³**These ALL died in faith, NOT having received the promises...**

This means Abraham did NOT yet locate that city for which he was looking, that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God!" (Heb. 11:10) That clearly means Abraham is NOT in "the holy city, the new Jerusalem," because THAT is the specific city he was looking for! If Abraham is now in "Mount Sion," the "holy city," the "New Jerusalem," then He DID receive at least one of the promises made to him! But that is not what the Scripture says!

HEBREWS 11

¹³These ALL died in faith, NOT having received the promises...

If it is true, just say it!

If these individuals received their inheritance after they died (like most people believe), the overwhelming question is why doesn't Paul (or any other Bible writer) just SAY THAT PLAINLY? Wouldn't saying something to that effect be an *extremely* motivating factor for the Hebrews to live a godly, sacrificial life?

For example, "Suffer now, brothers, but, *at the moment you die*, you will instantly receive your reward!"

But the fact is that Paul never says anything like that!

We try to "read between the lines" of phrases like "the spirits of just men made perfect" in order to establish that men are "in heaven" right now...and we only do this because the Bible never just comes out and plainly says what we want it to say!

Why wouldn't Scripture just say dead believers are in heaven right now....if that is truly the case? Why doesn't it say dead believers are fellowshiping with Christ right now and seeing their dear departed loved ones...if that is true? The Scriptures never say that!

The fact of the matter is that Christ already says - and says repeatedly - exactly *when* the dead will be raised up:

JOHN 6

³⁹And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at THE LAST DAY.

JOHN 6

⁴⁰And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at THE LAST DAY.

JOHN 6

⁴⁴No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at THE LAST DAY.

JOHN 6

⁵⁴Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at THE LAST DAY.

When will Christ raise us up? At the moment of our death? No! The Scriptures never say that! The Lord Jesus Christ will raise us up at "**the last day!**" It is very clear!

The Apostle Paul approaches death and resurrection the same way; he attributes the believer's resurrection to an action performed by the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of the age. When specifically addressing those who have "fallen asleep," Paul says the hope is clearly the return of the Lord! (1 Thess. 4:13-18) Our hope is realized when the Lord comes back!

When the Apostle Paul talks about the timing of when believers will be "made alive" again in resurrection, he says it will occur "at HIS (Christ's) coming!" (1 Cor. 15:22-23).

When Paul talks about when the believer will be "raised incorruptible," he says it will be at "the last trump" (which signals Christ's coming - 1 Cor. 15:52).

These verses are extremely plain if we can only see past our tradition about "heaven!"

The Great Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews 11

Paul is not trying to establish that "men" are currently "in heaven" by writing Hebrews 12:23. What Paul is doing in Chapters 11 and 12 of the letter to the Hebrews is re-establishing the efforts of those believers who have gone before us...and he is using those witnesses as motivation for the Hebrews of his time - and for us who read that letter today.

In the past, the great men of faith "were persuaded [of the promises made by God to them]. They saw the fulfillment of these promises "afar off." They "embraced the promises" and confessed that, while they were on the earth, they were only in a temporary situation. (Heb. 11:13). They suffered what they suffered and went to their graves *without receiving that which they were promised by God*. It does NOT say they went to their graves *in order to* receive the promises!

The Hebrews of Paul's day were most likely going to be called to suffer. They were going to have to adopt the mindset that the Great Heroes of the Faith had adopted. They had to focus on the promises...and look past this life and their circumstances which yielded no indication that the promises God made would ever come about. Those Hebrews might even be asked to offer their lives during the trials that would make them "**perfect**."

It would be then - in those dire times of testing - that they should remember this truth Paul taught them in Hebrews 12:23: Paul told them, "the spirits of the just men made perfect are with the Lord, dear brothers, in the heavenly Jerusalem! And because their spirits are in the "heavenly Jerusalem," it is an absolute guarantee that those who suffered for Christ and were "**made perfect**" will be raised up in resurrection to be in that City when it comes down upon the earth on judgment day! Those faithful, "**perfected**" individuals will warrant a special attention all their own for the sacrifice they offered to their Lord and Savior!"

THIS is the picture Paul is trying to paint in Hebrews 12:23! It is a picture of future glory, a future glory and hallowed assurance that can make very real and present dangers easier to face! It is a glory that will only be realized "at His coming," when that glorious city comes down from heaven...and the great assembly is finally gathered with the Judge of all mankind...and with our blessed advocate and mediator!

Even so, come Lord Jesus!