

Heaven, Hell or in Between?
(Luke 23:40-43; Psalm 73:24, 25; II Corinthians 5:2-4)

Where will we be after death? That's the question that many ask. The uncertainty of life after death is for many people a reason to fear. But uncertainty should not coexist with hope for the believer in YAHSHUA. At the moment of the thief's repentance, heaven opened its door for his entrance; and when he asked YAHSHUA to remember him when He entered Paradise, YAHSHUA confirmed the fact by saying to him, Truly I tell you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:40-43). YAHSHUA did not say you must go to the place in between first to prepare for Paradise; He simply said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise". "Today" was the day in which the thief had died; and "today" he would be in Paradise. The idea of a purgatory- a place to be made ready for heaven by the purging of the soul from unforgiving venial sin which is an offense against the law of YAHWEH is a belief according to the Catholic Church and it is found also in Judaism belief which implies that Gehenna (purgatory) is a place of purification where most sinners spend up to a year before release. This teaching is completely erroneous and misleading, for it is contrary to the teachings found in the Word of YAHWEH. We read in Hebrews 9:27-28 the following: and just as it is appointed for people **to die once and after this judgment**, so also the Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

According to Holman's commentary on the Greek word hades and its Hebrew equivalent, Sheol, the word indicates (1) the condition of the unsaved between death and the great white throne of judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). In the chapter sixteenth of Luke and verses twenty-three through twenty-four, it shows the lost in hades having consciousness and memory and being tormented. This condition continues until the final judgment of the lost (II Peter 2: 9), when all the unsaved and hades itself, will be cast into the lake of fire (Rv. 20:13-15). (2) It indicates in general, the condition of all departed human spirits between death and the resurrection. This is found in the O.T. but rarely, if ever in the NT. One should not think of a possibility of change from one state to the other after death. We see in Luke 16 v. 23 that the unsaved man was a long way off, and the two places had a great chasm, preventing the crossing between one place to the other. So As YAHSHUA died once and for all, we too will die only once to face heaven or hell. The word hades or Sheol, although sometimes translated "grave", they never indicated a place for burial.

Absent from the body, present where? For the Believer the answer to this question brings bliss in the hope of the promise of YAHSHUA, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise"; in the words of Paul . . . My yearning desire is to **depart and be with Christ**, for that is far better (Phil. 1:23); and here indeed, in this [present abode, body] we sigh and groan inwardly because we yearn to be clothed over with our heavenly dwelling; yet we are confident and satisfied **to be out of the body and at home with the Lord** (II Cor. 5:2,8). Asaph, in one of his Psalms expressed hope of heaven after death: You guide me with your counsel and afterward You will take me into glory (Psalm 73:24,25). And what the expression 'and afterward You will take me into glory' means if it is not heaven? Have you ever read the beautiful transition of the believer to heaven in the conclusion of the Psalm seventeen? "**As for me, I will continue beholding Your face in**

righteousness; I shall be fully satisfied, when I awake beholding Your form”. Our intimacy with the Savior here on earth will continue unto eternity never to be broken; in death we are just closing our eyes to open them in heaven to behold Him, our Lord and Savior YAHSHUA MESSIAH! In his state of disease and pain, Job said, And after my skin, even this body has been destroyed, then from my flesh or without it I shall see YAHWEH Whom I, even I, shall see for myself and on my side! And my eyes shall behold Him, and not as a stranger (Job 19:26-27a)!

Although the heroes of the faith, of whom the world was not worthy, had not received the tangible fulfillment of YAHWEH’S promises, but had only seen them from the distance through their faith, they confessed to be strangers and temporary residents in this earth yearning and aspiring for their heavenly home, with perseverance of faith when mocked and scourged, chained and imprisoned; when stoned to death sawn asunder, slaughtered by the sword, living in caves and holes of the earth (Hebrews 11). Their yearning was satisfied when in the closing of their physical eyes they saw the form of the One and true YAHWEH welcoming them home – absent from the body, present with the Lord!

Where will the unbeliever be when absent from the body? Not in purgatory- the place in between. No. In the words of YAHSHUA for those who do not believe in Him He said, But he who does not believe is **judged already** because he has not believed in and trusted in the name of the only begotten Son of YAHWEH; the [basis of the] judgment lies in this: the Light has come into the world, and people have loved the darkness rather than and more than the Light, for their works were evil (John 3:18-19). So judgment follows the unbeliever after his death. This is a hard and difficult thing to bring to light, in view of the sufferings and torments known to be in hell. The rich man of the parable, who being in torment, looked up and saw Abraham and the poor man Lazarus with him, cried, ‘Father Abraham have mercy 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 flame’ (Luke 16:19-31)! It is written in the Bible that is **appointed for people to die once and after this, judgment** (Hebrews 9:27). It is true then that after death the destinies will be heaven or hell for the spirits to stay while they wait the final salvation or final judgment. My friend, if you had once committed your life to Christ, but now walk in disobedience and in willingly sinning after once acquiring the knowledge of truth, there is no longer any sacrifice left to atone for your sins, but a kind of awful and fearful prospect and expectation of divine judgment and the fury of burning wrath and indignation which will consume those who put themselves in opposition; it is a fearful thing to incur the divine penalties and be cast into the hands of the living YAHWEH (Hebrews 10: 26-27,31)! You too are an unbeliever and condemned to suffer YAHWEH’S wrath. There is no “once saved, always saved” for the sinful life. YAHSHUA, when on the cross, suffered the pain of hell in the separation of His Father the moment He had taken all our sins upon Himself; and in the agony of hell, He cried, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? He also suffered the thirst of the flames of hell so that we didn’t have to suffer. That sacrifice was done once and for all; rejection of it or the fall away from it will result only in the dreadful wrath of YAHWEH against you and me.

In summary, the physical death is not the cessation of consciousness neither the cessation of existence; the spirit lives independently of the death of the body and continues existing either

waiting for the **first** resurrection, (heaven) blessed and holy is the one who shares on the first resurrection; the second death has no power over these (Rev. 20:6); or waiting for the **second** resurrection (in hell), which is the final condemnation of those who have rejected YAHSHUA'S salvation.

Heaven, hell or in between? The answer to this question is that there are only two places awaiting the spirits of the dead: heaven, and hell. Do you know where will you be going?