

## **Afterlife: Where Do the Dead Go?"**

**This is an open discussion intended to inform not confuse. It is not necessarily meant to be dogmatic or unbending in its' approach. Many things in Scripture are crystal clear. Other areas seem to be somewhat confusing and contradictory.**

**Discussion about life and death, resurrection, and where the dead are was a source of lively debate even in Jesus' time (Mk. 12:18-27; Mt. 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-40). The Sadducees did not believe in a bodily resurrection as would be clearly stated in the New Testament. There are those today that would hold to a similar unenlightened view: "when you're dead, you're dead". Where that logic may fall a little short of genius, it does provide the seedbed for all kinds of unrestrained, undisciplined lifestyles (hedonism; materialism; atheistic existentialism). When you remove punishment and reward in a human system usually chaos will reign because all restraints and incentives have been removed. Ideally all of us should lead Christian lives out of love. Most of us though are not as purely motivated as we ought to be.**

**Donald Guthrie's book, "New Testament Theology" has this comment about heaven:**

**"In the OT there are many references to heaven as the abode of God, and this is an important factor in the NT (cf. such passages as Is. 63:15; Ne. 1:4; Dn. 2:37-44). The root idea of habitation is in all the words used of heaven in both the OT and NT. We shall not expect, however, to find a description of a place, so much as the presence of a person."**

**I would believe hell to be a place that would be described by the absense of a person. God!**

**Because we have difficulty in understanding spiritual realities much of the language for the afterlife is couched in places:**

- 1. HEAVEN**
- 2. HELL - a translation of the word "gehenna"**
- 3. HADES - Sheol (Hebrew equivalent term)**
- 4. ABYSS**
- 5. TARTARUS**
- 6. PARADISE**

**We all like to talk about heaven and going there some day, let's look at some of what the N.T. has to say about the subject.**

## HEAVEN

### **God Is In Heaven:**

(expression 'Father in heaven' occurs 14 times in Matthew and 'heavenly Father', 5 times). There is a close link seen in the Lord's Prayer between heaven and God.

### **Heavenly Beings Inhabit Heaven:**

There is evidence for the presence and activity of angels connected with heaven (Mt. 18:10; 22:30; 24:36; 28:2; Mk. 12:25; 13:32; Lk. 2:15). Jesus tells us that there is great joy on the part of the angels over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7).

### **The Life To Come For Christians:**

Especially in John's gospel the term "eternal life" is a central theme (John 3:15-16; 4:36; 5:39; 6:54; 6:68; 10:28; 12:25; 17:2-3). Eternal life is relational in knowing God/Jesus and must start here and now if there will be a hereafter with God.

Guthrie says, "Knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ is the main aim of heavenly living. Naturally this process begins in this life, but can reach its goal only in eternal life". If we wait until Jesus returns to be right with God, it's too late. Paul tells believers to wait for Christ's coming from heaven (I Thess. 1:10; 4:16; II. Thess. 1:7).

There is evidence early in the NT to a bodily resurrection (Mt. 5:29ff, Mt. 10:28). This is different from immortality of the soul (Greek concept back to Plato).

## HELL

J. Jeremias writes in the "Theological Dictionary of the New Testament" (TDNT), "The NT distinguishes between hades and geenna: (a). the former is temporary, the latter definitive (cf. Mk. 9:43, 48); (b). the former is for the soul alone, the latter for the reunited body and soul (Mk. 9:43ff; Mt. 10:28). Geenna is preexistent (Mt. 25:41). It is manifested as a fiery abyss (Mk. 9:43) after the general resurrection. Those who fall victim to divine judgment (Mt. 5:22; 23:33) will be destroyed there with eternal fire. The ungodly are sons of geenna (Mt. 23:15). They go to it with Satan and the demons (Mt. 25:41; cf Rev. 19:20; 20:10-11). The threat of geenna in the NT is used to show the seriousness of sin and to awaken the conscience to fear of the divine anger (Mt. 10:28; 23:33)." The word geenna is used 12 times in the NT. These uses are in Mt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; Ja. 3:6.

## HADES

Hades is sometimes confused with Hell. The word 'hades' is used 10 times in the NT. These passages are Mt. 11:23; 16:18; Lk. 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. J. Jeremias also writes in the TDNT on hades:

### A. Hades in later Judaism

1. Used for the Hebrew Sheol, the realm of the dead, this term came to denote the place of temporary sojourn prior to resurrection (cf. Is. 26:19).
2. In this place the good were then seen to be separated from the bad (Lk. 16:23, 26).
3. The good were finally thought to be already in bliss (Lk 16:9, 23ff.).

### B. Hades in the NT.

1. **The Link with Judaism.** The NT view is close to that of Judaism (Lk 16).
  - (a). There is no soul-sleep.
  - (b). One goes down into Hades (Mt. 11:23; 12:40).
  - (c). The stay is limited (Rev. 20:13). Sometimes all the dead seem to be in Hades (Acts 2:27), but elsewhere believers are in paradise (Lk. 16:9, 23ff.), or with the Lord (II Cor. 5:8), or under the altar (Rev. 7:9). Hence Hades is sometimes just the abode of the wicked (Lk. 16:23; Rev. 20:13-14).
2. **The Early Christian Reconstruction.** Faith in the risen Lord gives assurance that believers are secure from Hades (Mt. 16:18) and go to be with Christ (Lk 23:43). Jesus is the Lord of Hades (Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:31). The descent shows this. Distinctive here is that Christ preaches in Hades (I Pet. 3:19ff.) and that he has the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:18).

## ABYSS

Abyss is another word for the underworld as:

- a. prison for the disobedient (Lk. 8:31; Rev. 9:1) and
- b. the realm of the dead (Rom. 10:7). The word is used 9 times in the NT. It is used mostly in the Revelation (Lk. 8:31; Rom. 10:7; Rev. 9:1, 2:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3).

## TARTARUS

Tartarus is a one-time used word in the NT. It refers specifically to a place for fallen angels (II Peter 2:4) where they are to be held for final judgment. Bauer-Arndt and Gingrich (BAG) says that “Tartarus, thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out, was so regarded in Jewish apocalyptic as well: Job 41:24. Tartarus was also the place in Greek mythology of punishment for the Titans who had rebelled against Zeus (s. Barclay p. 379 ff. “The Letters of Peter”).

## PARADISE

Paradise is a word that may refer to three different places and or times (God’s original paradise in Gen. 2-3 in the LXX; the place promised to the thief on the cross, Lk. 23:43, II Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7). The word is only used 3 times in the NT (Lk. 23:43; II Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7). J. Jeremias states that paradise is not used in the NT to reference the garden. He goes on to say that “the concealed paradise is the *intermediate abode* of the redeemed” in Lk. 23:43. Other NT terms for the intermediate state are table fellowship with Abraham (Lk. 16:23), being with the Lord (II. Cor. 5:8) or Christ (Phil. 1:23), and the heavenly kingdom (II Tim. 4:18). In Mk. 13:27 the dead will assemble in the heavenly world. The final (new, “kainos”) paradise is mentioned in Revelation 2:7, and the tree of life becomes again available.

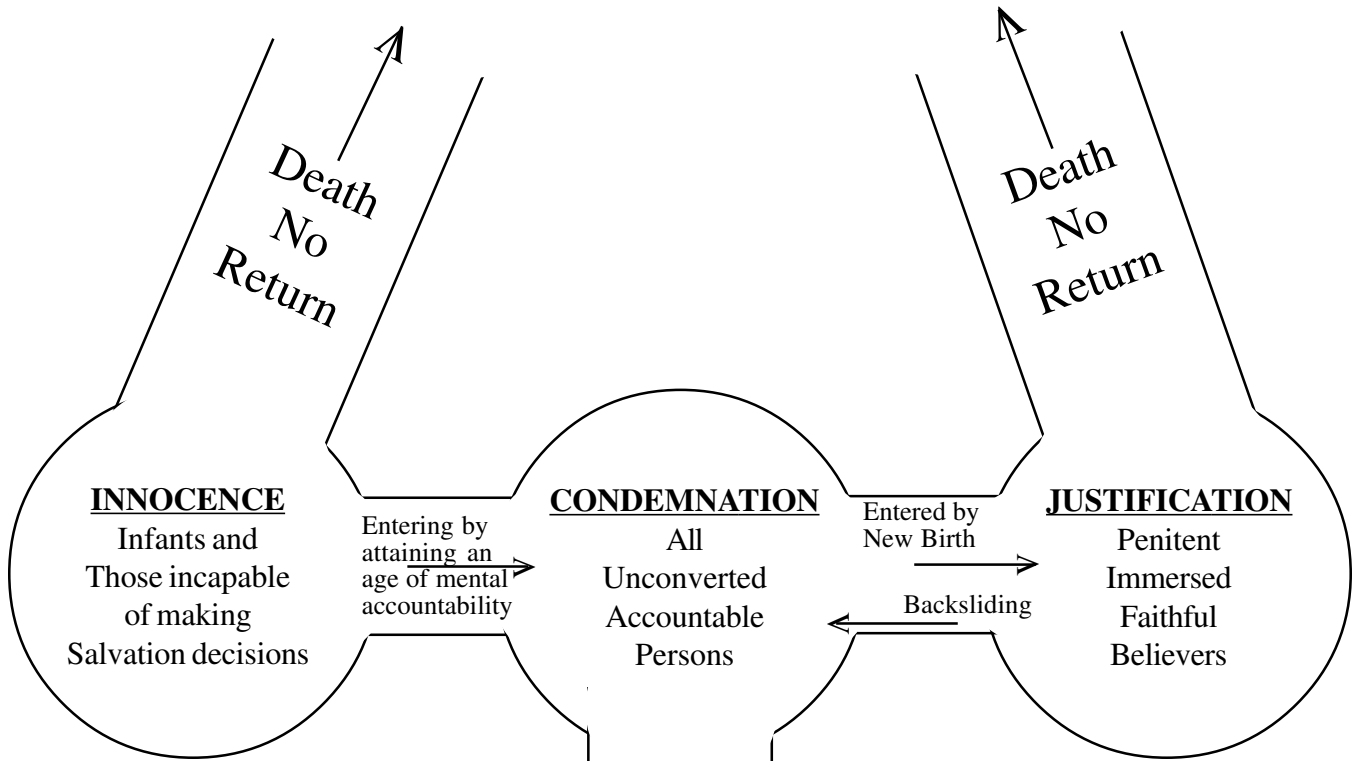
At this point we should know at least the possibilities for our eternal destination. We should all realize that we will all live forever (Jn. 5:25-29). The question is where?

Chart Illustrating the Different States of Man from Birth to Eternity

→ Judgment → Heaven

(HADES)

Paradise



Death  
No  
Return

Tartarus

HADES

→ Judgment → Hell

## **Some of the remaining questions are:**

### **1. Where are the Christian dead before judgment?**

**Answer:** Paradise, but still in God's presence. Heaven comes to the faithful (Rev. 21:1-4) after judgment and the end of time when the Church is retrieved by the Bridegroom (Christ). We know that nothing, not even death, can separate us from Christ (Rom. 8:38ff.)

### **2. Where are the unbelieving (unsaved) dead before judgment?**

**Answer:** Hades, but not hell otherwise the judgment is a waste of time.

### **3. With what form will I be raised?**

**Answer:** Seed analogy (I Cor. 15:35ff). We know that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 15:15ff.), so transformation is necessary. We know our body will be like that of the risen Lord (Phil. 3:20-21).

### **4. Will I know other loved ones?**

**Answer:** Maybe, but the holy presence of GOD will take up our focus. Human relationships will not be what commands our attention. It will be worship of the FATHER.

### **5. When will this transformation take place?**

**Answer:** R.H. Gundry, in his *Soma in Biblical Theology* (1976), p. 165, maintains that the "psychikon soma" is a physical body animated by the psyche, and that the "pneumatikon soma" is a physical body renovated by the Spirit of Christ". See I. Cor. 15:42-49.

### **6. Where will this transformation take place?**

**Answer:** See I Thessalonians 4:13-18 (in the clouds in the air). Also see I Corinthians 15:50-55.