

“How were people saved before Jesus died for our sins?”

Hebrews 9:24-28 (NASB)

²⁴ For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;
²⁵ nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.
²⁶ Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
²⁷ And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,
²⁸ so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Judgment Demands a Substitute

All men have **to die**, and our death is by divine appointment. It is one appointment everyone will keep. After death comes **judgment**, which is also appointed by God. And since men are not able to atone for their own sins, God’s judgment demands that they pay or have a substitute pay for them.

Like all men, Jesus Christ was divinely appointed to die once. But unlike all other men, He will never face judgment. Because He took our sins upon Himself, He took our judgment upon Himself. But the judgment was for *our* sins, not for His, for He had none. God **“made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”** ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). He died the one death that judgment demanded.

As mentioned several times, the people always waited expectantly on the **Day of Atonement** for the high priest to come out from the Holy of Holies. If he did anything wrong, if he failed to follow God’s precise instructions, he would die. So there was always a sigh of relief, for their own sakes as well as for his, when he reappeared.

That is the situation being alluded to in [Hebrews 9:28](#). If the people were so eager to see the former high priests reappear from the earthly Holy of Holies, how much more should Christians look eagerly for their great High Priest to reappear from the heavenly Holy of Holies? This will occur at the Second Coming ([Revelation 19:11-16](#)).

When the high priest walked out of the old sanctuary, the people knew that his sacrifice had been accepted. He had done everything right. Jesus Christ’s reappearing will be one more confirmation that He did everything right, that His Father is satisfied with Him. And because the Father is satisfied with Him, He is satisfied with us, for we are in Him. When He comes back, our salvation will be full. When He appears a second time to those who expect Him, it will not

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be to deal with sin. Sin only needs to be dealt with once, and this He did on the cross. When He comes again, it will be **without reference to sin**.

Three appearing's of Christ are mentioned in this passage. [Verse 26](#) speaks of His appearing, or being manifested, **at the consummation of the ages**, that is, when He came to be crucified. [Verse 24](#) speaks of His appearing back **in heaven**, before **the presence of God**. [Verse 28](#) speaks of His appearing on earth again. It is His third appearing, but only the **second time** on earth.

At the end of that eventful Passover week when Jesus was finishing His ministry, the Romans had prepared three crosses for three criminals. On two of the crosses, thieves were to hang. The third cross was for an insurrectionist named Barabbas, who had been found guilty of treason against the empire. But Barabbas never made it to the cross. He was guilty and condemned, but he was not executed—because someone took his place. On the middle cross that day hung not a violent, profane rebel, but the sinless Son of God. Barabbas went free not because he was innocent, but because Jesus took his place. Jesus was crucified not because He was guilty, but so that He *could* take Barabbas's place—and the place of every other sinner.