

Death and Hades

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Revelation 20:13-14: “The ocean gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged each one according to their works. 14 And Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death, the Lake of Fire.”¹

All of my life, until a few weeks ago (aged 88), whenever I read these verses I was puzzled. How could Death be holding people who were not in Hades (not to mention the ocean)? I was filming my translation, with commentary, in both English and Portuguese, and when I came to chapter 20 I asked the Holy Spirit to illumine me as to the correct understanding of verse 13. I believe He did, and I share that illumination as follows.

To begin, Hades should not be confused with Hell. Hell is the Lake of Fire into which Death and Hades will be thrown, verse 14 above. For a detailed discussion, please see “Hades is not Hell” in the Appendix to my *The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken* (third edition).

It was Colossians 1:18 that gave me the clue. “He is Beginning,² the firstborn from among the dead,³ so that He may be preeminent in everything.” This is an interesting (even if unpleasant) figure of speech; death is viewed as a monstrous womb, pregnant with all the deceased, and Jesus was literally the first one out, the first one to be ‘born’, the first one to resurrect with a glorified body.⁴ But it was only His body that was in that ‘womb’; His spirit was in ‘Paradise’ (Luke 23:43). ‘Paradise’ here refers to that half of Hades (Sheol in the OT) reserved for the righteous dead. (Hades is the ‘halfway house’ where departed spirits await the final judgment.) In Luke 16:22 it is called ‘Abraham’s bosom’.⁵

Luke 16:19-31 is not stated to be a parable, so most probably it is not. Parables do not have named participants. Sovereign Jesus gave us important information about that halfway house. Notice in verse 22 that the rich man “died and was buried”, but it was only his body that was buried, because in the next verse his spirit was in Hades. In Luke 8:54-55, Jesus addressed Jairus’ dead daughter and “her spirit returned”. The body was there on the bed, but the spirit was

¹ The first death is the physical one; the second is the spiritual one—eternal separation from the Creator (the essence of death is separation).

² There is no article with “beginning”, so I consider that it functions like a proper name.

³ He was the first, but only the first! Because He conquered death, we also can escape that ‘womb’.

⁴ Resurrection re-unites body and spirit.

⁵ Neither the Lord nor the criminal were in Heaven “this day”, so the Lord’s use of ‘Paradise’ here cannot refer to Heaven.

somewhere else. Notice also what Peter said about Jesus in Acts 2:26-27, quoting Psalm 16:9-10.

“Furthermore, even my flesh will repose upon hope,¹ 27 because You will not abandon my soul in Hades,² nor will You allow Your Holy One to see decay”. Notice that the soul is in Hades, but for the body not to see decay, it would have to be resurrected; but for resurrection to happen the soul must be reunited with the body, and therefore could not remain in Hades. David had no way of knowing that, so evidently wrote under divine inspiration.

So then, Death holds bodies, while Hades holds souls/spirits. But why is the ‘ocean’ mentioned? I don’t know, but I offer the following: the vast majority of people die on land, so their graves (or urns) are known. People who die in the ocean have no grave, and even their bones will have been scattered, but they will be resurrected, even so. (The same holds for those who are dissolved by nuclear fission, etc.)

I now return to Revelation 20:13-14. The context is the final judgment, the Great White Throne. All the righteous will have been resurrected, the first resurrection,³ so only the lost will stand before that Throne. I understand that Jesus emptied ‘Abraham’s bosom’ when He returned to Heaven, so at this point Hades holds only the lost. Further, both Death and Hades have to do with this world, only, so at the end of this world both will be thrown into the Lake. Since at this point both hold only the lost, they may be metonyms for those lost.

¹ I take it that the emphasis here is upon the physical body; Jesus’ body was preserved from decay by divine intervention—there was no bad smell in the empty tomb. The resurrection accounts refer to the wrappings, but not to the 100 pounds of spices—I wonder what happened to them (you know, that much spice would be hard to ignore).

² Peter was speaking Hebrew, quoting Psalm 16. The Hebrew word there is ‘Sheol’. Luke wrote Greek, and translated ‘Sheol’ as ‘Hades’. If Luke wrote under divine inspiration, then ‘Hades’ is the inspired translation of ‘Sheol’.

³ The first resurrection is for the saved; the second resurrection is for the lost. The first resurrection has several stages: 1) the first stage was the resurrection of Jesus, at which time He emptied ‘Abraham’s bosom’; 2) the second will be the Rapture of the Church; 3) the third will be those who are saved between the Rapture and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom; 4) the last will be the righteous during the Millennium. The second resurrection has a single stage: all the lost of all time will be raised to face the Great White Throne.