

PARADISE AND HELL

ONE DAY YOU WILL LEAVE this life and find yourself in a place that is quite different than what you have known upon this earth. According to the Bible, you will find yourself in one of two places. Here is how the prophet Daniel explains what happens after we die:

"...those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2)

For those who fear God, have repented of their sins, and have put their trust in Jesus, death is not the end, but the beginning to life. Death is looked forward to with great expectation. For those who do not fear God, have not quit their sin, nor put their trust in Jesus, death will be a terrifying experience.

WHAT IS DEATH?

The Apostle James tells us that death is that experience when the spirit leaves our body; it is a separation of the spirit from the body. Here's how James puts it:

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

The spirit is the real you. The body is only the house that you live in while you are upon the earth. When the spirit separates from the body, you are still alive. You still have the memory, emotions, appearance, and personality that you now have. The only difference between you now and you at death is that at death you will be pure spirit. Take a look at the following Scriptures for more information: Luke 16:19-31; 1 Peter 3:19.

WHERE IS THIS PLACE I'M GOING TO?

Hebrews 9:27 makes it clear that ten out of ten people die and when they do, they go into a place of judgment. Here's what the writer of Hebrews writes:

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment..."

This place of judgment is not the great white throne judgment spoken of in Revelation 20:11-15. The white throne judgment is when those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ

are cast into the lake of fire and those who have are taken into the new heaven and new earth. We will not enter this reward until Jesus returns the second time. In the meantime, our spirits enter into a place of waiting...waiting for the return of Christ to the earth and the receiving of their eternal inheritance.

PARADISE

There are two places of judgment. In Luke 23:42-43, notice that the thief on the cross next to Jesus asked him: "Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." Notice that Jesus did not say that they would be in his "kingdom" as the penitent thief requested; no, he said they would be in a place called "paradise." Jesus made it clear that paradise and the kingdom of God are not the same place.

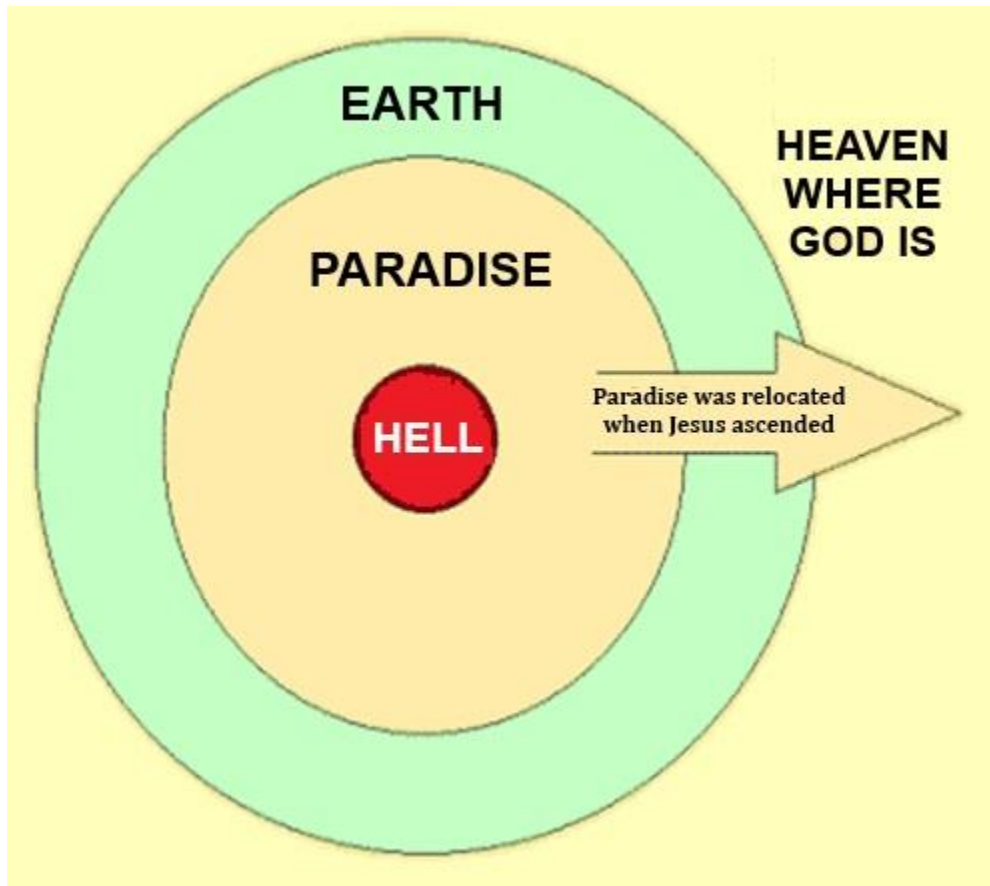
This is made clearer when we understand that when Jesus died, he "descended first into the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9) before ascending into heaven. As incredible as this sounds, the "lower parts" are in the "heart" or "center" of the earth as revealed by the Apostle Matthew: "...so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). After he was in the earth's center for three days and three nights, he rose from the dead (left paradise) and returned to the earth. Jesus still had not ascended into heaven. This is made clear in John 20:17 when Jesus tells Mary not to touch him because he had not yet entered heaven. The Apostle John recorded: "Jesus said to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father."

After talking with Mary, Jesus then ascended into heaven, that place where God is. When He entered the place where God is, Ephesians 4:8 tells us that He took "captivity captive." This means that all the people who were taken into captivity by death to the center of the earth (also called hades, the place of the dead) were taken out of paradise (taken captive by Christ) and entered into their new place where God is and Christ now sits at the right hand of God.

Not only were the dead in God taken to a new location, but paradise was also relocated. We know this for the following reasons. First, note that there are only three verses in Scripture which uses the word paradise. The first is found in Luke 23:43 and refers to the center of the earth where Jesus and the thief went to. The second reference is found in 2 Corinthians 12:4: "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Notice that this man that the apostle Paul knew was "caught up" and not taken down into paradise. Paul wrote these words after Christ died and was resurrected. Also note in Revelation 2:7 that the "tree of life" is mentioned as being in the "paradise of God." We know that the "tree of life" is now in the

place that Christ is preparing for us in New Jerusalem at the time of our final rewards, we will be able to eat from this tree when we enter God's kingdom (Revelation 22:2, 14).

What we find now is that these who died in Christ are taken to be with Him. We also know that the tree of life and paradise are in the New Jerusalem and currently we don't have access to this place until we are given our final rewards at the great white throne judgment. This is the time that God's people will be given their final rewards (entrance into the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem).



HELL

The second place of judgment is for those who do not put their trust in Christ and is called hell. Hell is also at the center of the earth. This is revealed in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Here we are told that the rich man was able to see Lazarus in paradise by looking up (Luke 16:23). Abraham also tells the rich man that there was a great gap that prevented anyone in paradise from entering hell or anyone in hell from entering paradise (Luke 16:27). These verses make it clear that hell is near to paradise, located in the center of the earth.

Paradise and hell are where human spirits wait for the second coming of Christ and entrance into their eternal reward. No one--dead or alive--enters God's kingdom until Jesus returns. This is made clear in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 where it is written that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him..." In verse sixteen, Paul goes on to write, "the dead in Christ shall rise first." How can the dead in Christ rise first if they are already in their final eternal inheritance? When Jesus returns, Revelation 20:11-15 records that the dead will leave Hades (the place of the dead): those in paradise will enter God's kingdom and those in hell will be cast into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the inheritance/judgment for those in hell. Entrance into God's kingdom is the inheritance for those in paradise.

ARE THESE PLACES PURGATORY?

Though paradise and hell are the waiting areas until Christ returns, they are not purgatory. Purgatory is a false doctrine that teaches there is a place where a person who is not pure enough to enter God's kingdom, yet not evil enough to enter hell, is able to purify himself of sin so that he is made acceptable to God. This idea has been held by the Catholic church since the 13th century. It is a doctrine developed from tradition and is nowhere supported from Scripture.

Paradise and hell are not places to purge sin. Now is the time to cleanse ourselves of sin, not after we die. If we carry sin into death, we will go to hell and not be able to escape: there will be no purging of sin or praying out of our place of judgment. Scripture is clear that it is appointed for men to die and then enter judgment.

IN SUMMARY

1. We die when our spirit separates from our body.
2. Our spirits are judged.
3. We enter a place of waiting (paradise or hell).
4. Jesus returns.
5. All people are raised from the dead and judged at the white throne judgment.
6. Our Spirits receive their final reward (kingdom of God) or punishment (lake of fire)

IN CLOSING

The day will soon come when you will die and enter either your eternal punishment or eternal reward. Where you go is entirely your choice. If you are not already trusting in Jesus Christ, [take a moment and read this.](#)