

# *Salvation for the Dead*

**Hades is not Hell**

**A Biblical Second Chance Theology for Dead People in Hades**

**Why did Christ descend to Hades after death on the Cross?**

**What is the Final Destiny of the People of Hades?**

[Rev. Arimasa Kubo](http://www2.biglobe.ne.jp/~remnant/hades.htm) <http://www2.biglobe.ne.jp/~remnant/hades.htm>



Christ stretching his saving arms to the people in Hades  
(Greek Orthodox Icon, Turkey)

**Christians go to Heaven after death, and non-Christians go to Hades.**

**Hades has been very frequently confused with Hell. The two are not the same. Hades [also known as Sheol] is temporary; while Hell is final. Hades receives non-believers, who stay there until the final judgment; Hell is the final destination for non-believers after the Judgment.**

**The Bible says that the Gospel of Jesus exists for those in Hades as well (Philippians 2:8-11), and that in the time near the end of the world, voices of praise and worship to God will be heard from Hades (Revelation 5:13). How should we interpret these verses?**

## **Hades is Not Hell**

Hades is the world where non-Christians go after death. It is different from Hell, because the Bible says in Revelation 20:14, "Then death and **Hades were thrown into the lake of fire**. The lake of fire (=Hell) is the second death."

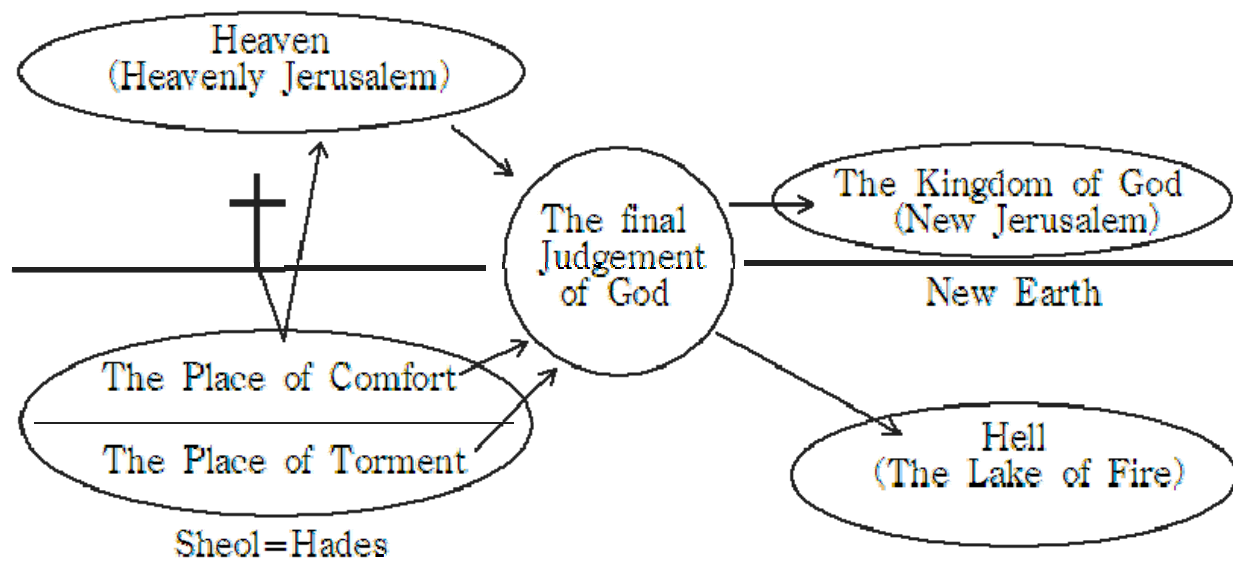
This passage describes a scene from the end of the world when the old Heaven and old Earth pass away, when the new Heaven and new Earth are soon to come, and when all non-Christians, who are now in Hades, are brought out before God's court to be judged. Final destinies will be determined and after that, the empty Hades will be abandoned and thrown into "the lake of fire," which is another name for Hell. Since this is what the Bible says, then how can Hades possibly be one and the same as Hell? The two are totally and completely different.

Since the Middle Ages, during which the Church suffered heavy corruption, **Hades has come to be confused with Hell**, but they are not the same. Hades is a temporary place that receives non-Christians until God's final judgment of the end of the world, while Hell is reserved for after Judgment, for those who continue to reject God.

People are being taught that Christians go to Heaven after death, and that non-Christians will go to Hell right after death. This is misleading and not Biblical. The Bible clearly separates the temporary and the permanent destinations for both Christians and non-Christians.

Christians go to Heaven after death, and they temporarily live in a spiritual state without a body in heaven. But when the new Heaven and new Earth replace the old, believers will receive a new and eternal body, which is their final state.

Non-Christians, on the other hand, go to Hades after death, where they remain until God's final judgment of the end of the world. So, **Hades is their interim destination.** At His court of judgment, God will determine their final destiny: either the kingdom of God [new Heaven and new Earth] or "the lake of fire" [Hell].



### Before Christ, All who died Went to Hades (Sheol)

Hades is a Greek word which means “world of the dead.” The Hebrew word “Sheol” matches this meaning entirely. Some claim that Hades of the New Testament has a slightly different meaning from Sheol, but the terms are identical in meaning.

Each citation of the Hebrew word “Sheol” in the Old Testament is translated as “Hades” in the Septuaginta, which was the authorized Greek translation of the same, and widely read among Greek Jews in the time of Jesus. “Hades” is thus a mere Greek translation of “Sheol.”

In times before Christ, Sheol, that is the same as Hades, was known as the world

where all dead people went. Both believers and non-believers went there. For example, when Jacob, forefather of Israelites, heard the news that his beloved son Joseph had died, Jacob said: "in mourning will **I go down to Sheol to my son.**" (Genesis 37:35)

In Jacob's understanding, Joseph went to Sheol, in spite of his pious faith in God. It was a general understanding among Jews that all those who died go down to Sheol. Obviously, Sheol is not Heaven, for it is said to be under the earth. Sheol is not Hell either, since it was a destination for believers as much as it was for non-believers. Before Christ, Sheol was the world for all the dead.

King David said, when he felt death was near, "my life draws near to **Sheol**" (Psalm 88:3, NRSV) . In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon refers to "**Sheol**" as the world where everybody goes after death (9:10). When King Saul went astray and asked a female medium to bring up the late Prophet Samuel, the medium said, "I see a god-like being **coming up** out of the earth." (I Samuel 28:13) Samuel came up from Sheol.

Not only the wicked, but also the righteous (including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Isaiah, Jeremiah and all believers and prophets) were destined for Sheol after death, because it was before Jesus died on the cross. The ancient Jews taught that a vast **Sheol was divided into several parts**: one for the righteous (believers of God), and other parts for the wicked (non-believers).

## **The Rich Man Went to Hades, Not Hell**

The Book of Enoch, written long before Christ, was widely familiar and read among Jews, including Jesus' disciples. In the New Testament, the Epistle of Jude verses 14-15 refer back to The Book of Enoch 1:9. This book refers to Sheol as divided into 4 parts: one for souls of the righteous, and the other 3 for that of the unrighteous. According to their deeds performed on earth, people are each taken to the one division of Sheol they most deserve. The division for the righteous offers more comfort and less torment, but the other parts host greater degrees of torment and a lesser degree of comfort.

Jesus told a story familiarly known as "The Rich Man and Lazarus" (Luke 16:19-31), depicting certain events that happened in Sheol, or Hades. The New

International Version (NIV) offers the following translation of Luke 16:22-23: "The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment..." In this passage, "hell" is a misleading translation because the original Greek text is Hades. The rich man went to "**the place of torment**" (16:28) **in Hades**, not Hell.

Lazarus went to the place where Abraham had gone, which is "the place of comfort" in **Hades**, Greek word for Sheol. As mentioned, all souls went to Sheol (Hades), to one of its divisions. So my point is, this story is set neither in Heaven nor in Hell; the setting is Sheol (Hades).



The rich man was in Hades, not in Hell.

It seems that the "place of torment" where the rich man went is the division of greatest torment. Even so, the severest torment in Sheol must have been far lighter than what awaits in Hell. For one thing, the rich man was able to converse with Abraham, requiring functional intelligence. The torment that characterizes Hell is so severe that conversations would be out of the question.

**Sheol** (Hades) could be likened to a **custody cell**, and **Hell** would be more like **prison**. A custody cell holds the suspect until trial, and prison is reserved for the convicted criminal. Likewise, Sheol (Hades) retains souls of the dead until God's final judgment; Hell is prepared for the destruction after that.

One could say that Abraham and Lazarus went to the division of Sheol reserved for believers. It was the division of relative comfort, but lacking the joy and glory promised in Heaven. This “relative” comfort in Sheol could be similar to what a person experiences when going to bed and resting at night, but Heaven, which is full of Joy and happiness, is promised for Christians.

## **Believers Who Lived Before Christ Are Now In Heaven**

The story, told by Jesus, of Lazarus and the Rich Man can be understood not as a parable, but as a **true story**, because it specifies both Abraham and Lazarus by name. When characters are specified by name in the Bible, it is always a true story. Jesus told many parables, but never told parables specifically naming his characters and settings. He always told parables, generalizing his characters and settings, saying "one man" or "in a place."

On the other hand, when Jesus told stories by name, they were all true accounts. For instance, when Jesus told, "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:29), it was not a parable, but a true story. When Jesus told, "David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him" (Matthew 12:3), it was a true story. Thus, stories of Jesus by name were all true ones.

Jesus told, in the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man, with naming Abraham and Lazarus, a historical fact of Sheol(=Hades) set during Old Testament times. It is wrong to think that this story about Hades is just a parable which can be interpreted into various meanings.

Today, Abraham, Lazarus, the prophets, and all the other believers who lived in Old Testament times are **no longer in Sheol, but in Heaven**. The New Testament observes:

“When he (Jesus) ascended on high, **he led captives in his train** and gave gifts to men.” (Ephesians 4:8-9)

When Jesus ascended into Heaven, "he led captives (in his train)." Who are these "captives"? Evil spirits? No, Jesus did not lead evil spirits to Heaven. The “captives” are humans and Jesus "gave gifts to men." One translation of the Bible refers to the people in Hades as "spirits in prison" (I Peter 3:19) and in yet another

translation, "spirits in captivity." Those who ascended to Heaven with Jesus at his ascension were "captives" held hostage in Hades.

In the eyes of his disciples, Jesus appeared to ascend alone from the Mount of Olives, but actually, a multitude of spirits from Hades are thought to have been with Jesus. Saints, prophets, and believers who had been held hostage in Hades ascended with Jesus. They are now in Heaven.

## **Confusion of Hades with Hell**

Since Jesus' ascension, Christians go to Heaven after death, and non-Christians go to Hades, or Sheol. The apostle Paul thought that when he was drawn out of his body, he would be with Christ in Heaven (II Corinthians 5:8). The book of Revelation mentions the Christian martyrs in Heaven directly conversing with the Lord (6:9-11, 8:3). Thus, Christians go directly to Heaven after death, neither to Hades, nor through Hades, because Christ has redeemed them.

Not so for non-Christians, for Hades remains wide open as ever for dead souls in general, until God's final judgment. Each unbelieving soul is taken to an appropriate division of Hades, according to their deeds done on earth, and rewarded or avenged accordingly by God.

All unbelieving souls now bide their time in Hades, or Sheol. Hell remains vacant. Hell awaits, ready and prepared (Matthew 25:41), but will remain vacant until after the final judgment. Only then will the damned be thrown into Hell.

The original Greek word for Hell is "Gehenna" (Matthew 5:29). It is also referred to as "the lake of fire." The Bible mentions Hell to be the place of eternal torment (Revelation 20:10) and the final destination for non-believers.

In the 17th century, a translation error in the authorized *King James Version* (KJV) resulted in confusing Hades with Hell. "Hades" was translated into "Hell." Even today, certain English translations still contain the same mistake. The original Greek text clearly states that the rich man went to "Hades" after death (Luke 16:23); however, some English translations, including the *Living Bible*, a best seller in the USA and many other countries, so simply interpret that the rich man went to "Hell."

This fundamental error has emerged to be the source of an on-going confusion that plagues the Christian world. Many people still think that non-Christians promptly go to Hell after death. Nonetheless, the Bible clearly states that Hell is for the subjects of the final judgment of the end of the world. Non-Christians' interim destination continues to be the same old Hades until the end.

We must not confuse Hades with Hell. Such confusion is the source of every misunderstanding about the world of the dead.

## **The Gospel Exists for those in Hades as well**

The non-Christians who have passed away now reside in Hades, or Sheol, and at the end of the world, God's final judgment will determine their final destiny. Does this mean all of them will go to Hell? Or, will any of them be saved and delivered to God's kingdom?

The Bible clearly states in Philippians 2:8-11 that Christ died and rose again not only for the people on earth, but also for those in Hades:

"He (Jesus) humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and **of those under the earth**, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (NKJV)

The Gospel that Jesus is the Savior is not only for the living, but also for "those under the earth," which is the Bible's special way of referring to the souls of Hades! The passage cited above is taken from the New King James Version, but several other English translations omit the part about "of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth," in spite that the original Greek text has that part. The Gospel is for the people of Hades as well, so that they may confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord," which is the very confession that saves people, for the Bible says:

**"If you confess** with your mouth, "**Jesus is Lord**," and believe in your heart that



God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved.**" (Romans 10:9)

Philippians 2:8-11 thus means that the Gospel of Jesus exists for the people of Hades as well, so that they may confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord," and get saved. This is very important. Romans 14:9 also teaches:

"Christ died and rose and lived again, that **He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.**"

Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and salvation are not only for the living, but also for the dead, including the dead people in Hades, so that Christ might be Lord of them and could save them.

## **Voices of Praise Will be Heard from Hades**

The result is written in Revelation 5:13, that in the end times, voices will be heard from the depths of Hades praising and worshipping God:

"Then I heard **every creature** in heaven and on earth and **under the earth** and on the sea, and all that is in them, **singing**: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be **praise and honor and glory and power**, for ever and ever!" (NIV)

Every English translation of this verse includes the part "under the earth," i.e., Hades. If Hades were confused with Hell in this context, one may struggle to understand. In the end times, voices of praise and worship will be heard from Hades.

This does not necessarily mean that all souls in Hades will be saved, for the Greek word for "every" sometimes does not mean "all" in the strict sense of the word, but rather means "very many." (See Luke 7:29, Acts 2:47, etc.) In the end times, very many people, who repented and got to believe in Jesus in Hades, will praise and sing, "To God and Christ be praise and honor and glory and power."

They are not evil spirits or people destined to perish, for the Bible does not record any of them praising God in any verses. They are people who repented in Hades and got to believe in Jesus, for in the Bible the people who are called to praise God are all "servants of God." It is written in Revelation 19:5,

"Then a voice came from the throne, saying, '**Praise our God, all you His**

**servants’”**

The souls who praise God from Hades are those who believed in the Savior to become God's servants.

Very many people in Hades will thus finally get saved. But on the other hand, there are also many who are to perish. Christ taught:

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." (Matthew 7:13)

It is easy to walk on the road that leads to destruction. The gate of the road is wide open for them. People have to be very careful for finding the road that leads to eternal life, both on earth or in Hades. Not a few people in Hades cannot repent even in the opportunity to have faith and receive God’s salvation, and will finally face eternal damnation in Hell. There are thus two kinds of people in Hades; one is the people who repent, believe in Jesus praising God, and the other the people who do not repent and finally go to Hell.

These verses from Philipians, Romans and Revelation mentioned above have been often ignored, attributed to either careless negligence or indifferent disregard. Regardless, those who do the ignoring often dismiss the idea as heresy. Naturally if this is heresy, then we who probe in search of truth are labeled “heretics,” which is objectionable. We are not called to ignore Bible verses, but to rejoice in and preach the entire Gospel, which declares God’s inclusive Grace for even the inhabitants of Hades.

## **Bible Verses Speak about the Second Chance**

Living in this world is the “**first chance**” to hear the Gospel and believe in Christ, but there are many who did not hear it in their lives. So, there is the “**second chance**” for them to be saved in the world after death, as I mentioned above referring to Philipians 2:10-11, Romans 10:9 and Revelation 5:13.

The following verses also testify that there is the second chance.

"I (Christ) tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when **the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live...** a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice." (John 5:25, 28)

Many Bible commentaries interpret "the dead" as spiritually dead people, or sinners. It surely means that, but not only that, "all who are in their graves" shows that "the dead" also means physically dead people. They are now in Hades but "will hear the voice of Christ," and those who hear will "live," which, when Christ says, always means to live in eternal life or to be saved. (Matthew 4:4, 22:32, Romans 1:17, 1 Peter 4:6)

And the Bible says in Ruth 2:20:

"The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. **'He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.'**"

It is wrong to think that God is not merciful to the dead in Hades. Human being is the object of God's love, so are the people in Hades.

The Bible tells that God relents according to man's attitude.

"if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then **I will relent and not inflict** on it the disaster I had planned."(Jeremiah 18:8)

"Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and **he relents from sending calamity.**" (Joel 2:13)

God judges both the living and the dead by righteousness and mercy. According to man's attitude, He relents and rethinks of the disaster He planned to him. God is the One who gives a second chance. If He would relent to the living, He would also relent to the dead. Thinking of this, Job once said in sufferings:

"If only you (God) would **hide me in the grave** and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! ...You will call and I will answer you; ...Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; **you will cover over my sin.**" (Job 14:13-17)

Job was a believer of God but experienced great sufferings, and felt he was perishing similarly like a non-believer. The only hope he got was the second chance after his death. He believed in God who is merciful and relents to the dead.

Prophet Jonah once preached to the people of Nineveh, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4) These were unchangeable God's words,

and it seemed inevitable that all Nineveh's people would soon perish. However, the people repented and God relented toward the people. God did not destroy them. God is thus the one who gives man a chance to repent. God is merciful toward those in repentance, not only of the living, but also of the dead.

## **Book of Life and People of Hades**

Through our faith, God guarantees us our salvation while we are still living. This is very significant. As a result, we are given the benefit of living in blessed awareness as children of God. No such life is available in Hades. That is why our faith in Christ is so important to us while we abide on earth, and also why we ought to start living our lives that reveals God's glory.

To experience salvation while still alive on earth would be the most desirable. On the other hand, many have never heard the Gospel of Christ, not even once. Still others may have never had the opportunity to secure their faith. Would they be turned away at the gates of Heaven for that?

No! As we have seen, the **Gospel of Christ is available to those "captives" in Hades as well.**

Revelation chapter 20 describes God's final judgment of those in Hades:

"death and **Hades gave up the dead** that were in them, and **each person was judged** according to what he had done." (20:13)

This passage describes how all "the dead" of Hades will be brought before the court. It is also mentioned that "**the book of life**" will be brought there to judge people of Hades.

"If anyone's name was not found written in **the book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (20:15)

**"The book of life" is a list of all converts.** Anyone whose name is not found in it will go to Hell. While, anyone whose name is in it will inherit God's kingdom. Why does it say that **the book of life (list of converts) will be used to judge people of Hades?**

If there were no potential believers among the people of Hades, there would be no need to bring **the list of converts (the book of life)** to the court of this final judgment. We must think that **the book of life will be used there to identify and**

## **separate converts of Hades from the others.**

Some claim all those in Hades will go to Hell after the judgment. But if so, there is simply no need for God to judge each person individually at the court, much less is there any need for the book of life to be introduced. If all those in Hades are destined to go to Hell, then even Hades would have been hardly necessary.

God made Hades as a temporary "storage" for dead non-believers. And at the court of His final judgment, God will bring the book of life (list of converts) to judge people of Hades, because there will be converts in Hades who are to be permitted to enter God's kingdom. Not a few people of Hades, who are listed in the book of life, will then be brought to God's kingdom after the final judgment.

## **"Second Chance" is Not an Obstacle for Evangelism**

The number of people who oppose this interpretation of the Gospel is certainly not small. They see it as an obstacle, directly conflicting with their idea of "winning souls." They think presenting a second opportunity for salvation after death would cause people to lose any sense of urgency to seek change, and to receive salvation here and now. They say, "People may think 'I will do what I like as long as I live, and then ask God's forgiveness after I die.'" But we wouldn't want them to think that. So, let us not make any mention of the 'second chance.'"

However, this kind of anxiety exposes a **misinterpretation of the Gospel**.

Suppose you are non-Christian. If you repent and accept Jesus as your personal Savior while you are still alive, the Bible promises life abounding in joy, as a child of God. The Bible also promises life even beyond death, in communion with God.

But if you do not repent during your lifetime, your independence from God will inevitably warrant your lifeless consequences of Hades. According to your lifestyle, the seeds you sowed on earth, there you will reap them (Galatians 6:7). You will suffer during your time in Hades. Even if you did repent in Hades, you would not be relieved of your circumstances until God's final judgment.

Which is better? Which would you choose? I choose to repent, believe in Christ and receive God's salvation and His blessings which are given here and now, for the **benefits to receive them on earth are too great to refuse**. I want to walk on

earth in God's grace until I die. I want to walk in His blessings as long as I live, being a child of God. I think you would do the same, if you get to know His amazing salvation. The Gospel of Christ is not only for the eternal life after death, but also for making our lives on earth abundant and fruitful.

Therefore, if we get to know the wonderfulness of the Gospel of Christ, it is impossible for us to postpone our repentance beyond death. **Repenting on earth is clearly far more excellent than waiting until I am in Hades to do so.** If we talk enough about this and wonderfulness of the Gospel which makes our lives on earth happy, seekers would never postpone their repentance, but choose to repent now on earth. The thought of the second chance to be an obstacle of evangelism is merely a misinterpretation of His Gospel.

I once asked Christian believers, "Do you think that it is a wise policy for you to repent after you die?" Then, a woman answered, "Now that I know the wonderfulness of Jesus, I can't help but believe in Him here on earth. I want to live with Jesus." Her answer shows that she has a full understanding of the Gospel. Thus, if we preach the benefits to live with Jesus on earth, no one would think that it is a wise policy to postpone the repentance. If I see a man say, "The thought of the second chance is an obstacle for evangelism," I doubt if he really knows the Gospel fully or not.

Suppose you are single and fell in love with a nice lady or a nice guy. Will you think that you want to postpone the marriage until 10 or 20 years later, and during that postponement do you want to live as you like without the mate? I don't think you will. Believing in Christ is just like a marriage with Christ. When people fall in love with Jesus, they would never postpone living with Jesus.

## **Sad Result of Wrong Teaching**

In addition, denying the second chance for the dead people in Hades has ever presented major difficulties to evangelism, especially in the East, for **a vast majority of ancestors of Oriental civilizations never had the chance to hear the Gospel of Christ.** People of Eastern cultures revere their ancestors very much. One Japanese person who chose against becoming a Christian writes:

"I asked a Christian missionary, 'Where are my ancestors?' He answered, 'In Hell.'"

So I asked again, 'Is there any way to save them from there?' He replied, 'No way.' When I heard it, I decided not to become a Christian. Western person is generally individualistic, and he may be able to become a Christian even knowing that his ancestors are in Hell. But I don't want to go to Heaven alone when all of my ancestors are in Hell with no hope. I don't want to believe in God who does such an unreasonable thing."

Everyone in the East understands this sentiment. Denying the second chance in Hades has ever kept people from knowing Christ. Furthermore, this denial is based on the confusion of Hades with Hell, a prime heresy of Bible interpretations.

### **Christ Preached His Good News in Hades**

Jesus once said to His disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to **every creature**" (Mark 16:15). The Gospel must be preached to **everyone** who once lived on earth. It is impossible for Jesus to ignore the people who already descended to Hades without any opportunity on earth to hear the Gospel. If there were no way to preach the Gospel to them, his words would go in vain.

However, the Gospel was preached in Hades. Jesus descended to Hades after his death on the cross, as we confess in the Apostle's Creed, and as recorded in Acts 2:27. Jesus stayed in Hades for 3 days, after which he was raised from the dead. What did he do during those three days in Hades? The Bible says:

"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 to the spirits in prison** (Hades) who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built... **the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead.**" (I Peter 3:18-20, 4:6 NIV)



Christ descended to Hades and preached his Gospel there.

This passage is taken from the New International Version, but in the original Greek, "the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead" is "**the gospel was preached even to the dead.**"

"Who are now" is not in the original Greek, especially "now" is an addition of the translator. American Standard Version correctly translates it into "(unto this end) was the gospel preached even to the dead." I believe every honest student of the Bible reading this passage would simply think that Jesus preached his Gospel to the souls in Hades. That is the right interpretation.

**William Barclay**, a professor at University of Glasgow and a well-known Scottish theologian who reads the New Testament in original Greek, comments on these Bible verses that Apostle Peter clearly states **Christ descended to Hades and preached his Good News there** (commentary on I Peter). **Yoshinobu Kumazawa**, the president of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, interprets these verses as Christ's preaching of the Good News in Hades. **Joel B. Green**, a leading professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, states, "the dead" of I Peter 4:6 are dead members of the human family given **postmortem opportunity to hear the Good News.**" (commentary on I Peter) They clearly taught that Jesus had descended to Hades and preached his Gospel to the people there. Green also states, referring to early Christian writings, that this interpretation was widespread among Christian leaders and believers of the first-third centuries.

However, since the dark Middle Ages, a great majority of scholars has insisted on



various conflicting interpretations. One such interpretation is that in Hades, Jesus preached condemnation, instead of the Good News. Another is that these verses refer not to Jesus' preaching in Hades, but to Noah's preaching to the people in Noah's time who are now in Hades. Many other interpretations also emerged.

The prime reason for these interpretations emerging is the basic confusion of Hades with Hell. They thought, "Jesus went to Hell. There is no opportunity for anyone to be saved there. We can't think that Jesus preached the Gospel in Hell. He must have preached, instead of the Gospel, condemnation there." Thus, a desperate effort was made to fabricate some "acceptable" interpretations, ignoring the Biblical meaning.

But Jesus actually went to Hades, not Hell. He "preached" in Hades. Furthermore, the original Greek word for "preach" mentioned here at the verse I Peter 3:19 is "kerusso," which, in the Bible, is **used always in the context of "preach the Gospel."** For instance, "preaching the good news of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23), "preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2) (as well as in Acts 9:20, Romans 10:8, I Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 2:2, II Timothy 4:2, etc.). There are many others.

Some people assert that "kerusso" means to condemn; however, this is wrong. Not one citation of this term is used in that context in the Bible. The term is reserved for "preaching Good News." Furthermore, several verses after this, we read "**the gospel was preached even to the dead.**" (I Peter 4:6) It is the most natural comprehension that these verses speak of Christ's preaching of the Gospel in Hades.

Other people interpret these verses as Noah's preaching to the people in Noah's time, and Jesus was in Noah's preaching spiritually. They say that this was not a preaching in Hades, but preaching on earth in ancient time. What a complex interpretation they invented! It would be impossible to interpret so, unless we twist the Bible verses in many parts.

## **They Who Died Before the Great Flood Heard the Message of Christ**

During Christ's stay in Hades, not everyone there heard his message. The Bible verses in I Peter indicate that **Christ preached only to those who had "disobeyed" at the time of the Great Flood of Noah**, which had occurred about

1600 years after the creation of Adam and Eve.

Considering a person's life span prior to the Great Flood was nearly 1000 years, most people who had been born before the Flood were alive until the time of the Flood. They died in the Flood and went to Hades. They listened to the message of Jesus who descended there.

While Jesus was in Hades, he preached to the dead who had been only before the Great Flood of Noah, which occurred around 2400 B.C. **An approximate time of 2400 years had passed since they died, before they were given the opportunity to hear the Gospel.** In other words, they were confined in Hades for a time much longer than the time they had spent alive on earth.

This could mean that, even if souls in Hades were given an opportunity to repent and to be redeemed, it would quite definitely not be soon after their deaths. The person would have to spend many more days in Hades than the days of his/her life on earth before he/she is given another chance to hear the Gospel.

The opportunity for salvation in Hades is granted only after many long years of reaping. So in this respect as well, we cannot honestly say, "It's a fine idea to do as I please here on earth, and to repent and receive Christ's salvation after I die." Now is our chance to receive it, while we are living and breathing here on earth.

### **When Will Those of Hades After the Great Flood Hear the Gospel?**

Then, when will those who died after the Great Flood be able to hear the Gospel? The Bible says, in Revelation chapter 11, that **two prophets of God** will testify in Jerusalem during the time of great tribulation, as the day of Christ's second coming approaches. As indicated, the prophets will be killed by the "beast" (tyrant), but **3 days and a half** later, they will be raised and taken "up to Heaven."

Where will they spend the 3 days and a half? Since they are destined for Heaven after their resurrection, they will not go to Heaven during their "death," but to Hades. They will prophesy and proclaim the Gospel of Christ, like Jesus himself did 2000 years ago, to the souls in Hades. It is very likely that those who died after the Flood will hear their Gospel at that time.



Christ stretching his saving arms to the people in Hades  
(Orthodox Icon, the 14th century)

## Why Should We Believe in Christ Now?

Will everyone in Hades repent? No, not everyone. The Bible says, "the Gospel was preached even to the dead, so that they might live according to God in regard to the spirit." (I Peter 4:6) This means that Christ preached the Gospel in Hades to save souls, when some responded and were saved by accepting Christ's invitation, but the Bible also clearly prophesies that the number of souls who will finally perish in Hell is not small. Some of those in Hades will be saved, but not a small number of people will finally perish. They, who choose not to take advantage of their second chance in Hades, will surely perish in Hell.

Why does not everyone believe in the Savior and receive salvation? Hades is a place of suffering, and the people there should know much more about spiritual things than we do. Do you think it is easy for them to have faith in the Lord?

**Faith is not a mere belief that God exists**, or mere knowledge about God. James says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that -- and shudder." (James 2:19) The demons know and believe, but they don't have faith in God.

Demons also know that Jesus is the Savior (Mark 5:7), but neither do they have faith in him. Thus, faith is not only believing and knowing about God and Christ. It is more than that. Faith is to love, obey, and live with God and Christ with all your heart, mind, and energy.

In Hades, one's attitude toward God is all naked and all known. That is how those who have faith will be distinguished from those who do not. If you choose not to repent during your lifetime, you will end up going to Hades, and will never know if you can surely repent there and if you can show your loyalty to God, who knows everything in your heart.

**If you hear the Gospel while you are alive, it is the best opportunity for you to believe and repent**, for your decision to have faith today in God and Christ will give you forgiveness of all your sins you committed, happiness as a child of God, power to overcome troubles of your life, blessings to lead your life and eternal life which lasts even beyond death.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Question 1

**The Bible says that Christ descended to Hades (Acts 2:31), but when Christ was suffering on the cross, he said to the criminal next to him,**

## **"today you will be with me in paradise." How does this make sense?**

"Paradise" in the Bible has two meanings. One is the kingdom of Heaven (Revelation 2:7). The other is the state of being in communion with Christ, for Christ is the "reality" of the kingdom of God and the things to come (Colossians 2:17). The source of love, of life, and of grace in the kingdom of Heaven is Christ.

So, in this second meaning, to be with Christ is to experience paradise. The criminal, who suffered on the cross next to Jesus, surely went to Hades after death, but he went with Christ, which, according to this meaning, was his experience of paradise.

Some people think that "paradise" is a place of comfort in Hades where Abraham and Lazarus went. And yet, Christ visits the depths of suffering in Hades (I Peter 3:19-20). So, "paradise" here is understood not to be a place, but a state of being with Christ.

### **Question 2**

#### **What is the destiny of the rich man in the story of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" (Luke 16:19-31)?**

The rich man said to Abraham, "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." (16:27-28)

His request was not granted, but note how he was motivated by love. The rich man wanted Lazarus (not the rich man himself) to go to his brothers, because he was concerned for their sake, for the sake of his brothers who are still living selfishly.

These words of the rich man demonstrate his repentance, kindness, and love. He would gain nothing personally by saying this, but he spoke out of love for his brothers. There is no reason to think that God would not have pity on this broken-hearted person.

As mentioned already, this true story occurred in the times of the Old Testament, because it personally addresses Abraham and Lazarus by name. I imagine Jesus was moved at heart when he witnessed this from Heaven. I think the rich man's

unselfish attitude made a lasting impression on Jesus.

And as mentioned above, the Bible speaks of the two prophets from God who will be killed in Jerusalem just before Christ's second coming; they will then descend to Hades and stay there for 3 days and a half (Revelation 11:3). They will prophesy and preach the Gospel of Christ to the people in Hades.

I suggest it is very probable that the rich man will hear the Gospel at that time, repent and receive God's mercy, and be saved. If so, it is no wonder even if he will be declared righteous by God at the final judgment, and at last enters into the new Heaven and the new Earth.

Jesus once told a story of a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), in which the tax collector "would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'" Jesus said that he went home justified before God. I identify the rich man's heart to have been very similar to that of the tax collector.

### **Question 3**

**I was pregnant 3 years ago, but I had to make an abortion. Where is the child now?**

Aborted children are now in Heaven with Christ, for He said: "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:3, 10)

In other words, little children will enter the kingdom of Heaven, for God's angels guard and guide their souls. Especially embryos, fetuses, and babies who became victims are no doubt in Heaven now by the mercy of God.

They are with God, in the peace and joy of His presence, but indeed they lost their lives on earth. Could the abortion have been avoided? If your convenient decision took an innocent life, then God eagerly awaits your repentance. Ask Him about your child.

If you are grateful to God for receiving your child into Heaven, then your life

would increasingly reflect that attitude, and expressing your faith in God would take an increasingly higher priority. You must live more for God also for your child's sake. If you do not, then you will not meet your child after you die, for "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." But if you live for God, you will meet your child again in Heaven.

Since your child is experiencing the deep comfort of God's love, I am sure that he/she must be eager to meet you. God will give the child back to you then, and you and your child will live happily together in Heaven.

#### **Question 4**

#### **Did those who committed suicide go to Hell?**

I believe those who committed suicide are now in Hades, not Hell. As discussed above, Hell will remain reserved until the final judgment of the world.

The Bible clearly appears to divide the human state after death as having two stages, the temporary and the final. For Christians, the temporary stage is Heaven, and the final stage is God's kingdom in the new Heaven and the new Earth. For those who deny Christ, the temporary stage is Hades (Sheol), and the final stage is Hell. Those who committed suicide abandoned their life and mission on earth given to them by God. They go to Hades after death.

Some suicides were committed as a result of an easy decision. Other suicides were committed in the midst of a pitiful situation. Only our all-knowing God knows everything of situations and motivations. He is a merciful God, and deals mercifully according to each situation.

As mentioned in the Bible, it seems that God's two prophets -- who are to be killed in Jerusalem -- will descend to Hades for 3 days and a half, where they will preach the Gospel of Christ to the people there. Those souls who committed suicide may listen to their message at that time and find hope. Among them, I believe that there must be souls who are justified at God's final judgment and brought to the new Heaven and the new Earth full of happiness and glory.

#### **Question 5**

**I want to believe in Christ. But my grandfather and grandmother were not believers of Christ. So were other ancestors of mine. Where are they now?**

They are now in Hades, which is not the same as Hell. They are now in God's care, in each part of Hades, according to the deeds they committed while they were still alive on earth.

Hades is not the final state, but a temporary condition that will last only until God's final judgment of the world. The Bible says:

"I, the Lord your God, showing **love to a thousand {generations}** of those who love me and keep my commandments." (Exodus 20:5-6)

So if you love God and keep His commandments, then God will show His love "to a thousand generations" of yours. You can think that the "thousand generations" are not only those of the future, but also those of the past, because, if you live now near the end of the world, then you don't have a thousand generations in the future. And the Bible always holds ancestors in high esteem. According to a Biblical interpretation, your ancestors, you and your descendants are all one set of generations in God's mind.

Therefore, the love and grace of God are directed at not only the believer, but also at his/her family, relatives, descendants and ancestors. **If you love God, then His grace reaches your deceased relatives and ancestors, who are now in Hades.** I call this the Gospel for Family Line.

I do not mean that all of them will be instantly saved, but I do believe that many of them, who would otherwise be lost eternally, may be guided to acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior.

For instance, when God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Bible tells that He saved Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his family from the destruction because He "remembered Abraham." (Genesis 19:29) This is an example that God's grace to a righteous man, Abraham, went not only to Abraham, but also to his relatives.

The Bible also tells of Noah's righteousness, without making any claims as to



character of those in his family. But his entire immediate family was saved from the Great Flood.

When God blessed Abraham, God also blessed his son Isaac, as well as his grandson Jacob. When Jacob was blessed, all of his twelve sons, plus his daughters, were also blessed, and the blessing reached all his descendants known as the Israelites.

So God's blessing to a person is not limited to the individual. If you walk with God now, then you shall meet many relatives, descendants and ancestors in the coming kingdom of God.

### **Question 6**

**I am a Christian. I often told the Gospel of Christ to my friend, but the other day he was killed in a car accident before he confessed his faith in the Lord. What happens to him now?**

If he did not believe before he died, then he would be in Hades (Sheol) now. But as discussed above, Hades is temporary, not final.

In Hades, I believe he would remember the Gospel of Christ as he heard from you, for the memories of the things on earth remain in the souls of Hades. In fact, in the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man in Hades remembered his life on earth.

So, I believe your friend in Hades remembers what you told him. Now that he is in God's merciful care, it is likely that he will choose to believe in the Savior.

Thus, your effort of love will not end fruitlessly. He will be grateful for your labors, and the day will come when you will see him again. It is very important that we spread the Gospel regardless of whether or not they believe.

### **Question 7**

**A pastor said, "The Second Chance Theology for the dead is wrong." I asked him, "Then, how can those who have never heard the Gospel be saved?" He said, "I believe that even if a man could not hear the Gospel**

**of Christ, it is important for him to walk in the light (natural revelation, conscience, religion) which was given to him. The rest belongs to God.”  
What do you say about this concept?**

That is one of the typical answers of the denialists of the second chance. They often give such a vague answer. Roman Catholic Church has a similar thought called “**Anonymous Christians.**” It means that even among those who are not called Christians, there are people who get saved by the grace of Christ. According to the “Anonymous Christians” theology (Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner), even the people who have not heard the Gospel of Christ could get saved by walking in the light given to them. However, it contains a misleading idea.

Surely it is important for a man to walk in the light given to him. The Bible says, “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20) This natural revelation is given to all people, and even only with it they could get to know the existence of God.

However, even if walking in the light of the natural revelation, it does not teach them about Christ. Human conscience also does not. Religions other than Christianity do not give them good understanding about Christ. It is our understanding that anyone would not be saved without believing in Christ personally, as the Bible says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name (than Jesus) under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."(Acts 4:12)

Therefore, if we say, “When a man, who has not heard the Gospel of Christ, walks in the light given to him, he will be saved even without faith in Christ,” it is against the teaching of the Bible. It equals to saying, “You don’t need Christ.” It is not Christianity any longer. Even if we could say that the natural revelation, conscience and some truths of religions were originally given by the grace of Christ, the Gospel of Christ must be preached clearly to everyone by living words. People could be saved by person-to-person “fellowship with Christ” (I John 1:3). It is the teaching of the Bible. They must be given the opportunity to hear the Gospel, repent and have faith in Christ when living on earth or staying in Hades.

Only the second chance theology gives a clear explanation on this.

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email: [remnant@mte.biglobe.ne.jp](mailto:remnant@mte.biglobe.ne.jp) (Your email is welcome)

Translation into your country's language is also welcome.

## **Arimasa Kubo**

Arimasa Kubo is a Japanese Christian pastor, Bible teacher, non-fiction writer on science, culture and history, and the president of Remnant Publishing. He is also director of the Bible and Japan Forum, Movement of Evangelizing All Japan, Kobe Peace Institute and Japan-Israel Friendship Association.

He was born at Itami city in Hyogo, Japan, in 1955, and graduated from the Tokyo Bible Seminary in 1982. He had been the chief writer for a Christian evangelistic magazine *Remnant* for 22 years, and served as the pastor of a church in Tokyo for 6 years. He is also involved in a wide range of projects to promote understanding of the Bible, and sometimes appears on television as a commentator.

He is author of a number of books, including the book written in English "*Science Comes Close to the Bible*" (ACW Press), and the books written in Japanese "*Israelites Came to Ancient Japan*," "*Japan-Israel, A Sealed Ancient History 2 - Buddhism & Eastern Christianity Edition*" and "*The World of Scientific Creationism*."

His books have been translated into English, Korean and Chinese, and are widely read. He was also the translator for "*Nihon-Yudaya, Huin no Kodaishi*" (Japan-Israel, A Sealed Ancient History) written by Rabbi Marvin Tokayer, "*Nihon-shoki to Nihon-go no Yudaya Kigen*" (Jewish Origin of Nihon-shoki and Japanese) written by Joseph Eidelberg, and many other books.