

# Where are the Dead?

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We are all interested in where our departed loved ones went at death. We Wonder . . . Did they go directly to heaven-- or to hell—or to purgatory? Are they conscious? And if so, are they aware of what we are doing here on earth; do they know about our sorrow, how we miss them? That will be our study today.

We would all like to know all we can about where people go immediately after death. And we would like to know, if possible, whether the dead are in a state of consciousness, and if so, are they aware of what we do here. We will never be able to answer all the questions about death and dying, but that's probably a blessing. I am sure God loves us enough that if He felt we should know more about these things, He would have told us more in the Scriptures. So, we will should be content with what He has revealed.

Our lesson text today is from the apostle Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth; **2 Corinthians 12:1-5**

Physicians, psychologists and sociologists and others have Made some in-depth studies of the subject of death and dying. They have even compiled some very interesting information about the “near death” experiences of their patients.

During our Lord's ministry upon the earth, He raised several people from the dead-- people we know were dead. One was Jairus' daughter as recorded in Matthew 9. Another was the widow's son in the village

of Nain recorded in Luke 7. But the best known was Lazarus, many of the details of which are given us in John, the eleventh chapter. We don't know how long the others had been dead. The widow's son's body, we know was being carried in a casket, to what seems to have been its burial when Jesus restored him to life. But Lazarus had been dead four days and his body had begun to deteriorate. Now we read that in verses 17 and 39. Well, our Lord commanded him, **“Lazarus, come forth,”** and the dead man came forth from the grave. He walked and talked with his family and with friends.

Now, don't you suppose some of those friends who had comforted his sisters while Lazarus was dead, and the multitudes that came to see him after he was raised, were curious about where he had been and what he knew during those four days? And, don't you suppose they asked him some questions? I am confident they did. **But, there's no such conversation recorded in the Scriptures about all that.** And don't you know after the crowds had gone, and Mary and Martha could talk with their brother in the quietness and in the privacy of their own home, that they would ask him some questions. “Lazarus, where were you those four days? What did you see and what did you hear? Did you know how we grieved over your death? Did you know about the funeral service we had for you? Did you know that Jesus came and wept with us?” No doubt, they had many questions. But inspiration says nothing about it. It isn't revealed to us.

I have a good idea from what we learn from 2 Corinthians 12, that when Lazarus returned to his body, those things faded from his

memory, and he couldn't have related them if he had wanted to do so. Paul said of himself, "whether in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know. God knows . . ." how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter is not revealed." Now if Paul was forbidden to report what he saw and heard, surely the widow's son was, too; and Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus, and even those who may have had similar experiences in our own generation. In fact, if one of them should tell us about what he saw and heard in such an experience, we would question his or maybe even her integrity because of what the Scripture revealed to us in this passage.

So, what does the Bible say? Man is of dual nature. He is physical. His body is of the earth; it's earthy. His spirit is of God, spiritual. Paul declares: "While our outward man (the body) perishes, yet the inward man (the spirit) is renewed day by day." **2 Corinthians 4:16**. From Ecclesiastes 12:7, we learn at death the body returns to the earth from which God formed it in the beginning and the spirit returns to God who gave it. **Zechariah 12:1** tells us that God "forms the spirit of man within him."). The Holy Spirit clearly divides the human being into flesh and spirit, and declares that the flesh came from one source and the spirit another when He says, "We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" **Hebrews 12:9**

Now we know what Jesus meant when He said to the penitent thief on the cross, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in

Paradise” (Luke 23: 43). Though they both would die that day, the spirit of each one of them would continue on in Paradise. And later Jesus cried with a loud voice and said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. Having said this, He breathed His last.” His body became lifeless, and was taken by friends and buried. In Acts 7:59, we have the story of the stoning of Stephen. As he died, he cried, “Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit.” So people don’t cease to exist at death. The body goes to the grave and to ashes, and the spirit lives on somewhere.

Does the spirit go immediately to its eternal destiny, to Heaven or to Hell? Perhaps you have heard preachers at the funeral of a loved one say something to the effect maybe like this, “Oh, your dear mother is right now in Heaven with God.” Well, I’m sorry, but that is a mistake. In the first place, it isn’t within him to say where mother is. Funerals are not for the purpose of determining the destiny of the departed spirit, or where the deceased will spend eternity. And too, the spirit of the saved person does not go directly into Heaven, if by “heaven” we mean the eternal dwelling place of God. **The Spirit, the real “we” goes, rather to another place to await the judgment, and then to the eternal abode, after judgment.**

There are several reasons for my saying that. First, the Bible teaches that there is to be a general judgment when all men will be judged. We will just say here that if people were judged at death and went immediately and directly to Heaven or to Hell, there would be no purpose for the judgment. Jesus spoke of this judgment day as being

universal in all its scope. He said “All nations” will be there (Matthew 25:31-32). He also said, “The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation” (Matthew 12:41), and in the next verse, “The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation.” The men of Nineveh lived approximately 500 years before Christ’s day on the earth, and the Queen of the South lived a thousand years before. Yet Jesus said they would be in the same judgment with people of His generation-- and ours. And when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he said, “David has not yet ascended into Heaven” (Acts 2:32). David, too, had been dead a thousand years, but the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Peter said he had not yet ascended into Heaven. And, the Bible says “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2:9). So where are the Ninevites, the Queen of the South, David, the unjust and all the others who have died and gone from among us? They are somewhere awaiting the same judgment in which you and I will appear, but where is that?

Are they in “Purgatory”? **The Bible has nothing to say about purgatory.** Neither the word nor the doctrine is found in the Scriptures, so we will not spend a lot of time here, but we will examine it as a legitimate part of this study. Since it is not a biblical doctrine, we turn to other literature to learn what we know about it.

From the Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions by Pike, and the Encyclopedia Britannica, we learn the idea was first conceived by Thomas Aquinas, thirteenth century theologian-philosopher. **It**

**became a part of the Catholic doctrine at the Council of Trent (1545 to 1563).** Simply and briefly stated, purgatory is thought to be a state of suffering after death in which the souls of those who die in “venial sin,” and those who still owe some debt of temporal punishment for “mortal sin,” are punished until they are rendered fit to enter into Heaven. **But, since the Bible says nothing about it and since the Bible holds no hope of another chance after death for salvation before the judgment, well, we may be certain our departed loved ones are not there.**

Are they in Hades? We often use the word “Hades” and “Hell” interchangeably, but they are not the same. “Hades” is the unseen world, the world of departed spirits. The word also means “all-receiving,” in that it receives every spirit that departs this life in this world, both the good and the bad. Even Jesus went to

Hades for those three days and nights his body was in the tomb (Acts 2:27-31). **Unfortunately the old King James Version translates the word as “Hell” in those verses, but the New King James, the American Standard and other versions translate it “Hades.”** So every person who dies goes to Hades. All of our friends and loved ones who have died have gone to Hades. But Jesus promised the thief on the cross, **“Today you shall be with me in Paradise.”** Right? Then Paradise is that part of, or shall we say a state in Hades to which the righteous go. But Paradise is not “Heaven,” if we mean by “heaven” the dwelling place of God, the eternal abode of the righteous. No, it isn’t. Jesus spent those three

days and nights in Paradise/Hades. But after He was raised from the dead He told Mary, “Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.” (John 20:17). “Paradise” means “a pleasure garden.” Yes, it is sometimes used with reference to Heaven, but that doesn’t mean it always means Heaven. Heaven is also called a “city,” but that doesn’t mean every city mentioned in the Bible is Heaven. The departed saved people are in Paradise, Hades awaiting the judgment, after which they will enter into Heaven for all eternity.

We mentioned a moment ago that God “. . . knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority” (2 Peter 3:9-10). Well, where are the unjust reserved? They are in “Hades” too, because Hades is the place of “all receiving,” receiving all, but they are in the place or “state” called Tartarus in Hades. In 2 Peter 2:4. Peter declared “For God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and delivered them into the chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.” Again, it’s unfortunate that the King James translates Tartarus as “Hell” in that verse. Other versions correct that. Tartarus is in Hades, on the other side of “a fixed gulf” from Paradise as we read in Luke chapter 16:19-31. **From 2 Peter 2:4, We can know that is where all of the wicked, the unforgiven people have gone to await the judgment. It is not “Hell.” It is not the eternal abode of the unforgiven wicked dead. It is a prison where they are held until**

**judgment day.** And of course, here is torment in Hades, if for no other reason, just knowing as the rich man did, that he was unsaved. After the judgment, they will enter into “Hell” itself, where they will suffer eternally. **So my listening friends, our departed loved ones are in Hades. If they were saved by an obedient faith in Jesus Christ, they are in Paradise, Hades; awaiting the judgment to go on into Heaven to live forever with the Lord. If they died without Christ, they are in Tartarus, Hades; awaiting the Day of Judgment, and here’s a great gulf fixed so that they can’t cross over into Paradise and eventually into Heaven. And, all the dead are fully conscious.** The righteous are enjoying the pleasure garden of Paradise, and the unrighteous are imprisoned and are tormented in Tartarus, Hades. **None of them know what we are doing here on the earth.** **Ecclesiastes 9:5** — “For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing . . .” And if they did, it’s very likely they would be like the rich man of whom Jesus spoke in Luke 16. They would urgently want someone to send a message to be saved at once and without delay. My friend, God has made every provision He can to prevent man from a life of punishment in the other world. However, in His righteous character, God must punish the wicked and disobedient as well as reward the righteous and the obedient. **A person’s eternal destiny is irrevocably determined by the time he dies.** The Bible doesn’t offer any other chance beyond the grave. In his story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, Jesus makes it clear that there is no crossing the great gulf to go from Paradise to Tartarus or from Tartarus



to Paradise. So, it is important that we give attention to the important things while we may. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation.**