

LESSON 18

Foundations Curriculum

Jesus Descended to Hades

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Introduction

Jesus Descended to Hades

In this eighteenth lesson, we will learn what occurred between the death and the resurrection of Jesus (when He descended to Hades after dying). The Scriptures record that Jesus descended to Hades and preached to the spirits in prison. This can cause confusion in the understanding of some people, as can the translation itself in passages where the word “hell” is used (when the correct word in the original is “Hades”). What happened to Jesus during the three days and three nights of His death, when He was in Hades? What did His resurrection mean? Here we will also understand the difference between Hades and hell, and the meaning of the word Paradise.

1) What Happened Between the Death and the Resurrection of Jesus?

The incorrect translation that appears in some Bibles can generate various confusions

There are in the Holy Bible many texts that speak about the death and the resurrection of Jesus. This caused the topic to be widely discussed in the Church. As a result, we have set aside the three-day interval between these two events: death and resurrection.

Although few, there are in the Scriptures sufficient texts that clarify for us what occurred and what Jesus did during the time of His physical death.

But before addressing the question of the person of Jesus having gone (and remained) in Hades for three days, we need to emphasize that there are wrong understandings on the subject, precisely because of incorrect translations of the Greek texts.

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Matthew 16:18 (NKJV)

The original Greek word that appears in the text quoted above is Hades, not “hell,” as it appears in several translations we know.

Let us look at other texts that were also mistranslated and therefore brought confusion.

“And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

Luke 16:23 (NKJV)

In the passage above, Jesus is telling about the story of the rich man who had died and found himself in Hades (not in hell). Remember that this is a teaching of Jesus about life after death, and not a parable, as some believe. Parables always had a function of teaching about the Kingdom of God.

“For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

Acts 2:27 (NKJV)

The text above, from Acts 2:27, refers to a Psalm that Peter quotes in his sermon. The correct translation is “You will not leave my soul in Hades.”

It is important to understand clearly the difference between Hades and hell. They are completely distinct places. Hades is the region of the dead. Hell is the lake of fire.

Let us meditate on the text of Revelation 20:11–14:

“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. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 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.”

Revelation 20:11–14 (NKJV)

By understanding the text above, many doubts can be cleared up. After all, it does not make sense for hell to be cast into the lake of fire. Hell is the lake of fire.

Let us look at the difference between Hades and hell in a more instructive way.

With this comparison, it is important that the brothers and sisters be able to perceive the difference between what Hades is and what hell is, since many confuse them.

Jesus went to Hades, not to hell. According to the Word, hell is the place to which Jesus will send the condemned.

It is important to note that Hades and Sheol are the same thing. Hades is the Greek word, and Sheol is the Hebrew word.

When Jesus speaks about the condemnation of the wicked, the word used is Gehenna. Gehenna was a place that existed in Israel. It was a large pit where people threw garbage, animal carcasses, and the bodies of people who had no money to pay for burial. There the fire burned 24 hours a day, and nothing that entered that place could come out. Jesus refers to Gehenna when He speaks of where the wicked will go after the judgment. So it was an example that Jesus took from that place to refer to Gehenna, which is the condemnation, the lake of fire.

When the Bible says that “the body of Jesus would not see corruption,” it is because the two thieves were thrown into that pit (Gehenna), but Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus so that He would not be thrown into that Gehenna and His body would not experience the destruction of that fire.

Paradise

There is a word that is not widely used in the Scriptures. It appears only three times in the New Testament, but it causes some confusion in the minds of certain people: the word PARADISE.

When Jesus died, Paradise was in the lower regions of the earth. Jesus descended there. Jesus said to the thief on the cross: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

At that moment, Paradise was in the lower regions of the earth. This is unquestionable. Another unquestionable fact is that Paradise is no longer down there. Paradise, today, is in heaven.

According to the text of 2 Corinthians 12:2–4, Paul affirms that he was caught up to Paradise, and at the same time was caught up to the third heaven, meaning that Paradise today is in heaven.

This leads us to believe that, possibly (this is not a categorical affirmation), in this transfer of Paradise — from the lower regions to heaven — Paul is referring to this when he says in Ephesians 4 that “when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive,” that is, Abraham’s bosom. The saints of the Old Testament who were not in the place of torment were in Abraham’s bosom. They were brought into the presence of the Father after Jesus presented His blood before the Father, opening access for all.

There is also the possibility of confirming this according to Luke 16. In that text there is a dialogue between those in the place of torment and those in Abraham’s bosom. In the

text, it is possible to see Abraham conversing with the rich man. Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom and the rich man is in the place of torment. It is possible to see them both dialoguing, which gives the impression that they could be in nearby places, according to what Jesus said, separated by a great gulf.

Today, it is impossible to imagine that someone who is up above in heaven is dialoguing with someone who is beneath the earth. So this is the possibility that can be raised.

The word "Paradise" is neither Greek nor Hebrew. It is a word of Persian origin that appears three times in the New Testament. It appears later in Revelation, at the end.

After these clarifications (as a backdrop), what, after all, did Jesus go to do in Hades?

2) What Did Jesus Go to Do in Hades?

Jesus went to do three things

1) He Was Justified in the Spirit

First, we must remember what Paul wrote to Timothy.

*"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit,
seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles,
believed on in the world, received up in glory."*

1 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV)

Think: what was Paul referring to when he said that Jesus was justified in the Spirit?

Let us remember that the word "justified" was very common in the courts of that time. We were justified by the merits of Christ Jesus.

"Justified," in that time, in the courts, meant "declared innocent." Today, in the courts we know, the most common expression is innocent or guilty, but in that era, when the defendant was declared innocent, he was called justified.

The following is what happened: Jesus was condemned by men; He was condemned by the majority of the Jews and He was condemned by the Gentiles. Jesus was tried and condemned.

What happened when Jesus was in the spirit? Jesus was outside the body. Jesus had died and was outside the body when He was justified. This means that the trial of Jesus was reviewed. This is the true Supreme Court of our Father, of our God, who is the Judge of all the universe.

He reviewed the case of Jesus. His case was reviewed when Jesus was in Hades, and the life of Jesus was examined. The perfect life that Jesus lived caused the Father to

declare Him righteous. This means that the Father reversed the judgment in favor of Jesus.

He is the only one who was declared righteous by His own merits in all the history of humanity. All others were justified by His merits.

2) He Preached to the Spirits in Prison

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

1 Peter 3:18–22 (NKJV)

“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

1 Peter 4:6 (NKJV)

At times, speculators arise who speak of the possibility of conversion for those people who were in Hades, those who were already dead. This is not possible. And it is not this that the Bible is speaking of or referring to in this passage — it is speaking of those who were judged; and Peter emphasizes that it concerns that generation from the time of the flood.

Jesus went there to explain to them why they were there, in complete ignorance. They did not understand anything. It was not a death like any other. That was a judgment of God upon the entire earth.

And Jesus went to Hades to explain that judgment, so that those men who were there in spirit and had understood nothing when they were in the flesh would understand. Their judgment was according to men; today, in the spirit, they understand everything and know what their condition means.

Setting these speculations aside, what is important here is the reaffirmation that consciousness continues after death, and dialogue also continues.

The most important thing in this passage, however, is to emphasize that Jesus did not stop preaching even after He was dead.

Imagine the situation: the body of Jesus was being embalmed, being wrapped in linen cloths and spices; the disciples were there mourning and weeping, thinking that the Master had been silenced forever — and at that very moment Jesus was preaching.

They were weeping; Jesus was preaching. Not even death silenced Jesus. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

3) By the Grace of God, Jesus Tasted Death for Every Man

*“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels,
for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor,
that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”*

Hebrews 2:9 (NKJV)

What is the writer of the letter to the Hebrews trying to say when he declares: “that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone”? He is saying that Jesus had to taste, to undergo, to experience death in its full sense. If Jesus had died on the cross and immediately been raised, He would not have experienced death in all its fullness.

In truth, Jesus died physically on the cross, but afterward He had to experience death to its very depths, descending to the region of the dead.

The only thing the Father decided not to apply to Jesus, with regard to His death, was the corruption of the body. Indeed, the prophetic psalm says:

*“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*

Psalms 16:10 (NKJV)

This means that the body of Jesus did not experience corruption, because before the body of Jesus could decay from death, He was justified; and before His body began to decompose, He was raised.

Let us read the passage from Psalm 22, which is a prophetic psalm. As you follow the reading attentively, you will notice how the text is referring to the person of Jesus, to what Jesus was experiencing on the cross and at the moment of His death. There are references there that will help us understand what matters most.

*“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?
O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;
and in the night season, and am not silent.
But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.
Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them.
They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You,
and were not ashamed. But I am a worm, and no man;*

*a reproach of men, and despised by the people.
All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip,
they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the LORD,
let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'"*

Psalm 22:1–8 (NKJV)

*"But You are He who took Me out of the womb;
You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts.
I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God.
Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help.
Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me.
They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion.
I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws;
You have brought Me to the dust of death.
For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.
They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones.
They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them,
and for My clothing they cast lots.
But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!
Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog.
Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen!
You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise You."*

Psalm 22:9–22 (NKJV)

How far did Jesus go in taking on our sins? What happened to Him mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?

When the text mentions "the strong bulls of Bashan," it is possible that this is figurative language that the spirit of Christ is giving here in reference to the demons who surrounded Him, celebrating as they took Him to the lower regions of the earth.

The passage "I can count all My bones" refers to the fact that, when they went to break the bones of Jesus, He had already died and they did not break them. Here we see Jesus not merely dying. These words show Jesus experiencing death. That is why Jesus descended to Hades — because He had to fulfill the entire process of death.

It is impossible not to love this Man! It is impossible not to love this God.

Finally, Jesus took the keys of Death and Hades:

*"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.
And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."*

Revelation 1:18 (NKJV)

Jesus was the first to come out of Hades. In doing so, He acquired the keys upon His departure and brought out all who belong to Him from there.

CONCLUSION

In this eighteenth lesson of the Foundations Curriculum, we learned the difference between Hades and hell (and the confusions that exist because of incorrect translations), and we understood what occurred between the death and the resurrection of Jesus (when He descended to Hades after dying). We also saw why Jesus needed to taste death for every man, what He went to do in Hades, and what it meant to be justified in the Spirit. Furthermore, we understood the meaning of the word Paradise. Finally, Jesus preached to the spirits in prison (to make them aware of the condemnation of the past) and took the keys of Hades for Himself.

CONSIDER CAREFULLY

- 01 What is the difference between Hades and hell?
- 02 Do you see the glory of Jesus having been declared righteous by the Father?
- 03 Does the description of Psalm 22 constrain your heart?
- 04 Jesus preached after He was dead. Do you preach while you are still alive?

*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.*

Ephesians 2:20 (NKJV)