

Ministry of Grace

Hell – Speaker Notes

Most Christians think of hell as the place where the unsaved souls go when they die and that they will spend eternity there. As shocking as this may sound, this is not what the Bible teaches. Here are a few more misconceptions about Hell. Did you know that before Jesus was resurrected from the dead both righteous and unrighteous people went to different parts of the same place when they died? That place is called Hades (or Sheol). Today, only the unrighteous go to Sheol. Another interesting factoid is that after they die, people are aware of their previous life and of the people they knew when they were alive. When Jesus died on the cross, He and one of the thieves crucified with Him went to the same place, called Paradise. However, Paradise is no longer where it was when Jesus went there.

Hang in there, we will clear up your confusion in just a few minutes. Before we get into these things, however, we need to look at the words that are commonly translated as “hell.” There are four words that may or may not be translated “hell” depending on which translation you are using. They are:

Sheol -- This is a Hebrew word meaning “the place of the departed dead.”

For you will not leave my soul in hell (*Sheol*); you will not allow your holy one to see corruption. (Psalms 16:10) [MKJV]

In Hebrew writing, Sheol is never used to describe the final destination of the wicked. It is, instead, used to indicate:

- The unseen realm of the dead, where both the righteous and the unrighteous go
- The grave, the actual place where bodies are buried
- The place of punishment for the wicked
- The place from which the righteous are saved

Hades -- This is a Greek word meaning “the place of judgment.” Originally, it was the name of the Greek god of the underworld (the place where human souls go after death). Eventually, his entire realm became known as Hades.

And you, Capernaum! You won't be lifted up to heaven, will you? You'll go down to Hell (*hades*)! For if the miracles that happened in you had taken place in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. (Matthew 11:23) [ISV]

In the New Testament, Hades is a temporary place of the souls of those who have died physically. Yes, I said “temporary.” As we will see, the righteous have since been moved out of Hades, and eventually Hades and all who are in it will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14), which is referred to as “the second death.”

Geena or Gehenna -- This is translated from the Hebrew "*ge' Hinnom*." This specifically refers to the Hinnom Valley, SW of Jerusalem, where a trash fire burned constantly. Bodies of dead animals and criminals were also thrown into this “eternal” fire. Idolatrous Jews even offered their children in this fire as a sacrifice to the god Molech.

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. (*gehenna*) (Matthew 5:29) [NASB]

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Tartarus -- In Greek mythology, Tartarus is far below Hades. It is the deep abyss that serves as a dungeon of torment and suffering where gods, ferocious monsters and horrible criminals were banished. In the Bible, it is the place of punishment for angels.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but threw them into the lowest hell (*Tartarus*) and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept for judgment (*2 Peter 2:4*) [ISV]

Are Sheol & Hades the same?

When the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek (this translation is called the Septuagint), the Hebrew word *Sheol* was consistently translated using the Greek word *Hades*. Also, *Acts 2:27* is a direct quotation of *Psalms 16:10* and we see that *Sheol* was translated as *Hades*. From this we can deduce that Sheol and Hades refer to the same place. From this point on in our discussion, we will refer to this place as Sheol.

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. (*Psalms 16:10*)

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. (*Acts 2:27*)

Where is Sheol?

In Numbers chapter 13 we read about the twelve men who were sent into the promised land to spy it out. Ten of them brought back a bad report and two of them (Joshua and Caleb) brought back a good report. The people believed the bad report and refused to go in to conquer the land. Instead, they said, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." As a result, God told them that none of the adults, except Joshua and Caleb, would be allowed to enter the promised land. Instead, they would die in the wilderness. Shortly after that Korah, along with Dathan and Abiram, stood up to Moses and challenged his leadership. So Moses told them and all the people:

If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD." And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. (*Numbers 16:29-33*)

From this description we can clearly see that Sheol is down inside the earth. Also, when the Pharisees challenged Jesus to show them a sign to prove that he was who he claimed to be, he told them that he would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (*Matthew 12:38-40*)

One Sheol or many?

There are several places in the Old Testament where a reference is made to the lowest Sheol. Here are a couple of them:

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For a fire is kindled in My anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell (*Sheol*); It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains. (*Deuteronomy 32:22*) [NKJV]

For great is Your mercy toward me; and You have delivered my soul from the lowest hell. (*Sheol*) (*Psalms 86:13*). [MKJV]

Since a superlative (lowest) is used, it implies that there is a low Sheol and a lower Sheol also, and yet, the words Sheol and Hades never appear in the dual or plural form in the Bible. Therefore, the superlative is seen to refer to areas, portions, or compartments of Sheol or Hades.

Luke 16 - Parable or Actual?

We are about to look at a narrative described in the 16th chapter of Luke's gospel account. The question we have to ask ourselves first is, "Is this a description of actual events and places or is this a parable?" To answer this question we have to learn what a parable is and how we can recognize a parable.

Parable – From Greek '*parabole*' – '*para*' meaning '*beside*' or '*alongside*,' and a form of '*balein*' meaning '*to throw*.' The word *parabole* means to place two things side by side for sake of comparing them.

A parable is a saying or story in which something is expressed in terms of something else. In other words, a parable is a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson.

So, to put it in plain English, a parable is a made-up story with fictional characters (who, incidentally, are never named) used to explain a truth by comparison or association. A parable often uses the form of a simile ("*like*", or "*as if*") to express the comparison. Here are some examples:

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field ...(*Matthew 13:24*)

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed ...(*Matthew 13:31*)

For it (the kingdom of heaven) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property... (*Matthew 25:14*)

In the 16th chapter of Luke, our Lord is teaching the Pharisees that righteousness is what God demands and that riches mean nothing. In teaching this he uses the story of the rich man and Lazarus to show them where their future lies based on their righteousness. This is not a parable, since it does not contain any language of similitude (like, as if, similar to) and Jesus talks about real people (the poor man is named Lazarus and Abraham is called by name). Finally, Jesus is not using this story to teach some other truth. This IS the truth He's teaching.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw

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Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

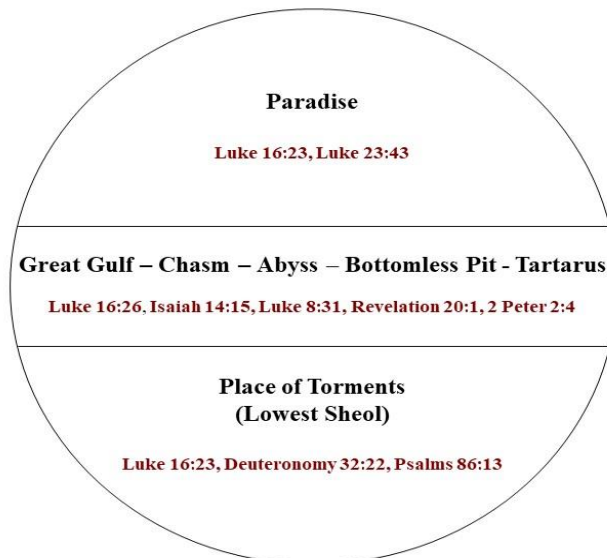
And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- for I have five brothers--so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'

(Luke 16:19-31)

The Compartments of Sheol

From the story of the rich man and Lazarus, we can see that there are, in fact, three different areas, or compartments, of Sheol. There is the place where Abraham and Lazarus are (Paradise) which is a place of comfort and ease; there is also the place where the rich man is, a place of torment; and in between these two there is a chasm or gulf that cannot be crossed. Let's look at each one of these.

Sheol [Psalms 16:10] – Hades [Luke 16:23]



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Paradise

According to Matthew's gospel account and the book of Psalms, we know that when Jesus died on the cross, he went to Sheol.

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40)

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. (Psalms 16:10)

But we also see that he told one of the thieves crucified next to him that the thief would be with Jesus in Paradise. When we compare this to the story of the rich man and Lazarus, we can deduce that Jesus and the thief went to Abraham's side. Based on the comments Jesus made to the thief, we can infer that this compartment in Sheol is called Paradise.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43)

The place of torments

The portion of Sheol on the other side of the great gulf appears to be the place of torments that we read about in the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame. (Luke 16:23,24)

For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. (Psalms 86:13)

The Great gulf

The portion of Sheol that is in between Paradise and the place of torments is referred to by a number of different names; The Great Gulf, the Chasm, the Pit of the Abyss, the Sides of the Abyss, the Pit of the Abyss, the Bottomless Pit, and Tartarus. In the Luke 16 passage quoted above, it is called a great chasm.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us. (Luke 16:26)

We also know from Isaiah and the book of Revelation that Satan and other evil spirits are, and will be, incarcerated in the abyss.

How you are fallen from the heavens, O shining star, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, ... Yet you shall be brought down to hell (*Sheol*), **to the sides of the Pit**. (Isaiah 14:12-15) [MKJV]

And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven fallen unto the earth: and there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss. (Revelation 9:1) [RV]

The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. (Revelation 17:8) [NIV]

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and

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bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him ... (Revelation 20:1-3) [NIV]

Compare these verses above with what is said in Jude and 2 Peter:

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6) [KJV]

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell (Tartarus) and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment (2 Peter 2:4) [NKJV]

Also, notice what the demons said to Jesus when he was about to cast them out of a man and into a herd of pigs:

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. (Luke 8:30, 31)

From these verses, it appears that the abyss, or pit of the abyss, or sides of the pit are the same as Tartarus. It also appears that this is the great chasm that Abraham talked about in Luke 16. And, we see that this is where evil angels and demons are confined.

Paradise has been moved!

We just learned that Paradise was one of the compartments of Sheol/Hades. However, according to the Apostle Paul, it is no longer in Sheol. When we read of Paul's description of his being transported to paradise, we learn that he was transported **into paradise** but **up to the third heaven**.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up **to the third heaven**--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up **into paradise**--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows- (2 Corinthians 12:2-3)

To get the full impact of this, we need to look at a couple of Greek words. The word translated "to" is *eōs*, which means "to the edge of" or "as far as." The word translated "into" is *eis*, which indicates movement from the outside of something to the inside of it. Thus, we see that Paul was transported to the edge of the third heaven, but not into it, yet he was transported into paradise. It logically follows that paradise is up there at the edge of the third heaven.

How did it get there?

Since paradise used to be in the heart of the earth (part of Sheol), but is now up next to the third heaven, it must have been moved. According to the passages below, when Jesus was resurrected, he ascended on high and "led captivity captive." This is a military expression that is a picture of a conquering army rescuing those who had been held captive by the enemy, taking them and freeing them from their captor(s).

Therefore He says, "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men." Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? (Ephesians 4:8, 9) [MKJV]

You have gone up on high; You have led captivity captive...(Psalms 68:18) [MKJV]

To add further to this idea that those in Paradise before the resurrection were captives, we want to look at a couple of verses. Before Christ's resurrection, the devil had the power of death. He was able to take a person's life and hold him or her in death. As evidence of this, look at Job 2:6 where

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God gave Satan permission to test Job, but not to take his life. If Satan did not have power over death, God would not have had to give him this command.

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives....(Hebrews 2:14,15) [NASB]

Then, in the first chapter of the book of Revelation, we read about John falling at the feet of Christ who informs John that he, Jesus, has the keys to death and Hades.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17, 18)

Having the keys indicates authority over what they keys unlock. Hence, Jesus is saying that He now has authority over death and Hades, not Satan. This is why Jesus was able to take captivity captive, to carry paradise away from Hades and up to the third heaven.

Eternal destination of the unsaved - The Lake of Fire

In the beginning of this study, we said that Sheol is not where the unsaved will spend eternity. Yes, Sheol is a place of torment and based on what the rich man said, there are flames there. But, some day, all the dead (unrighteous) will appear before the Great White Throne and will be condemned to the lake of fire. Hades (Sheol) will also be cast into the lake of fire. This is referred to as "the second death" and it will last for eternity. So, let's look at a few things about the lake of fire.

Eternal, prepared for Satan and his angels

The lake of fire was initially prepared for the devil and his fallen angels. He will be thrown in there at the end of the millennial reign of Christ. It is referred to here as "eternal fire."

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)

It is not in the earth

In Revelation 20:10, the devil is thrown into the lake of fire. In the very next verse we learn about the Great White Throne Judgment. In this description, we are told that the first heaven and earth are destroyed. However, the lake of fire still exists and the dead who stand before the Great White Throne will also be thrown into it (as we will discover below).

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. (Revelation 20:11) [NKJV]

Hades is thrown into it

Although heaven and earth have been destroyed, we see from verse 14 that Sheol (Hades) still exists and is thrown into the lake of fire. It is uncertain what is meant by death being thrown into the lake of fire. However, in order for God to establish his eternal heaven and earth, death must be done away with. This is probably what is meant by death being thrown into the lake of fire.

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14) [NKJV]

The Beast & The False Prophet are the first to go there

At the battle of Armageddon, the beast (anti-Christ) and his false prophet will be captured and thrown into the lake of fire. They are the first ones to be sent there.

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But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (Revelation 19:20) [NIV]

Also notice that it is a fiery lake of burning sulfur (brimstone). The Greek word for Sulphur is *theiō*. When it is said to be burning, it is referred to as brimstone. Sulphur burns with a blue flame that is even hotter than red, orange, or yellow flames.

The Devil is thrown in there

As was mentioned above, the devil will himself be thrown into the lake of fire. From that moment on, he will not be able to bother humans. He will be tormented there forever.

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10) [MKJV]

Unsaved are thrown in there

At the Great White Throne Judgment, all the unsaved (unrighteous) will be thrown into the lake of fire. They will suffer torment there for all eternity.

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41)

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15)

What happens to people in the Lake of Fire?

There are a number of scriptures that talk about eternal punishment. Though the passages below do not specifically identify the place of torment, based on what we have learned above, the only place of eternal fire and torment is the lake of fire. Here are some descriptions of the torment of the lake of fire. Keep in mind that perhaps the worst part of the torment of the lake of fire will not be physical torture, but eternal separation from God!

The fire shall not be stopped

Then they will go forth and look On the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind. (Isaiah 66:24) [NASB]

Eternal fire, eternal punishment

Then He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;" ... These will go away into eternal punishment, (Matthew 25:41, 46) [NASB]

Torment forever

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 20:10) [NIV]

Darkness, weeping/wailing & gnashing of teeth

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will

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be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 8:11, 12) [NIV]

And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13: 42) [KJV]

Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 22:13, 14)

And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25:30)

So What?

From what we've learned here, we should all have a much better understanding of what hell is. But, it's not sufficient to simply know about hell. We all have loved ones and friends who are destined for this place of torment. Personally, I don't want any of my family or friends to end up there because, in spite of what the Catholics teach, there is no temporary hell, called Purgatory. We mentioned earlier that Sheol (Hades) is a temporary abode of the unsaved. The problem is, since the resurrection of Jesus and the taking of Paradise up to the edge of the third heaven, everyone who goes to Sheol will end up in the Lake of Fire.

We possess the truth that can set the unsaved free and keep them out of Hell. We can't keep it to ourselves. We need to share the Gospel message with those around us. We originally formed this church because we did not want to stop meeting together when bureaucrats told us we had to. We used a verse in Hebrews to justify that. Now we need to consider it along with the verse before it:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Paradise is awaiting every born-again Christian, but we will all have to appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Here's what Paul told the Corinthians about this judgment:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

No Christian will be condemned for anything he or she has done. However, each of us will be rewarded for the good deeds we have done. Among those good deeds is our witness to the unsaved.

Let's commit to sending treasure up ahead of us by being an active witness for Jesus Christ. Don't wait until tomorrow. Be a witness today and know that you may be saving someone from the fires of torment!

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