

# Heaven, Paradise, Sheol, Hell & Hades

**D**o you know where you are going after this life? The vast majority of people believe that there is a life after this one, and most people do not believe we all go to the same place. The Old Testament talks about Sheol, the recesses of Sheol, Abaddon, and heaven, while the New Testament uses the terms Hades, hell or Gehenna, the abyss or Tartarus, the lake of fire, Paradise, and heaven. This study will explain these biblical terms and end by explaining what happens to Christians after they die.

**DESTINY OF THE BODY.** In the Old Testament the terms for death and our life after this world are vivid. They are serious reminders that each person will die someday. Those who reject God will not be going to a vacation spot or to a place where they can talk with their friends and have a party. The Bible makes it clear there is no fun for the spiritually dead, as we will discover shortly.

**SHEOL - OLD TESTAMENT.** The word Sheol is the common word for the grave in the Old Testament. It occurs 65 times. The King James Version Bible uses the word Hell in the Old Testament rather than Sheol. This is unfortunate since Hell is the New Testament word for the place where the spirits of wicked men and women go. Other Bible translations correctly use the word Sheol. Sheol refers to both the grave and sometimes a portion of it is the temporary home for the spirits of the wicked who have died.

Amos 9:2 says that people can dig into Sheol.

Though they dig into  
Sheol, from there shall  
My hand take them . . .  
(NASB) Amos 9:2

This clearly implies that Sheol is in the ground, and the next verse reveals that Sheol is the dust of the ground.

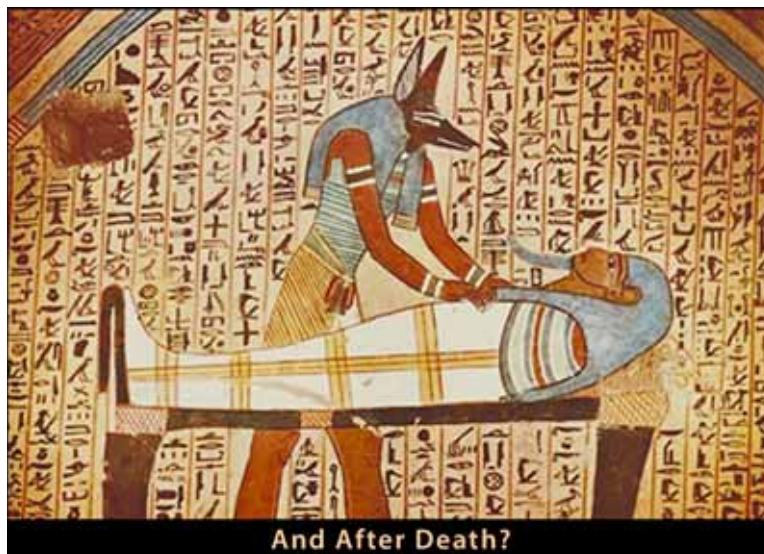
Will it go down with me to Sheol? Shall we together go down into the dust?" (NASB) Job 17:16

By combining these two verses we discover that Sheol is something into which we can dig and it is the dust. Sheol is also a dark place and a place of no sound. That is, when we go to the grave, we can no longer see nor hear.

If I look for Sheol as my home, I make my bed in the darkness.  
(NASB) Job 17:13

The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence. (NASB) Psalm 115:17

When we are in Sheol, no one will praise us and our bodies do not return to life.



No-one remembers you  
when he is dead. Who  
praises you from his grave?  
(NASB) Psalm 6:5

. . . he who goes down to  
Sheol does not come up.  
(NASB) Job 7:9

The Old Testament reveals that both the godly or righteous and the wicked or unrighteous

teous go to Sheol. For example, in Psalms 31:17 we read that the wicked go to Sheol. During the rebellion of Korah against Moses, which is described in Numbers 16, we are told that wicked Korah and his family went down into Sheol. The ground opened up and swallowed the entire family.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.’” Moses said, “. . . But if the LORD brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the LORD.” As he finished speaking all these words, ground that was under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah, with their possessions. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. (NASB) Numbers 16:23-24, 28, 30-33

In Jonah 2:2 we discover that the prophet Jonah, a righteous man, even though he was a poor prophet, was in Sheol temporarily. That is, he was in the process of dying, or was figuratively in Sheol. Jonah cried out to God from the stomach of the great fish and God rescued him. This illustrates that the righteous also go to Sheol.

I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. (NKJV) Jonah 2:2

Also, note that the patriarch Jacob (Genesis 37:35) and King David (Psalm 88:3) expected to go to Sheol. It is a dusty resting place to which our fleshly bodies go after death.

Therefore, we conclude that both the righteous and the wicked go to Sheol or the grave (Genesis 42:38) upon death. In the grave our bodies are lifeless. They no longer function. Our spirits go elsewhere, which we will discuss shortly.

**HADES - NEW TESTAMENT.** Hades is the New Testament word, corresponding to Sheol. The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, substitutes the Greek word Hades seventy-two times in the Old Testament for the Hebrew word Sheol. This means the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word for Hades are interchangeable. Hades refers to the grave. Just like Sheol, Hades is the New Testament term for the place where our bodies return to dust. This is evident by comparing Acts 2:31 with an Old Testament prophecy, Psalms 16:10, about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here is the Old Testament prophecy,

For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. Psalms 16:10 (NASB)

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter declared that the prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Here is his statement.



Waiting For Resurrection

. . . he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. (NASB) Acts 2:31

The passage simply says that Jesus was not abandoned to Hades nor did He undergo decay. Psalms 16:10 and Acts 2:31 help us understand that Sheol and Hades are interchangeable terms. Finally, Jesus tells Peter that Hades will not conquer the church (Matthew 16:18). In other words, the church will not die. Sheol is the Old Testament word for the grave and the New Testament word is Hades.

**SPIRITS OF THE WICKED DEAD.** Different words are used in the Old and New Testaments for the location of the

spirits of the wicked and righteous dead. However, at the end of this age God will destroy the universe, every thing we know, and then judge the wicked (Revelation 20:11-15). The wicked will be sent to the Lake of Fire and the righteous will enter the New Heaven and New Earth.

**RECESS OF THE PIT - OLD TESTAMENT.** In the Old Testament the location of the spirits of the wicked dead appears to be down deep in Sheol or the “Recess of the Pit.” Some writers have correctly concluded that “The Pit” is another word for the grave or Sheol (Job 33:18; Psalm 30:3, 9; Proverbs 1:12). A careful study of the Hebrew word BORA reveals that, apparently, there is a deep place within the pit or Sheol where the spirits of the wicked exist.

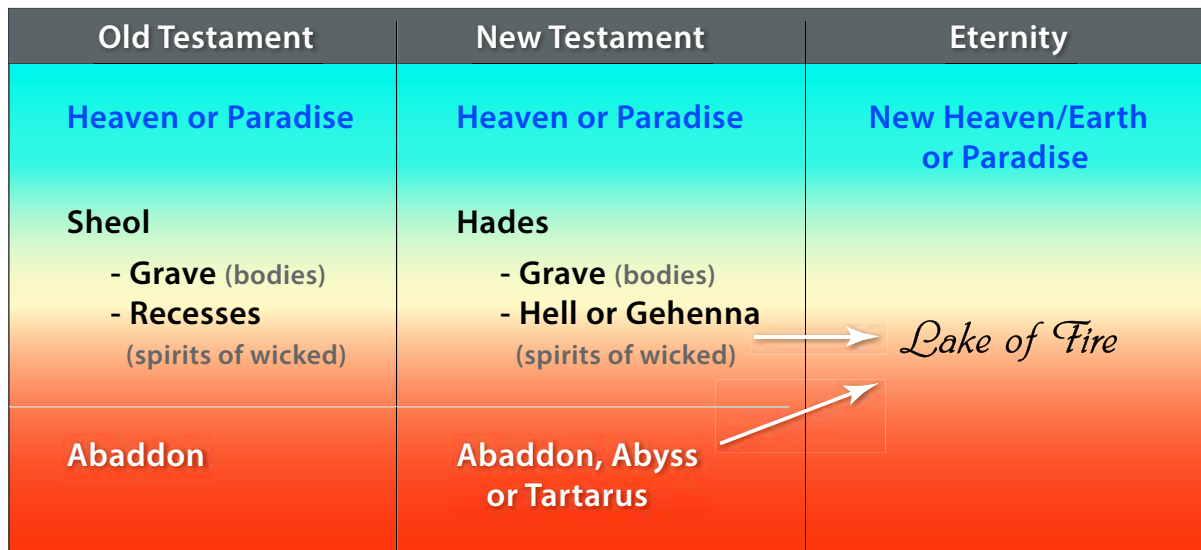
Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit. Isaiah 14:15 (NASB)

Isaiah 38:18 also indicates that those who go down into Sheol have no hope for eternal life when we are told that they cannot hope for “Your faithfulness.”

For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness. Isaiah 38:18 (NASB)

Now this could be a statement saying that dead corpses cannot hope and that would be true, but Deuteronomy 32:22 seems to suggest otherwise. It says that God’s anger burns to the lowest part of Sheol.

For a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. Deuteronomy 32:22 (NASB)



But this was not true for the Old Testament saints. Consider Isaiah 14:4-21 which is a taunt against the king of Babylon. It is a description of what would happen to the wicked king.

Sheol<sup>1</sup> from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; it arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; it raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones. (NIV) Isaiah 14:9

The description is similar to that stated about Hell and the Lake of Fire. Therefore, we conclude that deep within the recesses of Sheol are the spirits of the wicked.

**HELL - NEW TESTAMENT.** Hell is the New Testament word for the location of the spirits of the wicked dead. The Greek word for hell is Gehenna. One of the most obvious examples that Gehenna or hell is the place of the spirits of the wicked dead is Mark 9:43,

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you

1. The New King James Version Bible (NKJV) reads Hell instead of Sheol. That is unfortunate since Hell refers to the place where the spirits of the wicked dead go and not the grave. The grave is where dead bodies go. The NKJV followed the 1611 KJV Bible.

to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire . . . Mark 9:43 (NASB)

This is not a description of a grave in the dust of the ground. This is a place of “unquenchable fire.” The word “unquenchable” reveals that hell (Gehenna) is eternal - unquenchable, never ends, cannot be extinguished and it is a place of fire. This is where the spirits of the wicked dead exist.

Gehenna or hell is further described as a place of horrible suffering (Mark 9:43, 48). It is a fiery place (Matthew 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:43; James 3:6). According to Jesus, Gehenna or hell is where both the body and soul are destroyed (Matthew 10:28). Jesus’ comment would seem to suggest that hell may be somewhere within Hades.

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 (NASB)

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man ties all the piece parts together (Luke 16:23-31), In the parable, Jesus reveals an important fact when He says the rich man was in Hades and Lazarus was in the bosom of Abraham (v. 22). That is the spirit of the rich man was in Hades and the spirit of Lazarus was in the bosom of Abraham. This suggests that Gehenna or hell is a place within Hades. Just as the “Recesses of the Pit” is within Sheol in the Old Testament, Gehenna appears to be within Hades in the New Testament and Abraham’s bosom appears to be Paradise.

**DESTINY OF BOUND ANGELS.** Abaddon is another horrible place. It is the place where the angels who sinned in Genesis 6:1-4 are bound. They were and are particularly disobedient evil angels who sinned by having relations with women. This statement is supported by comparing Jude 6-8 with 1 Peter 3:18-20; 2 Peter 2:4-8 and Luke 8:31. By comparing these verses we discover that the angels sinned before Noah built the ark in Genesis 6. They sinned in Genesis 6:1-4. As a result, these angels were imprisoned in Abaddon (Old Testament name) or Tartarus (New Testament name).

**ABADDON & ABYSS.** It is clear that Abaddon is not Sheol since they are usually referred to as separate places (Job 26:6;

28:22; Proverbs 15:11; 27:20). Proverbs 27:20 refers to both.

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied. (NASB) Proverbs 27:20

Abaddon is also called an abyss in Revelation 9:11. The passage tells us that there is an angel - Satan - who is the king over the abyss.

They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. (NASB) Revelation 9:11

In Revelation 9:1 we are told that Abaddon or the abyss is a bottomless pit. Later in Revelation we discover that Satan will go there some day.

And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss . . . (NASB) Revelation 20:2-3

That is the same message of Isaiah 14:15. Satan will be imprisoned there some day.

Nevertheless you [Satan] will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit. (NASB) Isaiah 14:15

This last verse implies that Abaddon is also within Sheol. It is a fiery place.

For a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. (NASB) Deuteronomy 32:22

**TARTARUS.** Tartarus is another New Testament name for Abaddon. The Greek word Tartarus appears in 2 Peter 2:4.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell [Tartarus], putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment. (NIV) 2 Peter 2:4

Here we are specifically told that it is a place where the bound angels exist.

**DESTINY OF THE UNGODLY & ANGELS.** Every unbelieving man and woman will stand before the Great White throne judgment. The Great Throne judgment is only for unbelievers - the wicked dead. They will all be sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire is not Hades, since God says that Hades will end up there. That is, the wicked dead will receive their immortal bodies and live forever in the Lake of Fire.

*And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (NASB) Revelation 20:14*

The Lake of Fire is where Satan, the demons, the Antichrist, the False prophet and all who reject Jesus Christ in this life will spend eternity - eternal condemnation. It is a place of constant fire, darkness, silence and suffering. This will not be a fun place of parties.

**SPIRITS OF THE GODLY DEAD.** Now we ask, “Where do the spirits of a godly or righteous man exist? The answer is heaven or paradise in the Old Testament era and in the New Testament era. The Old Testament era continued

until Christ’ death when He descended into Abaddon and declared victory to the bound angels. 1 Peter 3:18-19 states that Christ visited these spirits or evil angels in prison and declared victory. Ephesians 4:8 adds that Jesus “led captive a host of captives,” that is, He transferred Paradise to heaven.

**HEAVEN - OLD TESTAMENT.** In the Old Testament heaven is pictured as being above while Sheol is below. In 2 Kings 2:11, God took the prophet Elijah up to heaven in a fiery chariot to be with Him forever. Scripture also says that God took Enoch up to heaven (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5).

What is “up”? King David gives us the answer when he says that heaven is above and Sheol is below.

*If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. (NASB) Psalm 139:8*

Sheol has no holding power over the spirit of a righteous person. We are told that the bodies of the righteous may die and return to dust, but their spirits go “up to heaven” to be with God,

**HEAVEN.** The New Testament refers to paradise and heaven as the place where the spirits of the godly exist after physical death. Throughout Jesus’ ministry He referred to heaven.

The word heaven appears 145 times in the gospels alone and 275 times in the New Testament. Jesus told us that God the Father resides in heaven (Matthew 6:9). Mark 13:32 says that the angels are in heaven.

*But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Mark 13:32 (NASB)*

Hebrews 12:23 and 2 Peter 3:13 indicate that the saints will go to heaven.



**Lazarus & Rich Man**

*... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, Hebrews 12:23 NASB)*

*But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.. 2 Peter 3:13 (NASB)*

**PARADISE.** The phrase “Abraham’s bosom” in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man is another term for Paradise,

which occurs only three times in the New Testament.

The first time the word paradise occurs is in a conversation between Jesus and a thief who was hanging on an adjacent cross during Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus promised the thief that he would go to paradise. The thief believed in Jesus, and as a result, the thief was saved from the penalty of his sins.

And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (NASB) Luke 23:43

There was no time, no opportunity for the thief to do any good deeds to gain God's favor. This is a great example that salvation is a gift. It is not something we can earn. The thief just believed, trusted Jesus, and as a result he went to paradise (Revelation 2:7).

The next time the word paradise occurs is in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Paul tells us that once he was taken up to the third heaven.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

And I know how such a man - whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows - was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. (NASB) 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

The Jews considered the first heaven to be our earthly atmosphere. The second heaven was outer space and the third heaven is what we normally call heaven. In Acts 1:11 the apostles saw Jesus ascend upward into heaven. Paradise is another word for heaven.

*SINCE THE CROSS.* Death is wonderful for Old and New saints. The Old Testament indicates that God received the spirits of the Old Testament saints at death (Psalms 49:15).

They are currently waiting for their resurrection bodies, which they will receive at Jesus' second coming.

When New Testament saints or Christians die now, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 teaches that we go immediately to be with the Lord Jesus in heaven. But we do not have resurrection bodies.

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord - for we walk by faith, not by sight - We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. (NASB) 2 Corinthians 5:6-8

Today there are many Christians in heaven. Some day in the future Jesus Christ will descend briefly in order to rapture all living Christians up to heaven just before the Tribulation Period starts. When this happens, all Christians who are alive on earth at that time will meet Christ in the air,

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. (NASB) 1 Thesalonians 4:17

Every Christian since Pentecost will be instantly changed and receive immortal or heavenly bodies.

Then we will wait in heaven until Jesus' second coming. When He comes to earth (second coming of Christ) for the battle of Armageddon at the end of the tribulation period every Christian and Old Testament saint will join Him (Revelation 19:11-16) and we will reign with Him in an earthly kingdom for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4). Old Testament saints will receive their resurrection bodies at the start of the 1,000 years earthly kingdom (Revelation 20:4).



After the 1,000 years a rebellion will occur and everyone involved will be swiftly defeated and the universe will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11).

*NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH.* God has prepared a wonderful place for the saints of the ages. Revelation 21-22 calls this place the new heaven and new earth. It is new since the old universe will have been destroyed. It is a place of joy, comfort, peace and harmony. There will no longer be suffering of any kind. It will be a place of eternal joy (Revelation 21:7; 22:14-15).

Revelation 2:7 states that the Tree of Life is in a place called Paradise. Where is Paradise? The answer is found in Revelation 22:1-3. In this passage we are told that the Tree of Life is in the New Heaven and New Earth.

*Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb*

*will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him . . . Revelation 22:1-3 (NASB)*

Paradise is the New Heaven and New Earth. That is where every saint will live for forever. Wow, what a great place in which to live.

**CONCLUSION.** In summary, we are told that the bodies of Christians will be buried in Hades or the grave and our bodiless spirits will go to heaven. We will wait until the rapture occurs at which time we receive our immortal bodies and continue living in heaven. At the second coming of Christ, He will descend from heaven to the battle of Armageddon with all of the saints of all the ages. It will be a victory celebration. Then the Old Testament saints will receive their immortal bodies and we will reign with Jesus for 1,000 years. After Christ's millennial reign, a brief battle will occur in which Satan and the world forces are defeated. Then God the Father will destroy the universe and everyone who has rejected Jesus Christ will be judged at the great White Throne Judgment. Then we will enter the New Heaven and New Earth, which will last forever.