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MOTIFS OF DEATH AND HELL IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS: PART 1—AN EXAMINATION OF HADES

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Abstract

Death and the afterlife are issues that interest every person living today. They were also issues that interested Bible writers. There is a plethora of relevant texts. This study focuses on one word, Hades, and explores its meaning, beginning with a background study of Old Testament material and extra-biblical sources, and then focuses on New Testament texts, especially in the Gospels. While most commentators habitually consider Hades to be a place where immaterial, immortal souls go at death or after a judgment – because of the influence of the Greek pagan/secular background of Hades – in biblical usage *hades* is detached from this Greek background and is mostly a translation of the Hebrew *sheol*. This study argues that the biblical *sheol/hades* is another name for the tomb, the place where all people go in bodily form, there to await the resurrection. This motif, first developed in the Old Testament, is replicated repeatedly and without fail in the New Testament texts that refer to Hades.

Keywords

Hades, death, hell, afterlife, the grave

INTRODUCTION

The question of what happens when a person dies and, perhaps more importantly, what will happen to the wicked on the Day of Judgment and then for eternity, are questions that have elicited countless discussions and generated a massive bibliography. This two-part study will approach the topic by examining two of the most pertinent terms, Hades and Gehenna.

It was assumed for a long time that the two terms are nearly synonymous,¹ due in part to the translation in the KJV of both as “hell,”²

¹ E.g., R.E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 295: “[Hades] comes in this case to much the same thing [as hell]”.

and partly because of the mistaken tendency to conflate post-mortem expectations with eschatological punishment. Today, however, it is recognised that the two denote different things: Hades relates to temporal death and Gehenna to the final fate of the wicked.³

This first part will examine Hades. It will begin with a discussion of background material, first by looking briefly at Greek literature, and then by discussing at more length the use of *hades* in the Old Testament (OT), early Jewish writings, and the New Testament (NT) outside of the gospels. Then we will concentrate on the gospels, first discussing two parallel texts (Matt 11:20-24, Luke 10:13-15), then Matthew 16:17-19, and finally Luke 16:19-31.

Most ancient pagan religions believed in continued existence after death.⁴ I will endeavour to demonstrate in this short study, what I have argued in more detail elsewhere,⁵ that the biblical worldview is decidedly different and that in biblical anthropology, death is the complete cessation of life, and not its continuation in another form of existence.

HADES: OUTSIDE THE GOSPELS

1. Greek Literature and LXX

Hades (ᾍδης) is a Greek term that comes from the verb ὁράω, “to see” (infinitive, ἰδεῖν).⁶ With the negating prefix α it literally means, “the place

² Cf. Matt 16:18, Mark 9:43, and Luke 16:23 in the KJV. Cf. D.A. Jacoby, “Doctrinal, Biblical, and Psychological Obstacles,” *A Consuming Passion* (ed. C.M. Date and R. Highfield, Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 296-306.

³ C.G. Marshall, “Divine and Human Punishment in the New Testament,” *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (ed. C.M. Date, G.G. Stump, J.W. Anderson; Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 207-227.

⁴ E.g., G. Shushan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

⁵ K. Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus: Gehenna, Hades, the Abyss, the Outer Darkness Where there is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth*, (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013). This article draws extensively in summary form from this work. Cf. K. Papaioannou, “Death, Eternal Life, and Judgment in the Gospel and the Epistles of John,” in Date and Highfield, *A Consuming Passion*, 172-89.

⁶ See H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, rev. H.S. Jones with assistance from R. McKenzie (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, with rev. suppl. 1996), s.v. (henceforth, LSJ).

that is not seen.” The name indicates that despite differing views and stories about Hades, to the Greeks the state of the dead was ultimately unknown. As such, Hades could refer to a place of torment, especially in later writings, to a place of marginal, shadowy, non-bodily existence, or it could be just another name for the tomb.

In the Septuagint (LXX) Hades appears over one hundred times. Most commonly it translates the Hebrew שְׁלוֹיָהּ (henceforth “Sheol”), and sometimes דְּיִמְוָה, “silence,”⁷ בּוֹר, “pit,”⁸ and derivatives of מָוֶת, “death.”⁹ I shall refer to both the Hebrew and the LXX texts. There are several things we need to note.

First, Sheol/Hades is where everyone goes at death. There is no distinction between the righteous and the wicked. It becomes the home of respected figures like Jacob, Job, and David,¹⁰ as well as of the bloodthirsty Joab or the idolatrous king of Babylon.¹¹

Second, there is no life or consciousness in Sheol/Hades. In contrast to some cultures that envisioned meaningful existence in the afterlife, the Bible portrays Sheol/Hades as a place of silence¹² and lifelessness where human existence has come to an end. Job 7:9, for example, compares the person who goes to Hades to a cloud that vanishes: “As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so is he who goes down to the grave [Sheol].”¹³ A person’s days come to an end without hope. The expectation for something better dies with him/her.¹⁴ There is no memory in Hades;¹⁵ and there is no longer any communion with God.¹⁶ It is a place of silence, darkness, and oblivion.¹⁷ Thus, a person who dies, in effect, ceases to exist.¹⁸ Psalm 88:11

⁷ R. Whitaker, F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oak Harbor: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1997), s.v. (henceforth, BDB).

⁸ BDB, s.v.

⁹ BDB, s.v.

¹⁰ E.g., Gen 37:35; 42:38; Job 14:13; 17:13; 1 Kgs 2:9-10.

¹¹ 1 Kgs 2:6; Isa 14:9-10.

¹² R. Bauckham, “Dead”, in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D.N. Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:787-88.

¹³ All Bible references are from the NIV unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁴ E.g., Job 17:16; Eccl 9:5.

¹⁵ E.g., Isa 26:14; Eccl 9:5; Ps 6:5.

¹⁶ Pss 115:17; 88:10-12; Isa 38:18.

¹⁷ Cf. Job 17:13; Ps 88:5.

aptly notes: “Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in destruction?” Ecclesiastes 9:5 is even clearer: “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing.”

Third, Hades is simply another name for the physical grave. In Job 17:13 the writer, reflecting on the fate he expects will soon befall him, complains that Hades has become his home; that his bed is the darkness. The mention of a bed is an obvious reference to the custom of burying the dead in a horizontal position.¹⁹ He then adds that the worm²⁰ and corruption have become his partners, meaning that the body will decompose and his existence will come to an end (Job 17:14). In Job 21:26, the wicked who go down to Sheol/Hades sleep in the earth, another reference to the horizontal position of the body in the grave: “Side by side they lie in the dust, and worms cover them both.” Psalm 9:17 equates Hades with the dust. In language that reflects Genesis 2:7 and 3:19, the wicked “return” to Sheol/Hades, i.e., to the dust from which they had been formed (cf. Job 17:16). In Psalm 16:10 Hades is where decay reigns. The destiny of humans is similar to that of animals.²¹ The dead lie in silence. Hades is a synonym for the grave.²²

There is, however, one text that seems to depart from the above depictions, namely Isaiah 14:9-10. Here the prophet depicts a lively exchange between the king of Babylon who has descended in disgrace to Hades, and the dead rulers of the earth.²³ This lively motif, however, is the

¹⁸ Eccl 9:6. In this respect it is no surprise that on two occasions (Pss 94:17 and 115:17) Hades is the translation of the Hebrew *דְּרוֹמָה*, which carries the idea of “stillness” or “silence.” Something similar can be said of the three texts (Job 33:22; Prov 14:12; Isa 28:15) where it is the translation of derivatives of *מָוֶת* (“death”).

¹⁹ The notion of a dead person in a horizontal position, often accompanied by the idea of sleeping, is common (eg. Job 14:13, 21:26, 26:6, Pss 31:17, 88:5, Isa 14:8, 11, 18, Ezra 32:27). For a discussion of burial customs see E. Bloch-Smith, “Burials,” in Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:785–89.

²⁰ Hebrew *חֲרָמִים* also used, for example, of the worms in rotting food in Exod 16:24: see W. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1972, s.v. The LXX uses *σάπρις*, “corruption,” “decay,” rather than “worm.”

²¹ Ps 49:14, 15, Eccl 3:19, 20, 12:4.

²² A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament – Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 132.

²³ N. Wyatt, “The Concept and Purpose of Hell: Its Nature and Development in West Semitic Thought,” *Numen* 56 (2009): 161-184, uses this oracle as well as the story of the

embellished, metaphorical language of an eloquent poet, rather than anticipation of vibrant existence in Hades.²⁴ Isaiah 14:11 returns to the images alluded to above: in Hades, the glory and rejoicing that accompanied the king of Babylon while alive suddenly come to an end. With language reminiscent of the physical grave and the horizontal burial position, the writer explains that maggots (רִמָּה) are the bed beneath him and worms (תוֹלְעָה) his covering.

Finally, there is some debate whether there was an anticipation of resurrection. References to bodily resurrection are sparser in the OT than in the NT. Partly through the influence of Form Criticism and the History of Religions school of thought, it became generally assumed that resurrection appears only in the latest strata of OT tradition, well after the exile.²⁵ Today, however, with a re-examination of the evidence a growing number of scholars are convinced that despite the scarcity of direct allusions, belief in a resurrection is reflected in many early texts²⁶ like Job 14:11-17, 1 Samuel 2:6, Hosea 6:1, and Daniel 12:2. With an anticipation of Sheol/Hades as only a temporary home, the dead remain there until they are raised.

2. Early Jewish Literature

The picture in non-Biblical Jewish writings is more complicated. A number of documents use similar language to that of the OT. Sheol/Hades is the destiny of all people, wicked and righteous alike. *Testament of Abraham A*

death of the family of Korah in Num 16 to assume belief in a lively if suffering-filled afterlife, in parallel with ancient pagan near eastern beliefs. Careful reading of both texts does not support his conclusions.

²⁴ C.f. J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66* (Word Biblical Commentaries 25; Waco: Word Books, 1987), 209.

²⁵ G.W.E. Nickelsburg, "Resurrection," in Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:684–86; cf. A. Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 4, who in his touching study on the topic of death is wrong in seeing Hades as a possible place of conscious, unhappy existence, but is right in emphasizing that the true hope is not in an immediate afterlife but in the resurrection at the end of the age.

²⁶ E.g., F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 419-21; N.J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the OT* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); M. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 183, 222-23.

8:9 portrays all as gathered by the “sickle of death” and going to Hades.²⁷ There is also a frequent association between Hades and the dust. *2 Baruch* 42:8 implies that all the dead are now lying in the dust. *Sibylline Oracles* 1:81-84 depicts Adam and his generation going to Hades and being covered by the earth. In *1 Enoch* 51:1 there is a parallel between the earth and Sheol.²⁸ In *2 Baruch* 11:6 the dust is called upon to announce to the dead that they are happier in their state than those who are alive. In *1Q Thanksgiving Hymns* 11 the poet offers thanks because God has saved his life from the pit, from Sheol, and destruction. In *1Q Thanksgiving Hymns* 11:19-23 the hope is expressed that God will “raise from the dust the worm of the dead to an [everlasting] community.”²⁹ In *1Q Thanksgiving Hymns* 14:34 the dead “lie in the dust.” And in *4Q Amram, Fragment 1ii 1-16*, “the sons of dark[ness will go to the shades, to death] and to annihilation.”³⁰

A common motif that likewise links the dead to the earth is where resurrection is presented as the earth giving back the dead. In *1 Enoch* 51:1 the earth, Sheol, and destruction appear together as near synonyms and give back the dead that have been entrusted to them. In *4 Ezra* 7:32 the earth gives back those who sleep in it. In *2 Baruch* 42:8 the dust is called to give back that which does not belong to it.³¹

Sometimes, the dead are described as being asleep without any consciousness, even being at peace. In the *1 Enoch* 102:5-11, for example, the righteous that have perished appear to become like “those who were

²⁷ Cf *T. Ab.* A 19:7; *1 En.* 22:1-14; 51:1; 102:5-11; *4 Ezra* 4:42; 7:72.

²⁸ G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 70-78, 84-87, 112-29.

²⁹ Translation by J.J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 120.

³⁰ Translation by F.G. Martinez and E.J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 275. Collins, *Apocalypticism*, 117-122, has argued that despite such references, the Dead Sea community anticipated bliss for itself and punishment for the wicked immediately after death (he cites *1 QS* 4:6-8; *1 QS* 4:11-14; 18-19). The question is not fully settled and it should be no surprise if in the Qumran literature that spans over two centuries of writing, both views should be present as is the case in other near contemporary Jewish literature.

³¹ For a list and discussion of the relevant Jewish and Christian texts see R. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 269-90.

not.”³² In *Wisdom* 2:1 a person comes to his/her end at death. In *4 Ezra* 7:32 the dead are pictured as sleeping. In *2 Baruch* 11:4 the righteous sleep “at rest in the earth” (cf. *2 Baruch* 42:7). In *Psalms of Solomon* 2:2 people who die are as though they had never been.

In other ways, the picture is decidedly different. Sometimes Hades, no more associated with the dust, becomes a hollow place in the earth (*2 Bar.* 21:23), where the supposed immaterial souls or spirits of the dead go. The idea of soul “chambers” or “treasuries” appears.³³ Often the chambers are common to all souls but at least in two instances the righteous are distinguished from the wicked (*1 En.* 22:1-14; *Ps.-Philo* 15:5).

Bauckham correctly observes that there were two views on human fate in Jewish thought: the unitary and the dualistic. The unitary was “the simplest and doubtless the earliest Jewish notion” in which death was not a separation of body and soul but rather the death of the “bodily person.”³⁴ The dualistic, by contrast, made a clear distinction between body and soul and seems to have been influenced by Platonic dualism. Often the two appear alongside.³⁵

Resurrection plays an important role in non-Biblical Jewish writings.³⁶ In *4 Ezra* 4:42 the “the earth”³⁷ is compared to the womb of a pregnant woman, anxious to deliver. The dust will give back what does not belong to it (*2 Bar.* 42:8). Sheol will return the deposits she received (*1 En.* 51:1). In *2 Baruch* 50:2 the dead return to life in exactly the same form in which they died. As such, Hades/Sheol is only a temporary home for the dead. It is not a place of punishment; rather punishment will come in the day of judgement. After the resurrection, Hades itself will cease, the realm of death will be sealed, and its mouth will be shut.³⁸

³² G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: Chapters 1-36, 81-108* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 521, interprets the view expressed in 102:11 as “the effective annihilation of the person.” This is the worldview the author of the passage ascribes to sinners, and he then proceeds to counter-argue that death is not annihilation, but a place of suffering for sinners (103:7-8) and of waiting for judgment (104:5).

³³ E.g., *Ps.-Philo* 32:13; 15:5; 21:9; *2 Bar.* 30:1; *4 Ezra* 4:35.

³⁴ Bauckham, *Fate*, 275.

³⁵ Bauckham, *Fate*, 276-7.

³⁶ Nickelsburg, *Literature*, 84-87, 112-129

³⁷ So the Ethiopian and Georgian versions.

³⁸ *2 Bar.* 21:23; *Ps.-Philo* 3:10.

In very few instances, Hades becomes the place of eschatological punishment. Jeremias links this development to the entrance into Judaism of belief in the immortality of the soul.³⁹ In *Pseudo-Phocylides* 112-113 Hades is the eternal home for all, not because of a coming day of judgment, but on account of the soul's supposed innate immortality. In *1 Enoch* 63:10 and 103:7 Sheol is considered an oppressive place of torment, which, at least in the latter text, could be said to last forever.⁴⁰

By way of summary, we may say that early non-biblical Jewish writings most commonly reflect OT thinking and language. However, we note the beginnings of a differentiation between body and soul as well as an incipient tendency to view Hades as the place of final punishment mainly due to Greek philosophical influence.

3. Hades in the NT

The word Hades occurs eleven times in the NT, four in the gospels, two in Acts, and five in Revelation. The gospel references will be discussed in more detail below. For now we will look at the seven occurrences in Acts and Revelation beginning with Acts 2:27 and 31. The former is a quotation from Ps 16:10:

Because you will not abandon me to the grave [MT Sheol/LXX Hades], nor will you let your Holy One see decay (Ps 16:10).

“Because you will not abandon me to the grave {Hades}, nor will you let your Holy One see decay” (Acts 2:27).

The latter contains Peter's comments on that text:

Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave [Hades], nor did his body see decay (Acts 2:31).

The context is Peter's sermon on Pentecost. Psalm 16:10 could be understood as a prayer expressing either confidence that God will deliver from death, or hope in the resurrection; or perhaps both.⁴¹ In Acts it is

³⁹ J. Jeremias, “ᾠδης,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel; trans. G.W. Bromley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:147 (146-49).

⁴⁰ Nickelsburg, *Enoch*, 511, translates 103:8b as follows: “... and the great judgment will be for all the generations of eternity.”

⁴¹ P.C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (Word Biblical Commentary 19; Waco: Word, 1983), 158.

understood as a messianic prophecy about the resurrection of Jesus. Peter says that even though David, the author of Psalm 16, died and was buried, he had not risen; on the contrary, his grave was still intact in Jerusalem (Acts 2:29). The text therefore must apply not to David, but to David's offspring, the Messiah. David died and is still in the grave; Jesus died, was buried, but came out of the tomb alive. Here, therefore, Hades is neither a place of punishment, nor a place of conscious existence, but another name for the grave, just as is the case with Sheol/Hades in the OT.

This connection to the physical grave is confirmed by the use of the verb ἀνίστημι (Acts 2:24, 32), "to rise" from the dead, but literally "to stand up again."⁴² The related verb ἐγείρω, also used repeatedly of resurrection, also has the meaning of "causing someone to rise."⁴³ Both verbs tie the concept of resurrection to the grave. In the grave a person lies horizontally; at resurrection he/she comes alive and is able again to stand up in the vigor of life.

The next reference is 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."⁴⁴ The title "the Living One," is often used of God.⁴⁵ It suggests that unconquerable life is inherent in the divine person and, in this respect, Jesus has full power over death and resurrection.⁴⁶ This aspect of the person

⁴² Cf. W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature* (trans. W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich; rev. and exp. F.W. Danker; 3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. (henceforth, BDAG).

⁴³ BDAG, s.v.

⁴⁴ R. Harper, "Hades in Revelation," in Date and Highfield, *A Consuming Passion*, 190-210, discusses the use of Hades in Revelation as well as briefly in some key gospel texts and concludes correctly that Hades is distinct from Gehenna, but incorrectly that Hades is a place of torment. The problem with Harper's methodology is that he takes the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, interprets it without due consideration of genre, relation to non-biblical parallel tales, and superimposes this outlook on the remaining biblical texts. While the parable should be given its due attention, and is discussed below, it is important in biblical theology to see the overall weight of the evidence, and in this respect both in the OT and NT Hades is synonymous with the grave.

⁴⁵ E.g., Deut 5:26; Josh 3:10; 1 Sam 17:16; 2 Kgs 19:4; Isa 37:4, 17; Jer. 10:10; John 5:26; 11:25; 14:6; Rev 4:9; 10:6; 15:7.

⁴⁶ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 55; R.G. Bowles, "The Offer of Life," in Date and Highfield, *A Consuming Passion*, 320 (307-323).

of Jesus brings to mind OT texts about God's lordship over Sheol.⁴⁷ Here, death and Hades appear to be synonymous and this close juxtaposition between life on the one hand and death/Hades on the other supports the outlook we found in the OT.

In Revelation 6:8 death and Hades appear again together:

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.

John sees in vision a number of apocalyptic horses and riders bringing woes upon the earth. The fourth horse is pale, *χλωρός*, in colour, literally a yellow-green pale).⁴⁸ Robertson suggests the colour is a symbol of death;⁴⁹ while Massynberde Ford thinks that it could depict a corpse in an advanced state of decomposition.⁵⁰ The rider of this horse is death who in turn is followed by Hades⁵¹ with the combination death/Hades being a hendiadys.

Finally, in Revelation 20:13-14 Hades and death appear again together this time in an eschatological context:

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

In addition to death/Hades, it is noteworthy that the sea also gives back the dead. In the ancient Near East it was very important that the dead

⁴⁷ E.g., 1 Sam 2:6; Job 11:8; Deut 32:39; Hos. 6:1-3.

⁴⁸ BDAG, s.v.

⁴⁹ A.T. Robertson, *The General Epistles. The Revelation of John* (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), 342.

⁵⁰ Massynberde Ford, *Revelation*, 57.

⁵¹ The Greek for death is *θάνατος*, which in the LXX often translates *דָּבָר* which means “pestilence” rather than “death.” Hence, some like G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Oliphants, 1978), 133, have proposed that what is pictured here is possibly a pestilence followed by death. Two elements weigh against such a suggestion. First, in Revelation Hades always appears together with death (Rev 6:8; 20:13, 14), and the combination seems to be a hendiadys. Second, pestilence is mentioned as one of the four means through which death comes about (6:8c), so it would not make sense for the Revelator to have pestilence represent both the rider of the horse and one of his weapons.

received a proper and honourable burial.⁵² Those lost at sea would obviously not get that. The text, therefore, assures that all the righteous dead will have a place in the resurrection, irrespective of how they died and whether they were properly buried.⁵³

The contrast of sea and Hades is a contrast between water and dry land. The text underlines the universality of the resurrection; all the righteous will rise.⁵⁴ In the process, it also connects Hades to the physical grave and the dust – water and dust will both give back their dead.

In Revelation 20:14 death and Hades meet their end when they are thrown into the lake of fire, which, in turn, is called “the second death.” This creates a curious picture: death meets its end through death. The phrase “second death” appears three more times in Revelation (Rev 2:11; 20:6; 21:8) and in all cases refers to the eschatological punishment that awaits the wicked but not the righteous. The picture of Revelation 20:14 therefore is not so much of a personified death/Hades who is thrown into the fire and dies; rather Hades comes to an end when the wicked die the second death. There is now nobody else to die so death becomes defunct.⁵⁵

From the above discussion of Hades in the NT outside the gospels, Hades is always connected to temporal death and the grave. It is never a place of suffering, never a place of consciousness, and never the eschatological judgment of the wicked.⁵⁶ It is closely connected to the concept of physical resurrection from the physical grave as evidenced by the use of the verb ἀνίστημι. Imagery and references to the OT are strong. The Hades texts do not show any evidence of the concept of the immortality of the soul that was beginning to appear in Jewish non-biblical literature.

⁵² Bloch-Smith, “Burials,” 785-89.

⁵³ Beasley-Murray, 302.

⁵⁴ So R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 366; A.F. Johnson, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 589-90.

⁵⁵ Cf. 2 Bar. 21:23 and Ps. Philo 33:3 where Hades’ mouth is sealed forever.

⁵⁶ Wyatt, 161-184, without due argumentation assumes that a collection of words like Gehenna, Hades, Sheol, the Pit and the Grave had more or less “coalesced in meaning” and shared elements with Greek and Roman cosmology. Quite the contrary is the case with the terms Hades and Genenna sharply differentiated. Though the former was a common term in Greek cosmology, in biblical use it denoted something completely different, as discussed throughout this study; and the latter is absent from Greek and Roman cosmologies.

HADES: IN THE GOSPELS

1. *Matthew 11:20-24 and Luke 10:12-15*

Having looked at the different literary contexts, OT, NT, early Jewish writings, we now turn to the gospels, the main focus of this study. Hades does not appear in John, so that gospel will not be discussed. There are four references to Hades in the gospels, two in Matthew (11:20-24; 16:18) and two in Luke (10:12-15; 16:19-31).

²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you” (Matt 11:20-24).

¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. ¹³“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths” (Luke 10:12-15).

The saying about Hades in Matthew 11:23 parallels that in Luke 10:15. It occurs in a small pericope (11:20-24) in which Jesus pronounces a woe on three Galilean cities because they have failed to believe in him. This is one of several woes which appear, in turn, in the general context of 11:2-30, which may be divided into three parts: Jesus’ work in relation to (a) John the Baptist (vv. 2-19); (b) its apparent failure (vv. 20-24); and (c) its real success (vv. 25-30).⁵⁷ The main theme of this unit seems to be the acceptance or rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.⁵⁸ John the Baptist has

⁵⁷ W.C. Allen, *St. Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 113.

⁵⁸ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Vol. 2 (New York: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 265.

accepted him and receives words of praise (11:3, 11); so have the “little children,” the simple folk (11:25). However, the “wise and learned” have rejected first John and now Jesus (11:16-19, 25). The woes against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (11:20-24), therefore, serve as a warning to all who reject Jesus.

The woes are pronounced within the context of eschatological punishment. Matthew 11:20 does not appear in Luke and in Matthew functions as an introduction to the woes. It is a prelude to the final judgement. The word “woe” itself connotes a solemn warning of imminent threat.

In Matthew 11:21-22 the final judgement plays a prominent role. Chorazin and Bethsaida⁵⁹ are condemned because they have failed to believe the divine manifestations of power displayed in Jesus. By contrast, if Tyre and Sidon had seen the works Jesus did in these Galilean cities, they would long ago have repented. The mention of Tyre and Sidon injects a touch of irony and points to the magnitude of the guilt of the Galilean cities. These two cities on the coast of Lebanon were not only Gentile, but are repeatedly condemned for their wickedness by the Hebrew prophets.⁶⁰ Thus, even notoriously evil Gentiles would have been more receptive to Jesus’ ministry than the chosen people of God. The solemn warning of Jesus is that in the day of judgement, Tyre and Sidon will carry a lighter sentence than the one to be pronounced on Chorazin and Bethsaida.

Matthew 11:23-24 carries a similar warning phrased differently. This time the juxtaposition is between Capernaum and Sodom: 11:24 repeats the idea of 11:22 – namely that the unrepentant inhabitants of Capernaum will receive a heavier sentence than those of Sodom who did not hear and see Jesus. But 11:23b is modelled on the saying concerning Tyre and Sidon in 21b. It sets the stage for the mention of Sodom in 24.

⁵⁹ Beyond this verse (and Luke 10:13), we know little about the work of Jesus in these two cities. Except for a couple of references in Jewish writings (*b. Menah.* 85a; *t. Mak.* 3:8), Chorazin is nowhere else mentioned among the ancient writers. Bethsaida seems to have been the native town of Peter and Andrew and also of Philip (John 1:44; 12:21). It lay in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee and must have been a large village since Herod Philip made it into a city and renamed it Julias. The feeding of the 5000 took place nearby (Luke 9:10, 25) and it was also the sight of a healing miracle (Mark 8:22-26).

⁶⁰ E.g., Jer 25:22; 27:3; 47:4; Joel 3:4; Zech 9:1-4; cf. 1 Macc 5:15; Jdt 2:28.

Matthew 11:23a condemns Capernaum in language taken from Isaiah 14:13-15,⁶¹ an oracle directed against the king of Babylon (14:3). He will go to Hades which in this instance is another name for the grave (14:11; see the discussion above). The prophecy reflects the destruction of Babylon which would be brought about not by human hand but by God's power (14:5, 22). The name of Babylon will be wiped out and so will her people (14:22); as for the land, it will become unfit for habitation (14:23).

Capernaum esteemed herself to be as high as the heavens⁶² but will end up in Hades. In contrast, if the mighty works done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, the latter would still be around.⁶³ Matthew 11:23, therefore, concerns the temporal destruction of Sodom. Unlike Sodom, Capernaum has had the opportunity to hear Jesus and see his mighty works but still has not repented. Capernaum, therefore, can expect a similar fate, as indeed happened when Capernaum was destroyed by the Romans.

The context in Luke is somewhat different: Jesus is sending out the seventy to prepare the way for him (10:1).⁶⁴ Luke 10:3-12 contains directions about how they should conduct their work, as well as the prospect their ministry might be rejected (10:10-12). Luke 10:16 concludes Jesus' mission charge. Luke 10:12-15 parallels closely Matthew 11:21-24. So while the context might be different, the sayings about Hades are nearly identical.

⁶¹ R.H. Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Reference to Messianic Hope* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 81.

⁶² The exact meaning of the Greek here is unclear. The Greek sets the phrase in the form of a question: "Will you exalt yourself to heaven?" There is a textual problem: there are two variants of the verb ὑψόω ("to exalt"), both of which have strong manuscript support. The first, which NA²⁸ prefers, is active and suggests that Capernaum attempted to exalt herself. The second is passive meaning that the city had been raised by other factors. Why exactly Capernaum would have considered herself exalted is not clear. Perhaps it had to do with geographical position, or that it was possibly a rich city, or that it was a matter of pride. A likely possibility is that its importance came from the extensive ministry of Jesus there since the "woes" passage deals with the cities that rejected Jesus. It appears to have been the centre of Jesus' Galilean work (Matt 4:13; Mark 2:1); Jesus healed several people there (Matt 8:5; Mark 1:21-28; 2:1-12; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:41-54) and taught in its synagogues (Luke 4:31-38).

⁶³ This is the force of the Greek, ἔμεινεν ἄν μέχρι τῆς σήμερον (Matt 11:23). This is an allusion to the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19).

⁶⁴ C.F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM, 1990), 443-45.

What does Hades involve in these two passages? Jesus does not explain; but from the above brief discussion we can draw some conclusions. First, Hades is a reference to death and destruction, perhaps a synonym for the grave. This is indicated: by the allusion to Isaiah 14 where Hades and the physical grave are parallel expressions (Isa 14:9, 11); by the use of OT imagery where, as noted, Hades is another name for the grave; and by the association of Hades with the physical destruction of Capernaum during the Jewish rebellion against Rome. Certainly there is no hint or suggestion that Hades is a place of continued conscious existence.

Second, while the two passages take an interest in eschatological judgment, the reference to Capernaum and Hades seems to reflect Capernaum's temporal destruction. Any eschatological application would be secondary.

2. Matthew 16:13-20

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

One of the more important uses of Hades is found in Matthew 16:18. This saying of Jesus is found in the context of a dialogue between the disciples and Jesus concerning his messianic identity (16:13-20). This incident happens at Caesarea Philippi shortly before Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. The pericope can also be found in Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-21; but Matthew 16:17-19 with its reference to Hades has no parallel in the other two Synoptics.

(a) *The Central Focus of the Pericope*

Though several exegetical questions arise and are discussed in many commentaries, our purpose here is rather specific: to determine the function and meaning of Hades. I will therefore limit my analysis to three issues, namely: (a) the central theme of this passage; (b) the precise identity of the rock on which the church will be built; and (c) the function of Hades in relation to (a) and (b).

Discussions of the pericope usually centre on the words of Jesus to Peter concerning the founding of the church.⁶⁵ While this is understandable, there is a danger of missing the primary focus of the pericope. This focus is, without doubt, the messianic identity of Jesus. In Mark, after a short narrative introduction, the pericope begins with the question: “Who do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27). After a brief discussion in which Peter, possibly expressing the conviction of the rest,⁶⁶ confesses him to be the Christ, the pericope closes with an admonition to the disciples “not to tell anyone about him” (8:30). In Luke we see a similar pattern with slight differences in wording (Luke 9:18-20).

Matthew’s account also focuses on the messianic identity of Jesus⁶⁷ with an even greater emphasis than Mark. Thus, in place of Mark’s “I am” in the question, Matthew has substituted the title Son of Man – “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”⁶⁸ Davies and Allison suggested that Matthew’s

⁶⁵ Davies and Allison, 2:617-25; R.H. Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 329-30.

⁶⁶ That Peter is expressing a conviction shared by the other disciples is suggested by the form the discussion takes: Jesus asks *them* (disciples), Peter replies, then Jesus admonishes *them* rather than Peter, not to say anything about his identity.

⁶⁷ J.C. Fenton, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Penguin, 1976), 264-69.

⁶⁸ The phrase “Son of Man” has been discussed at length and opinions are divided concerning its meaning; for an overview see, e.g., I.H. Marshall, “Son of Man,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J.B. Green and S. McKnight; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 67-87. G. Vermes, “The Present State of the Son of Man Debate,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978): 123-34, has argued that in all sayings of Jesus, the phrase is a substitute for “I.” Perhaps a majority of commentators considers it a messianic title: see, e.g., Marshall, “Son of Man,” 775-81; Davies and Allison, 2:617. The phrase “son of man” occurs 93 times in Ezekiel as a reference to the prophet and 14 times in poetic writings also to refer to human beings. In Dan 7:13 it occurs not as a title, but as a description (“one like a Son of Man”) of a heavenly being. He receives royal power, dominion and glory. His relation to Israel is analogous to that of Michael to his “people”

wording aims to bring together three messianic titles of Jesus – Messiah, Son of Man, and Son of God.⁶⁹

When Jesus asks the disciples who they think he is, in Mark Peter replies, “You are the Christ,” while in Luke the reply is, “the Christ of God.” Matthew has the fullest and most emphatic account of the answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”⁷⁰

At the pericope’s conclusion where Jesus admonishes the disciples to keep silent about what has been said, Matthew again gives us a fuller and more Messiah centered account. Thus, in Mark Jesus tells the disciples “not to tell anyone about him,” (Mark 8:30), while in Luke he says that they should not tell anyone (Luke 9:21). In Matthew, however, Jesus admonishes the disciples not to tell anyone *that he is the Christ* (Matt 16:20).

Finally, it is worth noting the importance of this pericope in the unfolding of Jesus’ identity. All three synopticists have already stated their conviction that Jesus is the Messiah.⁷¹ Yet, the incident in Caesarea Philippi is the first instance that followers of Jesus acknowledge this identity. In this respect, Caesarea Philippi marks a turning point in the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. Jesus can now tell them boldly of his coming death and resurrection. This is especially so in Matthew; 16:21 begins with the phrase, “from that time ...” indicating a change in circumstances.

We conclude that the central focus of all three Synoptic accounts, especially of Matthew, is the Messianic identity of Jesus. This will become important when we discuss Hades below.

(Dan 12:1). In the NT it occurs solely on the lips of Jesus as a self-designation, and always with the definite article. He, like the heavenly figure of Dan 7:13, is likewise a royal figure (Matt 21:4, 9) who receives dominion and glory (Matt 24:30; 26:64; cf. Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 22:69). These last references are direct allusions to Dan 7:13, which suggests that for the Synoptic writers, Jesus is the heavenly figure of Dan 7:13. Marshall, “Son of Man,” 776, notes that on two occasions when Jesus is identified by others as the Messiah, he replies with a Son of Man saying (Mark 8:29-31; 14:61-2). The phrase is nowhere in the gospels or the rest of the NT used of others. The above suggest that at least for the Synoptic evangelists, the Son of Man was a title closely related to Jesus’ messianic identity.

⁶⁹ Davies and Allison, 2:617.

⁷⁰ Gundry, *Matthew*, 330, notes that the title “Son of God” characterizes Matthew’s Christology, and anticipates the statement that Peter has received divine revelation, because it is only through revelation that Jesus can be recognized as such (Matt 11:25-27).

⁷¹ Matt 1:1, 16-18; 2:4; 11:2; Mark 1:1; Luke 2:11, 26; 3:15-16; 4:41.

(b) *The Rock on Which the Church Will be Built*

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus predicts that he will build his church upon a rock. This saying has since become an issue of great controversy about who the rock is. Is it Peter who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah? Or is it Jesus?

Davies and Allison opt for Peter.⁷² They suggest that behind this saying lies the influence of Isaiah 51:1-2 which talks about Abraham being a rock from which Israel had been hewn. Peter becomes the father of a new Israel, the Christian Church, in the same way that Abraham was the father of the old Israel. They furthermore suggest that the name change from Simon Bar Jonah to Peter echoes the change of Abraham and Sarah's names that accompanied the promise that Abraham would become the father of a great nation.

This interpretation has substantial weaknesses. First, there is no direct evidence that Isaiah 51:1-2 played any role in early Christian ecclesiology. Second, it is not certain that the rock of Isaiah 51:1-2 is Abraham. Instead, Isaiah asks Israel to look to the Lord who will comfort Zion. In light of the many Isaianic references to God as the Rock of Israel⁷³ it seems likely that the rock of Isaiah 51:1-2 is the Lord rather than Abraham. Third, nowhere else in the NT is Peter the foundation of the Church. In Galatians 2:9 Peter is called a "pillar," but appears on an equal footing with James and John with James mentioned first. And there is a considerable difference between a pillar and the foundation stone.⁷⁴

Fourth, the association of Peter with the rock poses questions concerning the syntax of Matthew 16:17-19. The name πέτρος, Peter, is masculine whereas the noun πέτρα, rock, on which the Church would be

⁷² Davies and Allison, 2:625. Fenton, 265-9, takes a similar view and cites Matt 10:2; 14:28-32; 15:15; 17:24-27; 18:21, as well as Luke 22:31-34 and John 21:15-22. However, none of these texts establishes a primacy for Peter to the point of making him the foundation of the church.

⁷³ E.g., Isa 8:14; 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8.

⁷⁴ C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Black, 1968), 87-88, has in turn suggested that 1 Cor 3:11 could imply Peter was thought to be the foundation of the Church prompting Paul to refute the claim. Barrett's suggestion goes beyond exegesis to speculation. The problem in Corinth was not excessive attention to Peter, but simple factionalism (1 Cor 1:11-15). While there can be little doubt that Peter played a prominent role in the early Church, other individuals were equally prominent (Acts 15:13; Gal 2:12).

built, feminine.⁷⁵ The distinction concerns not only gender but meaning; while πέτρος means “stone,” πέτρα signifies a “rock” or “boulder.”⁷⁶

Moreover, five times Jesus addresses Peter in the second person: “blessed are you,” “you are Peter,” “I will give you the keys,” “whatever you bind,” and “whatever you loose.” By contrast, the saying concerning the rock is in third person: “on this rock...” If the rock is Peter, then we have person disagreement in the syntax.

Taking into account the above objections, the association of Peter with the foundation rock of the Church cannot be substantiated exegetically. Rather, the association of the rock with Jesus seems more plausible. Several elements point in this direction.

A number of texts refer to God as a Rock. In Isaiah 17:10 God is the Rock of the strength of Israel. In Isaiah 44:8 he is the Rock of the security of Israel. In Isaiah 28:16 God promises to establish Zion on a firm rock foundation.⁷⁷ More importantly, such texts were freely used in the early Christian church as references to Jesus.⁷⁸ Matthew 21:42 points to Jesus as a rock in fulfilment of OT prophecy,⁷⁹ and Jesus is the rock on which wise men build their homes in Matthew 7:24-27.

The association of Jesus with the rock better explains the choice of the third person in the phrase “on this rock.” In 16:13 instead of Mark and Luke’s first person “who do people say I am?”, Matthew has the question in the third person, “who do people say the Son of Man is?” However, in 16:15 he parallels Mark and Luke in the first person: “who do you say I am.” Thus, while in Matthew the second person is consistently used when Jesus addresses Peter, both the first and the third person are used when Jesus refers to himself. The selection of the third person in the rock saying serves an exegetical function: in the first question Jesus presents himself in

⁷⁵ D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 55, cautions that one should not emphasize this difference too much since in the Aramaic which Jesus spoke there is no gender difference. While this caution is valid, the fact remains that in the Greek form of the saying as it appears in the gospel there is a gender difference that should not be considered incidental.

⁷⁶ BDAG, s.v.

⁷⁷ In the Isaiah targum, this text was understood to refer to a person rather than a literal stone; to an idealised king (the Messiah?) who would rule over Jerusalem.

⁷⁸ E.g., Rom 9:23, 33, 1 Cor 10:3.

⁷⁹ Cf. Ps 118:22; Luke 20:17; Isa 28:16; Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6-7.

the third person as a messianic figure (Son of Man), but the people have failed to recognise this and instead regard him simply as a prophet; in the second question Jesus uses the first person “I” and thus turns attention to his present, plain appearance. Yet, Peter sees beyond this appearance and recognises the messianic majesty in his teacher. In this respect, the beatitude that Jesus pronounces on Peter (16:17) is fully deserved. The people have seen a Son of Man but recognise only a prophet; Peter sees a humble Jesus but recognises a Messiah.

This juxtaposition becomes the defining point and chief characteristic of the ones who will compose the Church. The Church is not built on Jesus as a simple human being, but on Jesus as the anointed of God. Those who recognise in him the anointed of God have found the true foundation and become building stones, like Peter, in this spiritual temple. Hence the different words πέτρα and πέτρος reflect the relationship of the human rocks that are placed on the anointed rock, the true foundation. In this respect, “rock” becomes a further messianic title for Jesus.

(c) *The Gates of Hades*

The mention of the gates of Hades comes in 16:18. In order to understand this saying, two questions need to be addressed. First, there are two feminine nouns in 16:18, πέτρα and ἐκκλησία, rock and church. Does the phrase “will not overcome it [ESV “prevail *against it*”] refer to the rock or to the church? Second, is the expression “gates of Hades” a simple reference to death, or does it carry broader connotations?

Central to the first question are three words, which stand in the following sequence: the two nouns πέτρα and ἐκκλησία and the pronoun αὐτῆς (rock, church, it). The proximity of the pronoun to the second noun could suggest that it is a reference to it, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church.⁸⁰ This, however, is not necessarily so. The history of interpretation of this text shows varied approaches.⁸¹ Grammatically both options are plausible. For the moment, I will tentatively suggest that αὐτῆς refers to the rock (Jesus) on the grounds that Jesus the Messiah is the

⁸⁰ Fenton, 269.

⁸¹ J.P. Lewis, “‘The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against it’ (Matthew 16:18): A Study of the History of Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 354 (349-67).

epicentre of this pericope, and that it can apply to the Church only in a secondary sense. I will return to this shortly.

The meaning of the phrase “gates of Hades” has also drawn conflicting interpretations. Allen, for example argues that the phrase means that the organised powers of evil would not prevail against the organised society representing the teachings of Jesus.⁸² Davies and Allison opt to see a conflict between demonic forces and the Church in which the latter emerges triumphant.⁸³ Sullivan, rather surprisingly, envisions the Church attacking Hades and rescuing its inhabitants.⁸⁴

There is, however, considerable evidence that “gates of Hades” simply refers to death. While this phrase does not appear elsewhere in the NT, it is fairly common in the LXX and somewhat less so in the early Jewish literature. In these it is always a reference to death.⁸⁵

If we bring together the above considerations, then the saying becomes a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus – the gates of Hades will not prevail against Jesus the rock; though the Messiah will die, he will not remain in the tomb but will rise a victor. The verb *κατισχύω* translated as “prevail” (ESV) adds an interesting insight. The verb is a compound word of the preposition *κατά*, “against,” but which can also carry the idea of “keeping under.”⁸⁶ The second element, *ισχύω*, means to “be strong against”. The two together mean “prevail;” but may also convey the idea of “prevail by keeping under” thus adding credence that the saying is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus.⁸⁷ Hades, or the tomb, will not be able to keep Jesus dead “in the ground.”

Bringing the discussion together, Matthew 16:13-20 is all about the Messianic identity of Jesus and his triumph over death. The “gates of

⁸² Allen, 176. Cf. Rev 6:8; 9:1-6; 20:3, 7-8, 1QH 13. See also, H. Hommel, “Die Tore des Hades,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 80 (1989): 124-25, who maintains that the church will eventually prove stronger than the gates of Hades.

⁸³ Davies and Allison, 2:632.

⁸⁴ L.E. Sullivan, “The Gates of Hell,” *Theological Studies* 10 (1949): 62-64.

⁸⁵ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 132. Cf. Isa 38:10; Pss 9:13; 107:18; Job 38:17; compare with Wis 16:3; 3 Macc 5:51.

⁸⁶ LSJ, s.v., renders it as “downwards,” indicating motion from above.

⁸⁷ Fenton, 269, correctly evaluates the meaning of the “gates of Hades” in relation to resurrection, but feels that the words apply to the members of the church who share in the resurrection of Jesus.

Hades” are a reference to death. They would not be able to keep Jesus dead in his tomb. Rather, he would rise a victor, as he did. It is on him, the Rock, that the church would be built, and little stones, like Peter, who acknowledge the messiahship of Jesus becoming building blocks in the establishment of the church, God’s spiritual temple on earth.

3. Luke 16:19-31 – The Rich Man and Lazarus

We have examined a broad scope of literature. We noticed that throughout the OT and NT, Hades refers to death and the physical grave⁸⁸ without any hint of continued existence after death. We noticed that this picture also holds true to a large extent in non-Biblical Jewish writings, but with some exceptions.

We now come to the last Hades text, contained in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus⁸⁹ (henceforth, the parable), whose depiction of Hades is at complete odds with everything biblical examined so far. Hades is not the grave, but a place where real persons with full bodily functions converse and experience bodily pleasure and pain. Though often cited as support, the parable does not fit the immortality of the soul outlook either. It depicts not immortal souls floating in heaven or hell but actual persons with full physical capacities, tongue, fingers, and the ability to see, hear, speak, and feel heat and cold.

The parable is unique with no direct or even remote relation to other bible stories or depictions of Hades. Bock has called it the “most complex”

⁸⁸ Cf. E.E. Ellis, “The New Testament Teaching on Hell,” in *Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (ed. K.E. Brower and M.W. Elliott; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 199 (199-220).

⁸⁹ The absence of features that identify this literary unit as a parable, and the use of a proper name for the poor man (unique in the parables), have led to speculation as to whether this passage does indeed constitute a parable. Some consider this not a parable but a true life story. However, the details of this parable as discussed in this study, and its depiction of the afterlife do not reflect the biblical view of death. The unit begins with the phrase “There was a certain rich man,” similar to the introductions to three other Lukan parables (Luke 14:16-24, 15:11-31 and 16:1-8). On the other hand, vv. 19-31 contain strong similarities with a number of folktales, as will be discussed below. We may therefore call it a parable modelled on popular folktales. L. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1966), 239, interestingly, calls it a “parabolic fable.”

of Jesus' stories.⁹⁰ It is for such reasons that scholars of different outlooks advise that it should *not* be viewed as a road map of the afterlife.⁹¹

In this short study I will argue that Jesus borrows a genre of story prevalent throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, and deconstructs it in such a way so as to discredit the genre. The depiction of Hades is important not for what it appears to depict, but for what it aims to negate.

(a) *Jesus Borrows: The Non-biblical Background*

Scholars recognize that there is no direct parallel to this parable in the Bible. They also recognize that similar stories were prevalent throughout the Mediterranean. The closest non-biblical parallels are what we call stories of reversal of fortune, whereby at death the rich suffer and the poor receive rich rewards.

A number of such ancient tales are extant. The best known is an Egyptian folktale.⁹² Setme and his son come across two funerals, one of a rich man with splendid honours, the other of a poor man who is cast into a common necropolis. Setme envies the funeral of the rich man. His son, who is the reincarnated sage, knows better. He takes his father on a tour of the underworld where they see the rich man in torment, while the poor man stands justified by the side of the judge of humankind.

A similar Jewish tale is the Bar Mayan tale⁹³ about a sinful rich tax collector who dies and receives a splendid funeral. A poor Torah scholar also dies, but receives a most humble burial. This leads an onlooker to question the justice of God. In reply, God reveals that the fate of the two after death is reversed. Bar Mayan had done one good deed in his life, and receives his reward in his splendid funeral. The poor scholar had done one bad deed, atoned through his poor burial. The tax collector can now face the torments of hell without respite and the poor scholar the joys of heaven without hindrance.

⁹⁰ D. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1986), 1377.

⁹¹ E.g., see the cautions of J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 607-608; and W. Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1869), 1038.

⁹² The tale was first pointed out by H. Gressman, *Vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus: Eine literargeschichtliche Studie* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1918). The story dates from a 1st century AD manuscript, but is probably much older.

⁹³ *j.Hag.* 2.77.

The Greek philosopher Lucian (ca. AD 120-180) tells a similar tale of three men who die and are taken to Hades—the rich tyrant Megapenthes, the poor shoemaker Mycilus, and a philosopher.⁹⁴ In the judgment, the philosopher and Mycilus are found spotless and are sent to the blessed isles, while Megapenthes, who is found guilty, is punished accordingly.

Beyond such tales that closely parallel our parable, the motif of communication between the dead and the living, discussed in the parable, is also common. A few examples will suffice. Plato (428-348 BC) tells the story of Er the Pamphylian,⁹⁵ who is killed in battle but revives several days later. While “dead” Er visits Hades and sees a judgement in which the good go to heaven and the wicked are punished. He is specifically told to return and report what he has seen, presumably to warn the living. Plutarch (AD 46-120) tells a similar story about Thespesius, and Clearchus of Soli about Cleonymus.⁹⁶

Lucian tells another tale about Cleomenes who falls ill, but his time has not yet come. In a case of mistaken identity, he is brought to Hades, only to be informed that his neighbour Demylus should have been brought instead. Cleomenes is, therefore, sent back and within a few days Demylus dies.

Such tales, though from a pagan background, found their way into Jewish and Christian tradition. The Talmud (*b. Berak.* 18b) tells an apocryphal story of Samuel the prophet to whom some orphans entrust a substantial amount of money which he deposits with his father Abba. Abba hides the money, but dies before informing Samuel. Desperate to retrieve the entrusted money, Samuel visits Abba in the underworld, learns the location of the hidden money, restores it to the orphans, and all is well.

A Christian example is the story of Jannes and Jambres (1st-2nd century AD), about two magician brothers who, according to tradition, opposed Moses in Pharaoh’s court.⁹⁷ Jannes dies. Jambres calls his spirit up from the

⁹⁴ R. Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16:19–31,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 455 (447-63).

⁹⁵ Plato, *Resp.* 10.614B-621B.

⁹⁶ R. Bauckham, “The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels,” *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 238 (225-46).

⁹⁷ This tale is told in the rather late Christian document, *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres*. Genesis neither numbers nor names the magicians who opposed Moses, nor does it state they were brothers. Jewish tradition named them as Jannes and Jambres, a tradition known in 2 Tim 3:8.

underworld through necromancy and Jannes informs him of his sufferings and urges Jambres to repent.

In the tales of reversal of fortune at death we have a parallel to the reversed fortunes of the rich man and Lazarus, and in the tales of communication with the dead, we have a parallel to the rich man's request that Lazarus inform the five living brothers. The non-biblical context of the parable is fairly evident, and according to Hock, such stories were common.⁹⁸

Such tales had three common elements. First, contrary to the Bible which declares that the dead "know nothing" (Eccl 9:5), such tales presuppose that the dead know more than the living and their witness can lead to repentance. Second, a message from the dead could come in a variety of ways, like bodily or disembodied visits, ghosts, or necromancy. Bodily resurrection is never involved because in the pagan cultures where such tales originally developed there was no teaching of bodily resurrection (Acts 17:32). Third, tales of revelations from the dead always include an eyewitness, usually named, usually well known, perhaps in an effort to give such tales credibility.

With this background in mind we can now turn our attention to the parable. Bauckham has suggested that it is often at the point where a story departs from the expected that its importance lies.⁹⁹ We will compare the parable with such tales and point out the areas where it departs from the expected.

(b) The Parable's First Part – Deconstruct to Discredit

The parable has two parts: (a) the rich man's request for relief; (b) his request that Lazarus be sent to the five living brothers. The first part of the parable begins in a similar way to other such tales: a rich and a poor man die and at death their fortunes are reversed. Despite this conventional beginning, a number of peculiarities immediately begin to assault the reader.

First, Lazarus, while alive, tried to "eat" crumbs falling off the rich man's table (Luke 16:21).¹⁰⁰ The Greek χορτάζω does not mean "eat," but

⁹⁸ Hock, 455-63.

⁹⁹ Bauckham, "Rich Man," 328.

¹⁰⁰ Bible references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

“being filled,” “satisfied,”¹⁰¹ filled with food to the full. Can someone really be filled and satisfied with crumbs falling off a table?

Second, when Lazarus dies he is taken to “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22 RSV). Abraham’s bosom appears nowhere else. Most assume it is a byword for heaven.¹⁰² However, in the parable it appears as a literal description: the rich man looks up and sees “Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:23 RSV). Do the righteous dead sit on Abraham’s bosom? How many can sit there?

Third, when the rich man sees Abraham in the distance he “called/cried out” (NIV/NKJ) to him (Luke 16:24). The Greek is φωνέω. It means, “to call out,”¹⁰³ and carries no drama. A person in severe torment, like the rich man, would have “shrieked,” “cried out” (Greek κρᾶζω), or at least called out “with a very loud and pain-filled voice.”¹⁰⁴ But the rich man does not. He raises his voice just enough to be heard, but perhaps not too loud to disturb.

Fourth, the rich man in Hades experiences torment (KJV/NKJ), anguish (ESV/RSV), or agony (NIV) (Luke 16:24). The Greek ὀδυρόμαι and the cognate ὀδύνη are used four other times in the NT¹⁰⁵ and refer to emotional anguish, grief, sorrow.¹⁰⁶ So the rich man is in literal flames, but experiences emotional anguish, which he tries to quell with literal water!

Fifth, to quell his pain, the rich man requests that Lazarus dip “the tip of his finger” (Luke 16:24) in water and bring it over. He could have asked for a cup of water; or at least that Lazarus scoop some water. The tip of the finger can only carry a minuscule amount of water which would surely evaporate in the fires of torment. Fitzmyer sees a hyperbole to highlight the

¹⁰¹ BDAG, s.v.

¹⁰² Cf. the translation, “Abraham’s side” (e.g., ESV and NIV).

¹⁰³ BDAG, s.v.; LSJ, s.v.

¹⁰⁴ LSJ, s.v.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 2:48; Acts 20:38; Rom 9:2; 1 Tim 6:10.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Gen 44:31; Exod 3:7; Deut 26:14; Prov 29:21; Hag 2:14; Zech 9:5; 12:10; Isa 21:10; 40:29; 53:4; Lam 1:13. See also Gen 35:18 where though Rachel’s son is born in the physical pain of birth, she names him Ben-Oni, υἱὸς ὀδύνης, “son of sorrow,” highlighting perhaps her emotional anguish over her physical pain.

severity of the torments.¹⁰⁷ Hardly. The description sounds more ridiculous than scary.

Sixth, the rich man expects that miniscule amount of water will “cool” his tongue (Luke 16:24). The Greek is καταψύχω,¹⁰⁸ a compound word made up of the verb ψύχω “to make cold” and the prefixed preposition κατά which functions to make something more emphatic.¹⁰⁹ To illustrate, in Modern Greek καταψύχω refers to the freezer of the fridge which freezes the food. The rich man, therefore, expects the minuscule amount of water, carried on the tip of Lazarus’ finger over the tormenting fires to freeze his tongue and quell his emotional anguish!

I would like to propose that the use of such awkward, exaggerated, even ridiculous imagery is intended to undermine the credibility of the genre it is modelled on, the pool of tales of supposed interactions with the underworld, some of which were outlined above. Such use of exaggeration is not uncommon in the Bible.¹¹⁰

(c) *The Parable’s Second Part – Deconstruct to Reinforce the Biblical Outlook*

In contrast to the first part of the parable, the second is solemn, and poignant. We noted that all tales from the non-biblical background shared three common characteristics. They: (a) can enlighten the living; (b) do not include resurrection; and (c) include eyewitnesses. Jesus deconstructs all three points.

First, when the rich man requests that Lazarus be sent to the five living brothers to warn them, he is confident this will be so: “I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment” (Luke 16:27-28).

¹⁰⁷ J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV* (The Anchor Bible 28b; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 1133.

¹⁰⁸ LSJ, s.v. Liddell and Scott define it as “cool,” “chill,” “refresh,” while they render the related adjective κατάψυχρος as “very cold.”

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. S.E. Porter, J.T. Reed, and M.B. O’Donnell, *Fundamentals of NT Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 132-33.

¹¹⁰ E.g., 2 Sam 16:20; 1 Kgs 18:27; 22:13-16; Isa 46:6-7; Jer 10:5; 12:5; Matt 23:24; Mark 7:25-30; John 1:45-46; 2 Cor 12:13; Gal 5:12.

The reply shocks him: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them” (Luke 16:29). Evidently the witness of Scripture (“Moses and the prophets”) is more than adequate.

The rich man replies, “No” (Luke 16:30). The Greek, οὐχί, is emphatic, meaning “NO!” The rich man who has accepted without complaint his miserable fate as well as Abraham’s refusal to send relief, cannot accept that a revelation from the dead is immaterial to repentance, and rebels. His incredulity probably reflects the incredulity of the masses, who similarly believed in the efficacy of revelations from the dead.

To drive the point home, Jesus repeats the statement with more emphasis: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Supposed revelations from the dead cannot bring repentance; only Scripture can.

From an inter-biblical perspective, there is a connection here with the resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. The Pharisees had rejected the testimony of Scripture about Jesus as well as the Biblical preaching and teaching of Jesus. Having rejected these, when Lazarus was raised from the dead, they rejected the manifested power of Jesus and rather than believe sought to kill Lazarus too (John 12:10).

Second, the parable juxtaposes two modes of return from the dead. In 16:27 the rich man asks Abraham to “send” Lazarus to his living brothers and in 16:30 that Lazarus “goes.” Neither expression indicates resurrection. Any of the modes of communication between the living and the dead prevalent in the Mediterranean worldviews and discussed in the section on the non-biblical background was probably fine.

To the rich man’s open-ended request, Abraham affirms that the only way a person can return from the dead is through bodily resurrection: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Third, and perhaps most important, is the eyewitness. In the parable, apart from Abraham, Lazarus is mentioned. This is the only parable which names characters. “Lazarus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Eliezer. Eliezer was Abraham’s most trusted and only named servant (Gen 15:2). In non-biblical Jewish cosmology, Abraham was the highest human in heaven. So if heaven were to send a message from the dead to humanity, the best candidate would be Abraham’s most trusted servant, Eliezer or

Lazarus.¹¹¹ Of course, the parable does not state that Lazarus is Abraham's servant Eliezer. But it is fairly obvious that in the audience's mind some connection between the two would be made. As such, Eliezer/Lazarus would be the ideal candidate to return from the dead.

So the parable creates the ideal eyewitness from the dead, but refuses to send him. Not because God cannot send someone back from the dead through resurrection; neither because God does not want to help the five brothers in need of repentance; but because it is not necessary or useful: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). And God will not do that which is unnecessary; neither has he done so in the past, nor will he do so in the future. With one bold statement Jesus dismisses all supposed revelations from the dead.

In essence, through the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus repeats the prohibition of Deuteronomy 18:10-12 that there should be no interaction whatsoever with anyone who claims to communicate with the dead, because such supposed communications do not come from God.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that Hades as used in both the OT and the NT (the main focus of our attention) is a synonym for the grave. It refers to the physical reality of death. In the OT we saw that it translates Sheol as well as other associated words in connection with the physical reality of death. It is whole persons that die, not bodies versus spirits or souls. At no place is Hades a place for supposed immaterial souls. We saw repeated references to the horizontal position of the body in the tomb, and repeated affirmations that the dead cannot communicate either with God or anyone else. Biblical Hades depicts death as a state of non-consciousness. After death a person remains in the physical grave awaiting the resurrection. We also saw a very high level of consistency.

The only exception is Luke 16:23 which appears to depict continuing human existence in full bodily form after death in Hades. But even this text, when understood in context, aims to negate what it appears to endorse

¹¹¹ V. Tanghe, "Abraham, son fils et son envoye (Luc 16,19-31)," *Revue Biblique* 91 (1984): 557-77, considers Lazarus to be Abraham's envoy, since Lazarus is the Greek version of the Hebrew Eliezer, Abraham's servant (Gen 15:2; cf. 24:2).

by decrying the popular ancient genre of tales whereby the living could communicate with the dead. At no point in the biblical material is Hades a place for spirits. Death is a physical reality which causes the cessation of the totality of a person. No existence is envisaged apart from the body.

What are the implications of seeing death as the complete cessation of life? They are immense. Human cultures seem fascinated by the idea that death is not really death; that some aspect of human existence, a soul or spirit, continues to exist after a person dies. We noted how in the non-biblical Jewish writings, while the biblical view predominates, there already was a tendency, under Greek influence, to move towards continued existence after death. Christianity followed a similar path, whereby the NT view of death as the complete cessation of life was replaced gradually by a view that death is a transition from a bodily into a non-bodily form of existence. However, the clear belief in a resurrection at the Parousia of Jesus has helped Christians keep in focus the reality that the real hope of the believer is at the Parousia.

However, in areas which Christianity entered in relatively recent times and encountered animism, Christianity has found it hard to eliminate the very strong pre-Christian beliefs in continued existence after death and efforts to communicate with spirits. Christianity and a substratum of animism seem to operate side by side in uneasy co-existence.

This seems to be the case in Melanesia, the traditional religions of which are saturated with belief in spirits.¹¹² Spirits can be ancient divinities or dead ancestors.¹¹³ They inhabit space in very close proximity to humans and can be contacted through rites, shamans, sacred dances, and sorcery, among other things.¹¹⁴ They are believed to interact with humans, can bring wealth or poverty,¹¹⁵ and play a role in the smallest aspects of life.¹¹⁶ While

¹¹² E.g., T. Swain and G. Tromph, *The Religions of Oceania* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 117-18.

¹¹³ E.g., P.L. Newman, "Supernaturalism and Ritual Among the Gururumba" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1962), 65-82; see also N. Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Point 29; Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 2005).

¹¹⁴ Swain and Tromph, *Religions of Oceania*, 142.

¹¹⁵ J. Thiele, "Papua New Guinea's Distinctive Culture: Advice for Investors," *Language & Linguistics in Melanesia* 31 (2013): 82-89.

the Bible knows of spirits in the form of good and fallen angels (e.g., Heb 1:14), the former always appear to humans in physical form, and the latter are to be shunned. Against an animist backdrop, the biblical outlook on Hades and death, as described above, calls on Christians to abstain from any communication with the supposed world of the dead (cf. Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:1-14; 1 Chr 10:13-14; 2 Chr 33:6; Isa 8:19; 1 Tim 4:1), since the dead are, indeed, dead.

¹¹⁶ G.J. Humble, "Sorcery and Animism in a South Pacific Melanesian Context," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 9 (2013): 2 (1-19); cf. E. Mantovani, *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions* (Point 6; Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1984).