

Hades And Sheol

The Unseen World to Which Spirits of the Old Testament Went

Often, therefore, it is spoken of as the equivalent of the grave, where all human activities cease; the terminus toward which all human life moves (e.g. Gen 42:38; Job 14:13; Ps 88:3).

To the man 'under the sun', the natural man, who of necessity judges from appearances, Sheol seems no more than the grave.

Scripture reveals Sheol as a place of sorrow (2 Sam 22:6; Ps 18:5; 116:3), into which the wicked are turned, Psalms 9:17, and where they are fully conscious (Is 14:9-17; Ez 32:21). Compare Jonah 2:2; what the belly of the great fish was to Jonah, Sheol is to those who are therein. The Sheol of the Old Testament and Hades of the New Testament are identical.

The Greek word "Hades" (like its Hebrew equivalent, Sheol) is used in two ways; (1) to indicate the condition of the unsaved between death and the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11-15). Luke 16:23, 24 shows the lost in Hades are conscious, possess full use of their faculties, memory, etc., and are in torment. This continues until the final judgment of the lost (2 Pt 2:9), when all the unsaved and Hades itself, will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:13-15). (2) To indicate, in general, the condition of all departed human spirits between death and the resurrection. This usage is found occasionally in the Old Testament, but rarely, if ever, in the New Testament (cp. Gen 27:35; 42:38; 44:21, 29). It should not lead anyone to think there is a possibility of change from the one state to the other after death, for Luke 16:23 shows when the unsaved man who was in Hades saw Abraham and Lazarus, they were "afar off", verse 26 states that between the two places there is a great gulf fixed, so that no one can pass from one to the other.

Some interpreters think Ephesians 4:8-10 indicates a change in the place of the departed believers occurred at the resurrection of Christ. It is certain that all who are saved go at once into the presence of Christ (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23). Jesus told the penitent thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43). Paradise is a place of great joy and bliss but this bliss is not complete until the spirit is reunited with a glorified body at the resurrection of the just (1 Cor 15:51-54; 1 Thes 4:16, 17). Paul was "caught up to the third heaven . . . into paradise" (2 Cor 12:1-4). Though both Sheol and Hades are sometimes translated "grave" (cp. Gen 37:35; 1 Cor 15:55), they never indicate a burial place but rather, the state of the spirit after death.

"Hell" in Acts 2:27-31 should read "Hades." Our Lord's soul did not go into Hell, but it did go into Hades, which until His resurrection included the abode of the saved and that of the lost, though these were separated by a "great gulf fixed" and impassable (Lk 15:26). At His resurrection He took with Him to Heaven all the saved out of Hades, and since that time, the saved, at death, go immediately to "be with the Lord in Heaven" (Eph 4:8-10; 2 Cor 5:6-8). It is only the saved spirits which go to God. The lost go to their "own place" (Acts 1:25), awaiting the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11-15).