

Where are the dead?

BY ANDY HASTINGS

How many judgement days will there be? One.

When will the one judgement day come? At the end of time.

Does anyone go to Heaven or Hell before the judgement day? No.

Where do the souls of the dead go until then?

In Luke 23:39-43 we read, “Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, *today you will be with Me in Paradise.*”

Three days later, when Mary came to the tomb and saw Jesus there, He said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have *not yet* ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’” (John 20:17).

When Jesus was on the cross, He told one of the thieves with Him that “**today** you will be with Me in paradise.” Yet, **three** days later, He told Mary He had **not yet** ascended to His Father (in Heaven). Obviously, Paradise and Heaven are not the same place. But if He was in Paradise and not in Heaven, just where is this place called Paradise?

Acts 2:31-32 in the old King James Version reads: “He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in **hell**, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

The old King James has Jesus in Hell for those three days He was dead. If this is true, then Paradise and Hell are exactly the same place. And that’s trouble, because that would mean a contradiction.

But fortunately, there is really no contradiction. What is unfortunate is the placement of the word “hell” in this verse of the old King James Version. Other translations have this verse saying (correctly) that He was not in Hell for those three days, but in (properly translated from the Greek) **Hades**.

If you mention that to a lot of people today, they'll probably shrug their shoulders and say, "What's the difference; aren't Hades and Hell the same place?"

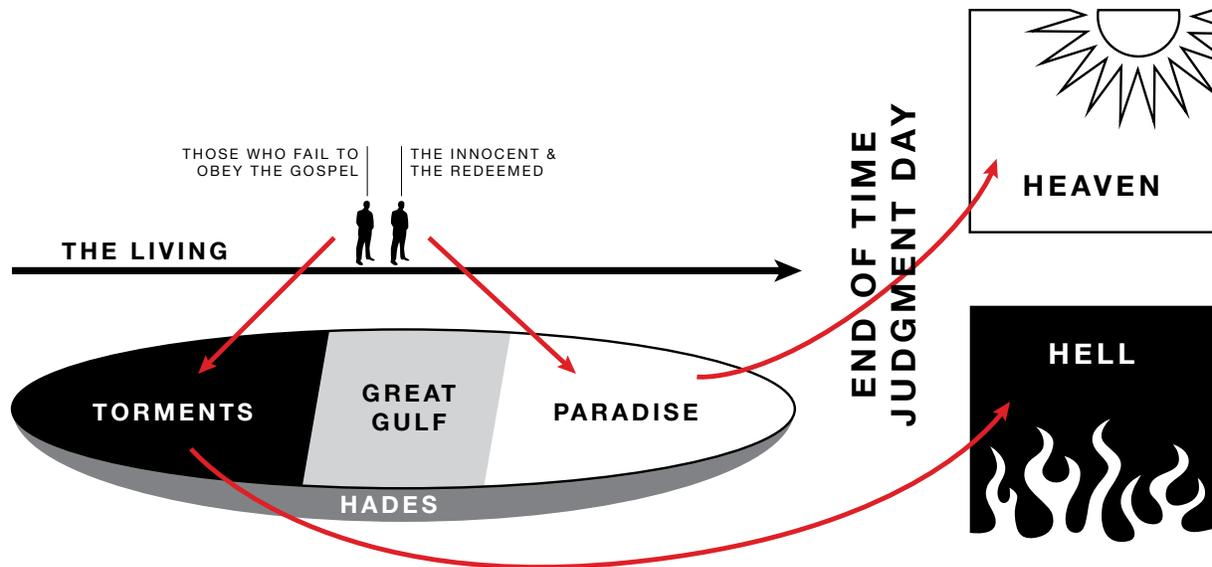
No, Hades and Hell are not the same place. Just like Paradise and Heaven are not the same place. So if Jesus was in Paradise with the thief on the cross for three days, and they weren't in Heaven and they weren't in Hell, where were they?

From the moment we are conceived in the womb, from that moment forward, we will never cease to exist. Our bodies may die in this present world, but our spirit (who we really are) never dies. We will always exist, somewhere. Luke records a story that Jesus told about a man who was very rich and a man who was very poor. They both died and both went to a certain place. This is not told as a parable. Jesus speaks of these men historically, as actual people who lived on this earth. *"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead'"* (Luke 16:19-31).

From these verses, we learn about two men who lived totally different lives, died, and went to the same place. Verse 26 gives us an idea of the landscape of this place. There was a great gulf that split it right down the middle, and none could cross from either side.

Verse 25 tells us one side was for the unrighteous, which was called Torments. The other side was for the righteous, which was called Paradise.

Verse 23 tells us the name of this place: Hades.



Jesus died on the cross, went to the Paradise “side” of Hades (with the penitent thief), was raised from the dead on the third day and then ascended to Heaven. This brings up another question: When people die, why don’t they just go straight to Heaven or Hell? Why do they have to go to this place called Hades to wait? Notice that I said “wait.” Wait for what?

Hebrews 9:27 tells us that *“it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”*

2 Peter 2:9 reads: *“then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”*

We die. There’s a judgment day. Then, either Heaven or Hell awaits us. There is only one judgement day at the end of time; there is no “private, individual” judgement day for each of us at our death. There is only **one** judgement **day** for all of us at the end of time. Why the wait? Why are the unjust “reserved,” as Peter wrote?

2 Corinthians 5:10 helps provide the answer: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

“According to what he has done.” Keep that in mind as we read Revelation 14:13: *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’”*

“Their works follow them.” What does that mean?

Hebrews 11:4 tells us: *“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it **he being dead still speaks.**”*

Even though Abel lived thousands of years ago, because of his good example, you and I can be encouraged by that today, just like Noah, Abraham and every other righteous person we know of.

Think about this: If someone’s good example can live on for future generations, can their bad example live on as well? Think of someone like Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin. Do the choices made by people like them still inspire others to do evil, even to this day? Of course they do.

In addition, passages like Matthew 16:27, Luke 10:13-14 and James 3:1 suggest various degrees of reward and punishment in Heaven and Hell.

Revelation 20:12-15 gives us a glimpse of the great spectacle that will occur on the last day: *“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”*

That’s why people don’t go to Heaven or Hell as soon as they die. They go to Hades first (either Paradise for the righteous and innocent or Torments for the rest), according to how they lived their lives, waiting for the judgment day at the end of time to be judged by the things they’ve done in their lifetime **and also** by their influence that has continued to carry on long after they’ve passed from this earth. The unjust, especially, cannot be fully judged until their influence has been allowed to completely run its course, and that will only be when time is no more.

Your actions not only influence the people around you now, but your influence, whether good or bad, lives on long after you’re gone. Remember, Abel, even though he lived at the beginning of time, is still an influence for us today. All that have died are existing, are conscious and self aware, at this very moment in either Paradise or Torments.

On the last day we will see: *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Matthew 25:31-34, 41 shows us: *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’...Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”*

There is only one person who ever walked the earth in Heaven at this moment — Jesus. The rest are in Hades, either in the Paradise half or the Torments half awaiting the great judgement.

Whether we die before time ends or the Lord comes back first, God has given us life, and we will give an account for the way we’ve lived it.