

THE TWO-COMPARTMENT VIEW OF HADES IN EPHESIANS 4:8-9

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the centuries there has arisen much debate as to the locale of both the righteous and unrighteous dead prior to the ascension of Christ. Two major views have resulted from this debate: (1) all of the righteous and unrighteous dead (except Enoch and Elijah) departed from the earth and were relegated to a place designated in Scriptures as Sheol, or Hades, which contained two divisions separated by “a great gulf fixed” (Luke 16:25), or (2) only the unrighteous dead were relegated to Sheol, or Hades and the righteous immediately entered Paradise, or heaven. The genesis of most of this debate centers on Christ’s parable or allegory of Dives and Lazarus recorded by Luke in Luke 16:19-31.

In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Dives (the rich man) has died and is found in Hades, but in proximity (though separated by a great gulf) to Lazarus who has also died but has been carried by angels to “Abraham’s bosom.” In this parable Dives is suffering torment, but Lazarus is being comforted. Although separated by a great gulf, Dives is still able to see Lazarus, and also Abraham, and also is able to speak with Abraham. Thus a seemingly visual picture of two places, Hades and Abraham’s bosom, that are located proximate to each other has led many throughout history to conclude that Hades contained two compartments, one for the righteous (called Abraham’s bosom or Paradise) and one for the unrighteous (Hades, or Sheol; LXX).

Stemming from the two-compartment view and to harmonize with NT teachings on Paradise or Heaven, an interpretation of Ephesians 4:9 arose that understands that Christ entered Hades (specifically the saved portion of this unseen world) after his death to take OT saints to heaven when he ascended to heaven following his resurrection. It is this interpretation that will

be the focus of the discussion herein; specifically, does Ephesians 4:9 support the two-compartment view of Hades, as Hades has variously been understood, prior to the ascension of Christ? In answer to this question, this study will attempt to show that there is insufficient biblical evidence to definitively demonstrate the existence of two divisions of Hades prior to Christ's ascension and, therefore, that Ephesians 4:9 should not be used in support of a two-compartment view.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TERMS SHEOL AND HADES

To better understand the locale under consideration, it is prudent to trace the uses of the terms Sheol and Hades from the OT to the NT, respectively.

Old Testament Uses of Sheol

In the Hebrew OT the term Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) is used 65 times, Hades (ᾍδης) is used 61 times in the LXX, and *infernus*, *infernus* is used 65 times in the Vulgate. The word Sheol is translated “hell” (e.g., KJV, NKJ) thirty-one times (Deut. 32:22; Ps. 9:17; 18:5; Is. 14:9), “grave” (e.g., KJV, NKJ, NIV) thirty-one times (Job 7:9; 14:13; Ps. 16:10; Is. 38:10), and “pit” (e.g., KJV) three times (Num. 16:30, 33; Job 17:16). According to Enns,

It may refer to the place of the dead where both good and bad people go upon death (Gen. 17:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num. 16:33; Job 14:13; Ps. 55:15; Pro. 9:18). Believers will be rescued from sheol (Ps. 16:9-11); 17:15; 49:15). The wicked go to sheol upon death (Job 21:13; 24:19; Ps. 9:17; 31:17; 49:14; 55:15).¹

Fundamentally, according to Merrill, Sheol is a place, one beneath the earth's surface to which people descend at death (Gen. 37:35; Job 7:9; Ezek. 31:15, 17; 32:27) or even while still alive

¹ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1989), 374.

(Num. 16:33; Ps. 55:15[16]). The context of its Hebrew word usage suggests that people go to Sheol against their will; they are brought down to that place (Gen. 42:38; 44:29, 31; 1 Sam. 2:6; 1 Kgs. 2:6, 9; Ezek. 31:16). It is Yahweh who ultimately causes them to go down, but he also has the power to bring them forth again (1 Sam. 2:6; cf. Isa. 26:19).² Whether the grave or netherworld is in view, Sheol describes the deepest depths, in contrast to the highest heavens (Job. 11:8; cf. Prov. 9:18).

There are six ways Sheol is used in the OT: (1) as a silent, dark place (Job 10:21-22; Psa. 94:17; 115:17) of no activity of work, planning, knowledge, or wisdom (Eccl. 9:10) from which no one can save themselves once there (Job 7:9; 17:13-16); (2) a place where all people go at death (Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31); (3) a place where the unrighteous go at death (Job 21:13; 24:19; Psa. 9:17; 31:17; 49:14); (4) a place where the righteous are saved from (Psa. 49:15; 86:13; Prov. 15:24) and not abandoned to by God (Ps. 16:10); (5) a place which includes the presence of God where He displays absolute sovereignty (Job:26:6; Psa. 139:8; Prov. 15:11); and (6) as a metaphor or image for greed (Prov. 27:20), murder (Prov. 1:12), jealousy (Song. 8:6), troubles of life (Psa. 88:3), near-death situations (Psa. 18:5; 30:3; cf. Jonah 2:2), and great sin (Isa. 28:15, 18; 57:9).³ These uses reveal that the OT saints did have a view of life after death; both the righteous and unrighteous go to Sheol but the righteous are delivered from it by God – the unrighteous remain there.

² Eugene H. Merrill, "שְׁאוֹל," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1997), 4:6.

³ W. A. Van Gemeren, "Sheol," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Baker Academic; Paternoster Press, 2001).

Sheol in the Intertestamental Period

In Intertestamental period Judaism, apocalyptic writings take on a different sense for Sheol. In the apocryphal book of 1 Enoch, for example, Enoch is portrayed journeying through various parts of the universe and scenes are depicted that he witnessed there; among others Sheol, which was located in a great mountain in the West where he saw the several classes of men awaiting their final judgment (1 Enoch 22). As Ladd comments,

There he saw three smooth places hollowed out of a mountain of hard rock, where the spirits of the souls of men were gathered until the day of judgment. One compartment was a bright place with a fountain of water, where the spirits of the righteous await their judgment. The other two were dark. One is for sinners who died without having experienced judgment in their earthly existence. These suffer in great pain until the judgment, when they are to be bound forever. The other place held sinners who were complete in transgression. "Their spirits shall not be slain in the day of judgement nor shall they be raised from thence" (22:13). Sheol thus is to become the place of their eternal punishment. We may infer from this verse that all others, the righteous and most of the wicked, will be raised at the day of judgment, the righteous to enter into the kingdom and the wicked to be judged.⁴

So then there is the idea of the presence and spatial separation of both the righteous and unrighteous in Sheol. According to Josephus, the Pharisees also held to the idea of a spatial separation in the underworld.⁵ Jeremias sees this belief developing after the Jewish Exile while under the influence of Persian and Hellenistic ideas concerning retribution after death where the righteous and godless would have very different fates⁶ – though not specifically different locales.

⁴ George E. Ladd, "The Kingdom of God in 1 Enoch," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110, no. 437 (1953): 37.

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans., William Whiston, Josephus, Complete Works (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1972), 18:14. "They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again" (Ant. 18:14).

⁶ Joachim Jeremias, "Ἄδης," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 1:147.

However, 1 Enoch 39 seems to place the righteous in a separate place called “high heaven” (39:1) with “the Elect One of righteousness and of faith” (39:6). Jeremias further comments,

The penetration into Palestine, through the mediation of the *Diaspora*, or the belief in immortality led to the idea that the souls of the righteous proceed at once to heavenly felicity after death, there to await their resurrection. In consequence the term ᾗδης/ἡνῆψ (Hades:LXX/Sheol) came to be used only of the “place of punishment” for ungodly souls in the underworld.⁷

Intertestamental period Judaism, then, does not provide a conclusive locale for the righteous and ungodly at death; they are either both in Hades/Sheol (a place where all people go at death), or only the ungodly are in Hades/Sheol (a place where the unrighteous go at death).

New Testament Uses of Hades

The NT is much more revelatory than the OT concerning the nature of Hades (used nine times in the NT). Hades in the NT is contrasted with the highest Heaven as the deepest depth (cf. Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15); is the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40); is a place one descends or is brought down to (Mat. 11:23; Luke 10:15; cf. Rom. 10:7); is a prison for Satan and the ungodly (cf. Rev. 20:7; 1 Pet. 3:19); and is said to have gates with keys (Matt. 16:18; Rev. 1:18). In most cases Hades is referred to as the abode of the souls of the ungodly (Luke 16:23) or unbelievers (Rev. 20:13 f.). However, there are some passages where a two-compartment idea of Hades could be in view and it is to this that will be the focus of the remaining discussions.

THE TWO-COMPARTMENT VIEW: POSSIBLE NEW TESTAMENT ALLUSIONS

There are three locations within the NT which will be evaluated that may to allude to a two-compartment view of Hades: Luke 16:19-31; Ephesians 4:8-10; and 1 Peter 3:19-20. An

⁷ Ibid.

analysis of each will be provided in an attempt to identify this two-compartment idea. The last analysis will be of the Ephesians passages as this is the primary focus of this paper.

The Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31

The only specific picture of a two-compartment idea of Hades is Jesus' parable about Dives (the rich man) and Lazarus which seems to borrow from the Intertestamental period view in which the souls of the righteous and unrighteous are in ᾗδης (Hades) together (Luke 16:19-31). In the story, the righteous Lazarus has died and has been carried away by angels to Abraham's bosom. The unrighteous rich man has also died and gone to the grave. Both appear to be in a proximate locale to each other though separated by a great gulf. Lazarus is experiencing peace and comfort, while the rich man is experiencing torment from the heat. Possibly this scene was portrayed this way by Jesus in view of his listeners who may also have held to this common-locale, though spatially-separated concept of Hades (a two-compartment view). However, Jesus does not elsewhere espouse this view and even promises the thief on the cross that he would be with him in Paradise that very day (Luke 23:43)⁸ – clearly contrary to a two-compartment view of Hades. Interestingly, Josephus, himself a Pharisee, seems to differentiate himself from his previously quoted statement regarding the Pharisaical belief of a two-compartment view by espousing a more modern view writing,

Do not you know that those who depart out of this life according to the law of nature, and pay that debt which was received from God, when he that lent it to us is pleased to require it back again, enjoy eternal fame? that their houses and their posterity are sure that their souls are pure and obedient, and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from where, in the change of ages, they are again sent into pure bodies; while the souls of

⁸ Jeremias, "Παράδεισος," 5:769. Though the term παράδεισος (as used in Luke 23:43 as the abode of the redeemed in the intermediate state between life and death) is only used three times in the NT, the NT has other expressions from which can be concluded as a locale of the departed righteous: table fellowship with Abraham (Luke 16:23); being with the Lord (Acts 7:59; John 12:26; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23); the heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18); the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22); and abiding places in the Father's house (John 14:2).

those whose hands have acted madly against themselves are received by the darkest place in Hades, and while God, who is their father, punishes those who offend against either of them in their posterity?⁹

Apparently Josephus has transitioned from a two-compartment view of Hades to a single-compartment view of Hades where only the unrighteous are found awaiting final judgment.

Nevertheless, there are other NT passages that still could imply the two-compartment view of Hades (in addition to Luke 16:23; cf. 16:26). The apostle Peter, speaking of David at Pentecost, writes, “For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption . . . [David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:27-31), with implication that Christ went there and thus a two-compartment idea of Hades was possibly in view – a least to his listeners. Bock comments,

But Hades generally has negative connotations in the [NT], since other parts of Jesus’ teaching suggest that only the power of death and judgment is associated with Hades (Matt. 16:18; 11:23 = Luke 10:15). If so, Hades comes close to equaling Gehenna, although technically Gehenna is the place where the final judgment of the unrighteous occurs. . . . In the [NT], Hades is where the dead are, while Gehenna is where they experience final judgment. It is clear that the righteous do not end up in Gehenna. Wherever the rich man is, Lazarus is not there. As a righteous man, Lazarus does not seem to be in Hades in its negative sense, but it is not clear that he is not in a compartment of Hades.¹⁰

⁹ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 3:374-375

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 2:1370.

Other commentators also take Bock's position that the locale of the rich man and Lazarus is ambiguous from these passages.¹¹ Still other commentators seem to view the proximate locale of the rich man and Lazarus as real.¹² Liefeld takes a conciliatory approach to the dispute writing,

To interpret the story literally introduces a difficult anachronism, that the man is already being tormented by fire, though the event of Rev. 20:14 has not yet taken place. The story can be understood as a parable that realistically portrays the fate of those who have rejected the Lord. If Luke had clearly indicated that Jesus was referring to an actual event, we would have to attempt to resolve the anachronism. But since Luke has not done so, and since the story is powerfully didactic, it seems best to interpret it as a parable.¹³

As is clear, there is little agreement on the literalness of the story or the locale. As such, Luke 16:19-31 does not appear to demonstrate a definitive place called Hades in which both the righteous and unrighteous go when they die, it merely alludes to this idea.

The Spirits in Prison: 1 Peter 3:18-20

These passages describe the pattern of Christ's suffering and exaltation to the right-hand of the Father. Peter writes,

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

¹¹ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, 5th ed., The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments V 28 (New York,: C. Scribner's sons, 1902), 396.; William Arndt, *Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Saint Louis,: Concordia Pub. House, 1956), 365.

¹² I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke : A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1st American ed., The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 637.; and by way of exegesis of Rev. 20:13, Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 : An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 2:433.

¹³ Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke*, ed. Frank Ely Gaebelin, J. D. Douglas, and Dick Polcyn, 12 vols., The Expositor's Bible Commentary : With the New International Version of the Holy Bible, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976), 993.

The allusion to a two compartment view of Hades is often found in verse 19, “in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.” There are three common views regarding this passage: (1) that Christ, during the interval between his death and resurrection went down to Hades, or the realm of the dead, and preached to Noah’s contemporaries – offering salvation to the spirits, announcing condemnation on the unbelievers of Noah’s time, and announcing the good news of his exaltation to those that have already been saved, or the righteous; (2) that the pre-incarnate Christ is viewed as preaching in the time of Noah to that sinful generation; and (3) Christ proclaimed to the disobedient spirits (fallen angels) his victory on the cross; either in the three days between his death and resurrection (the *descensus ad inferos* of Eph. 4:7-11), or at his ascension.¹⁴

All three of these interpretations have their own unique problems. As the second interpretation does not aid in a discussion of Hades and the two-compartment view, it will not be evaluated on its merits; though it is the view espoused by Augustine, Beza, Aquinas, and others.¹⁵ Given the similarity of the first and third explanations that Christ actually went to the realm of the dead between his death and resurrection, a collective analysis can be performed of these two views.

That Christ actually descended to Hades between his death and resurrection is an old and widely accepted interpretation held by Irenaeus, Tertullian, both the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, and also Zwingli and Calvin held that Christ announced salvation to the OT

¹⁴ Edwin A. Blum, *1, 2 Peter*, ed. Frank Ely Gaebelein, J. D. Douglas, and Dick Polcyn, 12 vols., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary : With the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976), 241.

¹⁵ *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 162. See also Gordon Haddon Clark, *Peter Speaks Today; a Devotional Commentary on First Peter* (Philadelphia,: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1967), 127.

believers and brought them from the realms of death into heaven (cf. John 3:13).¹⁶ The prison in the context of 1 Peter 3:19 would then be the abode of all the dead, and the preaching described is the proclamation of Christ's victory. Ephesians 4:8-9 is often used in support of this view: "When he ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives . . . Now this expression, 'he ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?." From this passage Christ is said to have led the OT saints from their captivity in Hades to Heaven at his ascension. However, the problem with applying this interpretation to 1 Peter 3:19-20 is that the spirits in prison (v. 19) to whom Christ is said to have preached are called formerly disobedient (v. 20a). Therefore, only disobedient spirits can be in view here – there is also no mention in the passages of OT saints; rather only disobedient spirits in the time of Noah. Therefore, whatever captivity Christ led captive, it was not OT saints. Thus, there are only two possible categories of spirits that emerge in 1 Peter 3:20: disobedient humans in the time of Noah (Gen. 6:5-6), or the fallen angels who were judged in the time of Noah (cf. Gen. 6:1-4, 2 Pet. 2:4-5).¹⁷ As the receivers of Christ's preaching in 1 Peter 3:19-20 are the unrighteous, then a case for a second compartment of Hades for the righteous cannot be made from these passages.

The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:8-9

The third NT text that possibly alludes to the two-compartment idea of Hades is the primary passage under consideration for this study (Eph. 4:8-9).

¹⁶ Clark, 125-126.

¹⁷ For a discussion on the spirits representing disobedient humans in the time of Noah see *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 161-163.; Louis Barbieri, *First and Second Peter*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 70. For a discussion on the spirits representing fallen angels see Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, [1st ed., The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: The Tyndale Press, 1959), 142-143.; Blum, 241-243.

⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

The historical focus in support of the two-compartment view is the verse 8 phrase, "he led captive a host of captives," and the verse 9 phrase, "He also descended into the lower parts of the earth" – though the primary focus here will be the verse 9 phrase. The idea from these two phrases is that Christ spent the *triduum* (the interval between his death on the cross and his resurrection) in the underworld where he ultimately led the OT saints (captives in Hades) to heaven at his ascension.

Verse 8 is a variation of Psalms 68:18 where Paul has apparently changed several words, likely to make the Psalm 68:18 passage applicable to the Ephesian church to whom he was writing. According to Taylor, the Psalm 68 passage envisions an Israelite king confident in battle because of the intervention by the Lord on behalf of his chosen people through the Exodus and the Conquest. In the subsequent battle for Jerusalem, the victorious Israelite king then led his captives in triumphal procession and received gifts of booty from those who celebrated his return.¹⁸ In the Ephesians passage, Paul has reworded the Psalm 68 passage to show Christ has ascended to heaven and has given spiritual gifts to believers (Eph. 4:7). As Hendriksen writes,

When Christ ascended he was not returning to heaven with empty hands. On the contrary, as a result of accomplished mediatorial work he returned in triumph to heaven, in the full possession of salvation for his people¹⁹ . . . Christ, as the now exalted Mediator, fills the entire universe with "blessings" or, if one prefers, with "gifts," the very gifts which he had earned; salvation full and free and the services of those who proclaim it; such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc.

¹⁸ Richard A. Taylor, "The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 in Light of the Ancient Versions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148, no. 591 (1991): 323.

¹⁹ William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 191.

The question then remains, who are the host of captives Christ led captive? Some have interpreted the captives as: (1) the enemies of Christ – Satan, sin, and death,²⁰ or (2) the people who have been the captives of Satan, sin, and death that have now been redeemed by Christ, perhaps even those in Hades.²¹ While the first interpretation seems to be the best fit here as it is most consistent with Paul’s earlier description of Christ’s ascension to heaven and rule over “all authority and power and dominion” (Eph. 1:19-22; cf. 6:12), an examination of the syntactical possibilities regarding the location to which Christ descended will help demonstrate the possibility of the second interpretation – more specifically, that Christ descended into Hades.

The phrase εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς (into the lower parts of the earth) is the location, or locale to which Christ descended. The preposition εἰς (“into” or “to”) gives the direction – Christ is descending down from a place. The adverb κατώτερα means “lower,” or “below,”²² while the plural μέρη denotes “a part” of a geographical area, such as the regions or parts of a country.²³ The syntactical difficulties begin with the genitive τῆς γῆς (“the earth”). There are commonly three ways to view this genitive: (1) as a partitive genitive – the lowest parts of the earth itself (the grave); (2) a comparative genitive – the regions below the earth (Hades); or (3) an appositive genitive – the lower regions, namely, the earth.²⁴

²⁰ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 1977 Reprint ed., Limited Classical Reprint Library. (Minneapolis, MN: James & Klock Christian Pub. Co., 1883), 287-288.; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians : An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 529-530.; Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 289.

²¹ For a detailed discussion of post-apostolic church fathers who espoused this view, see Eadie, 287.

²² Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 535.

²³ *Ibid.*, 633.

²⁴ W. Hall Harris, *The Descent of Christ : Ephesians 4:7-11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery*, 1st pbk. ed., Biblical Studies Library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 46.

Partitive Genitive View of τῆς γῆς

The partitive genitive view indicates that Christ descended into “the earth’s lower part, the grave.” In this view parallels are drawn between this verse and Ephesians 1:20 in that the death of Christ and his burial *in* a grave (1:20; 2:16; 5:2, 25) is contrasted with his resurrection *from* the grave (1:20-23; 2:5). This view also seems to make good sense in that it is depicting Christ going “into” the lowest part of the physical earth, the grave.²⁵

Comparative Genitive View of τῆς γῆς

This view gives a sense that Christ descended to regions lower than the earth, namely Hades in the context of the discussion here. Support for this view comes from several places. First, if Paul was only talking about the earth itself here, why provide the phrase “lower parts” or “lower regions”? – it would have been simpler to just say the earth. Second, in Ephesians 4:10 Christ is said to have “ascended far above all the heavens.” Contrasting this statement with the “lower parts of the earth” it reveals a possible four-story cosmology: below the earth, the earth, the heavenlies, and heaven itself. Hades, then, is the lowest part of the earth (Rom. 10:7), the place of the departed (Phil. 2:10) and the place of evil spirits (Luke 8:31). However, Wallace states that a comparative genitive here is “syntactically improbable, if not impossible: the comparative adjective is in attributive position to μέρη.”²⁶ Given this syntactical problem, it

²⁵ Hoehner, 535-536.

²⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics : An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 112. Wallace goes on to write, “if one were to ignore such a syntactical feature in, say, Matt 23:23, the meaning there would be ‘you have neglected the matters which are weightier *than* the law’ (instead of ‘you have neglected the weightier matters *of* the law”).”

would appear to be exegetically inconsistent to take the comparative genitive view – though not impossible, it renders the view inconclusive.

Appositive Genitive View of τῆς γῆς

This view indicates that Christ descended to the earth itself, in a more general sense. The support for this view is that the NT always relates Christ’s descent as being from heaven to the earth (John 3:13; 6:62; 16:28), and there is no mention in the Gospel narrative of any descent of Christ to Hades. It is also consistent with the two-story cosmology found in Ephesians; that is, the heavens and the earth – a three or four-story cosmology, according to Harris, would have necessitated a superlative form of κατώτερα.²⁷ This interpretation is representative of several modern English translations where the passage is rendered: “the lower, earthly regions” (NIV); “the lower regions, namely, the earth” (NET); and “the lower regions, the earth” (ESV).

Returning to previous question regarding *who* the captives were that Christ led captive, from the syntactical analysis of the locale of Christ’s descent, it does not appear that the captives, regardless who they are, were located anywhere beneath the earth except possibly the grave. Hades does not appear to be a viable choice in Ephesians 4:8-9, much as it was not a viable choice in the 1 Peter 3 passages previously discussed.

CONCLUSION

This study has traced the uses of the terms Sheol and Hades through the OT period, Intertestamental period, and NT period. From the OT uses, Sheol could be understood to be a real place where both the righteous and unrighteous went at their death. In Intertestamental

²⁷ Harris, 52.

Judaism a shift appears to have occurred, at least in some sense, that excluded the righteous from Sheol/Hades – the righteous souls immediately went to paradise at death, the unrighteous souls went to Sheol/Hades to await final judgment. In the NT, Hades is in most all cases referred to as the abode of the souls of the ungodly or unbelievers. However, there are several places in the NT where an implication of a two-compartment idea of Hades could be made. Three of the NT passages (Luke 16:19-31; 1 Pet. 3:18-20; Eph. 4:8-9) have been evaluated in this study with the primary focus being Ephesians 4:8-9.

From the analyses of the Luke passages, there is ample disagreement among many commentators on the literalness of Christ's parable and the locale of the rich man and Lazarus. As such, the Luke 16 passages do not demonstrate a definitive proof of the existence of two compartments in Hades. The 1 Peter passages appear to only demonstrate a single compartment in Hades and no mention or inference of a second compartment is made. As such, the 1 Peter passages also do not aid in developing the two-compartment view. As the Luke and 1 Peter passages are often cited in support of the two-compartment view in Ephesians 4:8-9, the Ephesians passages were more closely evaluated.

The Ephesians passages show Christ ascending to heaven following his death and resurrection – he is the Victor over a dark domain. However, these verses also portray Christ descending to lower regions of the earth. By analyzing the syntactical possibilities regarding the locale of Christ's descent, it was demonstrated that exegetically only two venues are probable: the grave or the earth itself in general. A view that Christ descended to Hades in the context of these verses seems to require exegetical gymnastics, and applying the same exegetical methods to other NT passages seems to create interpretive problems of their own.

Therefore, it is concluded that Scripture as a whole does not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the presence of two, spatially separated compartments in Hades where both the righteous and unrighteous went before the ascension of Christ. As a result, the Ephesians 4:8-9 passages also do not aid in the demonstration and it would appear that tradition, more so than honest biblical exegesis, has lent more to the two-compartment view in Ephesians 4:8-9 than anything else. Nevertheless, the absence of two compartments in Sheol or Hades is really an argument from silence. Therefore, it would also be unreasonable to be dogmatic about a single-compartment view given the limitations of God's revelation to us through his Word.

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