

# What's The Deal With Death?

## Part 2

By

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### The New Testament Revelation

As far as the New Testament (NT) goes, it begins by teaching virtually the same as the OT revelation on the subject (that is, surprisingly it doesn't reveal much at all about the intermediate state). Here is what Murray J. Harris had to say on the subject.

"When we remember the paucity of New Testament data about the interim state, it is not surprising how little direct light the New Testament sheds on the issue of embodiment during that period. Most of the evidence is ambiguous and therefore inconclusive. We can no more claim that the appearance of Moses and Elijah in bodily form on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:30-33) proves that some form of embodiment is received at death than we can establish this conclusion by citing the reference in the parable of Jesus to the eyes and the tongue of the rich man and the finger of Lazarus (Luke 16:23-4)! One of these examples is clearly exceptional (and, what is more, Elijah had never died), while the other is parabolic."<sup>1</sup> (Underline mine)

In the NT, Sheol now becomes Hades (as in the Septuagint), but both terms refer to the same thing – the place of the spirits of the dead. Death is viewed as a sleep, particularly as related to the body, while the spirit or soul (that is, the inner person or essence of being)<sup>2</sup> goes to Hades to await the resurrection. The spirit of a human, in general (according to Ecclesiastes 12:7), returns to God who gave it, although there isn't any indication that the spirit is in a conscious state after death.<sup>3</sup>

When we come to the NT, death is still viewed as a sleep. Take, for example, John 11:11-14, which speaks for itself really.

<sup>11</sup> 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."

<sup>12</sup> His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better."<sup>13</sup> **Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.**

<sup>14</sup> So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,<sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." (NIV)

The awesome miraculous sign of the resurrection of Lazarus that is recorded in this chapter was to show that God alone had the power to conquer death, and Jesus was the channel through which God would raise the dead, for he is the resurrection and the life. Lazarus' resurrection was, nevertheless, only a temporary one, a sign of something far greater to come – immortality within a spiritual body. Only the apostle Paul begins to reveal these things in greater detail in his letters.

Beginning with the gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, the NT writers reveal Hades as primarily the place of the spirits of the *unrighteous*, *unbelieving* dead, while the righteous dead are viewed as being in a place or state of blessing with/or near God. One of the primary texts that talks about this is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

### The Rich Man and Lazarus

During the Intertestamental Period, before the arrival of Jesus, Rabbinic Judaism had begun to view Hades as being separated into two, with the wicked (or unbelievers) on one side, and the righteous on the other side.<sup>4</sup> This kind of thinking is reflected in Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16 (this being a different Lazarus to the one mentioned above).

Much has been made about the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus among Christian teachers. The general consensus among bible commentators is that the original purpose of this parable was not to literally unveil the position of the dead in Hades. It is clear that Jesus made good use of certain phrases and ideas that he had evidently borrowed from the Rabbinic Judaism of the day, although he was probably using a little irony as a means of correcting and rebuking the teachers of the Law.

Be that as it may, it is still highly probable that something about the realm of the dead was being revealed here, but it has more to do with the judgment of God after death. Therefore, although caution must be taken when interpreting this parable, seeking to avoid too much 'literalism', the message or warning it contains is vitally important – and it does involve the destiny of human souls.

The New Bible Commentary (21<sup>st</sup> Century edition) has this to say about it.

"The story is a parable, and therefore does not necessarily give literal information about conditions in the next life. 'Hades' was the abode of the dead in popular Jewish belief, and it is not clear whether Jesus was referring to the time before or after the final judgment. Yet the clear implication is that the fate of the rich man was finally fixed. Although the language is manifestly symbolic when it talks of the poor man being beside Abraham, it speaks of real destinies for people." (p. 1007)

Here is the parable quoted in full.

"There was **a rich man** who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid **a beggar named Lazarus**, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"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 (*Gr. 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.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

"He said to him, '**If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.**' "

(Luke 16:19-31 NIV)

In this parable, Jesus actually used some of the terms and phrases that were commonly used by some of the Jewish Rabbis from their traditions (terms such as, Abraham's side or bosom; the angels carrying the dead; the figurative use of Hades & Paradise, with a great gulf between them; the dead talking to one another, etc).<sup>5</sup> There are examples of this in the Talmud.<sup>6</sup>

As already stated above, it is unlikely that these things were supposed to be taken literally, as some believe. Jesus was evidently employing a little irony, and using the Pharisees' own traditions to teach them something gravely important - the eternal destiny of the righteous and the unrighteous before, and after, the great day of judgment.

The religious leaders are portrayed as the Rich Man, dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury and self-indulgence; while the poor and infirm amongst the people are represented by Lazarus, the beggar. The name Lazarus comes from the Hebrew *Elazar*, which means *God is my Helper*. The religious leaders were corrupt and vainglorious, and they misused their wealth and position to exploit the poor and needy. Only those who turned to God for help, while being faithful no matter what their circumstances, would receive true deliverance.

The rich man never lifts a finger to help Lazarus, who is laid by his gate, covered in sores and longing for some food. Even the dogs lick his sores, which could've been a veiled reference to the fact that even 'Gentile dogs' had sympathy for Lazarus, and tried to help him, much in the same manner as the Good Samaritan cared for the

wounded Jew, while the religious elite just walked on by, not wishing to become ceremonially unclean (cf. Luke 10:25-37).

Then Jesus speaks figuratively about the death of each, revealing that once they had died, their destiny in the age to come was sealed, for they were separated by a great chasm or gulf, and the rich man could not just hop over to the other side. The unrighteous rich man was in Hades, the common place of the dead, while righteous Lazarus was with Abraham.

Lazarus was carried by angels and placed in heavenly Paradise with Abraham and the fathers of the Faith, being blessed with good things. This represents the inheritance of the kingdom of God, the blessing of 'eternal' life and nearness to God. On the other hand, the rich man was in a place of torment, experiencing the curse of a fiery punishment, made worse by the fact that, looking up, he could see Lazarus and Abraham on the other side.

Ultimately, the NT reveals that this place of torment represented the ultimate 'Gehenna of Fire,' 'the Lake of Fire,' 'the eternal fire,' the 'eternal punishment' and 'destruction' of 'the Second Death,' which 'the lost' will experience after the great Judgment Day (cf. Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 25:31-46; we will consider Gehenna later). Nevertheless, this could also have been revealing that some form of punishment or loss is experienced by the unrighteous immediately after death, though this is highly debatable (cf. 2 Peter 2:9).

The rich man longs to have his tongue cooled with water, which is symbolic of longing to receive the blessings of the Spirit of God to bring an end to the fiery chastening. Now that his eyes have been opened, though a little too late to avoid the inevitable judgment, he begs for Lazarus to go and tell his living brothers about their coming judgment. Yet Abraham, the man of faith, who represents the believing remnant, advises them to listen to the voice of Moses and the Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. The rich man reckons that this is not enough to convince them of the truth, so he reasons that if someone from the dead goes to them, they will listen.

Now here's the crunch line. Abraham is seen to reply with the following sobering words, '*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*' What an awesome statement to conclude the parable with. Jesus was using this statement to reveal to that generation that they had a wicked, adulterous, unbelieving heart, whose leaders, and the people in general, would not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, even though he was to rise from the dead. Ultimately, they would not be convinced even if the Son of God himself told them the truth!

That speaks volumes. No matter how much they claimed to believe in the Hebrew Scriptures, Yahweh was being revealed to them in Jesus of Nazareth. Rejecting Christ, and the true way of righteousness, was tantamount to rejecting the testimony of Moses and the Prophets.

So, to sum this parable up, the hypocritical rich man was judged by his actions, which revealed his lack of real faith in God's commands, and he received punishment in a 'place of fiery torment.' On the other hand, Lazarus was also judged for his faithful actions and his humble circumstances (of which the former may have led to

the latter), and he received blessing along with Abraham in a 'place of paradise', being associated with the angels of God.

At other times, Jesus used similar metaphors to this to describe the consequences of the coming judgment at his Parousia (that is, his Coming or Presence), for not all would inherit the kingdom of God. Here is one such example that echoes well the lesson behind the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

He said to them, <sup>24</sup> "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, **because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.** <sup>25</sup> Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

<sup>26</sup> "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

<sup>27</sup> "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

<sup>28</sup> "**There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.** <sup>29</sup> People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

(Luke 13:22-30 NIV)

This had special relevance to the Jews of Jesus' generation – and according to Christ's words here, the vast majority would not enter the kingdom, even though they claimed to know Him! Nevertheless, many would also come from all over the world to take their place in the kingdom celebrations – essentially meaning Gentile believers. Yet the warning here is very sobering – for every generation.

Now let us move on to discover what the NT reveals about Death and Hades, and the intermediate state, particularly for 'believers in Christ' after his resurrection.

## Death & Hades

A careful study of Hades in the NT will reveal that, particularly after Jesus' resurrection, it takes on more of a negative tone. It becomes the place of the unrighteous dead, particularly as a result of God's judgment and wrath. In contrast, followers of Christ are always associated with 'paradise', representing the dwelling place of God (we shall consider the subject of 'paradise' shortly). Hades is often associated closely with Death, whereas those in Christ are associated with Paradise & Life.

Let us consider some of these NT texts about Hades.

<sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? **No, you will go down to Hades.** For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

(Matthew 11:23-24 NIV; also Luke 10:15)

In this verse, Jesus was pronouncing judgment on the town of Capernaum because of their unbelief and lack of repentance in view of all the miracles he had performed there. Some translations (e.g. KJV) render the first part of the verse as a statement rather than a question, so it reads something like this, "*And you Capernaum have been lifted up to the heavens, but you will be brought down to hades.*"

Jesus had made Capernaum in Galilee his home base at the beginning of his ministry, probably staying at Peter's house (cf. Matthew 4:13). In this way, the town had been 'exalted to the heavens' through the presence of the Son of God in their midst. Nevertheless, due to their unbelief the town was going to be judged and 'brought down to Hades' during the coming 'great tribulation' of the Roman/Jewish war of 67-70 AD. Jesus was probably echoing the well-known words of Isaiah 14:13-15, which were originally spoken against the ruler of ancient Babylon.

<sup>13</sup> You said in your heart,  
    "I will ascend to the heavens;  
I will raise my throne  
    above the stars of God;  
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,  
    on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon (*or the secret mountain*).

<sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;  
    I will make myself like the Most High."

<sup>15</sup> **But you are brought down to the realm of the dead (*Heb. Sheol*),  
    to the depths of the pit.**

The then-approaching judgments that were to fall upon the land of Judea and all of Palestine - particularly the city of Jerusalem that had become as Babylon - were symbolically depicted in the vision of Revelation; things that were said to be near (cf. Revelation 1:1-3; 14:8).

<sup>8</sup> 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 (*or land*) to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

(Revelation 6:8 NIV)

The opening of the fourth seal unleashes Death personified as the rider on the pale horse, with Hades following close behind. They are given authority over a fourth of the land to kill with sword, famine and plague, and wild beasts (probably signifying evil men & demons). This was evidently referring to the judgment upon the unrighteous in the land, and not to the followers of Christ.

It is interesting to note that in the fifth seal that follows in Revelation 6:9-11, the destiny of the Christian martyrs is shown to be that of rest in God's presence while they await their full redemption, which was to be *'in a little while'*, at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (cf. 11:15-18). Therefore, in the same manner as Jesus had prophesied about Capernaum, *many* of the towns and cities of Israel were to be *'brought down to Hades'* in the soon-coming Day of the Lord.

Nevertheless, Jesus had promised something very different for his followers.

<sup>18</sup> "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church (or assembly), **and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**"

(Matthew 16:18 NIV)

The called-out assembly (or church; Gk. *ekklesia*) that Christ was about to begin building, a holy people that would become a figurative temple of God, would not be overcome by the gates of Hades. That is to say, the spiritual powers of darkness, along with the realm of death & hades (pictured as a prison-fortress with gates), would not be victorious over God's people in Christ – even though the powers of darkness (represented as various beasts in Revelation) would seek to obliterate Christ's people through persecution and martyrdom. Jesus' disciples were to heed the following powerful words of their Teacher.

<sup>22</sup> "You will be hated by everyone because of me, **but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.** <sup>23</sup> When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes..."

<sup>28</sup> "**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** (Gk. *Gehenna*). <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. <sup>30</sup> And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

(Matthew 10:22-23, 28-31 NIV)

The message here is very clear: All true followers of Jesus throughout the generations should heed these sobering, yet encouraging, words. Do not fear humans who can destroy your body but cannot kill your soul (or essence of being), but rather fear God who has the power to destroy both your soul and your body in Gehenna, the Second Death. Very sobering words indeed!

The writer of Hebrews goes on to show that, in the era before Jesus' death and resurrection, Satan, the spiritual adversary of God (also known as the 'devil'), was the one who held the power of death over God's people, causing them to be in slavery to their fear of Death and Hades.

<sup>14</sup> Since the children have flesh and blood, he (*i.e. Jesus*) too shared in their humanity **so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—** <sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. <sup>16</sup> For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.

(Hebrews 2:14-16 NIV)

Therefore, it was the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus that conquered the powers of darkness, so that now it is Jesus alone who holds the keys to the gates of Death & Hades, and not Satan. Here are the words of Christ himself recorded in the vision of Revelation that confirms this truth.

<sup>18</sup> "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! **And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**"

(Revelation 1:18 NIV)

Paul also spoke of Christ's triumph over the kingdom of darkness in Ephesians 4:8-10, where, quoting Psalm 68:18, he revealed that Christ had first descended to this earth to conquer death, after which he then took captivity captive (or led captives in his train, depending on the translation) when he ascended on high to his rightful place at God's right hand, far above all other powers in the universe (cf. Philippians 2:5-11).

<sup>8</sup> This is why it says:

**"When he ascended on high,  
he took many captives  
and gave gifts to his people."**

<sup>9</sup> (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (NIV)

Some believe that those who were taken captive here were the spirits of the dead in Hades. This is possible, for Christ now has the keys of Death and Hades, and only those 'in Christ' are set free from Death, which leaves 'the rest of the dead' in captivity to Death. Be that as it may, the 'captives' (or the 'captivity') appear to be placed in contrast to God's people, the ones who receive the spiritual gifts. It is therefore more likely that the spiritual powers of darkness are the intended subjects here.

This text could also be related to the strange passage in 1 Peter 3:18b-22, where Peter speaks of Christ preaching to '*the spirits in prison*' who had disobeyed back in the days of Noah.

He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. <sup>19</sup> **After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—** <sup>20</sup> to those who were disobedient 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, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. (NIV)

This was evidently a victory proclamation that occurred after Jesus had been '*put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit*'. It is possible that these 'spirits in



prison' were not human spirits but angels (i.e. the spirit beings in Tartarus;<sup>7</sup> cf. 2 Peter 2:4-5; Jude 6). Nevertheless, these could've also been human spirits in Hades, for some biblical texts do speak of human 'spirits' as well as human 'souls' (e.g. Hebrews 12:23; Ecclesiastes 12:7). Passages like these are difficult to pin down in a precise manner.

Returning to Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, Peter began to reveal some interesting details about what actually transpired in Christ's death and resurrection.

<sup>24</sup> "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him..."

<sup>31</sup> "Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it."

(Acts 2:24, 31-32 NIV)

Peter was emphasising the fact that Jesus had not been abandoned to Hades (the realm of the dead) after his death on the cross, but instead, having been freed from the pains of death, God had raised him from the dead, because as the Son of God, and being the righteous sacrifice, it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, according to this text, and the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:40 concerning 'the heart of the earth' and the sign of the prophet Jonah, it would appear as though Christ's spirit went to Hades.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, according to Luke 23:43 Jesus went to 'paradise' between his death and resurrection. This 'paradise' seems to be related to 'Abraham's side' alluded to in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

As was noted above, in the parable, the rich man is in torment in Hades and he looks upward to see Abraham and Lazarus in a place of blessing, being in proximity to God in heaven (i.e. paradise). It would therefore make sense if 'paradise' were initially a special place for the spirits of God's people, somewhere near to God's presence, equivalent to the holy places of the temple outside of the Holy of Holies. Subsequently, after Christ's death and resurrection, the way into the heavenly Holy of Holies was opened so that the place of 'paradise' became equivalent to the very presence of God (cf. Hebrews 9:8-14). This is paradise restored.

## Paradise

The Greek word *paradeisos* is of Persian origin and was used of the enclosed parks or gardens of Persian royalty. It was used in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the 'Garden' of Eden (Genesis 2:8). This theme of paradise is at the very heart of the human story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation. The imagery of the Paradise of Eden, where Adam and Eve, as the first of God's covenant people, were originally situated, consisted of intimate fellowship with the Creator, with free access to the Tree of Life & to the River of Eden.

As is widely known, the paradise of Eden was lost due to Adam's disobedience, and the couple were expelled from the paradise-temple of Eden. In the book of

Revelation, the grand story of salvation ends with Paradise Restored due to the ministry and sacrifice of Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God. The imagery of the Eden paradise – including the motifs of the tree of life, the river of life, and the throne of God - is given its full meaning in the vision of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city of God. This is the ultimate goal of God's plan of redemption through Christ – Paradise Restored.

On the day of Christ's crucifixion, some major changes occurred in the spirit realm, one of which appears to have taken place among the spirits of the dead in Hades. This event is highlighted by something Jesus said to one of the criminals who was crucified next to him. Here is my understanding of what the NT teaches on this matter.

Before Jesus died, one of the criminals (commonly called a thief) crucified next to him repented and asked to be remembered by Jesus when he came into his kingdom (cf. Luke 23:42-43). Jesus replied, "*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise*". For many years I was influenced by the teaching of those who translate this verse a little differently so that, in essence, it reads 'I tell you *today*, you will be with me in paradise'; that is, according to this view, it is to be understood that Jesus promised him *today* that he would see paradise at some point in the distant future.

I now realise that this translation and its accompanying viewpoint is untenable. The issue here is not really about the Greek grammar, as is often argued, along with the fact that punctuation was not a part of the original Greek; it's about the logic of Jesus' reply.

The thief had initially asked Jesus to remember him at the time when his future kingdom would be established. Yet Jesus tells him that even that very day, 'today', he would be with Jesus in Paradise. Therefore, it is evident that Jesus' spirit would be in Paradise immediately after his death (Luke 23:46), and he was also promising the repentant thief that he would also be there with Christ on that very day, after his own death.

Hence, Jesus was saying that the spirits of the righteous dead up to that point in time (i.e. faithful OT believers in the true God) would no longer be in Hades, but would now be with Christ in the presence of God, which is Paradise.<sup>10</sup> The outward earthly sign of this spiritual event was the tearing of the temple curtain at the moment of Christ's death (cf. Matthew 27:50-51; Luke 23:45-46).

As mentioned earlier, it is possible that 'paradise' was technically a part of Hades, the realm of the dead, before Christ's resurrection, and that subsequently, at a later point in time after Christ's resurrection & ascension, the spirits of the righteous dead in paradise were taken into the very presence of God in the heavenly Holy of holies.

The writer of Hebrews includes '*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*' among those who belong to the heavenly kingdom, the New Jerusalem, which kingdom includes God Himself, Christ Jesus, the elect angels and '*the assembly of the firstborn ones*' (that is, the firstfruit generation of Christian believers from Pentecost to the Parousia of Christ, i.e. from about 33-70 AD).

<sup>22</sup> **But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.** You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels

in joyful assembly, <sup>23</sup> to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, **to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,** <sup>24</sup> to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

(Hebrews 12:22-24 NIV)

All believers were being viewed here as one together with Christ in the heavenly realms, even though at the time of writing the Second Advent of Christ had not yet occurred. The writer to the Hebrews was declaring that the spirits of the OT believers who had previously been in Hades, along with the 1<sup>st</sup> century 'Firstfruit' NT believers since Christ's death (including the repentant thief who had died next to Christ), were now as one together in the presence of God and of Christ in the heavenly realms (i.e. in Paradise). Nevertheless, it is also very clear from the NT writings that the fullness of their heavenly inheritance would only occur in resurrection at Christ's Royal Appearing & Presence (i.e. his Parousia).

Even though the details of 'the intermediate state' are rather sparse in the NT, the letters of Paul in particular reveal that, during the period between Christ's death & resurrection and the soon-approaching Day of the Lord (i.e. from about 33-70 AD), the followers of Christ who had died still 'fell asleep' as to the body, while their spirits (or souls) went to be at home with Christ in Paradise while they awaited the fullness of the resurrection. Here are two key passages that reveal this.

<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> 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! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: **I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;** <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

(Philippians 1:21-24 NIV)

In the context of possible martyrdom, Paul was saying that to die for Christ was gain to him, probably in the sense of gaining future rewards for faithful service. Nevertheless, he goes on to reveal his desire to depart this world and be with Christ, which he says is far better. This would seem to indicate that the believer's spirit has much more intimate fellowship with Christ after death. Be that as it may, Paul stated that it was more necessary for the Philippian believers that he should remain in the body, gaining fruitful labour in this world.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. <sup>2</sup> Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> **For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.** <sup>5</sup> Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

<sup>6</sup> **Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.** <sup>7</sup> For we live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So we make it our goal to please him,

whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

(2 Corinthians 5:1-10 NIV)

Although this last passage has received a number of slightly differing interpretations over the centuries, and it does have its difficulties, I believe that Paul was saying the following.

The believer's 'flesh & blood' mortal body is like a tent, a temporary dwelling place for God's Spirit; while the future immortal body (which, when received at Christ's Appearing, would swallow up the mortal body by the Life of the immortal one) is likened to a permanent building from God, a heavenly temple. The time in-between is one of longing to be clothed with the immortal spiritual body to complete the redemptive process, so that the spirit of the dead believer will not be left incomplete as though being found naked (that is, we were created to be body, soul and spirit). God's people are not to be disembodied spirits, but resurrected humans in spiritual bodies like the angels (cf. Luke 20:34-38).

Hence, according to this passage, Christian believers are viewed as being at home with Christ after death, yet they are still awaiting the resurrection in the Day of the Lord to complete the process (cf. Romans 8:23-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; Revelation 6:9-11 <sup>12</sup>).

If my overall understanding is correct (and I firmly believe it is), then this redemptive process was consummated in the great Day of the Lord in 70 AD, and therefore, since that time, all believers in Christ now receive their spiritual resurrected bodies upon death, followed by each one's accounting before the judgment-seat of Christ – exactly in accord with this passage in 2 Corinthians 5.<sup>13</sup> We are no longer to be found naked!

### The Final Defeat of Death & Hades

Another text that may shed some light on the spirits of the dead in Hades is 2 Peter 2:9. As we have seen above, according to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Hades is a place or condition of fiery punishment and torment (apparently due to being shut out of God's presence – cp. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Here is what this verse in 2 Peter says.

<sup>9</sup> ... if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials **and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.** (NIV)

The Lord hath known to rescue pious ones out of temptation, **and unrighteous ones to a day of judgment, being punished, to keep...** (YLT)

There is much debate among scholars about this verse as there are two possible renderings of it (as shown above). One indicates that the unrighteous are being punished while they await the Day of Judgment in the Day of the Lord (e.g. YLT), while the other translation indicates that the unrighteous are being held *until* the Day of Judgment, and *then* they will be punished (e.g. NIV).<sup>14</sup> Either way, according

to the above NT teaching, both renderings are correct. The spirits of the unrighteous dead in Hades are imprisoned awaiting judgment; and being in Hades itself is a form of punishment and/or torment. Nevertheless, the punishment of the great Judgment Day that they awaited had not yet taken place. The ultimate punishment is in the future Judgment.

As for the final defeat of Death and Hades, which is clearly tied to the great Day of Judgment in the much-prophesied Day of the Lord, Revelation 20 gives us the symbolic picturing of this event.

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.

<sup>12</sup> **And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.** <sup>13</sup> 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 they had done. <sup>14</sup> **Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.** <sup>15</sup> Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:11-15 NIV)

This symbolic description belongs to the vision of the 'great white throne' Judgment. Although much could be said about the intricate details of this passage, I only wish to highlight here the main points of the text. The judgment depicted is evidently that which was to occur on the great Day of the Lord, at the coming of the Son of Man to fully establish his kingdom (cf. Matthew 25:31-46; 16:27-28; Jude 5-7, 14-15).<sup>15</sup>

In typical apocalyptic fashion, the 'old creation' is viewed as running away from the face of God and his judgment, and not only are Death and Hades viewed as giving up their dead, but the sea does also. In Revelation, 'the sea' is often associated with demonic powers, so this could be a reference to the total defeat of the spiritual powers of darkness under Satan's rule that had been awaiting the judgment; a subject we touched on earlier in relation to Tartarus & the Abyss (cf. Revelation 13:1). On the other hand, it could also be a reference to the Gentile nations of all mankind.

Anyhow, Death and Hades are also pictured as giving up the dead within them so they can be judged before the throne of God. All are then judged in accordance with their acts, but there isn't any hint here that any of 'the dead' in this judgment are saved from the Lake of Fire.

Finally, the state of Death and Hades is done away with in the lake of fire, and all of the unrighteous dead who are not found in the Book of Life are also destroyed in the fire – and the fire is called the Second Death. This Death is the ultimate punishment of eternal destruction – also referred to as the eternal Gehenna of Fire.

In part three, we shall consider Gehenna & the Second Death, along with the final Judgement, and the destiny of believers and unbelievers alike in the resurrection.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection & Immortality in the New Testament*, (Eerdmans Publishing, 1985) p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> The subject of **soul** (Hebrew *nephesh*, Greek *psuche*) and **spirit** (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*) is not an easy one to deal with. Scripture makes it clear that we are spirit, soul and body (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). It is also evident that the body can be separated from the spirit & soul, which occurs at death (James 2:26), while spirit & soul can only be distinguished. Generally speaking, the spirit is the higher form of a person's being, whereas the soul is the lower form. Nevertheless, both spirit and soul describe the invisible attributes of a person, the life force and essence of an individual. Even though other creatures are said to have souls and spirits (this is particularly brought out in the book of Ecclesiastes and the Psalms) humans are different in that we are made in the image of God, therefore our spiritual, intellectual and emotional capacity is very different from the other animals. (Reference source: *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson, 1985).

In both the OT and the NT 'spirit' and 'soul' are used interchangeably, indicating the intimate relationship between soul and spirit (e.g. compare Genesis 26:35 with 1 Samuel 1:10; and Psalm 35:9 with Luke 1:47). Nevertheless, Hebrews 4:12 reveals that soul and spirit can be distinguished, although there isn't any intimation that they can be separated. Jesus showed that the body can be separated from the soul/spirit in death, yet in resurrection the soul and the body can be destroyed or ruined in Gehenna (cf. Matthew 10:28,39).

<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is virtually impossible to grasp what form a human spirit may take, particularly when we reflect on the miraculous conception of Jesus himself, whose spirit (having previously existed as a spiritual being) somehow grew in a human body; who then died and was raised to life in a transformed spiritual body as the Firstfruit of a new humanity. Awesome, mind-expanding stuff!

<sup>4</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (1994, Eerdmans Publishing Co.), pp. 99-101.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (2003, SPCK), pp. 437-438. See also Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, (Third Edition, 2011, Cascade Books), Chapter 14 (pp. 148-154).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. W. Bullinger, *Selected Writings*, "The Rich Man and Lazarus," pp. 135-137 (Bagster), quoted by Concordant Publishing Concern in the booklet *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>7</sup>

"*Hell* (see the NIV mg.) in Greek mythology refers to Tartarus, the lowest and most terrible part of hell, reserved especially for those superhuman beings who rebelled against the supreme god. The MS readings of *gloomy dungeons* vary between a word meaning a 'pit' or 'cave', and another word (*siros* instead of *seirios* in Greek) meaning 'rope' or 'chain' (see the NIV mg.) The latter is in line with Jude 6. The imagery is drawn from apocryphal writings." (*New Bible Commentary*, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition, p. 1302)

Peter's use of Tartarus here seems to indicate that a spiritual place of imprisonment for angelic beings exists in the spirit world. It may be related to 'the Abyss' mentioned elsewhere in the NT as a prison for demons (Gk. *abussos* commonly translated as 'bottomless pit', 'abyss' or 'the deep'; cf. Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:1-11; 11:7 & 20:1,3). Some commentators see a connection between 1 Peter 3:18b-22, 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6, relating these texts to the strange event of the 'sons of God' and the 'Nephilim' in Genesis 6:1-4. It is not my purpose to delve into these things here though.

<sup>8</sup> It is possible that Peter was referring to the death state itself as being the restriction of 'the agony or pains of death' – because death is not the natural state for a human spirit, especially the spirit of God's Son. Jesus was subsequently freed from this state through his resurrection.

<sup>9</sup> For further information on the sign of Jonah and the expression 'the heart of the earth', see my archived article *The Sign of Jonah: Three Days and Three Nights*.

<sup>10</sup> The NT clearly reveals that Paradise is a description of the dwelling place of God, equivalent to 'the third heaven' and the New Jerusalem (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-5; Revelation 2:7 & 22:2). That is to say, Paradise = God's Dwelling Place = New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a picture of God's New Covenant people, the Israel of God, dwelling with the Father and the Son in the consummated kingdom of God.

<sup>11</sup> There is another possible translation of verse 23, put forward by the Concordant Literal New Testament, which reads as follows: "Yet I am being pressed out of the two, having the desire unto **the return** and to be together with Christ, for it is rather much better." Even if this translation were more accurate, with 'depart' (Gk. *analuo* – "to unloose or undo") being replaced by 'return', the meaning is essentially the same. Paul's desire was ultimately to be with Christ, whether this occurred by departing in death or remaining alive until the return of Christ. I used to accept this rendering, as seen in some of my archived articles, which sought to emphasise the *return* of Christ rather than departing in death, but I now tend to favour the common translation quoted in the above article, as even Young's Literal Translation reads 'depart' instead of 'return'.

<sup>12</sup> Even though the vision of the Christian martyrs in Revelation is in a somewhat different context, their souls were viewed as being under the altar in the heavenly temple in the presence of God while they were awaiting the resurrection that was said to be 'in a little while' in the soon-coming Day of the Lord, the day of their vindication.

<sup>13</sup> For further study of this view concerning the Day of the Lord, see my series *The Day of the Lord, the Royal Appearing*.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Hoekema had this to say about 2 Peter 2:9.

"In verse 9 Peter is speaking about unrighteous men. These, he says, God knows how to keep or hold under punishment until the Day of Judgment - literally, while being punished. The Greek word used here, *kolazomenous*, is a present passive participle from the verb *kolazo*, to punish. The present tense of the participle conveys the thought that this punishment is a continuing one (note the NIV translation, quoted above). The words *eis hemeran kriseos*, until or for the Day of Judgment, tell us that what is described here is not the final punishment of the ungodly, but a punishment which precedes the judgment day."

Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (1994, Eerdmans Publishing Co.), p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> When the details of Revelation 20 (& elements of chapter 19) are carefully compared with Daniel 7:9-12, it becomes evident that they are both referring to the same judgment event in the Day of the Lord. Note, for example, the following details: Thrones for co-rulers (Daniel 7:9; Revelation 20:4, also cp. verse 6); White associated with God's throne of judgment (Daniel 7:9; Revelation 20:11); a river and a lake of fire (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:14-15); tens of thousands of people standing before the throne (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:12-13); books are opened (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:12, 15); & the destruction of the (spiritual) beast in the fire (Daniel 7:11; Revelation 19:20).

As I have shown in my series *The Day of the Lord, the Royal Appearing* (Parts 3 & 4 especially), J. Stuart Russell, in his classic book *The Parousia*, made a good case for connecting 'the First Resurrection' saints in Revelation 20:4-6 with the Great White Throne judgment scene in 20:11-15 (pp. 519-525). I didn't accept this view at first, but after further re-examination, I now believe Russell was correct. In his book, Russell didn't attempt to link Revelation 20 with Daniel 7 as he was focusing primarily on the NT, yet it is evident that if he had done so this would've strengthened his position.

Duncan W. McKenzie was also eventually persuaded by Russell's position on Revelation 20, and he makes a strong case for interpreting the judgment scene of Revelation 20 as being one and the same as the judgment scene in Daniel 7 (*The Antichrist and the Second Coming: A Preterist Examination – Volume II: The Book of Revelation*, pp. 362-380, Xulon Press, 2012). I tend to agree with him here. The extra detail of Satan's release at the end of the 1000 years in verses 7-10 of Revelation 20 are viewed as being parenthetical in nature, where John was shown what would take place in the distant future in relation to the loosing of Satan after the '1000-year-reign.' This would be the only portion of the vision that wasn't 'near' or 'about to occur' in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, unlike the rest of it that was near; nevertheless, the *beginning* of this '1000-year-kingdom' was about to be fully established at Christ's revelation or manifestation in 70 AD. Hence, J. S. Russell's preterism was technically Premillennial. Hence, my own view is Consistent Premillennial Preterism.

There is also a dilemma with verse 5a of Revelation 20. Most versions put this sentence in parenthesis like so: (*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*) This appears to be saying that the Great White Throne judgment of verses 11-15 occurs after the '1000 years', implying two resurrections, one at the beginning of the 'millennium' and one at the end. Nevertheless, this contradicts all of the other biblical texts that speak of this subject. There is good reason to accept the view that verse 5a was probably not included in the original vision written down by John. Some earlier manuscripts do not contain this sentence. I have yet to do further research on this, but omitting this sentence from verse 5 does help the text to flow much better without causing any contradiction with other passages.

Duncan W. McKenzie deals with this issue in his book *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: A Preterist Examination – Volume II: The Book of Revelation*, pp. 374-392, (Xulon Press, 2012). McKenzie cites David Aune, G. K. Beale, R. H. Charles, and James Parkinson among those who have highlighted this apparent discrepancy. For further details on the connection of Revelation 20 with Daniel 7, and the subject of the Day of the Lord & the Second Advent, see my series *The Day of the Lord, the Royal Appearing*.