

SHEOL AND HADES

Sheol/Hades - the unseen world to which spirits of the Old Testament went.

(1) 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; Psa. 88:3).

(2) To the man “under the sun,” the natural man, who of necessity judges from appearances, sheol seems no more than the grave.

(3) Scripture reveals sheol as a place of sorrow (2 Sam. 22:6; Psa. 18:5; Psa. 116:3), into which the wicked are turned (Psa. 9:17); and where they are fully conscious (Isa. 14:9-17; Ezek. 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 O.T. and hades of the N.T. 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 that 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 Peter 2:9, ASV), 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 O.T., but rarely, if ever, in the N. T. (cp. Gen. 27:35; 42:38; 44:29,21). It should not lead anyone to think that there is a possibility of change from the one state to the other after death, for Luke 16:23 shows that 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 that Eph. 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” (Luke 23:43). Paul was “caught up to the third heaven ... into paradise” (2 Cor. 12:1-4). 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 Th. 4:16-17). 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 (Luke 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).