



What Is The Difference Between Hades And Hell?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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What is the difference between Hades and Hell? Is there any difference? There are some who consider the two words to be interchangeable and referencing the same place. However, as we search the Scriptures, we discover that these are two distinct places. One is temporary. One is eternal.

Some Confusion Caused By Mistranslation

Some of the confusion that exists about the difference between Hades and Hell is due to the mistranslation of “Hades” as “Hell” in the *King James Version* of the Bible. For some reason, the translators of this widely used version of the Bible chose to translate both the Greek words “hades” and “geenna” as “hell.”

Consider a few examples of this. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (KJV). In Luke 16:23, Jesus taught, “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (KJV). In Acts 2:31, Peter said, “He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (KJV).

Admittedly, I know very little about the Greek language. However, a proper evaluation of these passages will conclude that the Greek term for Hades simply does *not* refer to the same place the Greek term for Hell refers to. Yet, by simply following the way in which the *King James Version* has handled the word “hell” in these passages, individuals have misunderstood the differences in these two places. And, some have even concluded that Jesus Christ spent time in the fires of Hell. This is absolutely false. Therefore, let’s spend the remainder of our time in this study trying to rightly divide the Scriptures and understand the differences between Hades and Hell.

Hades Is The Temporary Realm Of The Dead

“Hades” is the Greek term. The English term, then, has not been translated. Yet, as you search the Scriptures, you should observe that Hades is not an eternal place of punishment. Instead, it is the temporary spiritual realm in which everyone who has died exists today. And, as we will see, this place contains two separate parts/sections. One is a place of comfort. The other is a place of torment.

We learn many things about Hades from Jesus’ teaching about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Let’s consider verses 19-26 specifically. “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.’”

Though the *King James Version* translates this passage in a way that puts the rich man in torments in “hell,” all the other translations I am familiar with have it as “Hades” (which is the Greek word used in the passage). Still, we need to consider other points from this passage to help us see whether this refers to an eternal place of fire and brimstone – or a temporary place for all who have died (both the evil and the good).

Consider that this was the place where both Lazarus and the rich man went after they died. While the text does not specifically identify Lazarus as being in Hades (as it does with the rich man), this conclusion is obvious from the Scriptures. First, consider that the rich man could see Lazarus. But, there was a great gulf that was “fixed” so that none could pass from one side to the other. They were in the same spiritual “realm.”

Second, this place of comfort Lazarus experienced after his physical death was the same place Jesus went to whenever He died. In Luke 23:43, Jesus told one of the two thieves hanging on the cross beside of Him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Then, in Acts 2:31, Peter said that Jesus’ soul was not left in “Hades,” but was raised from the dead. Clearly, Jesus did not go to Hell whenever He died (according to the mistranslation of the KJV). Instead, He went to “Paradise” in “Hades.” This is the same place that is identified in Luke 16:22 as “Abraham’s bosom.”

So, the picture that is presented of Hades in this passage is a spiritual realm in which there is one section of comfort and one section of torment. The torment is described in detail in this passage. The rich man said that he was tormented in flame so much that he desired for even a drop of water to be provided for relief. Yet, no relief was provided. Furthermore, the passage depicts that there is a great gulf/chasm that separates the two sections – so that the souls in one place cannot go to the other. And, verses 27-31 also present the fact that these souls cannot return to the earth by their own choosing.

Finally, let's consider Revelation 20:13-14 to underscore a key difference between Hades and Hell. This passage that depicts the great Judgment scene says, "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." Notice that there will be a time when both death (physical death) and Hades have no more use. And, they will be cast into "the lake of fire." So, please understand that this passage underscores the temporary nature of the Hadean realm. It is *not* the eternal abode of either the good or the evil!

Therefore, since Hades is the temporary spiritual realm of the dead, there are billions of people who exist in this place today. And, if you die prior to the return of Jesus Christ, you will also spend time in one of Hades' two sections. It should be your desire, then, to live in such a way that you will be granted rest and peace when your life on this earth ends – and so that you can avoid the punishment that will be given to those who have lived in rebellion against the Lord.

Hell Is The Place Of Eternal Punishment

"Geenna" is the Greek word that is most commonly translated as "hell." It has reference to the valley of Hinnom that was south of the city of Jerusalem. It was this place where people would bring all manner of rubbish and dead animals to be burned. Yet, while this word had reference to a literal place near Jerusalem, Jesus used this word to present the picture of future punishment for the wicked.

Consider some passages in which Jesus used this Greek word. Matthew 5:22 says, "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." Matthew 5:29 says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." Matthew 10:28 says, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Now, Jesus was not using this word to identify the literal valley of Hinnom. For, as evident from Matthew 10:28, a person's soul could never be destroyed by the literal fires of that place. Instead, Jesus was speaking about another place of punishment – a place of eternal torment!

Consider how this place is depicted in other passages. First, consider that Jesus spoke about a punishment those who were not obedient to God would experience. In Jesus' parable of the talents (in Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus said that the "unprofitable servant" would be cast "into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verse 30). Then, in the following picture of the Judgment Day (in Matthew 25:31-46), consider the punishment Jesus said would be given to those who would not be found faithful. "Then He will say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (verse 41). Verse 46 says, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote concerning those who were not obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ and did not know God. He said that these individuals would have vengeance taken on them "in flaming fire" when Jesus returns. They would "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Look also at the lake of fire and brimstone that is depicted in the book of Revelation. Revelation 20:10 identifies that the devil will be cast into the "lake of fire and brimstone" (as was also seen in Matthew 25:41). Then, after picturing the great and final Judgment, Revelation 20:15 says that "anyone not found written in the Book of Life" will be "cast into the lake of fire." And, Revelation 21:8 depicts this place and identifies its inhabitants. "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Surely this punishment is different than what the Bible identifies as "Hades." Although Hades includes one portion of punishment (and the punishment is also pictured by fire), it is a temporary place. However, the punishment of Hell is clearly identified as being eternal! There is no escape from it. Furthermore, though individuals are in Hades now, mankind will not be cast into the fires of Hell until after the Judgment. Finally, unlike Hades (which had a part of comfort and a part of torment), there is no comforting side to Hell. Hell is the place of eternal punishment for those who did not obey God during their earthly lives. The obedient will spend eternity in Heaven.

Conclusion

When the Bible talks about "Hades" and "Hell," it refers to two completely different places. Hades is a temporary place where those who have died exist today. Hell is an eternal place of punishment for those who fail to obey God.

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