

Dead Certainties

DEATH, HELL AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Introduction

Most evangelicals are reasonably clear in their basic hope; that is at death they are assured of eternal life and that they will go to heaven to be with the Lord. Beyond that many have very little idea what the hope consists of. They have little understanding that eternal life is corporeal (but a new spiritual body) on a renewed Earth; some have very woolly ideas about an immaterial existence in some sort of spiritual dimension. Few understand the place of unbelievers after death or the sequence of events that follow the Lord's return. As a result many are easily confused by rogue teaching, and are often unsettled in their faith by this. Others end up believing nonsense, such as the ability of the dead to communicate with the living, or the existence of ghosts. This is why clear teaching on this subject is important.

The doctrines under examination here cover a number of sections in the usual systematic theology format; namely: individual eschatology, death, the intermediate state, punishment of sin, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment and the final (or eternal) state. Theologians differ markedly in some of these subjects but the important object is to determine what is the most Biblical explanation of these matters which affect us all crucially. To preserve simplicity, the subjects will be kept to analytical note form as far as possible.

DEATH

Spiritual death

- Unbelievers are spiritually dead from birth to eternity (see Hell).
And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph 2:1)
He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 Jn 5:12)
- In one sense sin is death since it breaks the relationship with God as life-giver and destroys the image of God in man. This death works throughout man's entire nature in his life and the end result is physical death.
- Believers become spiritually alive at regeneration and move from death to eternal life. [Jn 6:24; 1 Tim 5:6, 6:19; Eph 2:1; 1 Jn 5:12]

Physical death

Results from sin in the race. Man was not originally created with the seed of death in him. Death is the separation of the spirit and soul from the body, not annihilation. The spirit, the essential nature of man, returns to God for further action (Gen 3:19; Eccles 12:7). Nothing is ever annihilated, but things are changed in form.

'Death is not a cessation of existence, but a severance of the natural relations of life'.¹

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (Jm 2:26)

¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Banner of Truth (1971) p668.

Death is often seen as the cessation of physical life, but we don't really know what this means, just as we don't really know what life is.

Destruction

Does not always mean that a thing ceases to be, but that it is so ruined that it no longer serves the use for which it was designed. The basic Biblical meaning is '*a separation from*'. In physics nothing is destroyed, just converted into a different form of energy e.g. ashes and smoke from burned wood. [Matt 26:8 (waste = 'perish'); 2 Pt 3:6; c.f. Jn 12:24] When wicked people are said to be destroyed, they are not annihilated and beyond any conscious state but separated from God and his glory. An example of this is:

... by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. (2 Pt 3:6)

'Perished' = 'destroyed', but the world did not disappear, it was ruined by sin and flooded.

There are various words for destroy in the NT:

1. PERDITION OR DESTRUCTION **avpw,leia** *apoleia* (Strong's 684) meaning: destroying, utter destruction of vessels or money, a perishing, ruin, destruction; the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell.
2. PERISH, destroy, lose **avpo,llumi** *apollumi* (Strong's 622) meaning: to destroy, a) to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to ruin; b) render useless; c) to kill; d) to declare that one must be put to death; e) metaphorically to devote or give over to eternal misery in hell; f) to perish, to be lost, ruined, destroyed, to lose.
3. DESTRUCTION **o;leqroj** *olethros* (Strong's 3639) meaning: ruin, destroy, death; for the 'destruction of the flesh', said of the external ills and troubles by which the lusts of the flesh are subdued and destroyed.
4. DESTRUCTION **kaqai,resij** *kathairesis* (Strong's 2506) meaning: a pulling down, destruction, demolition.
5. DONE AWAY WITH, destruction (in KJV) **katarge,w** *katargeo* (Strong's 2673) meaning: 1) to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative; to deprive of force, influence, power 2) to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul, abolish, to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, loosed from any one. This is spoken of the old nature which in believers has ceased to have dominion.

Conscious existence after death

Consciousness is not dependent upon the brain. In this life, consciousness transmits its effects through the brain, but it need not always do so. Many scientists think that the brain acts to thoughts as a prism does to light. The Bible proves that the existence after death is definitely conscious. [Lk 16:19-31; 2 Cor 5:6-9; Acts 7:59; Phil 1:23; Heb 12:23; Rev 6:9, 20:4]

The death of Christians

- The sting of death is sin. Since sin has been dealt with, the fear of death has been removed.
- This is why Christians are said to 'fall asleep'. [Matt 27:52; Acts 13:36; 1 Cor 11:30, 15:6,20,51; Eph 5:14; 1 Thess 4:14] The word 'cemetery' derives from a Greek word meaning 'to lull to sleep'. [1 Cor 15:6; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Lk 23:43; Heb 12:23]
- Death completes the sanctification of believers who immediately are made perfect (Heb 12:23; 1 Cor 15:55-56).
- After death, believers go straight into the Lord's presence (Phil 1:23; Lk 23:43).
We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.
(2 Cor 5:8)

The death of infants

Many evangelicals believe that aborted and stillborn babies, plus infants and mentally retarded people who have not yet reached the age of reason are covered by the blood of Christ and receive grace to enter heaven. Jesus said that the kingdom belonged to such as children - innocent in terms of actual responsibility, but sinful by virtue of their Adamic depraved nature. [Isa 49:25, 54:13; Ps 72:4, 90:16, 102:28, 128:6; Matt 19:14; Jn 21:5-17 (lambs as well as sheep). [For more information on this topic see the article *Infant Salvation* from this author.]

Is the soul immortal?

This concept, as normally stated, is unbiblical; there is no statement or argument to this effect. The word 'immortality' is often used too loosely and in an absolute sense only refers to God, who alone is immortal (1 Tim 6:15-16). God's people are also immortal since they are united with Christ and adopted sons of God.

When used to mean endless existence, all spirits are immortal – thus condemnation is also unceasing. Confusion is also caused by theologians mixing and confusing man's soul and spirit.

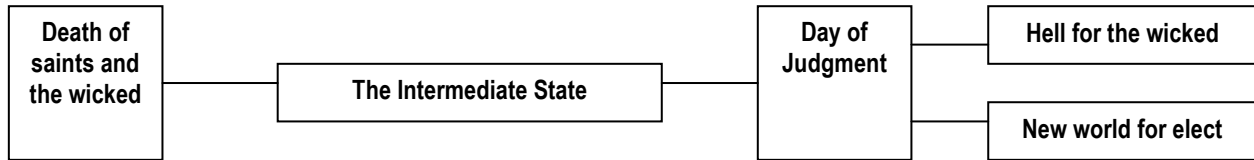
However, immortality means more than unending existence and includes the sense of eternal divine life and the freedom from the decay of sin and death. As regards humans, this only applicable to saints in Christ who have eternal, incorruptible life. The wicked are mortal and do not have uncorrupted life; while God can destroy (*apollumi*) both body and soul in hell (Matt 10:28). Only Christ brings immortality to light (2 Tim 1:10). The wicked after judgment will have unending existence, but in ceaseless condemnation; this is not immortality.

TO SUMMARISE

1. All spirits have unending quality of life. In the case of men, this appears to include the soul, which is the executor of the personality. The human spirit and soul continues.
2. All the wicked will be raised for unending punishment in hell. All evil spirits (fallen angels, demons) will be cast into hell. This punishment is conscious and thus requires personality. This resurrected human vehicle is not immortal but it is unceasing.
3. Immortality means more than unending life and is the quality of eternal life that belongs to God.
4. Only believers share this immortality, being free from sin and death.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

This refers to the present gap between physical death and the ‘putting on of the heavenly body’ for Christians or the final judgment of the wicked. [2 Cor 5:1-4; 1 Cor 15; Lk 16:19-31]



What does the intermediate state consist of?

The English word ‘Hell’ is used to translate several different original words: the Hebrew *sheol* and the Greek words: *Hades*, *Gehenna* and *Tartarus*. Thus it is vital to ascertain exactly what these separate words originally conveyed and whether or not they are synonymous.

- Much of the argument about this doctrine is based upon these word meanings. The interpretation of the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek word *hades* is surrounded by controversy even within the Reformed community. Distinguished theologians like: WGT Shedd, Gerhardus Vos, AA Hodge and Louis Berkhof can’t agree whether they equal ‘hell’ in existence now, or not.
- All agree that *sheol* and *hades* refer to the same place. Some say that place is hell, while others that it is the grave, or the place of departed spirits; Bible versions vary. The words refer in scripture to a place or to the state of death and are variously translated as: ‘Hell’, ‘grave’ or ‘pit’. Both Charles Hodge and AA Hodge believed that *sheol* and *hades* referred to the place of departed spirits.
- A key text is Rev 20:13-15. Sinners cannot be in Hell before the final judgment since it is being prepared for Satan and all his followers. Dead sinners are in Hades. They are only thrown into Hell, figuratively called ‘the lake of fire’, after the Day of Judgment (Rev 19:20, 20:10-15, 21:8). Since Hades will no longer be required, it is also thrown into Hell for purification, along with death itself. Death does not exist in the new world.

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. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:13-15)
- This text is authoritative and confirms that:
 1. Hades contains the dead (v13).
 2. Hades contains the dead before they are judged (v13).
 3. The dead, and Hades as a place, is then cast into the lake of fire, the second and final death (Hell, v14).
 4. No one in God’s book of life goes to Hell (v15).
- If death and Hades are thrown into Hell, Hades must be a separate entity to Hell.
- The beast and the false prophet are thrown into Hell along with the devil after the final battle and judgment (Rev 19:20). Satan and his followers cannot, therefore, be in Hell now. Hades and its contents cannot be in Hell either at this time. The time sequence is:
 1. The Great White Throne.
 2. The dissolution of creation.
 3. The Final judgment: the dead bodies come out of their graves; spirits comes out of Hades.
 4. The lake of fire, the second death - Hell. (Rev 20:7-14)

- Hades cannot be the place of eternal perdition or ‘Hell’.

Regarding the place of the righteous dead, all agree that after the cross believers go to be with the Lord in heaven (2 Cor 5:1-5; Phil 1:21-24 etc.). All agree that the expectation of OT saints was also heaven (Heb 11:10; Ps 17:14-15, 73:17-28), yet they did not receive the fulness of the promise of heaven in this dispensation (Heb 11:39-40); perfection was not to be attained without NT saints. Since their future state was one of glory (Lk 23:43), the saints must have been located in a place or state less than heaven, yet one full of glory and in fellowship with God. Jesus promised the thief on the cross that he would go that day into Paradise. Unless this meant what Jews normally understood by that term, Jesus’ comment would have been cruel. As we see later, this word meant a special area in the place of the departed. The OT saint did not expect to be in *Gehenna* but in the place of glory in *sheol* and to receive the fulness when the Messiah came.

Sheol

Sheol is the Hebrew word used in the OT for ‘the present state of death’ and is the OT designation for the abode of the dead. *Sheol* = *IAav.* or *laov.* (Strong’s 7585). Its key meanings are: the underworld, the grave, the pit, and the place of no return.

Sheol, occurs in the Old Testament sixty-five times. This word is derived from a root-word meaning ‘to ask’, ‘demand’; hence insatiableness (Prov 30:15,16). *Sheol* is populated by: the congregation of the dead (Pr 21:16), the wicked (Num 16:33 Job 24:19 Ps 9:17 31:17) and the good (Ps 16:10 30:3 49:15 86:13). It is described as deep (Job 11:8) dark (Job 10:21,22) with bars (Job 17:16) and the dead ‘go down’ to it (Num 16:30,33 Ezek 31:15,16,17).

Before the cross it refers to the spirit world of those awaiting judgment, or in the case of believers - the vestibule of heaven. *Sheol* is divided into a state of glory for the elect, and a place of desolation for the wicked. The righteous went to a section called ‘Abraham’s Bosom’ (i.e. all the elect people of the covenant); the Jews also called this place ‘Paradise’, a Persian word meaning a garden of pleasure, happiness. The wicked went to a place of torment. Between the two is an impassable chasm. The Psalmist knew that he would not remain in *sheol*. [Lk 16:19-31; Ps 16:10] While there are instances where Paradise clearly refers to the bliss in heaven (Rev 2:7), there are others where it may not or where that bliss was experienced while not being organically in heaven (2 Cor 12:4). Jewish tradition was that the location ‘Abraham’s Bosom’ was a state of Paradise. Paradise was also the original state of Adam and Eve before the fall, a place of glory and fellowship with God.

There are places in the OT where *sheol* could mean ‘Hell’, such as Job 26:6; Isa 14:15; Amos 9:2; Prov 15:11, 23:13-14, 27:20. Sometimes in connection with the word *Abaddown* (‘destruction’, Prov 15:11, 27:20.), a word used in Revelation as a messenger of Hell (Rev 9:11). This is explained easily. Firstly, the word had to cover every eventuality (Hell, the pit, the grave, the place of departed spirits). Secondly, these texts can sometimes simply be references to the grave, which fits just as well; e.g. ‘Though they dig into Hell [the grave], thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.’ (Amos 9:2). Thirdly, as far as the wicked were concerned, *sheol* was the vestibule or waiting room of Hell. Those in *sheol* were destined to Hell and awaiting sentence. For the wicked, *sheol* and *Gehenna* mean effectively the same thing.

Hades

This Greek word is used in the NT for ‘the place of the departed’ and equates to the Hebrew *sheol*. It is also a prison (1Pe 3:19) with gates and bars and locks (Matt 16:18; Rev 1:18) and it is approached downward (Matt 11:23; Lk 10:15). It also contains the righteous and the

wicked, who are separated. The blessed dead (before the cross) are in that part of Hades called Paradise (Lk 23:43) or Abraham's bosom (Lk 16:22)

Hades: **a[|dhj** (Strong's 86). It means: 1) the name Hades or Pluto, the god of the underworld; 2) Orcus, the nether world, the realm of the dead; 3) later use of this word: the grave, death, Hell. In Biblical Greek it is associated with Orcus, the infernal regions, a dark and dismal place in the very depths of the earth, the common receptacle of disembodied spirits. Usually Hades is just the abode of the wicked, Lk 16:23; Rev 20:13,14.

Before the cross, pious people were in a segregated place in Hades which was far different to the area where sinful people suffered in expectation of judgment. After the cross there is a change. At some point, the believers were taken out of Hades to be with Jesus in heaven. Rev 1:18 states that Jesus was given the keys of death and Hades and, therefore, must have released the OT saints at the ascension. This release is not explicitly stated but Eph 4:8 seems to refer to it, captivity being Christ's followers (Calvin / Hodge).

Before the cross, saints were carried to Abraham's bosom by angels, but we are met at death by the Lord himself (Jn 14:3).

Therefore, we see that, 'Hades, is the region of departed spirits of the lost (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the ascension of Christ). It never denotes the grave, nor is it the permanent region of the lost; in point of time it is, for such, intermediate between decease and the doom of Gehenna'.²

Dives (the rich man) and Lazarus in Lk 16:20-31

Hell is the place of eternal punishment. It is inconceivable that godly people before the cross waited there for release, and yet there is no clear text which states that they were in heaven either. It is also impossible that Christ spent days there being tormented by Satan as some teach. There is no evidence for this at all. Furthermore, the NT is clear that Christ suffered the wrath of God for sin on the cross and was able to state '*It is finished*'. If there were further suffering in Hell then Jesus' statement of completion is untrue.

Jesus himself explains that dead souls went to the Grave or Hades awaiting sentence at the Day of Judgment. After the cross it is clear that dead believers go straight to heaven and are even met by Jesus himself at death.

The only passage which explains this is the story of Dives (the rich man) and Lazarus in Lk 16:20-31:

- 20 "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,
 21 "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.
 22 "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.
 23 "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.
 24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'
 25 "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.
 26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

² W.E. Vine, *Expository Dict. Of The NT*, p188.

27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,
 28 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'
 29 "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'
 30 "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'
 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded
 though one rise from the dead.' "

Now this passage is dismissed as a mere parable, and the teaching in it minimised, but Jesus never calls this story a parable. It is not a parable for these reasons:

1. It uses proper names, Lazarus, Moses and Abraham referring to real people. Parables commonly begin with, 'a certain man' or suchlike and individuals in the story are not named but are, 'a certain priest', 'two sons', etc. Historical narrative uses, 'Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.' (Lk 10:38). Thus here we have, 'there was a certain beggar named Lazarus'.
2. It refers to real places. Parables usually mention generalities such as, 'a far country' (Matt 21:33, 25:14) but here we have Abraham's Bosom, which was an actual place in Hades.

The Lord was giving teaching about kingdom truths and castigating the Pharisees who perverted those truths with traditions of men and loved riches (Lk 16:14). It also correlates with the teaching on Hell and Hades found in Revelation. Even if it were a parable, Jesus makes clear statements which are to be understood as they stand by his hearers. It would make no sense if Jesus had just made up these things for the sake of making a point.

From this passage we learn these things:

1. When the beggar died, he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom (Paradise).
2. There he was comforted.
3. The rich man was in torment in Hades.
4. The rich man could see Abraham and Lazarus afar off.
5. The rich man was able to speak to Abraham.
6. Abraham was able to speak to him.
7. There is a great gulf fixed between the two so that there was no passage between them.

Hades, the place of departed spirits, is a waiting place. After the cross it is only populated by sinners; before the cross it also contained the righteous dead awaiting release. It is here that Jesus went to proclaim his salvation to those in Abraham's bosom and then lead them out triumphantly to heaven after the ascension, 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive' (Eph 4:8).³ After the cross, sin was atoned for and dead saints could now enter heaven, legally justified. Thus in Revelation we see saints in heaven.

HELL

ge,enna *geenna* [pronounced: gheh'-en-nah] (Strong's 1067; Greek word of Hebrew origin). It means: Hell as the place of the future punishment, and torment called *Gehenna* or *Gehenna of fire*. This was originally the valley of Hinnom [*Ghi-Hinnom*], south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned. It was originally the scene of Moloch worship where children were burned as sacrifices (2 Chron 33:6; Jer 7:31) thus becoming a fit symbol of the wicked and their future destruction.

³ Matt 27:51 refers to a resurrection of some dead saints at the time of the cross in Jerusalem, but this appears to be a miracle associated with the importance of what happened at Calvary, rather than a final state of a relatively small number of resurrected people.

Hinnom is a deep, narrow ravine separating Mount Zion from the so-called 'Hill of Evil Counsel'. It took its name from some ancient hero, the son of Hinnom. It is first mentioned in (Jos 15:8) It had been the place where the idolatrous Jews burned their children alive to Moloch and Baal. A particular part of the valley was called Tophet, or the 'fire-stove', where the children were burned. After the Exile, in order to show their abhorrence of the locality, the Jews made this valley the receptacle of the offal of the city, for the destruction of which a fire was, as is supposed, kept constantly burning there. The Jews associated with this valley these two ideas, (1 that of the sufferings of the victims that had there been sacrificed; and (2 that of filth and corruption. It became thus to the popular mind a symbol of the abode of the wicked hereafter. It came to signify hell as the place of the wicked. 'It might be shown by infinite examples that the Jews expressed Hell, or the place of the damned, by this word. The word Gehenna [the Greek contraction of Hinnom] was never used in the time of Christ in any other sense than to denote the place of future punishment'. About this fact there can be no question. In this sense the word is used eleven times in our Lord's discourses (Matt 5:22, 23:33; Lk 12:5) etc. [*Easton's Bible Dictionary*]

No one disputes that this word means hell. In English, the word is derived from the Saxon *helan*, to cover; hence the covered, concealed or the invisible place. Gehenna usually designates the place of the lost dead (e.g. Matt 23:33). Horrific figurative expressions are used to describe the fearful nature of the everlasting condition there (Matt 8:12 13:42 22:13 25:30; Lk 16:24) etc.

Hell is used by some as 'the grave' or 'the place of departed spirits', but we have seen that this is strictly incorrect. Hell is the place of perdition, where men and angels are punished. It is figuratively known as the 'lake of fire'.

Even if *sheol* and *hades* mean the place of the departed and only imply Hell by extension, this does not mitigate the fearful prospect of Hell for all who refuse to obey the Gospel. It is surely wrong that the NIV translation never translates *sheol* as 'Hell' and only rarely does so with *hades*. The impression is, therefore, that there is no sense of Hell in the OT at all - a very wrong notion. Also, the teachers who deny Hell as a place of eternal punishment or heaven as the objective of the redeemed are unsound and deeply flawed

It should also be noted that the Lord Jesus used the word more than anyone else in the NT. He describes Hell as a definite place of eternal torment and judgment for sin.

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched -- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched -- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire -- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' (Mk 9:43-48)

HEAVEN

- The word always designates the dwelling place of God [Matt 19:28; Acts 3:21; 2 Pt 3:13] and the rule of God [Ps 103:19].
- It is a definite place as well as a state of blessedness. [Rev 5:6]
- It is a place of glory. [Jn 17:24]

- Christians who die are taken to heaven by Jesus himself [Jn 14:1-3].
- The plural 'heavens' often refers to the atmosphere, sky (Ps 102:26-27). This is why God's throne is sometimes figuratively described as the third heaven: the first is the sky, the second is space (occupied by stars and planets) the third being the realm of God. However, we should not conceive of heaven as a physical place beyond the stars, but rather as a spiritual dimension.
- After the Second Coming, the world will pass away and be regenerated as a new creation (Matt 5:5, 19:28; Acts 3:21). Heaven and earth will be united as God dwells with us - his original intention (Rev 21:3). Here we will enjoy fulness of life, not just immortality, and discover fresh ways of glorifying God in Christ Jesus. We will recognise each other and be full of joy [Matt 8:11; Heb 12:22-23; Rev 7:17, 21:4]. There will be degrees of bliss and authority based upon how well we used our time on earth in obeying God. [Rev 21:3; Ps 102: 26:27]
- The fact that believers will inherit a renewed earth should not restrict the expectation of heaven. Scripture repeatedly tells believers that heaven is their hope and objective [Phil 3:20; Col 1:5; Heb 6:18-20, 10:34, 12:22; 1 Pt 1:4; Rev 11:12, 12:10]. Until the earth is renewed and purified, believers go to be with the Lord in heaven when they die. Heaven is the end of our race. After the final judgment, the earth is renewed but it is not just a new earth, it is now an earth re-united with heaven, God's dwelling is now on earth. Earth is then heavenly.
- 'The meek will inherit the earth', (Matt 5:5) but we will not stop there. It seems logical that we will expand beyond the planets in discovering the glory of God. He will have fitted us to search his infinite wisdom, this must include an infinite universe with an infinite time span. [Ps 103:19-22]

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION

- This takes place at the Second Coming when the elect and the wicked are both raised.
There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. (Acts 24:15)
- At the Second Coming the saints alive on earth are caught up in the air together with Christ and with the already departed (dead) saints, then all the saints are changed. The wicked will immediately die in the presence of God's glory and splendour but will be raised for judgment with everyone who ever lived.
For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thess 4:16-17; also 2 Thess 1:7-2:12).
- Resurrection is enacted upon the entire person: the body is raised and re-united with the soul and spirit.
But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Rm 8:11)
- The just are raised to enjoy the blessings of salvation in their whole personality, no longer weighed down by a sinful body. (Rm 8:23)
- The body of believers will be identical to those laid aside at death, except impurity, disease and infirmity will have been cleansed. We will recognise one another.
- Believer's bodies will also be modified to be adapted to the conditions of the new nature and cope with heaven on earth in the presence of God. They will be like Jesus' body after the resurrection: he could be touched, recognised, ate food (although sustenance wasn't necessary) but he had other faculties (e.g. he could pass through locked doors).
The Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body. (Phil 3:21; See also 1 Jn 3:2 and 1 Cor 15 in full)

- The wicked are raised to receive punishment. (Jn 5:28-29; Dan 12:2) The resurrected body of the wicked will also be adapted to face eternal punishment. There is no reason to presume that the fire of Hell is entirely figurative (c.f. the burning bush, on fire yet not consumed; Rev 20:13-15).

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

- The wrath of God is already resting upon the wicked.
He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn 3:18, 36).
- Believers are freed from condemnation already since they are justified by grace.
Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (Rm 5:9)
Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (Jn 5:24)
- The time of probation is this earthly life now. There are no further opportunities to repent or improve as, for instance, in a supposed purgatory.
And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment. (Heb 9:27).
- Saints will stand before Christ to be judged on the basis of work done in faith and rewards will be given. This is not a judgment for sin, which has been put away, and saints stand in the righteousness of Christ.
But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. (Matt 12:26)
... in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. (Rm 2:16)
Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. (1 Cor 4:5)
If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor 3:14-15)
- This accounting of behaviour is at the tribunal (*bema*) of Christ, not the place of judgment for sin.
For we must all appear before the judgment seat [bema] of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad [worthless]. (2 Cor 5:10)
- Sinners and demons will be called to account for their deeds. Saints and angels will assist in some way (Ps 149:5-9; Rev 20:4).
Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we shall judge angels? (1 Cor 6:2-3).
- Punishment will be allotted, although varying in degree, it will be eternal in duration (Heb 6:2; Mk 9:47).
- Sinners will then be consigned to Gehenna (Hell).
- It will be absolutely just.
- Allowances will be made for varying degrees of privilege of opportunity and responsibility. All infants, & dead foetuses will be saved. Heathen who have not heard the Gospel will be judged upon the light they had. Jews under the law will be judged by that law (Matt 11:24; Rm 1:19-23, 2:14-15).
- Evil angels will also be judged (Jude 6).
- God takes no pleasure in this (Ezek 33:11).

- Punishment consists in the loss of all good, alienation from God and the positive infliction of torment for eternity
... taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thess 1:8-9; Matt 25:44-46).
- At this point the renewal of heaven and earth takes place
But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up ... the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pt 3:10-13).

THE DESCENT OF CHRIST INTO HELL

- There is no scriptural teaching that Christ went into the place of torment or the place of the damned and suffered further punishment after the cross. The phrase as it appears in the Apostle's Creed, was used to indicate that Christ went into Hades. 'Hell' in this time meant any state of existence lower than heaven. Four passages are said to describe this event:
- Eph 4:9-10, 'Now this, "He ascended" -- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.' However, it is clear that this is referring to the humiliation of Christ on earth, his incarnation as a man, from which he ascended back to heaven. The best interpretation is that the descent here refers to the opposite of ascension (Jn 3:13; Ps 139:15).
- 1 Pt 4:4-6, but surely the dead here are the spiritually dead of Eph 2:1.
- Ps 16:8-10, however *Sheol* is used for the state of death, the place of the departed. Acts 2:31 quotes this applying it to Jesus.
- 1 Pt 3:18-20 which is variously interpreted e.g:
 - Christ preached a Gospel message to disobedient human spirits. What's the point of that? They are in Hades because they did not respond to previous damning messages and there is no second chance. The word here is not a Gospel message but a proclamation of victory.
 - Christ preaching his victory to fallen angels after Christ triumphed over them at Calvary (Col 2:15).
 - In the Spirit, Christ preached through Noah to the disobedient people that lived before the flood who were spirits in prison (Hades) when Peter wrote. Wrongly presuming that Peter does not state when Christ preached to them, whether before or after his death, many have suggested that it was the Spirit of Christ preaching through Noah that Peter has in mind; (from Augustine on and many reformed theologians.) But: the preaching is to 'spirits in prison', not on earth before the flood. Then, the preaching is clearly after the resurrection, not before Christ was made alive by the Spirit.

The text follows:

18 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,

19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,

20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine long-suffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

These verses are notoriously difficult to interpret. The prison mentioned here has to be Hades not Hell (viewed as the place of eternal damnation), no one has yet been thrown

into the lake of fire. Peter argues that Christ went into Hades and not Hell in Acts 2:24-27 as a disembodied soul. Here, however, Jesus went into Hades, not as a man, not as a disembodied soul, but after being made alive in the Spirit. In the Spirit he preached a triumphant message to all and led out the elect who had been faithful and were situated in Abraham's bosom. What is in Peter's mind here occurs after the resurrection.

Peter singles out the people preached to specifically as the disobedient people who ignored the warning of judgment by Noah, not OT saints. 'Preached' here means 'proclaimed', it is not a Gospel message or offer. In the wider context of Peter's encouragement to suffering believers, Peter highlights the total victory of Christ. The OT believers before the flood were especially persecuted for righteousness and evil was everywhere (Gen 6:5). God's cause seemed almost snuffed out, held by only eight persons at the deluge. To these evil souls, who thought they had triumphed, Christ proclaimed his victory from heaven. It is this victory which believers should concentrate upon in times of suffering, even when it seems like all is lost.

The main point is that Peter uses this as an exhortation, comparing the message of Christians as a similar warning to sinners to escape judgment by fleeing to Christ, who is like the ark which saves us from wrath. This is a poor and obscure verse from which to build a case that Christ went to Hell.

Christ entered Hades between his death and resurrection

During the time of his suffering, Jesus' Spirit was left with the Father while Jesus suffered as a man; a man with a human soul. As the perfectly obedient man, Jesus' soul went into Paradise (Abraham's bosom) after dying, while his body lay in the tomb, 'Today you will be with Me in Paradise.' (Lk 23:43).

Peter confirms this in Acts 2:27 by quoting Ps 16:10, 'Thou will not leave my soul in hell [hades], neither will you suffer your holy one to see corruption.'⁴ Between Friday and Sunday, Jesus' body lay in the tomb while his soul stayed in Paradise, a part of Hades. Christ, however, was not to be left in a disembodied state, nor would his human body experience the corruption of decomposition - it was to be raised. Death could not hold the Son of God (Acts 2:24).

When his human body was raised from a state of death, his Spirit was reunited with his body and soul and Jesus' natural spiritual home was again heaven. However, the ascension had not yet taken place as the formal coronation of the Son in his new role as the God-Man ruler of the universe. If Christ went to Hades to release waiting saints, the problem is, when did this occur? Was it at the cross, after the resurrection or at the ascension? The plain fact is that we just don't know for certain, but Eph 4:8 seems to imply that it was at the ascension. Then Jesus visited Hades to release the saints - only he had the key (Rev 1:18).

WHERE IS THE DEVIL AND HIS DEMONS?

- Not in Hades, where departed human spirits have no contact with the earth. [Thus there are no such things as ghosts.]
- Not yet Hell which is prepared for him.
- Demons occupy 'Tartarus':

⁴ Here David speaks as a type of the Messiah, in ways which can only apply to Christ. David's body did see corruption in the grave.

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [Tartaroo] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment. (2 Pt 2:4)

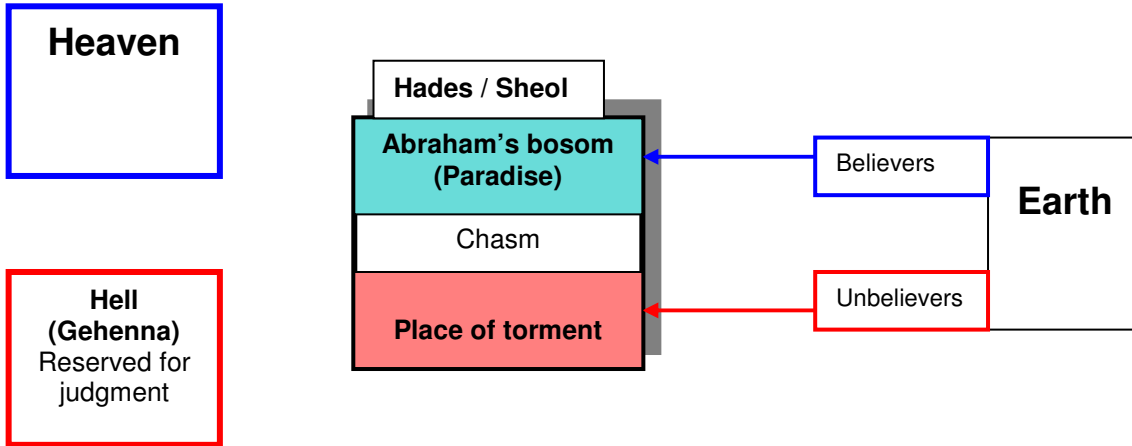
- The Greek word used for 'hell' in the various translations is not Gehenna (*'geenna'*) but a form of 'Tartaros' (from *'Tartarus'*, the place of the wicked dead and demons in Greek mythology which was below Hades). This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament.
- It refers to the extremity of the air around the world where Satan and his hordes have been confined; i.e. the aerial regions, the bounds of material creation. 'And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day'. (Jude 6)
- This is why he is called the 'prince of the power of the air' (Eph 2:2). This is the area to which Satan was bound after being ejected from heaven (Lk 10:18; Rev 12:4, 20:2-3).
- For this reason, OT saints were met and carried by angels through the air, Satan's dominion, into Paradise (Abraham's bosom, Lk 16:22). NT saints are met by the Lord and taken by him to heaven.
- Note that these angels are 'reserved for judgment' in Tartarus, their sentence (Hell) has not been passed yet. They are presently in the atmosphere accusing believers and tempting men, not in Hell where they would be powerless.

**Copyright Paul Fahy 1987 / 2002 / 2008
Understanding Ministries**

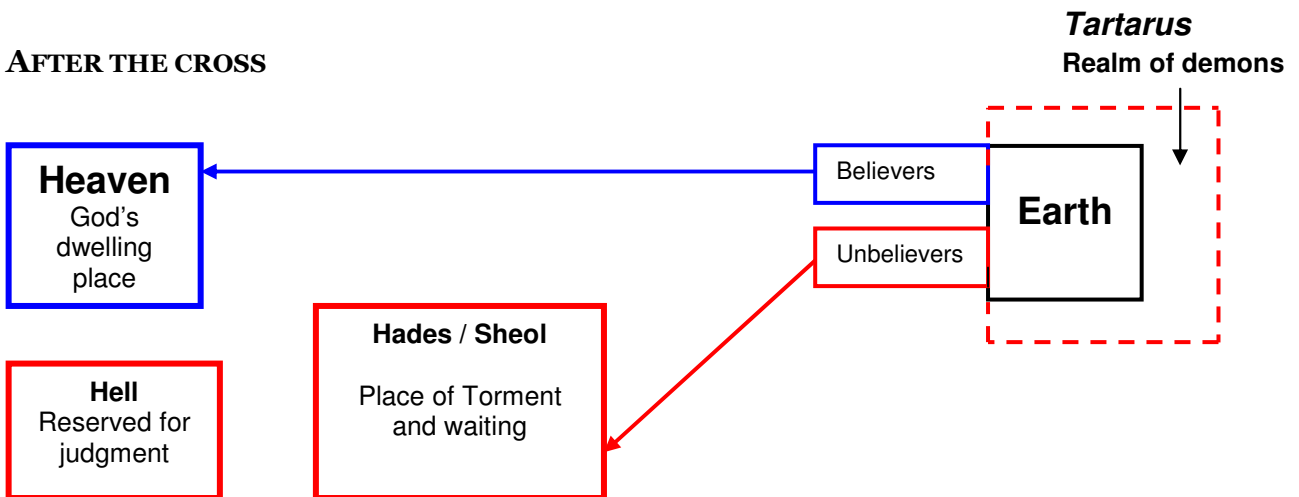
Appendix One

OVERVIEW OF THE INTERMEDIATE STATE: 1

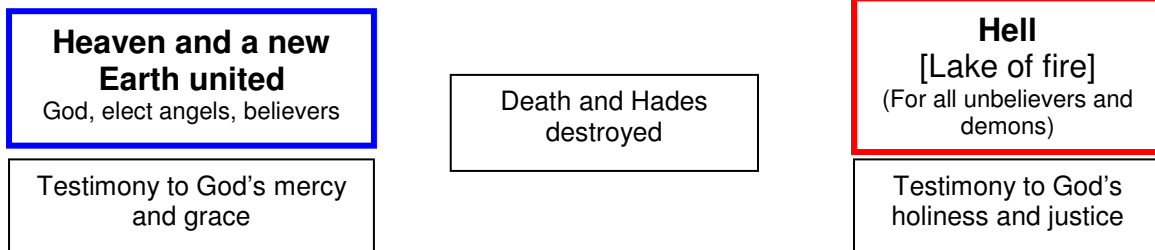
BEFORE THE CROSS



AFTER THE CROSS



AFTER THE FINAL JUDGMENT



Appendix Two

OVERVIEW OF THE INTERMEDIATE STATE: 2

