

*Lesson 36 –Across the Jordan in Perea
January 30 AD*

In our last lesson Jesus had just finished telling the three parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son. In this lesson we begin with another parable he told to a crowd which included many “tax collectors and sinners.” It also included the ever-present company of Pharisees who were hoping to catch Him saying something by which they could have Him condemned and executed.

The Unjust Steward

This parable is commonly called the Parable of the Unjust Steward. In this parable all the characters represent “people of this world.” The master, the steward, and the debtors are all operating from the worldly viewpoint. That is why the master, who does **not** represent God, can commend the steward (no doubt grudgingly) for his deceit. After all, he would have reasoned, put in the same place, he would have done the same thing himself.

Luke 16:1a Jesus told his disciples:

We should remember that included in the audience were the same people who were described in Luke 15:1 “Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear him.” Jesus had advised them against viewing the things of this world as of greater value than the things of God.

Luke 16:1b-2 “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

The rich man, who was the master of the manager (steward), represented the worldly system of wealth. He didn’t represent God! The manager represented any person who stood in peril of losing the security he had from the worldly system.

Luke 16:3-4 “The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg-- I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

The imperiled manager used logic to figure out a way to save himself.

Luke 16:5-7 “So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ “‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. “The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’ “Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ “‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. “He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

As the steward of his master's property the manager had the power of attorney to dispose of accounts receivable as he saw fit. As long as he didn't take any goods or money for himself but only made favorable settlements for the debtors without condition, he was safe from the law.

Luke 16:8a **“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.**

The worldly master could only admire how the worldly steward had outsmarted him by anticipating his dismissal. The steward had made a lot of worldly friends by reducing their debt to his previous master.

Luke 16:8b **For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.**

The question is: Who are the people of the light here? I think the term refers to those people who had heard the truth of God and believed in the Light of the World. Twice in the recent past Jesus had said:

John 8:12 “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

John 9:5 “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

I think the “people of the light” referred to those people who were listening to Him and had believed in Him.

Luke 16:9 **I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.**

Jesus was challenging His listeners to use the worldly wealth which was still at their disposal to gain “friends” in God's eternal city. “Worldly wealth” really referred to much more than money or property. It also referred to time, influence, and position. Any person living, no matter how poor, has “worldly wealth” which can either be spent for “eternal dwellings” or wasted.

This parable wasn't an excuse or recommendation for committing fraud! It merely pointed out that rational worldly people had enough foresight to take steps to protect their future when they were faced with losing all they had. Here Jesus advised “the people of the light” that the things of this world were passing away. If they failed to invest the things of this world, which passed away, in the world to come, which would not pass away, they were being irrational.

In another way, the martyred missionary Jim Elliot (1927-1956) said the same thing: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Luke 16:10-12 **“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”**

The verses above weren’t a parable, but an application. The subject was still stewardship. This taught about two kinds of wealth, “worldly” and “true” wealth. The worldly wealth is described as “very little.” The true wealth was Spiritual wealth, which was eternal and was described as “very much.” They had to realize that they were merely stewards for God of their impermanent worldly wealth and act accordingly. If they didn’t, God would never be able to give them the Spiritual wealth that would be theirs forever.

Luke 16:13 **“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”**

Luke 16:13 is a corollary of the previous verses. It described why some people cannot be trusted with “very much.” Those who think they can walk a middle course between being sold out to the world, or sold out for Christ, are kidding themselves. There is no middle ground.

What we do with what God has given us of worldly things is a benchmark of what God can give us of spiritual things. If we show that we are serving God rather than the worldly gift, God can trust us with all the spiritual gifts He is pleased to give us.

Luke 16:14 **The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.**

The statement about not being able to love God and money struck home at the rich Pharisees. They responded by sneering at Jesus who had no house or property and only a few simple clothes.

Luke 16:15 **He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”¹**

In response to the Pharisees’ derision, Jesus told them that they loved money. The Pharisees saw that money and status seemed to justify them before men. Unfortunately for them justification before men meant nothing. It was before God that they needed to be justified. Jesus saw past their outward façade to their hearts which were unjustified. The Pharisees’ self-justifying love of money was actually worse than the greedy love of money of the tax

¹ *A type of worldly wealth the Pharisees bought with money was the good opinion of men (“justifying themselves in the eyes of men”), which was just as transient as material things.*

collectors, who they despised. At least the tax collectors could see their sin. The Pharisees were blind to theirs.

Luke 16:16 “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

This seems to indicate that the Pharisees and others were trying to catch the wave of public enthusiasm for the preaching of “the Kingdom” by both John the Baptist and Jesus. Of course, they were distorting it and using it for their own purposes.

Luke 16:17 It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

The Jews were trying to bring the Crown without the Cross. However, before the Kingdom could come, the Law had to be fulfilled. By that I mean that the righteousness of the Law had to be fulfilled in the life of a man (Jesus Christ). Then the sacrifice of that same sinless and righteous man had to be fulfilled by His death on the Cross.

Mark 10 gives us the background for Jesus’ next comment in Luke about divorce. Mark 10 was written about the same time period when He was preaching in Perea:

Mark 10:1 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan (to Perea). Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

The Gospel of Mark is the most abbreviated of all the Gospel accounts. Here we pick up Mark again. His Gospel’s account had skipped all the way from the day after the Transfiguration on Mt. Hermon to here when Jesus was preaching in Perea. The statement in this verse covered the whole period during which Jesus left Galilee, traveled through Samaria to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, and then spent some time in Judea until after the Feast of Dedication. After that He retired across the Jordan from Judea into Perea where we have been in Luke’s Gospel.

Mark 10:2-4 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

Across the Jordan from Judea (verse 1) was Perea, the territory of Herod Antipas. The Pharisees were trying to ensnare Jesus in the same trap by which they had ensnared John the Baptist. They were trying to lure Jesus into criticizing Herod’s divorce and subsequent marriage to his niece. They must have hoped that would give them ammunition to provoke Herod into arresting Jesus or driving him back into Judea.

Mark 10:3-4 “What did Moses command you?” he replied. They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

The Pharisees were referring to a law in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4a “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.”

As you can see, the Law didn't really permit divorce, it just acknowledged it. It said that the divorced wife could truly become the new wife of another man. It also said that the divorce required some documented justification. Furthermore, the Law didn't really define what constitutes something “indecent” that might justify putting a wife aside.

Mark 10:5 “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied.

Jesus didn't disavow the Mosaic Law of divorce. He just said that although it was a fact of fallen human existence, it didn't embody the LORD's view of how things should be. Jesus then stated how things should be.

Mark 10:6-8a “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’

Jesus referred to the Law that existed from the beginning in the Garden, before the Law of Moses:

Genesis 2:22-24 “Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

Mark 10:8b-9 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

The institution of marriage was intended to be permanent. However, because of the intrusion of the sin nature in the inception and progression of many marriages, some are doomed to failure. However, in the beginning the LORD intended marriage to reflect His relationship with His Bride. His Bride was represented by His body, which was called “Israel” in the Old Testament.² In the New Testament, the Church has been said to have been incorporated into Israel.³

² *Isaiah 62:5.*

The relationship of the LORD with His body, the Church is supposed to be the model for the marriages of believers as outlined in Colossians:

Colossians 5:25-30 “Husbands, love your wives,⁴ just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’⁵ This is a profound mystery ⁶—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

As the LORD will never divorce us who are His bride, husbands should strive to never divorce their wives. That is why it says in Malachi:

Malachi 2:16 “‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel.”

Still, as in ancient Israel, divorce seems to be an inevitable outcome of some marriages. As such, it is only a sin. Sins can be confessed and forgiven and fellowship with the LORD restored. However, there is a special blessing to those who can live out in their own marriages the marriage of Christ and His Church.

Mark 10:10-12 **When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”**

³ *Ephesians 2:12-22*

⁴ *In the same way we should keep in mind: John 15:17 “This is my command: Love each other.” Hebrews 13:1 “Keep on loving each other as brothers.” 1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” 1 John 4:11 “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Also: John 15:12, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, James 2:8, Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:23, 1 John 4:7, 2 John 1:5. Loving is not just for the husbands.*

⁵ *This is from Genesis 2:24. It is also worth noting that in this first instruction about marriage, polygamy was implicitly ruled out. In the Book of Job, the righteous man Job, though rich, had only one wife. The polygamy of Jacob, David and Solomon is no more justified than the adultery and fornication of Samson and David.*

⁶ *From the beginning, God designed marriage to be a pattern for us of God’s love and plan for us.*

Jesus was merely pointing out that anyone who divorced his wife for whatever reason was violating the perfect standard of God's love for His bride which we are supposed to imitate. The same standard also held true for women who divorced their husbands.⁷

Jesus' teaching here and in Luke was very similar to what he had taught almost two years earlier in Matthew 5:32 in the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus had also taught that if one even looked at a woman with lust, he had committed adultery in his heart (Matthew 5:28).

Returning to the account in Luke which covered the same events:

Luke 16:18 "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

In the Luke account, Jesus had just mentioned John the Baptist. Here Jesus reiterated the same law that had gotten John the Baptist in trouble with Herod. John had been imprisoned and eventually executed for affirming the Old Testament Law that marrying a divorced woman was adultery. The Mark account tells us that Jesus made this comment in private (in the house), with only His disciples present.

Historical documents from the time indicated that the Law against divorce in Israel had so broadened the definition of "indecency" that, in effect, a husband had the right of divorce on demand. Although, originally, the prohibited "indecency" of Leviticus 24:1 was defined as sexual infidelity or perversion, by Jesus' day, it had been broadened to include offenses as trivial as being a bad cook.

While the principles indicated here are true, they were not the focus of Christ's teaching. He was just reiterating that nothing had changed in the requirements of God.

Some have used this verse to say that any divorced person is prohibited from remarriage. Considering that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 clearly allows the marriage of divorced persons, what is this talking about? Did Jesus make the Law more severe? It seems to me that this is speaking of a formalistic attempt to avoid technical "adultery" by divorcing a wife or husband to marry a partner for whom you are lusting. This certainly applied to Herod Antipas' divorce to marry a woman he already lusted for and with whom he had already had an affair. She was his brother's wife and was also his niece.⁸ I do not believe this verse refers to already divorced people who then find someone to marry. Otherwise, divorce would be tantamount to the extinction of the

⁷ *This text had a slightly different meaning than Matthew 5:32 and Luke 16:18. There adultery was imputed to the man who married a divorced woman. Here adultery was imputed to the woman who married after initiating the divorce.*

⁸ *To marry either a niece (Leviticus 18:6) or sister-in-law (Leviticus 18:16) was expressly forbidden by the Law of Moses.*

family line if there were no children from the first marriage. Considering the priority given in scripture to the perpetuation of every family line in Israel, that seems quite unlikely.

Next Jesus gave another parable, the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. This was aimed straight at the heart of the rich unbelieving Pharisees.

Lazarus and the Rich Man

I believe the story of Lazarus and the rich man is a story used to illustrate a spiritual lesson. I don't believe it was the story of two literal men. I believe it was told to illustrate certain truths about the afterlife in a simple and comprehensible way. Some will argue that the use of the actual name "Lazarus" meant that it was a literal story. I believe the name "Lazarus" was used to prove the lesson of the parable⁹ when, within a few days of Jesus' telling of this story, an actual man named Lazarus would be raised from the dead. We will see that in the next lesson.

Luke 16:19 **“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.**

In the ancient world, to be dressed in purple was a mark of high rank and nobility. Thus, for the purposes of this story, this identified this rich man with the rulers of the Jews, the Pharisees and Sadducees of the Sanhedrin.

Luke 16:20a **At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus,**

“Lazarus” is a form of the Hebrew name “Eleazar” It means “whom God helps.”

Luke 16:20b-21 **covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. *But*¹⁰ the dogs came and licked his sores.**

Dogs were the lowest members of the ancient society. They were often beaten and driven away with sticks. They were only fed unwanted scraps. Only the dogs had compassion on Lazarus who was even lower on the scale than they were.

Luke 16:22a **“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side *bosom*.**

The Greek word translated “side” here is κόλπος {kol'-pos} which is probably better translated “bosom.” It refers to the front of the body between the arms and has the concept of a loving and

⁹ *The lesson of the parable was that even if someone was raised from the dead to preach the Word, most would not believe.*

¹⁰ *The Greek word the NIV translated as “even” is ἀλλά {äl-lä'}. It means “but.” It contrasts the action of the dogs with the rest of society.*

intimate closeness next to the heart. The idea here was that Lazarus was not only with Abraham but received into a place of honor. When we remember what Lazarus' life on earth had been like, this story disabuses us of the idea that the worldly riches we receive in this life are any indication of the heavenly riches we will receive in the next.

This also informs us that one of the tasks that the elect angels perform is to carry the souls of believers to their final rest. Perhaps the ones chosen for the job are our guardian angels.

The place described was the abode of rest for believers before accomplishment of the redeeming work of Christ. Here it was called "Abraham's Bosom." It was called "Paradise" in Luke's account of the dying thief below:

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him (the dying thief), "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

When Jesus ascended to Heaven, He led forth the "prisoners" in this compartment of Hell, called here "Paradise." This is described in Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:8b-10 "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."¹¹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.¹²)"

When the work of Christ was completed it allowed Jesus to lead all believers to the presence of the Father in Heaven. Before that there were two destinations for the dead of humanity. There was "Abraham's bosom" (Paradise) for believers waiting for the redeeming work of Christ. There was also "torments" for unbelievers who are waiting for the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:11-15).

Luke 16:22b-23 The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus *in his bosom*.

In the vision of this parable, the rich man saw that Lazarus was in a place of comfort and assurance while he was experiencing torments of both body and soul.

Luke 16:24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

¹¹ This is a paraphrase of Psalms 68:18 which says "When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts for men, even for the rebellious -- that you, O LORD God, might dwell there."

¹² This seems to teach us that the whole universe will be filled with God's children and that God's unlimited galaxies are part of our inheritance.

This scene underlined the difference between the happiness of Lazarus and the misery of the rich man.

Luke 16:25 **“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.’**

Among other things this tells us that the righteous in the LORD aren’t always given material blessings while on this earth.

Luke 16:26 **And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’**

This tells us that the destination of the dead was fixed upon the point of death. The lost who had died couldn’t be delivered from “torments.”¹³ The saved who had died couldn’t lose their place in God’s blessing.

Luke 16:27-28 **“He answered, ‘Then 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.’**

The prayer of the rich man was that Lazarus would be raised from the dead to preach the truth to the rich man’s five brothers.

Luke 16:29 **“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’**

Abraham replied that they didn’t need Lazarus. All the truth they needed was already in the scriptures of the Old Testament and it had all the power and persuasiveness that was needed to save the lost who were seeking God.

Luke 16:30-31 **“No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

I do not believe that it is any coincidence that within a few days of teaching this Parable, Jesus raised a man from the dead, who was named Lazarus. In this parable, the rich man pleaded for Lazarus to be raised from the dead to preach to his brothers. Abraham said that if they didn’t believe Moses and the Prophets, they wouldn’t believe even one risen from the dead. When Lazarus of Bethany was raised from the dead, it proved this very point. Instead of believing the

¹³ *This firmly repudiates the idea that was taught by the Catholic Church that the lost can be purchased out of “purgatory.”*

testimony of that Lazarus, the rich Pharisees (who could recite Moses and the Prophets backward and forward) rejected the message of Lazarus' resuscitation from the dead. In fact, it caused them to accelerate their plans to kill Jesus. They also decided that they needed to kill Lazarus (John 12:10).

I believe that this Parable presents a picture of Paradise and Hell, which is poetically accurate, but not literal. Jesus had only a few sentences to paint the picture he wanted to paint. He accurately portrayed Hell as a place of horrible suffering, and Paradise as a separate place which is full of comfort and love. I do not believe the story is literal, in the sense of its details, but I believe it is accurate as regards its message. The Bible has a lot to say about Hell, and most of it is phrased in "language of accommodation." That means that it has to explain things which are beyond human experience, and for which we have no words. Therefore, it must use words from our experience which only partly express what Hell is really like. Following, I have produced a short summary of what the Bible says about Hell and the Lake of Fire.

The Nature of Hell

Hell, is a subject which is rarely off of the lips of everyday people. "Damn" and "Hell" are two of the most popular expressions in use. In Christian circles, the image of Hell is often used to motivate, to caution, and to stimulate fear. Yet, in spite of this I have found that very few people have given much serious thought to what the Bible actually says about Hell. I suppose that is understandable, because the mind seems to naturally shrink from the subject.

A Technical Discussion of Hell

In a typical discussion, "Hell" is the term that is used to speak of the place of punishment in the hereafter. However, the word Hell does not appear in the Bible.¹⁴ It is a Teutonic word which has been used to translate the Greek word γέεννα {ge'-en-nä}. In actuality, the Bible uses several words to convey the essence of what we have come to define as Hell. However, the common understanding of Hell is usually wrong. Some of the terms which are commonly associated with the concept of Hell in the English translations of the Bible are: Hades, Sheol, Gehenna, Torments, the Abyss, and the Lake of Fire.

Hades, Sheol, Death, the Grave

Hades or Sheol is evidently a underworld located in the heart of the earth. In the Old Testament it is sometimes translated "the grave." It originally contained several locations which served different functions. It was a place of separation from God, but it contained areas of blessing and areas of suffering.

¹⁴ *In the passage from Luke above, the Greek word translated "Hell" is ᾗδης {hä'-das}.*

John 5:28-29 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves (μνημείον {mnā-mā'-on}) will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live (*blessing*), and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (*suffering*).”

Job 17:13-16 ‘If the only home I hope for is the grave (the Hebrew לִישׁוֹן {sheh·ōl’}), if I spread out my bed in darkness, if I say to corruption, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother’ or ‘My sister,’ where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death? לִישׁוֹן {sheh·ōl’}) Will we descend together into the dust?’”

Sheol or Hell is evidently in the depths of the earth.

Job 11:7-9 “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens--what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave (לִישׁוֹן {sheh·ōl’})--what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea. See also Ezekiel 26:20-21 on the next page.

It seems that Hell exists in the heart of the earth. However, it may exist there in an entirely different dimension of space. Although we have explored almost to the limits of our solar system we know very little about what actually lies beneath the earth’s crust.¹⁵

“Death” is another name for Sheol or Hades

Revelation 20:13-15 “The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades (ᾗδης {hā'-dās})¹⁶ 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. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 1:17-18 “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 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 (ᾗδης {hā'-dās}).”

In the Old Testament “The Pit” or “The Dungeon” are other names for Death, Sheol, or Hades.

¹⁵ *The Kola Superdeep Borehole, located in Russia, is the world's deepest man-made hole, reaching a depth of 40,230 feet (12,262 meters) or 7.6 miles (12.2 kilometers), surpassing the depth of the Mariana Trench. Earth's radius at the equator is 3,963 miles.*

¹⁶ *“Hades” is a word from Greek mythology. It referred to the place of departed souls. This would have communicated to the Greek speakers to whom this was written.*

Ezekiel 26:20-21 “Then I will bring you (*Tyre*) down with those who go down to **the pit** (בֹּרַי {bōr}), to the people of long ago. I will make you dwell in the earth below, as in ancient ruins, with those who go down to the pit, and you will not return or take your place in the land of the living. I will bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

Ezekiel 32:18 “Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt and consign to the earth below both her and the daughters of mighty nations, with those who go down to **the pit** (בֹּרַי {bōr}).

Isaiah 24:21-22 “In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in **a dungeon** (בֹּרַי {bōr}); they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.”

There were different Compartments of Hell

Before the resurrection, all of mankind that had died and some of the fallen angels lived in different compartments of Hades (Greek), Sheol (Hebrew), or Gehenna (Aramaic).

There were within Hell several categories. There was the one called Gehenna, Hades, or Torments. There was one called the Abyss. There was also Paradise for Old Testament believers.

Torments or Gehenna

This is the place where unbelievers who rejected the grace of God reside awaiting the Last Judgment. We just saw this in our passage on Lazarus and the rich man in Luke:

Luke 16:23-28. “In hell (ᾗδης {hades}), where he (*the unbelieving rich man*) was in **torments**, (βάσανος {bas'-an-os}) he looked up and saw Abraham far away.”

Matthew 23:33 “You snakes! (*the scribes and Pharisees*) You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell (γέεννα {ge'-en-nä})?”

The word (γέεννα {ge'-en-nä}) came from the garbage pits outside of Jerusalem at a place called the Valley of Hinnom where the fires never went out. The term speaks to me, not as much of fire as of corruption and waste.

The Abyss

The fallen Angels from Genesis 6 are in chains there.

Jude 1:6 “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

The Greek word translated “Positions of authority” in this verse is ἀρχή {är-khā'} which literally means “first,” or “beginning.” It is often translated “first estate.” It probably indicates that these fallen angels had come down to earth to interfere in that which was not their proper sphere.

Jesus evidently went to preach (proclaim) His victory to the fallen Angels from Genesis 6 who were imprisoned there.

1 Peter 3:18-20 “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached (proclaimed) to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

Romans 10:6-7 “But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or ‘Who will descend into the deep (ἄβυσσος {ä'-büs-sos})?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

Demons who had access to the earth and were not imprisoned were afraid of being imprisoned in the Abyss on the word of Jesus:

Luke 8:30-31 “Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Legion,’ he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss (ἄβυσσος {ä'-büs-sos}).”

The fallen angels who are imprisoned in the Abyss will be let go for a time during the Tribulation:

Revelation 9:1-3 “The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss (ἄβυσσος {ä'-büs-sos}). When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.”

At the end of the Great Tribulation Satan will be cast into the Abyss for 1000 years:

Revelation 20:3 “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss (ἄβυσσος {ä'-

büs-sos}), and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.”

Paradise or Abraham’s Bosom

Paradise, also called Abraham’s bosom, was a place of comfort where Old Testament believers stayed until the Jesus Christ came and got them. Until He paid the price for their sins and imputed to them His righteousness, they were not qualified to be with the Father in Heaven. However, they were kept there in hope, waiting for the promise of God. When Christ arose, they arose, and they vacated the Paradise in the earth and moved it to Heaven.

Abraham’s bosom

We just saw this in our passage on Lazarus and the rich man in Luke:

Luke 16:19-22a “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s bosom.”

Paradise

Luke 23:43 “Jesus answered him (*the dying thief*), ‘I tell you the truth, **today you will be with me in paradise** (παράδεισος {pä-rä'-dā-sos}).”

The following verses indicate that Paradise and Abraham’s bosom (and the people who were there) are now in heaven and will always be where Jesus is.

Psalms 68:17-18 The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands;¹⁷ the Lord [has come] from Sinai into his sanctuary. **When you (Jesus Christ) ascended on high, you led captives in your train**; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious-- that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

Hosea 13:14 “I will ransom them from the power of the grave לִישׁוֹן {sheh·ōl’}); I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?

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.”

2 Corinthians 12:3-4a “And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows-- was **caught up to paradise** (παράδεισος {pä-rä'-dā-sos}).”

¹⁷ *This is comparable to ten billion chariots.*

Revelation 2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which **is in the paradise** (παράδεισος {pä-rä'-dā-sos}) **of God.**”

Zechariah 9:9-11 “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, **I will free your prisoners from the waterless** ¹⁸ **pit** (בּוֹר {bōr}).”

Luke 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me **to proclaim freedom for the prisoners** and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”¹⁹

Another description of Hell from Job

Job 10:20-22 “Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment’s joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness.”

Concerning the previous Job passage, I should say that this was Job speaking, not the LORD. The truth was that, as a believer, Job was going to go to Paradise, a place of comfort.

The Lake of Fire

Hell is also called Death and Hades, the grave, and the Pit. It also includes Gehenna and the Abyss. After the Last Judgment Hell will be emptied, judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire which is also called the Second Death. In our time, Paradise has long since departed from the regions of Hell and moved to heaven:

Revelation 20:7-15 “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into **the lake of burning sulfur**, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who

¹⁸ *It was without water in the sense of being waterless until Christ came who is the water of life.*

¹⁹ *Isaiah 61:1-2a*

was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done (*their works*) as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades (Ἅδης -hadēs) gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done (*their works*). Then death and Hades were thrown into **the lake of fire**. The **lake of fire** is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into **the lake of fire**.”

The Second Death

The Lake of Fire is also sometimes described as the Second Death:

Revelation 2:11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”

Revelation 20:14-15 “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

The True “Fires” of Hell originated in the Heart of Satan

Ezekiel 28:16b-18 “O guardian cherub (*Satan*), from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. **So I made a the fire come out from you,**²⁰ **and it consumed you,** and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching.”

Isaiah 33:11 “You (*Satan*) conceive chaff, you give birth to straw; **your breath (spirit)**²¹ **is a fire** that consumes you.”

Isaiah 1:31 “The mighty (*Satan*) will become tinder and **his work a spark**; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire.”

Job 20:25b-27 “Terrors will come over him (*Satan*); total darkness lies in wait for his treasures. **A fire unfanned will consume him** and devour what is left in his tent. The heavens will expose his guilt; the earth will rise up against him.

²⁰ *A fire which already existed inside Satan.*

²¹ *The Hebrew word here is רוּחַ {rü'·akh}. More than two thirds of the time it is translated “spirit.” I think that is the meaning here.*

The fires of Hell originate in our rejection of the LORD who created us and loves us. They aren't fanned by the LORD but spring up and burn fiercely of our own accord. Unbelievers create their own hell in this life. In the life to come it will be much worse because of the absence of the restraining power of God.

Returning to the Gospel of Luke

As you may remember, in the Gospel of Luke Jesus had just finished teaching the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar. It had been aimed at the hearts of the materialistic (Luke 6:14) Pharisees who had distorted the Law and the Prophets into a system of self-righteousness. The parable had ended with:

Luke 16:30-31 “‘No, father Abraham,’ he (*the rich man*) said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ‘He (*Abraham*) said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

The Pharisees who had eliminated the LORD's grace and mercy from Scripture and taught a system of achieving righteousness without faith in God's promised atonement were among those standing in the crowd. They were actively trying to discredit Jesus. They had actively planted stumbling blocks in the way of God's truth.

Luke 17:1 Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble²² are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come.

Jesus addressed this to His disciples in the presence of the Pharisees. Jesus knew that there had always been and would always be persons in the world, like the Pharisees, who would try to obscure or discredit God's plan of grace regardless of the obvious truth.²³ Here he warned His disciples of the inevitability of such false teachers. He was also indirectly warning the Pharisees of the judgment that would come on them. He was warning His disciples that the Gospel would always have enemies in the world. He was also warning the Pharisees of the dire consequences of being those enemies.

Luke 17:2 It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.

²² *The Greek word translated “things that cause people to stumble” is σκάνδαλον {skan'-dal-on}. According to The Outline of Biblical Usage in the Blue Letter Bible it is defined as: “Any person or thing by which one is (entrapped) drawn into error or sin.”*

²³ *In our day, science has proved beyond all reasonable doubt that the simplest cells, a livable earth, and a universe that contains the elements and molecules necessary for life all demand an intelligent designer. Such a being has all the attributes that we call “God.” Yet despite this many supposed “intellectuals” still cling to their atheism.*

The “little ones” were those in the crowd who still must come to God’s truth like “little children.” Their “stumbling” might be caused by the false teaching that the Pharisees were putting in the way of their salvation. Salvation by faith, not works, had been clearly taught in the Old Testament, but the Pharisees had distorted it. They were causing the people to sin the unforgiveable sin of rejecting Christ and losing the way to salvation. Their condemnation was just. Jesus also spoke to this in Matthew about three months later in the week before His death:

Matthew 23:13 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”

There is also a hidden shadow here. The millstone is a shadow of Christ the stone. Like the millstone He was intended to provide the true bread. Instead He had been made to be the instrument of condemnation for those who rejected Him.²⁴

Luke 17:3 Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

This was a new subject, and was addressed strictly to Jesus disciples who had Christian “brothers.” It brought up the possibility that one Christian brother might sin against another. Jesus commanded that they forgive one another.

Luke 17:4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

This kind of forgiveness was taught again and again throughout scripture. Just one example is in Colossians:

Colossians 3:13 “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

If God expects this sevenfold level of forgiveness from us, we can be sure that His level of perseverance in forgiveness exceeds that.

Luke 17:5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

This is another new subject. The word “faith” (πίστις {pis'-tis}) used here can refer to the content of their faith, or to depth of their faith. It can also refer to their confidence in what they had learned.

²⁴ There is also a similar shadow in the unusual story in Judges 9:52-54 where a woman (Christ is the seed of the woman) destroyed the evil Abimelech (a shadow of Satan) by dropping a millstone on his head.

Luke 17:6 He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.

If they accurately understood “the faith” (the will of God) and asked in accordance with that will (the name of God), there was nothing that God wouldn’t do. This is the same idea which was taught in John:

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last (*doing the will of God*). Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Luke 17:7 “Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’?

Here Jesus taught another new subject, the necessity of humility in a servant of the LORD.

Luke 17:8 Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’?

We know that most of the twelve were looking forward to imminent rewards after Jesus soon declared Himself King (they thought).

Luke 17:9-10 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

In fact, they would face years of suffering and persecution before the Lord called them home to their ultimate reward. Most of them would die as martyrs.