

# Hades is not Hell

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This is clear from Revelation 20:14-15—“And Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death, the Lake of Fire.<sup>1</sup> 15 And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.”<sup>2</sup> Death and Hades are treated as if they were living entities. However that may be, it is clear that Hades and the Lake are distinct. So just what is this ‘Lake’?

In this same passage it is stated to be ‘the second death’. But consider Revelation 20:10—“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the Beast and the False prophet also are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” The full title, Lake of Fire and brimstone, having been given in verse 10, in verses 14 and 15 it is shortened to Lake of Fire, but the place is the same, a place of eternal torment. (See also Revelation 21:8.) And now consider Matthew 25:41—“Then He will also say to those on His left: ‘Go away from me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels’.” In verse 46, ‘those on His left’ are sent into “everlasting punishment”. The Lake of fire was prepared for Lucifer (now Satan) and those angels that joined his rebellion (about a third of the angelic beings—Revelation 12:4). Human beings who side with Satan (there are various ways of doing that) will also share his destiny. The term ‘Hell’, properly understood and utilized, stands for the Lake of Fire and brimstone, the second and eternal death.

The name ‘Gehenna’ is a euphemistic metaphor for the Lake of Fire. Versions generally, and correctly, render it as ‘hell’. The word occurs in Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9 and 23:15, 33; in Mark 9:43, 45, 47; in Luke 12:5 and in James 3:6. In all but the last instance the word was spoken by Jesus Himself. In three of the references Jesus added “of fire”. Strictly speaking, ‘Gehenna’ was the local dump outside Jerusalem—something was always being burned, and there would be plenty of worms. Notice Mark 9:43-44.

43 Further, if your hand is causing you to fall, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into the Life maimed than having both hands to go away into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire—44 where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’.<sup>3</sup>

I find the figure of an immortal worm to be rather daunting—always chewing on you, but never finishing you off! I freely confess that I prefer never to encounter such a worm! The Lord was presumably referring to Isaiah 66:24. Notice also what He said in Matthew 10:28—“And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear the One who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell [Gehenna].” The destruction of both soul and body must refer to the Lake of Fire, the second death.

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<sup>1</sup> The first death is the physical one; the second is the spiritual one—eternal separation from the Creator, the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9); the essence of death is separation. In physical death, the spirit is separated from the body.

<sup>2</sup> That is right; since no one can be saved by his works, the only way out is the Book of Life!

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps 4% of the Greek manuscripts omit ‘into the unquenchable fire’ at the end of verses 43 and 45, and also omit verses 44 and 46 entire, to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, [TEV], etc., except that most keep ‘into the unquenchable fire’ in verse 43 (but not in verse 45). (Evidently there were those who thought that saying it once was quite enough.)

The Lord used other expressions to refer to the Lake. In Matthew 13:41-42 He was explaining the parable of the wheat and tares:

41 The Son of the Man will send out His angels,<sup>1</sup> and they will collect out of His kingdom everything that is offensive, and those who perpetrate lawlessness;<sup>2</sup> 42 and they will throw them into the furnace of fire. There, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“The furnace of fire”, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, is evidently a reference to the Lake. In verses 49-50, same chapter, He said the same thing. In Matthew 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30 Sovereign Jesus used the description: “the darkness farthest away; there, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”. See also Jude 13. Again, the reference is to the Lake, but what did He mean by the ‘darkness farthest away’, or farthest out? Throughout the NT the term ‘darkness’ is used to refer to Satan’s kingdom, and the Lake is the final destination of that kingdom, and therefore the ‘farthest out’. In Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17 the Baptizer was explaining what the Christ would do: “He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”. In sum, the term ‘Hell’, properly understood and utilized, stands for the Lake of Fire and brimstone, the second and eternal death.

As demonstrated at the outset, Hades and the Lake must be distinct, so just what is ‘Hades’? The word occurs in Matthew 11:23 and 16:18, in Luke 10:15 and 16:23, in Acts 2:27 and 31, in 1 Corinthians 15:55 and in Revelation 1:18, 6:8 and 20:13-14. Unfortunately the AV (KJV) uniformly renders the word as ‘hell’, thereby misleading the reader and confusing the issue. Fortunately the NKJV corrects the AV at all those points; but other versions offer a mixture of renderings. Looking at all the relevant contexts, Hades evidently refers to something that exists between a person’s physical death and the Lake; it must be some sort of intermediate state or place. The closest thing to an actual description is found in Luke 16:19-31.

19 “Now there was a certain rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, who had been placed at his gate, 21 just wanting to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table—why even the dogs would come and lick his sores!<sup>3</sup> 22 In due time the beggar died and was carried away to Abraham’s bosom by the angels. The rich man also died and was buried.<sup>4</sup> 23 And in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance, and Lazarus very close to him. And being in torment, 24 he called out, saying, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; because I am tormented by this flame!’ 25 But Abraham said: ‘Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things,

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<sup>1</sup> The angels are going to be busy.

<sup>2</sup> I take it that the “kingdom” here is physical (not merely ‘spiritual’) and includes the whole planet, because it contains “offensive” things and “lawless” people.

<sup>3</sup> In fact the dogs were doing him a favor, since canine saliva is good for sores.

<sup>4</sup> Note the contrast. Of course the beggar’s body had been buried, but the person was taken to Paradise. Here we have an explicit statement of angelic activity, which, however, is absent from the rich man.

while Lazarus had bad things; but now he<sup>1</sup> is being comforted, and you tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can anyone from there cross over to us.' 27 Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 because I have five brothers, so that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment'.<sup>2</sup> 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them'. 30 So he said to him, 'Oh no, father Abraham—if someone from the dead should go to them, they will repent!' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone should rise from the dead'.<sup>3</sup>

The Text does not state that this is a parable, so most probably it is not (no parable that is stated to be such employs a person's proper name). Several things in this account invite comment. *Hades* (Greek), or *Sheol* (Hebrew), is the 'halfway house' where departed spirits await the final judgment, but the results of that judgment are already known, since the saved are already separated from the lost (see Hebrews 9:27). There is a chasm separating the two sides that cannot be crossed, but evidently one side can see and hear the other (the 'dead' are conscious and have feeling). People in prison who are waiting for their trial are already suffering.

In verse 22 the side of the saved is called 'Abraham's bosom'. This is the only passage where that phrase occurs; in Luke 23:43 the Lord Jesus called it 'Paradise'.<sup>4</sup> When He said to the repentant robber, "Today you will be with me in Paradise", He was not referring to Heaven. We can deduce this from Acts 2:27. Peter is proving the resurrection by citing David's prophecy in Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:27 translates Psalm 16:10—"You will not abandon my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see decay". 'Hades' is a translation of the Hebrew *Sheol*, that I will discuss below. Jesus could not be abandoned there unless He did in fact go there. Referring to the sign of the prophet Jonah, Jesus said, "so will the Son of the Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). "In the heart of the earth"—presumably we here have instruction from the Lord on the location of Hades—it is inside the earth, somehow. Compare 1 Samuel 28:13 where Samuel (literally), returning from Hades/Sheol, comes up from inside the earth. If volcanoes can spew out molten rock, it is evidently quite hot down there.

Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15 are parallel, referring to Capernaum: "And you, Capernaum, who are 'exalted to heaven', will be brought down to Hades". Hades is contrasted to heaven (the Text has 'the heaven'), one being 'up' and the other 'down'. Capernaum is pictured as having a high opinion of itself, an opinion that God does not share. Comparing this with Luke 16:23, the bad side of Hades is in view. The bad side is also in view in

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<sup>1</sup> The best line of transmission (30% of the Greek manuscripts here) has the emphatic pronoun 'he', rather than 'here'.

<sup>2</sup> I find it interesting that he was concerned for his brothers; we cannot say, "Better late than never", since it made no difference.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham states a disquieting reality: people who reject God's written revelation are self-condemned. Note also that Abraham did not say it would be impossible to send Lazarus, only that it would do no good. But it is clear that the lost cannot return, or the rich man could have gone himself.

<sup>4</sup> The basic meaning of the term 'paradise' is a garden, and in the NT it is also used of heaven. So why did Jesus call the good side of Hades 'Paradise'? I suppose because the people there were on their way to Heaven, and were already experiencing bliss.

Matthew 16:18. “And I further say to you that you are a stone, but on this bedrock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not withstand her.” There is a play on words here, *petros* VS *petra*—the bedrock was obviously not Peter. The bedrock presumably has to do with the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. 'Gates' do not attack, but are the last line of defense for a walled city—it is the Church that is attacking Hades. (The normal meaning of the verb here is ‘prevail’, which is why versions usually render ‘prevail against’, as if it is Hades that is attacking the Church.) I take it that the Church is viewed as saving people from the bad side of Hades—of course it is actually Jesus who does the saving.

In 1 Corinthians 15:55 and the four cases in Revelation, death is mentioned along with Hades. I begin with 1 Corinthians 15:54-56:

54 So whenever this corruptible puts on incorruption and this mortal puts on immortality, then this written word will happen: “Death has been swallowed down into victory”. 55 “Where, O Death, is your sting? Where, O Hades, is your victory?”<sup>1</sup> 56 The stinger of death is sin, and the adjunct of sin is the law.

The first quote is from Isaiah 25:8. It is important to note that this whole paragraph is addressed to “brothers” (verse 50), those who enjoy the benefit of Christ’s victory over sin and death. The second quote appears to be an interpretation of Hosea 13:14.<sup>2</sup> “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Sin leads to spiritual death and lands the sinner in the bad side of Hades.

In Revelation 1:18, the glorified Jesus declares His victory, in consequence of which He now holds the ‘keys of Death and of Hades’. In Hebrews 2:14, the correct translation of the Greek Text is ‘abolish the one who had the power of death’. In Revelation 6:8, a sickly pale horse is ridden by Death, ‘and Hades follows with him’. The Text does not say that Hades was on a horse. John is stating a fact of human existence: Hades follows death—so it has been for 6,000 years.

I confess that the meaning of Revelation 20:13 is not clear to me. “The ocean gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged each one according to their works.”<sup>3</sup> How can Death be holding dead that are not in Hades? And how can the ocean have a separate roster of dead? However, the context is the Great White Throne, the final judgment. And since only the lost will appear before this throne, proceeding directly to the Lake, they have presumably already been resurrected. In physical death, the spirit is separated from the body, and resurrection is the reuniting of spirit and body. Before resurrection, the spirits of the lost are in Hades; but

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<sup>1</sup>Less than 2% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, have ‘death’, instead of “Hades”, to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

<sup>2</sup>The LXX is in basic agreement with the NT here, and is probably based upon it, not the opposite. The LXX we know and use is based on manuscripts copied centuries after the NT was written. A strict Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus would certainly use Hebrew manuscripts, not a translation.

<sup>3</sup>Twice it says that they will be judged on the basis of their works. So how can you really evaluate someone’s deeds? Only by taking account of their context. Those who never heard the Gospel will be judged within the context that they lived, and the Judge will prove that even within their own context they did not measure up.

where are their 'bodies'? The remains of those bodies are either in the sea or on land. If 'death' stands for those on land, then verse 13 could be referring to the resurrection of the lost. That is my best guess as to its intended meaning.

The observant reader may have noticed that after Luke 16 and Acts 2 all the references appear to be dealing with the bad side of Hades. Why might that be? I suggest that the good side is no longer occupied. I believe a case can be made for the understanding that when Jesus resurrected, He took all the good spirits with him, and the spirits of all the saved who have died subsequently are also with Jesus (but still without their glorified bodies).

I will now take up the meaning of the Hebrew *Sheol*. The term occurs some 65 times in the OT. The AV translates it as 'the grave' and 'hell' about 30 times each, the remainder being 'the pit'. Looking at the contexts, I see no reason for the different renderings. In my opinion, it should be transliterated as a proper name throughout. Since the inspired translation in Acts 2:27 equates *Sheol* with *Hades*, I take that to be the correct understanding. I say 'inspired translation' because Peter was doubtless speaking Hebrew, but the inspired account is in Greek.

To recapitulate and conclude, properly understood and utilized, 'Hell' refers to the Lake of Fire and brimstone, the second and eternal death. 'Sheol/Hades' refer to the halfway house where departed human spirits await the resurrection and the final judgment. However, since the resurrection of Christ, I believe the side of the saved, 'Abraham's bosom', is now empty.