

Did Jesus Go to Hell After He Died?

by David Emerson Root, Jr.

Question:

“Did Jesus go to hell after He died (as some people claim)? Surely He didn’t burn in hell, right?”

Answer:

In order to determine whether or not Jesus went to Hell, first we need to find out what “Hell” is. We’ll do this by looking at several Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible.

Sheol

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *Sheol* refers to the place where the departed spirits of the dead went. Here are some things that Bible scholars say about Sheol:

“*hades* or **the world of the dead** (as if a subterranean *retreat*), including its accessories and inmates: - grave, hell, pit.” (Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary, emphasis added)

“not the earth, for Joseph was supposed to be torn in pieces, but the unknown place – **the place of departed souls**, where Jacob expected at death to meet his beloved son.” ([Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary](#), verse 35, emphasis added)

“A grave is one particular cavity purposely digged for the interment of a dead person; “sheol” is a collective name for all the graves. He that is in the grave is in “sheol;” but he that is in “sheol” may not be in a grave, but in any pit, or in the sea. **In short, it is the region of the dead**; which is figuratively considered as a city or large habitation with gates and bars in which there are many chambers Pro_7:27.’ “Sheol” is never full, but is always asking or craving more Pro_27:20; Heb_2:5. Here it means, not a place of punishment, but the region of the dead, **where the ghosts of the departed are considered as residing together.**” (Barnes, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html>, Isaiah 14:9, emphasis added)

So in the Old Testament, Sheol was considered to be the place where the spirits of the dead went. Here are a few examples of the 63 passages which contain the Hebrew word *Sheol*:

“All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “in mourning will I go down to **the grave [Sheol]** to my son.” So his father wept for him.” (Genesis 37:35)

“As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to **the grave [Sheol]** does not return.” (Job 7:9)

“If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in **the depths [Sheol]**, you are there.” (Psalms 139:8)

“The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to *the grave* [*Sheol*].” (Proverbs 15:24)

“*The grave* [*Sheol*] below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you – all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones – all those who were kings over the nations.” (Isaiah 14:9)

“From within *the grave* [*Sheol*] the mighty leaders will say of Egypt and her allies, ‘They have come down and they lie with the uncircumcised, with those killed by the sword.’” (Ezekiel 32:21)

“Though they dig down to the depths of *the grave* [*Sheol*], from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down.” (Amos 9:2)

Throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *Sheol* is often translated in the NIV as “the grave,” and it’s sometimes translated as “Hell” in other versions of the Bible (such as the KJV).

In the above passages, notice that people go “down” to Sheol (they never go “up” to Sheol). In a moment we’ll examine some passages which give us an indication of where Sheol is located.

Hades

In the New Testament, the Greek equivalent of Sheol is *Hades*. Here are some things that Bible scholars say about Hades:

“the place (state) of departed souls: - grave, hell.” (Strong’s Greek Dictionary)

“Hades is technically the unseen world, *the Hebrew Sheol, the land of the departed*, that is death.” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament](#), emphasis added)

“The Greek word “Hades” means literally “a place devoid of light; a dark, obscure abode”; and in Greek writers was applied to *the dark and obscure regions where disembodied spirits were supposed to dwell*.” (Barnes, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html>, Acts 2:27, emphasis added)

“Hades never denotes the physical grave *nor is it the permanent region of the lost. It is the intermediate state between death and the ultimate hell, Gehenna*” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, p.82, emphasis added)

So according to a number of Bible scholars, Hades is a temporary place of confinement where the spirits of the dead go, and it’s equivalent to Sheol in the Old Testament. Here are all of the New Testament references to Hades (with one exception, which we’ll get to in a moment):

“And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to *the depths* [*Hades*].” (Matthew 11:23)

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of *Hades* will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18)

“And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to *the depths* [*Hades*].” (Luke 10:15)

“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to *the grave* [*Hades*], nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” (Acts 2:26-27)

“Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to *the grave* [*Hades*], nor did his body see decay.” (Acts 2:31)

“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.”

“Where, O *death* [*Hades*], is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

“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*.” (Revelation 1:18)

“I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and *Hades* was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.” (Revelation 6:8)

“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. Then death and *Hades* were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.” (Revelation 20:13-14)

In the above passages we can see that Hades is considered to be “down” in the New Testament, just like Sheol is considered to be “down” in the Old Testament. Notice that some of the passages in the book of Revelation (above) have “personified” both death and Hades (referring to them as if they were alive), and Revelation 20:13-14 (above) indicates that death and Hades will ultimately be thrown into the Lake of Fire. We’ll examine this “Lake of Fire” in a moment, but first let’s look at the remaining New Testament passage which mentions Hades:

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In *hell* [*Hades*], *where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away*, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because *I am in agony in this fire.*’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, *between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.*’” (Luke 16:22-26)

In this story, Jesus described an unrighteous man being tormented in Hades, and this man looked “up” and saw Abraham far away. This passage seems to indicate that Hades consisted of two “compartments” (so to speak) before the cross. In one compartment the unrighteous are being held in torment until Judgment Day, and in another compartment the righteous were held in relative comfort (until Jesus ascended up to Heaven, as we’ll see later). Between these two compartments there was some kind of “chasm” which made it impossible for people to travel from one compartment to the other, and this seems to imply that unrighteous people did not have a second chance to receive salvation after they died.

Sometimes people say that Luke 16:22-26 (above) is a parable, not an actual event. Because of this, they argue that we can’t take this passage literally, which means that we can’t learn anything about Hades from this passage. But if you look closely at all of Jesus’ parables, you’ll find that they *always* contain real places and realistic people and realistic events. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35), notice that the robbers and the robbery victim and the priest and the Levite and the Samaritan are all realistic people, and the setting is a real place on a real road somewhere between the real cities of Jerusalem and Jericho. There are no fantasy creatures such as unicorns, mermaids, fairies, leprechauns, enchanted ice queens, etc., anywhere in Jesus’ parables, and His parables never take place in mythical, imaginary settings such as Atlantis or Metropolis or the Hundred Acre Wood or Whoville. Jesus *always* used real-life objects and characters and settings and events in His parables. Therefore, if Luke 16:22-26 (above) is a parable then we have every reason to believe that it takes place in a real-life setting, because Jesus never invented any fantasy settings for any of His parables or stories.

To see for yourself, here are all of Jesus’ parables, according to *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Walvoord and Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary, p.35): Matthew 7:24-27, 9:16-17, 13:5-8, 24-30, 31-32, 33, 44, 45-46, 47-50, 18:12-14, 23-35, 20:1-16, 21:28-32, 33-46, 22:1-14, 24:45-51, 25:1-13, 14-30, Mark 4:26-29, 13:34-37, Luke 7:31-35, 41-43, 10:25-37, 11:5-8, 12:16-21, 13:6-9, 14:15-24, 28-33, 15:8-10, 11-32, 16:1-9, 17:7-10, 18:1-8, 9-14, 19:11-27.

Notice that the NIV uses the word “hell” for the Greek word *Hades* in Luke 16:22-26 (above). Because of this we might assume that Hades is “Hell,” but we’re going to see that this is not necessarily an accurate assumption.

Where Is Hades?

Throughout the entire Bible, Sheol and Hades are always considered to be “down.” Here are some examples from the Old Testament:

- Notice that Sheol is “below”:

“For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to *the realm of death [Sheol] below*. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire *the foundations of the mountains.*”
(Deuteronomy 32:22)

This says that Sheol is “below,” possibly where “the foundations of the mountains” are located (depending on how literally we should take that expression).

- Sheol is sometimes referred to as being “in the depths”:

“But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are *in the depths of the grave [Sheol]*.” (Proverbs 9:18)

- The prophet Isaiah said that people *descended* into Sheol:

“Therefore *the grave [Sheol]* enlarges its appetite and opens its mouth without limit; *into it will descend* their nobles and masses with all their brawlers and revelers.” (Isaiah 5:14)

This describes people “descending” into Sheol when they died. According to Barnes: “[Sheol] was represented by the Hebrews as *“low down, or deep” in the earth* - contrasted with the height of heaven; Deu_32:22; Job_11:8; Psa_139:7-8. It was a place where thick darkness reigns; Job_10:21-22 : ‘The land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself.’ It is described as having “valleys, or depths,” Pro_9:18.” (Barnes, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html>, Isaiah 5:14, emphasis added)

- The prophet Isaiah said that Sheol is *below* and *down*:

“*The grave [Sheol] below* is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses *the spirits of the departed* to greet you – all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones – all those who were kings over the nations. They will all respond, they will say to you, “You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us.” All your pomp has been *brought down to the grave [Sheol]*, along with the noise of your harps; maggots are spread out beneath you and worms cover you.” (Isaiah 14:9-11)

According to Barnes:

“*The word [Sheol] denotes*, says Taylor (“Heb. Con.”), ‘*The underground parts of the earth*, otherwise called the nether, or *lower parts of the earth; the earth beneath in opposition to the earth above*, where people and other animals live. In “sheol” are the foundations of the mountains Deu_32:22. In “sheol” “men penetrate by digging into the earth Amo_9:2. Into “sheol” the roots of trees do strike down Eze_31:16. ... “*Sheol*” was *always represented as being “in” or “under” the ground*, and the grave was the avenue or door that led to it” (Barnes, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html>, Isaiah 14:9, emphasis added)

Gill says that this passage refers to:

“those that are *under the earth*, in the grave, or in hell” (Gill’s Exposition of the Bible, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html> , Isaiah 14:9)

- The prophet Ezekiel also described Sheol as being “down” and “in the depths of the earth”:

“I made the nations tremble at the sound of its fall when I brought it *down to the grave* [*Sheol*] with those who go down to the pit. Then all the trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, all the trees that were well-watered, were consoled *in the earth below* [or “in the depths of the earth,” according to Strong’s].” (Ezekiel 31:16)

- When King Saul commanded the witch of Endor to bring up the departed spirit of the prophet Samuel, notice that Samuel’s spirit came “up” from the ground:

“Saul then said to his attendants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.” “There is one in Endor,” they said. So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. “Consult *a spirit* for me,” he said, “and *bring up for me the one I name.*” But the woman said to him, “Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?” Saul swore to her by the LORD, “As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this.” Then the woman asked, “Whom shall I *bring up* for you?” “*Bring up Samuel,*” he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!” The king said to her, “Don’t be afraid. What do you see?” The woman said, “*I see a spirit coming up out of the ground.*” “What does he look like?” he asked. “An old man wearing a robe *is coming up,*” she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me *by bringing me up?*” “I am in great distress,” Saul said. “The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.”” (1 Samuel 28:7-15)

This says that the spirit of the prophet Samuel came “up” from the ground, and Barnes points out that:

“Hell, or the place of the departed (compare 1Sa_28:19; 2Sa_12:23) is represented as *under the earth*” (Barnes, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html> , 1 Samuel 28:13, emphasis added)

Some people argue that this was not the dead prophet Samuel, but instead it was a trick by the witch of Endor (possibly using an accomplice, whether human or demonic). However, here are some reasons why it probably was the spirit of Samuel:

1. The Bible says that people “had” familiar spirits (i.e. demonic spirits) or that people “communicated” with familiar spirits, but I haven’t been able to find a single passage about familiar spirits which says that they can become visible in a disembodied form (see Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 27, Deuteronomy 18:11, 1 Samuel 28:3, 7, 8, 9, 2 Kings 21:6, 23:24, 1 Chronicles 10:13, 2 Chronicles 33:6, Isaiah 8:19, 19:3, and 29:4). So from a Scriptural standpoint, it’s not likely that an evil spirit became visible outside of a physical body in order to impersonate Samuel.

2. The spirit accurately prophesied the timing and manner of Saul's death, as well as the deaths of Saul's sons, as well as the Israelite army's defeat by the Philistines.
3. The Bible specifically refers to the spirit as being the prophet Samuel.
4. There's no evidence that the witch of Endor did anything to bring up the spirit.
5. The witch of Endor seems to be shocked and frightened at the appearance of Samuel. When Samuel unexpectedly appeared, the witch of Endor apparently realized that something unusual was taking place, so she took a closer look at her "client" and was shocked to find that it was King Saul (because she cried out at the top of her voice that Saul had deceived her by coming in disguise). These things imply that Samuel's appearance was not caused by the witch of Endor, in which case it was God who brought Samuel up from Sheol.
6. In the KJV, the witch of Endor said, "I saw gods [*elohiym*] ascending out of the earth." Bible commentaries point out that *elohiym* is used in the Old Testament for God, and for human judges or civil magistrates, and for a mighty one or a great personage of a majestic form, and in a general sense for supernatural appearances of angels or spirits. Sometimes people argue that *elohiym* indicates that the spirit was a demonic spirit (a "god"), but this argument doesn't work because it's equally possible that it was a "mighty one" (Samuel).
7. One reason for King Saul's death was because he apparently inquired of a familiar spirit:

"So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, *even* against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking *counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it;*" (1 Chronicles 10:13, KJV)

"Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance," (1 Chronicles 10:13, NIV)

"So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against Jehovah, because of the word of Jehovah, which he kept not; and also for that he asked counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire [thereby]," (1 Chronicles 10:13, ASV)

"So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep ; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it," (1 Chronicles 10:13, NASB)

"And Saul dieth because of his trespass that he trespassed against Jehovah, against the word of Jehovah that he kept not, and also for asking at a familiar spirit – to inquire, – " (1 Chronicles 10:13, Young's Literal Translation)

Sometimes people assume that this is proof that the witch of Endor called up a familiar spirit which impersonated Samuel. But remember, Saul was not trying to get information

from a familiar spirit, he was trying to get information from the prophet Samuel. In order to do this, he told his servants to find a woman who had a familiar spirit so that Saul could inquire of her about Samuel:

“Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.” (1 Samuel 28:7, KJV)

Saul’s transgression was that he sought a woman who had a familiar spirit to inquire of her (not to seek guidance from the spirit, but so that the familiar spirit would go call up Samuel). Easton’s Bible Dictionary says that the word “familiar” was “intended to express the idea that sorcerers had spirits as their servants ready to obey their commands” (see [Familiar spirit](#)). Saul’s transgression was going to a woman who had a familiar spirit (a demon) to inquire of her about sending her demonic servant to bring up Samuel (which was prohibited in the Law of Moses - Leviticus 19:31, 20:6). 1 Chronicles 10:13 (above) does not mean that a familiar spirit was impersonating Samuel.

8. In Matthew 17:3 and Luke 9:30-31 we see Moses and Elijah appearing at Jesus’ Transfiguration, even though they were long dead. Therefore, we have Scriptural precedent for God bringing up the spirits of dead saints and causing them to become visible.

For all of these reasons, it’s probable that God brought Samuel’s spirit up from Sheol. So based on all of the evidence throughout the Old Testament, Sheol was considered to be a place of departed spirits which was located *under* the earth.

In the New Testament we see exactly the same idea:

- We are told that there are spirits of departed people *under* the earth:

“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and *under the earth*” (Philippians 2:10)

Here are some things that Bible commentators have written about this passage:

“**And things under the earth** - Beings *under the earth*. The whole universe shall confess that he is Lord. This embraces, doubtless, *those who have departed from this life, and perhaps includes also fallen angels.*” (Barnes, from <http://www.esword.net/commentaries.html>, Philippians 2:10, emphasis added).

“**Under the earth** (*katachthonion*). Homeric adjective for *departed souls, subterranean, simply the dead.*” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament](#), emphasis added)

- Once again we see the idea in the New Testament that there are spirits of departed people *under* the earth:

“But no one in heaven or on earth *or under the earth* could open the scroll or even look inside it.” (Revelation 5:3)

Based on this verse, a number of Bible commentators have pointed out that Hades is *under* the earth:

“**Under the earth - In Hades.**” (Vincent’s Word Studies, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html> , Revelation 5:3, emphasis added)

“**under the earth** – namely, *in Hades.*” ([Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary](#), verse 3, emphasis added)

“**Neither under the earth** - These divisions compose, in common language, the universe: what is in heaven above; what is on the earth; *and whatever there is under the earth - the abodes of the dead.*” (Barnes, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html>, Revelation 5:3, emphasis added).

- Once again we see the idea in the New Testament that there are spirits of departed people *under* the earth:

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth *and under the earth* and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”“ (Revelation 5:13)

Again, Bible scholars sometimes point out that “under the earth” refers to Hades:

“**under the earth – the departed spirits in Hades.**” ([Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary](#), verse 13, emphasis added)

So the Bible clearly and consistently tells us that Hades (Sheol) is somehow *under* (or inside) the earth.

Tartarus

Tartarus is another Greek word which is sometimes translated into English as “Hell.” Here’s what a prominent Greek dictionary says about Tartarus:

“the subterranean abyss of Greek mythology where demigods were punished. It is mentioned in the pseudepigraphical book of Enoch *as the place where fallen angels are confined*. It is found only in its verbal form in 2 Pet. 2:4 meaning to cast into or consign to Tartarus. *It is part of the realm of death designated in Scripture as Sheol* (7585, OT) in the OT *and Hades* (86) in the NT. *These angels are being held in this netherworld dungeon until the day of final judgment.*” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, p.1367, emphasis added)

In this Greek dictionary we once again see that Sheol and Hades both refer to the same “realm of death,” and we see that Tartarus is considered to be a “dungeon” within Hades in which certain fallen angels are confined until Judgment Day. Here’s the only passage in the Bible which mentions Tartarus:

“For if God did not spare *angels* when they sinned, but sent them to *hell* [*Tartarus*], putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4)

In the above verse we see the NIV using the English word “Hell” again. However, this time the Greek word is *Tartarus*, which is perhaps another compartment within Hades.

Gehenna

Gehenna is another Greek word which is often translated as “Hell.” Here are some things that Bible scholars say about *Gehenna*:

“***The word Gehenna, rendered hell***, occurs outside of the Gospels only at Jam_3:6. It is the Greek representative of the Hebrew Ge-Hinnom, or Valley of Hinnom, a deep, narrow glen to the south of Jerusalem, where, after the introduction of the worship of the fire-gods by Ahaz, the idolatrous Jews sacrificed their children to Molech. Josiah formally desecrated it, “that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech” (2Ki_23:10). After this it became the common refuse-place of the city, into which the bodies of criminals, carcasses of animals, and all sorts of filth were cast. From its depth and narrowness, and its fire and ascending smoke, ***it became the symbol of the place of the future punishment of the wicked.***” (Vincent’s Word Studies, from <http://www.esword.net/commentaries.html>, Matthew 5:22, emphasis added)

“Gehenna is the Valley of Hinnom where the fire burned continually. Here idolatrous Jews once offered their children to Molech (2 Kings 23:10). Jesus finds one cause of murder to be abusive language. ***Gehenna “should be carefully distinguished from Hades (aidh ) which is never used for the place of punishment, but for the place of departed spirits, without reference to their moral condition”*** (Vincent). “ ([Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament](#), emphasis added)

“Hell, the place or state of the lost and condemned ... ***In the NT Gehenna is presented always as the final place of punishment into which the wicked are cast after the last judgment. It is a place of torment both for body and soul***” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, p.360-361, emphasis added)

So a number of Bible scholars point out that *Gehenna* is a ***different*** place from Hades. Here are all of the passages in the New Testament which use the Greek word *Gehenna*:

“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of *hell* [*Gehenna*].” (Matthew 5:22)

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into *hell* [*Gehenna*]. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into *hell* [*Gehenna*].” (Matthew 5:29-30)

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in *hell* [*Gehenna*].” (Matthew 10:28)

“And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of *hell* [*Gehenna*].” (Matthew 18:9)

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of *hell* [*Gehenna*] as you are.” (Matthew 23:15)

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to *hell* [*Gehenna*]?” (Matthew 23:33)

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into *hell* [*Gehenna*], where the fire never goes out.” (Mark 9:43)

“And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into *hell* [*Gehenna*].” (Mark 9:45)

“And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into *hell* [*Gehenna*].” (Mark 9:47)

“But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into *hell* [*Gehenna*]. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” (Luke 12:5)

“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by *hell* [*Gehenna*].” (James 3:6)

In the above passages, notice that the NIV always translates the Greek word *Gehenna* as “Hell.” What we have seen is that the NIV refers to Hades as “Hell,” *and* the NIV refers to Tartarus as “Hell,” *and* the NIV refers to Gehenna (which is different from Hades) as “Hell.” The NIV and other versions of the Bible are not very clear about Hell, so we need to dig deeper in order to understand what Hell is before we can determine whether or not Jesus went there after He died.

The Lake of Fire

In the book of Revelation, Gehenna is referred to as “the Lake of Fire.” Here are some things that Bible scholars say about the Lake of Fire:

“These both were cast . . . into a lake – *Greek*, “. . . ***the lake of fire,***” *Gehenna*. Satan is subsequently cast into it, at the close of the outbreak which succeeds the millennium (Rev_20:10). Then Death and Hell, as well those not found at the general judgment “written in the book of life”; this constitutes “the second death.”“ ([Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary](#), verse 20, emphasis added)

“In this short sentence the doom is told of all who are out of Christ, for they too follow the devil and the two beasts into ***the lake of fire (the counterpart of the Gehenna of fire,*** Matthew 5:22). There is no room here for soul sleeping, for an intermediate state, for a second chance, or for annihilation of the wicked.” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament](#), emphasis added)

So the Lake of Fire is the same thing as Gehenna, according to a number of Bible scholars. Here are all of the passages in the New Testament which mention the Lake of Fire:

“But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into ***the fiery lake of burning sulfur.***” (Revelation 19:20)

“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into ***the lake of burning sulfur,*** where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. ***They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.***” (Revelation 20:10)

“***Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.*** If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into ***the lake of fire.***” (Revelation 20:14-15)

“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – ***their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.***”“ (Revelation 21:8)

The above passages tell us that the Lake of Fire is the place where all of the unrighteous people throughout history will be punished day and night in torment.

So far we have seen that there’s a temporary prison in which the spirits of unrighteous people are being held until Judgment Day (called Sheol in the Old Testament and Hades in the New Testament), and there’s a place of torment into which all unrighteous people and fallen angels will be cast on Judgment Day (called Gehenna and the Lake of Fire). We’ve seen that the NIV refers to ***both*** of these places as “Hell,” but notice that someday Hades will be thrown ***into*** the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15, above). Hades and the Lake of Fire are not the same place and should not both be called “Hell.”

Consider that the Bible doesn’t give us a good definition of the English word “Hell,” since the English word “Hell” did not exist in Bible times. English dictionaries also don’t give us a good definition of “Hell,” as these quotes demonstrate:

“1. *Bible* the place where the spirits of the dead are: identified with *Sheol* and *Hades* 2. [often H-] a) *Christianity* **the place where devils live** and to which variously sinners and unbelievers are doomed to **eternal punishment** after death” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, emphasis added)

“1. the place or state of punishment of the wicked after death; the abode of evil and condemned spirits; *Gehenna or Tartarus*. ...

5. the abode of the dead; *Sheol or Hades*.” ([Dictionary.com Unabridged \(v 1.1\), based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary](#), emphasis added)

“1. a. often Hell The abode of condemned souls and devils in some religions; the place of **eternal punishment** for the wicked after death, **presided over by Satan**. ...

2. The abode of the dead, identified with *the Hebrew Sheol and the Greek Hades*; the underworld.” ([The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition](#), emphasis added)

“3. (Christianity) the abode of Satan and the forces of evil; where sinners suffer **eternal punishment**; “Hurl’d headlong...To bottomless perdition, there to dwell”- John Milton; “a demon from the depths of the pit”; “Hell is paved with good intentions”-Dr. Johnson [ant: heaven]

4. (religion) the world of the dead; “No one goes to *Hades* with all his immense wealth”- Theognis” ([WordNet® 3.0, © 2006 by Princeton University](#), emphasis added)

According to these dictionaries, the definition of “Hell” includes Sheol, Hades, and Gehenna. But as we have seen, these definitions are inaccurate because Hades and Gehenna are not the same thing. There’s a popular belief (described in some of the dictionary definitions above) that the devil lives in Hell and that he is the ruler of Hell. However, the truth is that he has never been there (Revelation 20:10, above, which is a prophetic passage that has not yet happened). No-one is in the Lake of Fire at the moment, and no-one has ever been there. When the devil is finally thrown into the Lake of Fire, it will be for his punishment in torment (Revelation 20:10, above). Demons (or “devils”) don’t live in Hell, and the devil will never preside over Hell, which further shows that these dictionary definitions are misleading.

To help us figure out what “Hell” is, notice that people tend to think of Heaven as being “the ultimate good place,” and people tend to think of Hell as being “the ultimate bad place.” To put it another way, there’s no place better than Heaven, and there’s no place worse than Hell. Since the Lake of Fire (Gehenna) is the final place where all unrighteous people will burn in torment day and night (as we saw above), this means that the Lake of Fire is a worse place than Hades because Hades is only a temporary prison before the unrighteous are cast into the Lake of Fire. As some of the above passages tell us, the Lake of Fire is “the second death.” Therefore, the Lake of Fire is the best definition of “Hell” because it best fits the description of being “the ultimate bad place.”

Paradise

Now that we have a better understanding of what the Bible says about Hades and the Lake of Fire, I think we can agree that Jesus did not go to the Lake of Fire to be tormented.

But did Jesus go to *Hades* after He died?

Before we try to answer this question, there's one more place that we need to know about. This place is called "Paradise," and here are some things that Bible scholars say about it:

"In paradise - ***The place where the souls of the righteous remain from death till the resurrection.***" ([Wesley's Explanatory Notes](#), verse 43, emphasis added)

"In the Jewish theology, ***the department of Hades where the blessed souls await the resurrection; and therefore equivalent to Abraham's bosom*** (Luk_16:22, Luk_16:23)." (Vincent's Word Studies, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html>, Luke 23:43, emphasis added)

"In later Jewish usage and in the NT, *paradeisos* is used for ***the abode of the blessed after death***. Paradise, before Christ's resurrection, has been thought to be ***the region of the blessed in Hades*** although it was not specifically called by that name (Luke 16:23)." (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, p.1102, emphasis added)

So according to a number of Bible scholars, Paradise was the section of Hades where Abraham and the other righteous people went after they died. Here are all of the passages in the New Testament which mention Paradise:

"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in ***paradise.***" (Luke 23:39-43)

"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." (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

"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.***" (Revelation 2:7)

Vincent's Word Studies (quoted above) says that Paradise is equivalent to "Abraham's bosom," which comes from the following passage:

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side [“Abraham’s bosom” in some translations]. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell [*Hades*], where he was in torment, he looked up *and saw Abraham far away*, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ *But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’*” (Luke 16:22-26)

So wherever the spirits of Abraham and the other righteous people were, that’s what was called “Paradise.”

In Luke 23:39-43 (above), notice that while Jesus hung on the cross He said to one of the thieves on a cross next to Him, “today you will be with me in paradise.” Jesus’ death and resurrection had not yet happened, and the Church had not yet been born, so the repentant thief did not become a Christian. Rather, he became an Old Testament saint by his faith. Therefore, after his death the repentant thief went to be with Abraham in Hades, and that place is what Jesus called “Paradise.” In fact, Jesus went to Paradise as well, because Jesus told the thief, “*I tell you the truth, today you will be **with me** in paradise.*”

Some people point out that there were no punctuation marks in the original Greek texts, and then they argue that Jesus’ words were actually, “I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise.” They dispute the placement of the comma before the word “today” on the grounds that there were no commas in the original Greek texts, and they argue that the comma should really be placed *after* the word “today” (because this fits better with their doctrines concerning Heaven). But notice that if there’s no evidence that the comma should be placed *before* the word “today” (according to the argument that some people make) then the same lack of evidence means there’s no proof that a comma should be placed *after* the word “today” (as those people want to do). As it turns out, we do have evidence that a comma should be placed *before* the word “today.”

In the NIV translation, Jesus is recorded as saying, “I tell you the truth,” 78 times in the Gospels (here are the references: Matthew 5:18, 26, 6:2, 5, 16, 8:10, 10:15, 23, 42, 11:11, 13:17, 16:28, 17:20, 18:3, 13, 18, 19:23, 28, 21:21, 31, 23:36, 24:2, 34, 47, 25:12, 40, 45, 26:13, 21, 34, Mark 3:28, 8:12, 9:1, 41, 10:15, 29, 11:23, 12:43, 13:30, 14:9, 18, 25, 30, Luke 4:24, 9:27, 12:37, 44, 18:17, 29, 21:3, 32, 23:43, John 1:51, 3:3, 5, 11, 5:19, 24, 25, 6:26, 32, 47, 53, 8:34, 51, 58, 10:1, 7, 12:24, 13:16, 20, 21, 38, 14:12, 16:7, 20, 23, 21:18).

When we look at every one of these references other than Luke 23:43 (above), we can easily see that there’s not a single example where Jesus said, “I tell you the truth today.” That was not an expression which Jesus used. Instead, Jesus frequently used the expression, “I tell you the truth,” before He explained something. Based on Jesus’ consistent use of that expression, the weight of evidence supports the view that Jesus told the repentant thief, “I tell you the truth, today you will

be with me in paradise.” This indicates that both Jesus and the repentant thief went to Paradise on the day that they died.

So the weight of evidence supports the view that Jesus went to Paradise on the day that He died, which is where Abraham and the other Old Testament saints were. Since Paradise was a compartment within Hades, this means that Jesus went to Hades after He died. This is also confirmed in Acts 2:31:

“having foreseen, he did speak concerning the rising again of the Christ, that *his soul was not left to hades*, nor did his flesh see corruption.” (Act 2:31, Young’s Literal Translation)

This verse confirms that Jesus temporarily went to Hades after He died.

What Happened to Paradise?

My article called [Beyond the Second Coming](#) explains that on Judgment Day, all unrighteous people throughout history will be resurrected and then cast into the Lake of Fire. On that day, Hades will give up all of its dead to be judged, and then Hades will no longer be needed:

“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. *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire*. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:13-15)

So the spirits of all unrighteous people will be held captive in Hades until Judgment Day, when they will be released and judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire. Hades is therefore a temporary prison.

But what about the spirits of *righteous* people being held captive in the Paradise compartment of Hades?

First, notice what Paul said (in several translations):

“Wherefore he saith, *When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive*, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that *he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?*” (Ephesians 4:8-9, KJV)

“This is why it says: “*When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train* and gave gifts to men.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that *he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?*” (Ephesians 4:8-9, NIV)

“wherefore, he saith, ‘*Having gone up on high he led captive captivity*, and gave gifts to men,’ – and that, he went up, what is it except that *he also went down first to the lower parts of the earth?*” (Ephesians 4:8-9, Young’s Literal Translation)

Bible scholars tend to say that “When he ascended up on high” refers to Jesus’ ascension into Heaven after His resurrection, and they sometimes say that “the lower parts of the earth” refers to Hades. For example, that expression is used in Psalms 63:9-10 (in various translations), which describes David’s enemies being killed and going down to Hades.

So Ephesians 4:8-9 (above) fits with what we know about Jesus, that He went down to Paradise in Hades after His death, and that He ascended into Heaven after His resurrection. But who was in captivity that He led captive when He ascended into Heaven? There are two main views, which we might refer to as the “good captives” view and the “bad captives” view.

According to the “bad captives” view, Jesus led captive such things as the devil and demons and sin and so on. The problem with this view is that the devil and demons and sin and so on have never been in captivity, and Jesus did not take them with Him when He ascended into Heaven. The devil is still active on the earth after Jesus’ ascension (e.g. Ephesians 6:10-11, 16, 2 Timothy 2:25-26, 1 Peter 5:8, James 4:7, 1 John 5:19), and demons are still active on the earth after Jesus’ ascension (e.g. Acts 8:7, 16:16, 19:13-17, 1 Corinthians 10:18-20, Ephesians 6:12, 1 Timothy 4:1-2), and sin is still active on the earth after Jesus’ ascension (e.g. Acts 3:19, 10:43, Romans 2:12, 3:9, 23, 6:12-13, 7:15-25), and so on.

Now let’s look at the “good captives” view. Again, who was in captivity, and was led by Jesus into Heaven at His ascension? The Greek word for captivity in Ephesians 4:8 (above) is only used in one other verse in the entire Bible, where it refers to *righteous* people being taken into captivity (see Revelation 13:7-10). In addition, Ephesians 4:8 (above) is a quote from Psalms 68:18, as we can see by comparing these two verses:

“This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”” (Ephesians 4:8)

“When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious – that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.” (Psalms 68:18)

Since Ephesians 4:8 is quoting from Psalms 68:18, then who are the captives that are being led in Psalms 68:18 (above)? Verse 1 of that psalm talks about God’s enemies fleeing from Him and being scattered, so they’re not being led by Him. Verse 6 says that God leads forth the prisoners with singing (or “into prosperity” in some translations), but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. Since the prisoners are going forth with singing (or into prosperity), and since they are contrasted with rebellious people, this means that they are *righteous* prisoners being led forth by God. Verse 7 says that God went out marching before His people, so again we see that God was leading *righteous* people. In verses 12 and 14 we see kings and armies fleeing in haste, so they are not being led by God. Verse 21 talks about God crushing the heads of His enemies, so they are not being led by God. Verse 22 says that the Lord will bring “them” from Bashan and bring “them” from the depths of the sea.

Bible commentaries point out that “Bashan” refers to Numbers 21:33-35 when God delivered the army of Bashan into the hands of Moses and the Israelites, and they point out that “the depths of the sea” refers to Exodus 14:21-22 when God delivered Moses and the Israelites from danger

through the parted waters of the Red Sea. So verse 22 is talking about the Lord bringing **righteous** people to safety. In verses 24 and 25 we see a procession of **righteous** people who are singing and playing music. So throughout Psalms 68, when people are led by God it's always **righteous** people. A consistent method of interpretation would mean that the captives who are led by God in Psalms 68:18 are **righteous** captives. Since Ephesians 4:8 (above) is quoting Psalms 68:18, this means that Ephesians 4:8 is referring to **righteous** captives.

Putting this all together, Ephesians 4:8 (above) describes Jesus going down to the Paradise section of Hades after His death, then leading righteous captives up to Heaven at His ascension into Heaven. Who are the righteous captives? Recall that the spirits of all righteous people who died before Jesus' resurrection were held captive in the Paradise section of Hades. Jesus went down to Paradise in Hades (as we saw earlier), and then He took all of the righteous spirits in Paradise up to Heaven.

So Paradise is now in Heaven, as Paul pointed out:

“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.” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

Bible scholars tend to say that it was Paul himself who went up to Paradise in the “third Heaven.” Notice that the first-century Jews referred to the atmosphere as the “first Heaven,” and the area of the stars as the “second Heaven,” and the “third Heaven” was considered to be where God's throne is:

“To the third heaven - The Jews sometimes speak of seven heavens, and Muhammed has borrowed this idea from the Jews. But ***the Bible speaks of but three heavens, and among the Jews in the apostolic ages also the heavens were divided into three:***

(1) The aerial, including the clouds and the atmosphere, the heavens above us, until we come to the stars.

(2) the starry heavens, the heavens in which the sun, moon, and stars appear to be situated.

(3) the heavens beyond the stars. That heaven was supposed to be the residence of God, of angels, and of holy spirits. ***It was this upper heaven, the dwelling-place of God, to which Paul was taken***, and whose wonders he was permitted to behold - this region where God dwelt; where Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father, and where the spirits of the just were assembled.” (Barnes, from <http://www.e-sword.net/commentaries.html> , 2 Corinthians 12:2, emphasis added)

“Paul was permitted not only to “hear” the things of Paradise, but to see also in some degree the things of the third heaven (compare “visions,” 2 Corinthians 12:1). ... ***The first heaven is that of the clouds, the air; the second, that of the stars, the sky; the third is spiritual*** (Ephesians 4:10).” ([Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary](#), verse 2, emphasis added)

“**Even to the third heaven** (*ewβ tritou ouranou*). It is unlikely that Paul alludes to the idea of seven heavens held by some Jews (Test. of the Twelve Pat., Levi ii. iii.). **He seems to mean the highest heaven where God is** (Plummer).” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament](#))

“It is plain from 12:6,7, that he [Paul] means himself, though in modesty he speaks as of a third person. ... **The third heaven - Where God is; far above the aerial and the starry heaven.** Some suppose it was here the apostle was let into the mystery of the future state of the church; and received his orders to turn from the Jews and go to the gentiles.” ([Wesley’s Explanatory Notes](#), verse 2)

So Paul was caught up to Paradise, which he said is in the “third Heaven” where God is. In addition, Paul said that when he died he will immediately be with Christ (in Heaven):

“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! I am torn between the two: I desire to **depart and be with Christ**, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” (Philippians 1:22-24)

Since Paul said that he will be with Christ right after he died, this tells us that he would go to Heaven rather than going to Hades. Again, righteous people no longer go to the Paradise section of Hades after we die, but instead we immediately go to Heaven (where Paradise is now).

Do We Go into “Soul Sleep” until the Resurrection?

When death is referred to as “sleep” in the Bible, people sometimes assume that death must be a state in which we are completely unaware (“asleep”) until we are resurrected. But is “sleep” meant to be taken literally when it refers to death?

Consider that if we say, “Blackbeard’s ship was sunk, and now he’s sleeping with the fishes,” this is simply a figurative way of saying that he’s dead. Or if we say, “Johnnie is dead to the world,” this is simply a figurative way of saying that he’s sleeping soundly. So in modern times we sometimes use the word “sleep” as a figurative reference to death, and we sometimes use the word “dead” as a figurative reference to sleep.

We use figurative language quite a lot in everyday speaking, and the Bible uses quite a lot of figurative language as well. For example, Jesus said that He had been speaking **figuratively** to the disciples, and He said that someday He will speak **plainly**:

“Though I have been speaking **figuratively**, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you **plainly** about my Father.” (John 16:25)

So speaking “plainly” is the opposite of speaking “figuratively.” With that in mind, take a look at the following passage:

“After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them *plainly*, “Lazarus is dead”“ (John 11:11-14)

Notice that Jesus told the disciples *plainly* that Lazarus was dead, because they misunderstood His *figurative* language when He said that Lazarus was “sleeping.” Jesus was using figurative language, not teaching a doctrine of “soul sleep.”

Here’s another example where Jesus used the word “sleeping” in a figurative way in the context of some parables concerning the Second Coming (see my article called [The Rapture of the Church - Part Eight](#)):

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you *sleeping*.” (Mark 13:35-36)

Here’s another example of using the word “sleeping” in a figurative way:

“In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been *sleeping*.” (2 Peter 2:3)

So the idea of “sleeping” is sometimes used *figuratively* in the New Testament.

Now, notice that when John saw a vision of heaven, he saw the souls of dead saints there:

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.” (Revelation 6:9-11)

In the above passage, the souls of dead saints are *not* sleeping. Instead, they continue to have their own memories and feelings, and they are able to communicate, and so on.

As we saw earlier, Jesus described the departed spirits of righteous and unrighteous people being held captive in Hades:

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good

things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.’” (Luke 16:22-25)

This might be a parable, but we have seen that *all* of Jesus’ parables used real places and realistic people and events. Jesus never invented fantasy locations and fantasy characters for His parables, so if the above passage is a parable then it’s reasonable to conclude that Jesus was describing the reality of Hades, because Jesus *always* used reality in His parables. In the above passage, Jesus described the souls of dead people with memories and feelings and desires, and these departed spirits are able to recognize and communicate with each other. They are not “soul sleeping.”

In the next verse, Jesus told a man that he would be with Jesus in Paradise that very day (after their deaths):

“Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”” (Luke 23:43)

Jesus and the thief both went to Hades after they died, as we saw earlier. Luke 16:22-25 (above) indicates that they were awake and comforted in Hades, not “soul sleeping.”

Here’s another one:

“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:18-20)

The above passage mentions people who were disobedient in Noah’s time, and it says that their spirits are in “prison” (in Hades), which fits perfectly with Luke 16:22-25 (above).

In the next passage, notice that if we are “away from the body” (another *figurative* reference to death) then we are not “asleep” but instead we are “at home with the Lord”:

“Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be *away from the body and at home with the Lord.*” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

On another occasion, Paul said that he desired to depart (another *figurative* reference to death) and be with Christ:

“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! I am torn between the two: *I desire to depart and be with Christ*, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” (Philippians 1:22-24)

Paul did not say or imply that he was looking forward to seeing Christ after a long “sleep,” but instead Paul was looking forward to “departing and being with Christ.” When we depart our bodies then we are with Christ in Heaven.

People sometimes use Ecclesiastes 9:5 as evidence of “soul sleep,” but look closely at that statement in its proper context:

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6)

Notice that in addition to saying that the dead know nothing, the above passage also says that the dead have no further reward. If we take this literally (as people do with the “know nothing” part), then this passage contradicts all of the New Testament teachings concerning our future rewards (for example, see my series called [The Rapture of the Church](#)). Plus, the above passage says that even the *memory* of the dead is forgotten, which is clearly not literally true because we can easily remember numerous people who are dead. Plus, the above passage says that the dead will never have a part in anything that happens under the sun, but if we take this literally then it contradicts all of the New Testament teachings concerning the resurrection of the dead. The above passage contains *figurative* language from a man who was very wise, but who did not have our New Testament revelation of what happens after we die.

What Did Jesus Do While He Was in Hades?

In 1 Peter 3:18-20, on the surface it appears to say that Jesus preached to some departed spirits while He was in Hades:

“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive *by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.*” (1 Peter 3:18-20)

People sometimes interpret this passage to mean that when Jesus went down to Hades, He preached to some spirits there. However, this interpretation has a number of problems:

1. Which spirits did Jesus preach to? Did He preach to the spirits of the *unrighteous* people in Hades? Did He preach to the spirits of the righteous people in the Paradise section of Hades? Did He preach to the fallen angels in Tartarus? To answer these questions, notice that Jesus preached specifically to those who were disobedient in the time of Noah. But why did He only preach to them, and not to anyone else in Hades?
2. What did Jesus preach to the people from Noah’s time? Did He preach the Gospel to them and offer them salvation? If so, then why did He only offer salvation to the people who were disobedient in Noah’s time, and not to the other unrighteous people in Hades?
3. If Jesus was not preaching the Gospel in Hades, then did He “preach” in the sense of proclaiming His victory? If so, then why did He only proclaim His victory to the spirits from Noah’s time, and not to anyone else in Hades?
4. In the passage which we are studying (1 Peter 3:18-20, above), notice that it says that Jesus was made alive *by the Spirit, through whom He preached*. Why does this specifically say

that Jesus preached a message “through the Spirit”? If Jesus was right there in Hades then why didn’t He preach this message Himself?

So if we interpret 1 Peter 3:18-20 (above) as meaning that Jesus “preached” something while He was in Hades, then we run into a number of difficult questions. However, there’s another way to interpret 1 Peter 3:18-20 (above) which does *not* bring up those issues. First, here’s an illustration. My Granddad was a Presbyterian minister in North Carolina for many years, and there was a graveyard on the grounds of his church. Undoubtedly some of the people in his congregation were buried there over the years. So if I visit the church where my Granddad used to preach, I could point to the graveyard and say that my Granddad preached to many of the dead people who are buried there. Obviously I don’t mean that those people were dead when my Granddad preached to them, but instead I mean that he preached to them while they were alive and that now they are in these graves. With that illustration in mind, let’s look at 1 Peter 3:18-20 again in a literal translation of the Bible:

“because also Christ once for sin did suffer – righteous for unrighteous – that he might lead us to God, having been put to death indeed, in the flesh, and having been made alive in the spirit, in which also to the spirits in prison having gone he did preach, who sometime disbelieved, when once the long-suffering of God did wait, in days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:18-20, Young’s Literal Translation)

According to various Bible scholars (see below), it’s valid to interpret this passage as meaning that Jesus preached through the Spirit to the unbelievers in Noah’s time (while they were still alive), and that they were dead and confined to Hades when Peter wrote the above passage. In other words, this is not something that Jesus did when He went down to Hades after He died on the cross, but instead this was a message proclaimed by the Holy Spirit through Noah to the people who lived in Noah’s time. Here are some things that Bible scholars say about 1 Peter 3:18-20:

“Wohlenberg holds that *Peter means that Christ in his preexistent state preached to those who rejected the preaching of Noah who are now in prison. Augustine held that Christ was in Noah when he preached. ... The language is plain enough except that it does not make it clear whether Jesus did the preaching to spirits in prison at the time or to people whose spirits are now in prison*” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament](#), emphasis added)

“By which Spirit he preached - *Through the ministry of Noah*. To the spirits in prison - *The unholy men before the flood*, who were then reserved by the justice of God, as in a prison, till he executed the sentence upon them all; and are now also reserved to the judgment of the great day.” ([Wesley’s Explanatory Notes](#), verse 19, emphasis added)

“As “He CAME and preached peace” *by His Spirit* in the apostles and ministers after His death and ascension: *so before His incarnation He preached in Spirit through Noah to the antediluvians* [i.e. to the people who lived before the Flood]” ([Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary](#), emphasis added)

“The plain and easy sense of the words is, that *Christ, by his Spirit*, by which he was quickened, *went in the ministry of Noah*, the preacher of righteousness, *and preached both by words and deeds, by the personal ministry of Noah, and by the building of the ark, to that generation who was then in being*; and who being disobedient, and continuing so, a flood was brought upon them which destroyed them all; and whose spirits, or separate souls, were then in the prison of hell” ([Gill’s Exposition of the Bible](#), emphasis added)

“As to the old world, *Christ sent his Spirit; gave warning by Noah*. But though the patience of God waits long, it will cease at last. And the spirits of disobedient sinners, as soon as they are out of their bodies, are committed to the prison of hell, where those that despised Noah’s warning now are, and from whence there is no redemption.” ([Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary](#), emphasis added)

“for Christ is he who in those days (when God through his patience appointed a time of repentance to the world) was present, not in corporal presence, but by his divine power, *preaching repentance, even by the mouth of Noah himself who then prepared the ark, to those disobedient spirits who are now in prison*, waiting for the full recompense of their rebellion” ([Geneva Study Bible](#), emphasis added)

So a number of Bible scholars believe that Jesus preached by the Holy Spirit through Noah to the people of Noah’s time while they were still alive, which would mean that 1 Peter 3:18-20 (above) doesn’t say that Jesus “preached” to anyone after He went down to Hades. Perhaps He did preach or proclaim His victory after He arrived in Hades, but this doesn’t appear to be what 1 Peter 3:18-20 (above) is talking about.

Elijah

We have seen that the righteous people who died before the cross all went *down* to the Paradise compartment in Hades. But then how do we explain what happened to Elijah?

“As they [Elijah and Elisha] were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, *and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.*” (2 Kings 2:11)

This verse says that Elijah went *up* to “Heaven” in a whirlwind. Since Elijah was a righteous man who lived before the cross, shouldn’t he have gone *down* to the Paradise compartment of Hades, as we have seen throughout this article?

If we interpret 2 Kings 2:11 (above) as saying that Elijah went directly up to the “third Heaven” (where God lives) then we run into problems with other passages of Scripture. For example, notice that Paul said that we will all be “changed” (“translated”) from mortality to immortality when Jesus returns at the Rapture because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God: “I declare to you, brothers, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, *but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will*

sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-53)

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will ***transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.***” (Philippians 3:20-21)

These passages say that our mortal bodies will be “glorified” or “changed” or “translated” when Jesus returns for us at the Rapture and takes us up into Heaven (see my series called [The Rapture of the Church](#)). The implication is that we can’t go into Heaven in our mortal flesh-and-blood bodies, so how could Elijah have physically gone into Heaven in the whirlwind? The only way to explain it would be to say that he was “translated” and given his glorified, immortal body, but how was it possible for Elijah to become glorified and immortal before Jesus’ death and resurrection? After all, the only reason why humans are able to gain entrance into Heaven is because Jesus made this possible, yet Elijah was carried up to “Heaven” long before Jesus was born.

Another problem is that Jesus specifically said that ***no-one*** has ever gone into Heaven:

“***No one has ever gone into heaven*** except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.” (John 3:13)

Jesus said that ***no-one*** other than Himself had ***ever*** gone into Heaven, so why does 2 Kings 2:11 (above) say that Elijah went up to “Heaven” long before Jesus was born?

Sometimes people interpret John 3:13 (above) as meaning that no-one had ever ascended into heaven and then ***returned*** to talk about it. However, Jesus specifically said that no-one had ever gone ***into*** Heaven. In fact, Jesus also said:

“***No one has ever seen God***, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18)

“***No one has seen the Father*** except the one who is from God; ***only he has seen the Father.***” (John 6:46)

Consider that God the Father lives in Heaven (the “third Heaven”), so if no-one had ever seen the Father then this means that no-one had ever gone into the “third Heaven” (because if we believe otherwise then we would need to prove that a person could go into the “third Heaven” and ***not*** see God). Since Jesus said that ***no-one*** had ever gone into Heaven, and He said that ***no-one*** had ever seen God, then Elijah could not have been taken up into the “third Heaven” where God lives.

Here’s another explanation of 2 Kings 2:11 (above) which resolves these apparent contradictions, and which fits with the rest of the evidence in the Bible concerning Paradise and Hades. Recall that Bible scholars say that the ancient Jews considered the “first Heaven” to be the sky, and they considered the “second Heaven” to be where the stars are, and the “third

Heaven” was considered to be where God’s throne is. Since the word “Heaven” has different meanings, it’s possible that Elijah was simply carried by the whirlwind up into the “first Heaven” (the sky). Notice that the prophets from Jericho who witnessed the whirlwind sent 50 men to search for Elijah (2 Kings 2:15-17). They didn’t find Elijah’s body, but it’s interesting that they did not assume that Elijah had been taken up into the “third Heaven.” Instead, they said that “Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley” (2 Kings 2:16). So even the prophets who witnessed this event did not assume that Elijah had been taken up into the “third Heaven,” but instead they thought that his body might have been taken somewhere else on earth.

Based on all of the evidence, perhaps Elijah was lifted up into the “first Heaven” (the sky) by the whirlwind, and then Elijah’s spirit was taken to Paradise in Hades (we’re not told what happened to his body). Or perhaps he was carried by the whirlwind and then deposited alive in some other location. Either explanation fits with all of the Scriptural evidence.

After Elijah was taken by the whirlwind, the prophet Elisha took over Elijah’s role (2 Kings 2:1-15). At some point in time, the king of Judah (Jehoram) received a letter from Elijah containing a prophecy of Jehoram’s death (2 Chr 21:12-15), which was accurately fulfilled (2Chr 21:16-20). It’s a bit tricky trying to sort out the timing of events at the end of 1 Kings and the beginning of 2 Kings (plus the parallel passages in 2 Chronicles), but it’s possible that Jehoram received this letter *after* Elijah was taken up in the whirlwind. In Bible commentaries, the three main theories for this are:

1. Perhaps Elijah received the prophecy sometime before the whirlwind took him (even years before), and then he wrote the letter to be delivered at the appropriate time.
2. Perhaps the whirlwind carried Elijah to another place where he lived out his years, and he wrote the letter from his new location.
3. Perhaps an ancient scribe was copying the Bible, and he accidentally put Elijah’s name in 2 Chronicles 21:12 instead of the name of the prophet who actually wrote the letter.

Since we don’t know which theory is correct, the letter to King Jehoram doesn’t add anything to our understanding of what happened to Elijah in the whirlwind.

Enoch

In addition to Elijah, we also need to examine what happened to Enoch:

“Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. *Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.*” (Genesis 5:23-24)

“*By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away.* For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.” (Hebrews 11:5)

There are many ways that people experience death (drowning, heart attack, cancer, old age, etc.), but the above verses say that Enoch did not experience death because God took him away. The

Bible doesn't tell us where Enoch went, but if we say that Enoch was taken up into the "third Heaven" (*before* the cross) then we run into the same problems that we saw concerning Elijah.

When we look at Hebrews 11:5 (above) in a more literal translation of the Bible, it appears that Enoch was "translated":

"By faith **Enoch was translated** [*metatithemi*] – not to see death, and was not found, **because God did translate** [*metatithemi*] **him**; for before **his translation** [*metatithemi*] he had been testified to – that he had pleased God well" (Hebrews 11:5, Young's Literal Translation)

The Greek word for "translate" in this verse (*metatithemi*) means:

"to **transfer**, that is, (literally) **transport**, (by implication) exchange, (reflexively) change sides, or (figuratively) pervert: - **carry over**, change, **remove**, **translate**, turn." (Strong's Greek Dictionary)

Christians tend to use the word "translate" when we talk about our physical bodies being "glorified" and "changed" from mortality to immortality at the Rapture. If we say that a similar meaning is intended in Hebrews 11:5 (above), then this would imply that Enoch was "translated" and taken up into the "third Heaven" where God lives. But remember, Jesus said that **no-one** had ever gone into Heaven, and that **no-one** had seen the Father, which means that Enoch could not have gone into the "third Heaven."

So here's a possible explanation. If Enoch was "transferred" to Paradise in Hades, or if he was "transported" to Paradise in Hades, or if he was "carried over" to Paradise in Hades, or if he was "removed" to Paradise in Hades, then this information can be stated using the same Greek word *metatithemi* which is used in Hebrews 11:5 (above), according to Strong's Greek Dictionary (above). Therefore, it's easily possible that Enoch was "taken away" to Paradise in Hades. This explanation is supported by the fact that the same Greek word *metatithemi* is used four more times in the New Testament, and it never has the meaning of being "translated" from mortality to immortality:

"Their bodies were **brought back** [*metatithemi*] to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money." (Acts 7:16)

"I am astonished that you are so quickly **deserting** [*metatithemi*] the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – " (Galatians 1:6)

"For when there is a **change** [*metatithemi*] of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law." (Hebrews 7:12)

"For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who **change** [*metatithemi*] the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." (Jude 1:4)

These are the only places where *metatithemi* is used in the New Testament other than in Hebrews 11:5 (above), and we can see that it's never used in the sense of someone being glorified and taken up into Heaven.

The explanation that Enoch was “transferred/transported/carried over/removed” to Paradise in Hades best fits all of the Scriptural evidence. He didn't “experience” death in any of the ways that other people do, but his body *did* die because it's un-Scriptural to say that his body was taken up into the “third heaven” before the cross.

Conclusion

We saw that the Hebrew word *Sheol* is equivalent to the Greek word *Hades*, and they refer to a temporary “prison” where the spirits of all of the unrighteous people throughout history will remain until Judgment Day.

We saw that the Greek word *Tartarus* refers to a “dungeon” (possibly within Hades) in which certain fallen angels are being held until Judgment Day.

We saw that Hades is described as being under (or inside) the earth.

We saw that the Greek word *Gehenna* is equivalent to the Lake of Fire, and this is the place where all of the unrighteous people throughout history will be tormented day and night (along with the devil and his demons). This is probably the place that most people would associate with the English word “Hell.” In that case, Jesus did not go to Hell after He died.

We saw that “Paradise” was a compartment within Hades in which the spirits of all of the righteous people were held until after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension into Heaven.

We saw that Jesus went down to Hades after He died, and then He took the Paradise compartment of Hades up into Heaven. So Paradise and all of the Old Testament saints are now in Heaven, and Christians go straight to Heaven when we die (rather than going down to Hades first).

We saw that no-one goes into “soul sleep” after they die.

Finally, we examined some theories of what might have happened to Elijah and Enoch.

All for Your glory, Lord Jesus!

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