

Where are the Dead?

By Al Felder

“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some of you that there is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:12)?

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13).

Questions about death are often on our mind. Death is something that each person will face one day, and the death of loved ones and friends is something that we will deal with throughout our life. The subject caused many questions among the church in the first century; and God, through the inspiration of the Spirit, answered those questions in His word.

The first point that we need to notice is that there are two paths. *“¹³Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13, 14).*

The first path is one that is contrary to God. *“¹⁴But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. ¹⁵Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14, 15).* This first path is wide and broad and many follow it. There are no rules to follow, no commands to obey. Each person does that which is right in his own eyes. On this path man gives in to sin instead of obeying God.

The second path is one in harmony with God. In order to walk this path you must obey God. *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).* *“I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lk. 13:3).* *“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32).* *“³Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6:3-6).* Notice what this passage says. It is baptism that brings us into the death of Christ and His resurrection. It is then that we gain access to His blood which cleanses us from our sins. Furthermore, it is only after obeying this command that we are said to walk in newness of life. Upon obeying these commands we are translated into the kingdom of Christ. *“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13).* This path is straight and narrow, and few find it. There

are rules to follow and commands to be obeyed. All who walk this road do that which is right in the Lord's eyes.

Now we get to the main part of our lesson. What happens when we get to the end of our earthly walk? Where does each path lead? Where are the dead? The bible is not silent on this matter.

Christ answers these questions for us in the account He gave in Luke 16. There he told of a rich man and a poor beggar by the name of Lazarus. Both men were Jews because verse 31 states that Moses and the prophets applied to them. Both men were in covenant with God under the old law, but each chose to walk a different path.

The rich man walked the wide and broad way. *“And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom”* (Lk. 16:23). The word hell is the Greek word hades. It means the unseen.¹ It is the equivalent to the Old Testament word shoel which means a place unseen. This is a holding place where the dead are reserved for judgment. *“⁴For if God spared not the old world, that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; ⁵And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eight person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; ⁷And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: ⁸(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) ⁹The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”* (2 Pet. 2:4-9). The word hell in this passage is the Greek word tartarus which means torments.² This is a place within the hadean realm where the wicked are kept. It is the place in which the rich man found himself in Luke 16.

Lazarus walked the straight and narrow path. *“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried”* (Lk. 16:22). This is the same place of which Christ told the thief on the cross. *“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”* (Lk. 23:43). You may wonder how the two verses can be connected. The answer is in (Acts 2:27, 31), *“²⁷Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see*

¹ Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 286.

² —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 300.

corruption. ³¹*He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.*" The word hell is the word hades. At His death, Christ went to the hadean realm until His resurrection. *"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God"* (John 20:17). He went to the place referred to by Himself as paradise or Abraham's bosom.

If you recall (2 Pet. 2:9), *"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished."* This verse points out very clearly that there is a holding place not only for the wicked, but for the righteous as well. It is a place where they are delivered out of temptations to await the judgment.

The bible tells us that between these two compartments within the hadean realm there is a great gulf fixed. *"And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence"* (Lk. 16:26). In other words, once you reach this point there are no second chances.

Some people believe that the wicked are in hades, but they refuse to believe that the righteous continue to be in paradise. *"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven"* (John 3:13). After the resurrection of Christ, David had not ascended to heaven. *"For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand"* (Acts 2:34). No one was taken from the hadean realm to heaven by Christ.

The bible further states that no man has seen God at any time. *"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us"* (1 John 4:12). If the righteous are in heaven, this verse would be untrue. What about (Phil. 1:23), *"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."* Does this verse conflict with the righteous being in paradise and not heaven? The answer is no. *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it"* (Ecc. 12:7). Since there is no conflict in saying that the spirit returned to God in this verse, then there is certainly no conflict in what the Apostle Paul said in the New Testament.

You see, there will only be one judgment. Not one for the righteous and one for the wicked. ⁴¹*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.* ⁴²*The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here"* (Matt. 12: 41, 42). Once again Jesus is talking to those in

covenant with God under Moses' Law and they would be lost by not obeying Him. They were to be judge along with others.

When Christ returns the judgment will take place. *"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory"* (Matt. 25:31). His return will be like His departure. *"Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). It will be with a shout and the trump of God. *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first"* (1 Thess. 4:16). The dead shall be raised, both wicked and righteous. *"²⁸Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"* (John 5:28, 29). It is at this time that the last enemy will be destroyed. *"²⁶For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death"* (1 Cor. 15:25, 26). Then those who are alive will be taken. *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:17). All of these events take place in a minute period of time according to the scriptures.

At the judgment the wicked will go to their final place of punishment. *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt. 10:28). The Greek word for hell is gehennah. It means valley of the son of lamentation.³

This valley was located just outside of Jerusalem. During the reigns of Ahaz, Manessah, and Amon the children of Israel sacrificed their offspring to the false god Moloch. The children were placed on the outstretched arms of the image, which was really a heated furnace. Flames poured forth through the hollow arms and consumed the victims. They perished in a gruesome and horrible manner as they withered off into a burning fire beneath. It is said that during the sacrifice they used drums to make noise lest the father heard the cry of his child, and returned to him. After they ceased this horrible idolatry, gehennah became the dump for dead bodies of criminals, the carcasses of animals, and every other kind of filth. It was a place of fire, heat, and stench. What a fitting description of eternal punishment.

Gehenna is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. *"And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matt. 25:30). It is a place devoid of the presence of God. *"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from*

³ —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 300.

the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9). Those who rejected God in this life will find out what it truly means to be without Him for all eternity. Everything that is of God will be absent in hell. There will be no peace, love, mercy, etc.

The righteous will go to the home prepared for them. *"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matt. 25:34). They will be delivered to the Father. *"²³But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. ²⁴Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power"* (1 Cor. 15:23, 24). It is then that they will receive a crown of righteousness. *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, should give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Tim. 4:8). Are you prepared should your life on this earth come to a sudden end? Make no mistake about it, there are no second chances.