

Hades

Its meanings and implications

There has been, and probably always will be, a great deal of discussion about the meaning of the word *Hades*. I hope this effort will be a positive contribution to that study.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for Hades is used only ten times:

Matthew 11:23

And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies [the Greek word here is Heaven - cb]? No, you will go down to the depths [the Greek word here is Hades - cb]. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

Matthew 16:18

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Luke 10:15

And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies [the Greek word here is Heaven - cb]? No, you will go down to the depths [the Greek word here is Hades - cb].

Luke 16:23

In hell [the Greek word here is Hades - cb], where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

Acts 2:27

because you will not abandon me to the grave [the Greek word here is Hades - cb], nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

Acts 2:31

Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave [the Greek word here is Hades - cb], nor did his body see decay.

Revelation 1:18

I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades

Revelation 6:8

I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Revelation 20:13

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Revelation 20:14

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

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The first step in understanding any word is to check the dictionaries. Using these definitions as our guideline, we must then study the context of each verse that uses the word. Once we get the information from these two sources, we should be able to understand what God has said when using that word. The following is the meaning of the Greek word, $\alpha\delta\eta\varsigma$, transliterated Hades in our versions, from seven Greek dictionaries.

The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised “the invisible abode or mansion of the dead; the place of punishment, hell; the lowest place or condition.”

B.A.G. “the underworld as the place of the dead Acts 2:27, 31 ... In the depths, contrasted with heaven Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15.”

Liddell and Scott, ninth edition. “...the nether world, 2. place of departed spirits **II**. After Homer [c. 8th century B. C.], ... *the grave, death*, ... ”

The Classic Greek Dictionary *Hades*, the god of the lower world, Latin *Pluto* ... In or into the house of *Hades*. **II**. Later, *the grave, death*”

Thayer “Orcus, the nether world, the realm of the dead.” In Biblical Greek it denotes: Orcus, the infernal regions, a dark and dismal place in the very depths of the earth, the common receptacle of disembodied spirits.

TDNT - V. 1, page 148. There are three full pages of information presented. I encourage you to read the entire article.

On the other hand, in another respect we seem to have a double view in the NT. In Acts 2:27, 31 $\alpha\delta\eta\varsigma$ seems to be thought of as a place of assembly for all souls, and in Luke 16:23 (cf. 26) all the dead are pictured as in the underworld, though Hades itself is used only of the place of punishment of the wicked.

Vine - page 187 “Hades ($\alpha\delta\eta\varsigma$), the region of departed spirits of the lost (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the Ascension of Christ).

None of these definitions from Greek dictionaries gives even a hint that the meaning of the word includes a two part abode for departed spirits. It is consistently portrayed as having only one chamber, compartment, area or locale for those spirits who are in prison there.

None of the above ten scriptures, even in a broader context, gives the slightest suggestion that Hades has two parts, one for the good spirits and one for the bad spirits. This of course is consistent with our previous conclusions that Tartarus is synonymous with Hell and Paradise is synonymous with Heaven (chapters 4 and 5 in *Understanding the Afterlife*, by Cliff Baird). It is really amazing that the traditional view of a two part Hadean world is so widespread, considering the absence of any evidence to support it.

Using each of the definitions given for the word Hades, listed above, we can collect and group those definitions as follows:

- 1) The invisible abode ... of the dead, the underworld as place of the dead, Acts 2:27, 31, the nether [below the earth’s surface] world, place of departed spirits, common receptacle of disembodied spirits, place of assembly for all souls, Acts 2:27, 31.

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- 2) The place of punishment, place of punishment of the wicked, region of departed spirits of the lost (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the ascension of Christ).
- 3) Hell, infernal [of hell, hellish] regions.

If we combine and simplify these three options we get:

- 1) Location of all departed spirits
- 2) Location of only the departed spirits of the lost
- 3) Hell

But since Hell is also the location of the departed spirits of the lost and the Hebrew word Sheol means the location of all departed spirits, before Christ, we are left with our word Hades meaning either Hell or Sheol. So as we read this word in each of the ten scriptures listed above (Matthew 11:23, 16:18; Luke 10:15, 16:23 Acts 2:27,31; Revelation 1:18, 6:8, 20:13,14), we must study the context to see which of these meanings apply.

The Matthew 11 passage gives us more detailed information about this story by Jesus than the parallel passage in Luke 10. Since there is also no additional or conflicting data in the Luke 10 passage we will only discuss the passage from Matthew. The context starts in verse 21.

*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the **day of judgment** than for you. 23 And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto **heaven**? Thou shalt go down unto **Hades**: for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the **day of judgment**, than for thee.*

In this passage the time period is *the Day of Judgment* (verses 22 and 24) and the place is Hades (verse 23). This implies that this “go[ing] down to Hades” will happen on “the day of Judgment.” This presents two problems for the traditionalists.

First, the traditional view says that the result of the judging on judgment day will be either Heaven or Hell, not Hades. If Hades and Hell are different places how can we harmonize this passage with that traditional view? But if Hades, in this context, means Hell then this passage presents us with no difficulties.

Second, Hades is here contrasted to heaven which implies that Hades (not exclusively Hell as we usually conclude) is the antithesis of Heaven. For this antithesis to be correct, Hades must have only one compartment or one type of occupant (the unrighteous) as Heaven does (the righteous), which is contrary to the traditional view.

The Matthew 16 passage is the next use of Hades in our list. In Matthew 16:18 we are told that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus says He has the keys to death and Hades. If you have the keys to a place you can control the closing and the opening of the door/gate to allow entrance or deny it. Does this passage in Revelation help us to understand the passage in Matthew?

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Jesus, in Matthew, is saying that He has the control and He will not let evil, represented here by “the gates Hades,” destroy the church. This agrees with the teaching that the church will still be in existence when Christ returns, 1 Thessalonians 4:13 ff.

If Hades and Hell are two different places why use Hades here? Is Hades worse than Hell? On the other hand if Hell is worse that Hades does this verse leave room for something worse that Hades actually being able to prevail against the church?

The expression “the gates of Hell” is nowhere found in the New Testament, except in the King James translation of this passage. Should we assume that Jesus has the keys to Hades but not to Hell? Don't we know by His death, burial and resurrection and the subsequent gospel He, in effect, has the keys to Hell also.

Does “the gates of Hades” here imply all evil, even that depicted by an expression like “the gates of Hell,” if, indeed, this expression existed? If so then Hades in this passage should be understood as meaning Hell. Maybe Ockham's razor (see *Hermeneutics for us common folks* on website cliffbaird.wordpress.com) could play an important role in our understanding of this passage. The simplest solution that Hades and Hell describe the same place, in this context, is preferred. Hades and Hell being different places leaves too many unanswered and unanswerable questions.

The next use of Hades is in Luke 16:19 ff.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, [Greek = Hades - cb] torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 6 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30 "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'

Here we have the famous parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Anyone reading verses 23, 24, 25, 28 will know this is a description of a terrible place of punishment, only for the ungodly. Therefore, the word Hades here should be understood as Hell as it is translated by the KJV, AKJV and NIV. For a detail explanation of this passage see *Luke 16:19-31* on website cliffbaird.wordpress.com .

This conclusion is strengthened when compared to the following passages: Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:28.

In Matthew 8:10-12 Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are pictured in Heaven, contrasted with outer darkness (Hell) where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The parable just quoted from Luke 16 gives the same vision

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of the good place, seeing Abraham in heaven, but uses Hades to identify the place from which the vision is seen, again emphasizing Hades can mean Hell.

The warning of Jesus in Luke 13:23-30 says,

Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' 26 "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' 27 "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' 28 "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. 29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.

Compare Luke 13:28 with Luke 16:23. It is conceded by all that Luke 13:28 is talking about Hell. How is it possible to read the word "Hades" in the context of Luke 16:23 and conclude that it is a different place than Hell?

"Weeping and gnashing of teeth" will occur in "outer darkness," Matthew 8:12, 25:30, in the "fiery furnace," Matthew 13:42, 50, in a place with the "worthless servant," Matthew 24:30, in the place "with the hypocrites," Matthew 24:51, and in a place from where you can see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, Luke 13:28, 16:23. Based on what evidence could a person read all these passages and conclude that they are all the same place, *except* the one in Luke 16:23? What is there about the description in Luke 16:23 that implies a different place? It too, is a place of torment and agony "in this fire" from where Abraham is visible, yet the place is Hades. How can it possibly be a different place than that described in Luke 13:28?

For the next use of the word "Hades" let us look at David's prophecy recorded in Acts 2:27,31

*because you will not abandon me to the grave [the Greek word here is **Hades** - cb], nor will you let your Holy One see decay." ... "Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave [the Greek word here is **Hades** - cb], nor did his body see decay.*

David expected to go to, but not be abandoned in, Hades. But David lived and died under the Old Law. So, in reality, David went to *Sheol* where all departed spirits went before Christ died, Psalms 16:10. Acts 2:27 is a quotation from Psalms 16:10. When Hebrew *Sheol* is translated by the Holy Spirit into Greek in Acts 2:27, it is translated by *Hades*. This is clear proof that Hades means Sheol, in this context.

This is in keeping with the standard practice of using the Greek word *Hades* to translate the Hebrew word *Sheol*, as evidenced by the fact that the Greek word *Hades* is used to translate the Hebrew word *Sheol* 59 out of the 63 times in the Septuagint.

In Acts 2:31 Luke explicitly says that David prophesied that Jesus would not be left in Sheol/Hades *nor will you let your Holy One see decay*, meaning that Jesus would be resurrected from the dominion of Hades/Sheol before His flesh decayed in the tomb. But David's statement about himself and his prophecy concerning Jesus are in the

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same sentence, with no indication that a different place is intended for Jesus. Therefore, David is prophesying that Jesus, also, will be in Sheol, since that is the only place known to the Hebrews for the dead. This conclusion is necessary because "Sheol" of the Old Testament did not end until just prior to Jesus' resurrection. While Jesus' body was entombed His spirit had gone to Sheol/Hades to "preach to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19). This is in perfect harmony with our analysis of 1 Peter 4:5-6 and John 5:25 which is detailed a little later. So both Acts 2:27 and verse 31 refer to Sheol when the Greek word Hades is used.

Another interesting fact about the word Hades is that it is nowhere mentioned between Acts 2 and Revelation 1:18. According to the traditional view Hades and Hell are always different places. This view also says that every person goes directly to Hades at death. That means we have fifty percent of the New Testament, from Acts 2 through Revelation 1, without any mention of the immediate location of the spirit at death. But in this same area of the New Testament we have many references to the final judgment of God, i.e. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, Hebrew 10:27, 2 Peter 2:7, 3:7 plus 26 references to "judgment" and 13 uses of the word "wrath" to indicate God's final punishment.

This unusual paucity of information about Hades would need an explanation if it is, indeed, the place we all go to at death. Of course if Hades/Sheol was emptied just before the resurrection of Jesus, then no explanation is needed because Hades/Sheol did not exist after the resurrection of Jesus, only Hades/Hell existed at that time.

Of the ten scriptures in the New Testament that use the word Hades we have discussed six. That leaves only the four in Revelation which we repeat here for the convenience of the reader.

Revelation 1:18

I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades

Revelation 6:8

I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Revelation 20:13

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Revelation 20:14

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

We only have to determine if the word Hades in these four verses should be understood as meaning the place of all spirits before Christ, i.e. equal to the Hebrew word Sheol (as in Acts 2:27 and 31), or the place for all unrighteous spirits, i.e. Hell (as the four uses in the Gospels).

In these four verses Hades is always tied to death. All four verses say "death and Hades." Why did the Holy Spirit tell John to use this coordinating conjunction to tie these two entities together? Neither Hell nor Hades is so grammatically linked with any other words anywhere else in the New Testament. The ideas represented by these two words must be closely related and they cannot refer to Hell since they (death and Hades) are thrown into Hell in their last usage verse 14. The context implies *death and hades* in verse 13 has the same meaning. These two meanings cannot refer to Hell because of the time the throwing took place, i.e. before the general resurrection. For verification of this conclusion see *Revelation 20:11-15* on the website cliffbaird.wordpress.com

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Unless, of course, a claim can be made that either of the other 2 verses in Revelation mean Hell and only the last two verses, 13 and 14, means Hades. Then examine the evidence supporting this distinction to see if it is both valid and sufficient.

Therefore, Hades in these four verses in Revelation must refer to Sheol, as it does in Acts 2:27 and 31. This Hebrew word Sheol means the place of residence for all those who died before the resurrection of Christ.

If this is not the correct understanding of the word *Hades* in revelation 20:14 then according to the traditional view, we must understand that Paradise (the upper part of the Hadean world) is also thrown into Hell, which just seems a little too incongruous.

Summary: Meanings for Hades

The word Hades is used ten times in the New Testament. We have demonstrated by dictionary definitions and the context of each usage that the four usages of the word in the Gospels describe the current place of punishment, i.e. Hell. This, of course, makes perfect sense as Christ came to fulfill the Old Covenant and establish the New Covenant, He would therefore make clear such an important new idea as having a new place for departed spirits, i.e. doing away with Sheol and establishing judgment at death followed by heaven or hell. He did this so very vividly through the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

We have likewise demonstrated by the same methods that the other six usages of the word Hades all refer to the place of all the dead before the resurrection of Christ, i.e. Sheol.