

Limbus Patrum

I. What is "Limbus Patrum"?

- A. "In the New Testament, Christ refers by various names and figures to the place or state which Catholic tradition has agreed to call the limbus patrum. In Matthew 8:11, it is spoken of under the figure of a banquet "with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven" (cf. Luke 8:29; 14:15), and in Matthew 25:10 under the figure of a marriage feast to which the prudent virgins are admitted, while in the parable of Lazarus and Dives it is called "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22) and in Christ's words to the penitent thief on Calvary the name paradise is used (Luke 23:43). St. Paul teaches (Ephesians 4:9) that before ascending into Heaven Christ "also descended first into the lower parts of the earth," and St. Peter still more explicitly teaches that "being put to death indeed, in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit," Christ went and "preached to those souls that were in prison, which had been some time incredulous, when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:18-20).

"It is principally on the strength of these Scriptural texts, harmonized with the general doctrine of the Fall and Redemption of mankind, that Catholic tradition has defended the existence of the limbus patrum as a temporary state or place of happiness distinct from Purgatory. As a result of the Fall, Heaven was closed against men. Actual possession of the beatific vision was postponed, even for those already purified from sin, until the Redemption should have been historically completed by Christ's visible ascendancy into Heaven. Consequently, the just who had lived under the Old Dispensation, and who, either at death or after a course of purgatorial discipline, had attained the perfect holiness required for entrance into glory, were obliged to await the coming of the Incarnate Son of God and the full accomplishment of His visible earthly mission. Meanwhile they were "in prison," as St. Peter says; but, as Christ's own words to the penitent thief and in the parable of Lazarus clearly imply, their condition was one of happiness, notwithstanding the postponement of the higher bliss to which they looked forward. And this, substantially, is all that Catholic tradition teaches regarding the limbus patrum." (Limbus Patrum, The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09256a.htm>)

- B. It is a Roman Catholic doctrine which is found the in the Apostles' Creed and other Protestant creeds.

1. "I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell;..." (English Text used in the Mass of the Roman Rite)
2. "...And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell;..." Church of England, Book of Common Prayer)
3. "...And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell...." (Lutheran Church)
4. Many Baptists have also bought into this Catholic heresy.

II. Verses used to support Limbus Patrum.

- A. It is believed by some that people who lived prior to Jesus ascending to heaven did not go to heaven, but rather went to a holding tank which was part of Hell.
 - 1. This area of the netherworld is referred to as "Abraham's Bosom" which it is surmised from **Luk 16:22-25** that it is in the center of the earth near enough to hell so as for people there to converse with those in hell.
 - 2. "Abraham's Bosom" is also said to be the "prison" where Jesus supposedly went during the three days between his burial and resurrection for an evangelistic seminar, which **1Pe 3:19-20** is used to support.
 - i. It is claimed that Jesus was in hell during his entombment (**Act 2:27-31**).
 - ii. This is said to be the "heart of the earth" (**Mat 12:40**) and the "lower parts of the earth" that Jesus descended into (**Eph 4:9**).
 - 3. Based on that, this place is also referred to as "Paradise" since Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in paradise that day (**Luk 23:43**).
 - 4. This is likely done out of pure desperation, the definition of the word and common sense notwithstanding.
- B. It is believed that no person went to heaven prior to the resurrection of Christ and **Joh 3:13** is offered as proof.

III. We have seen what saith the Papish proselytes, but "...what saith the scripture?" (**Rom 4:3**).

- A. How to go about refuting this heresy.
 - 1. Note: verses speaking of people going heaven after the resurrection of Christ such as **2Co 5:8; Phi 1:23; Rev 6:9-10** are not sufficient to refute this position because it is maintained that after the resurrection the righteous went to heaven upon death.
 - 2. To try to refute the position by refuting each point above is like trying to kill a tree by plucking off one leaf at a time, but the most effective method is to destroy the premise which is akin to laying an ax to the root.
 - 3. To refute the position it must be proved that people went to heaven upon death prior to the resurrection of Christ.
- B. The scripture is very clear that the spirits of the righteous have always gone to heaven to be with God upon death and their bodies have gone to the grave.
 - 1. When a person dies, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (**Ecc 12:7**).
 - 2. Upon death man goes to his *long home* (**Ecc 12:5**).
 - i. Home - 4. fig. In various connexions, referring to the grave, or future state: the 'long' or 'last' home.
1535 Coverdale Eccl. xii. 5 Man goeth to his longe home.
 - ii. The Hebrew word that translates "his long" is Strong's #H5769 and it is elsewhere translated in numerous places as *forever, always, perpetual, and everlasting*.
 - iii. When man died in the time before Christ he went to his perpetual and everlasting home in heaven, not to some *temporary* holding place in the center of the earth before going on to heaven.
 - 3. When a man's body dies, the spirit goes UPWARD, as opposed to the spirit of a beast which goes downward to the earth (**Ecc 3:21**).
 - 4. When Elijah left this earth, he "went UP by a whirlwind INTO HEAVEN" (**2Ki 2:11**).
 - 5. Enoch walked with God and God took him (**Gen 5:24**).
 - i. During Enoch's brief 365 years upon this earth he pleased God (**Heb 11:5**).

- ii. Would it make any sense for God to remove a man who walked with him while on earth and send him to "prison"?
 - iii. No, it wouldn't: Enoch was translated by God (**Heb 11:5**).
 - iv. Translate v. - I. 1. a. trans. To bear, convey, or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, transport;
 - b. To carry or convey to heaven without death; also, in later use, said of the death of the righteous.
- 1382 Wyclif Heb. xi. 5 Bi feith Enok is translaticid, that he schulde not se deeth; and he was not founden, for the Lord translaticide him
6. These five points have destroyed the foundation of the papish doctrine of Limbus Patrum.

IV. An examination of the major texts used in support of the doctrine.

A. **1Pe 3:18-20** - Jesus preaching to spirits in prison

- 1. Before the question of what this passage *means* can be addressed, it must first be understood what it *says*.
- 2. It *says* that Christ went (past tense) by the Spirit and preached (past tense) unto the spirits in prison (present tense).
- 3. It *says* that these were men who were disobedient in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing.
- 4. So Christ preached by the Spirit to men who were in prison at the time Peter penned these words who were disobedient in the days of Noah.
- 5. When and how did He preach to them?
 - i. Noah was a preacher of righteousness (**2Pe 2:5**).
 - ii. Preachers preach by the Spirit of God (**Act 1:16; 1Pe 1:12**).
 - iii. Preachers preach through Jesus (**Act 4:2**).
 - iv. The gospel was preached (past tense) unto them that are dead (present tense) (**1Pe 4:6**).
 - v. Jesus preached by the Spirit through Noah, a preacher of righteousness, unto men who were disobedient in those days whose spirits are now (at the time of the writing up till the present) in prison (hell).
- 6. The text says nothing of Jesus going to hell during His entombment and preaching the gospel to spirits there with hopes of them repenting so he could take them to heaven with him.

B. **Luk 16:19-31** - Abraham's Bosom

- 1. Was "Abraham's Bosom" a holding tank in the center of the earth where righteous men went when they died prior to Jesus' resurrection which was close enough to hell that those in each place could converse with each other?
- 2. Once again, what does the text *say*?
- 3. It *says* that Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom when he died and that the rich man was in the flames of hell in torment when he died (v.22-23).
- 4. It *says* the rich man in hell and Abraham who was afar off could converse (v.23-25).
- 5. It *says* there was a great gulf fixed between them which prohibited them from passing from one place to another (v.26).
 - i. Gulf - II. A deep hollow, chasm, abyss.
 - 2. A profound depth (in a river, the ocean); the deep.

- ii. Abyss - 1. The great deep, the primal chaos; the bowels of the earth, the supposed cavity of the lower world; the infernal pit.
2. A bottomless gulf; any unfathomable or apparently unfathomable cavity or void space; a profound gulf, chasm, or void extending beneath.
- 6. If there was any distance at all between Abraham and the rich man, they would not have been able to speak audibly and naturally.
- 7. Since there was a *great gulf* between them, and they were spirits without their bodies (being before the resurrection), they therefore must have been able to see each other and speak to one another by a spiritual means.
- 8. Therefore, since they were speaking by spiritual means and there was a great gulf (a deep bottomless chasm and abyss) between them, it is altogether reasonable that Abraham was in heaven and the rich man was in hell, which agrees with the proof texts that stated that the righteous went to heaven upon death prior to the resurrection of Christ.

C. Act 2:27-31 - Jesus not being left in hell

- 1. Jesus was in hell on the cross.
- 2. Jesus experienced everything that hell represents when he hung on the cross: damnation, torment, burning, darkness, and separation from God.
 - i. **Damnation** - (**Mat 23:33 c/w Gal 3:13**)
 - a. Damnation - 1. The action of condemning, or fact of being condemned (by judicial sentence, etc.); condemnation.
 - b. Curse *n.* - 1. a. An utterance consigning, or supposed or intended to consign, (a person or thing) to spiritual and temporal evil, the vengeance of the deity, the blasting of malignant fate, etc. It may be uttered by the deity, or by persons supposed to speak in his name, or to be listened to by him.
 - ii. **Torment** - (**Luk 16:23 c/w Luk 22:44 c/w Isa 53:10-11**)
 - a. Torment *n.* - A state of great suffering, bodily or mental; agony; severe pain felt or endured.
 - b. Grief *n.* - 1. Hardship, suffering; a kind, or cause, of hardship or suffering.
 - c. Travail *n.* - 1. Bodily or mental labour or toil, especially of a painful or oppressive nature; exertion; trouble; hardship; suffering.
 - iii. **Burning, intense heat** - (**Luk 16:24; Mar 9:43; Jud 1:7 c/w Psa 22:14**).
 - iv. **Darkness** - (**2Pe 2:4 c/w Mat 27:45**)
 - v. **Separation from God** (**Mat 25:41 c/w Mar 15:34**).

D. Mat 12:40; Eph 4:9 - Jesus descending into the lower parts / heart of the earth

- 1. Jesus was buried in a tomb for three days (**1Co 15:4 c/w Mat 27:58-60**).
- 2. This was the "heart of the earth" and the "lower parts of the earth" that Jesus descended into (**Mat 12:40; Eph 4:9**).
- 3. The "lower parts of the earth" need not refer to the center of the earth (**Psa 139:13-15**).

E. Luk 23:43 - Paradise

1. Since Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be in paradise with Him that day (Luk 23:43) and it is believed that Jesus went to prison in the center of the earth during His entombment, therefore the prison in the center of the earth must be called paradise.
2. See how a faulty premise reasoned out leads to a faulty and self-contradictory conclusion?
3. Any sane person should know that prison is not paradise.
4. **Paradise** - 1. a. The garden of Eden. Also called earthly (†terrenal, terrene, terrestre) paradise, to distinguish it from the heavenly paradise.
 2. a. Heaven, the abode of God and his angels and the final abode of the righteous.
[c1000 Ags. Gosp. Luke xxiii. 43 To-dæ¼ þu bist mid me on paradiso [Hatton on paradise; Gr. m sè paqade-r{, Vulg. in paradiso; Wyclif in paradys, Tind. in paradise].]
5. The word Paradise is only used three times in the entire Bible (**Luk 23:43; 2Co 12:4; Rev 2:7**).
 - i. 2Co 12:4 is clearly referring to heaven c/w (**2Co 12:2**).
 - ii. Rev 2:7 is clearly referring to heaven where the throne of God and the Lamb are c/w (**Rev 22:1-3**).
6. It is terrible hermeneutics at best, and intellectual dishonesty at worst, to assign a meaning to a word that is completely opposite of the dictionary definition and of all the other usages of the word in scripture.

F. **Joh 3:13** - No man ascending into heaven

1. Was Jesus here stating that no man at that time had gone to heaven when he died?
2. The context must be understood before privately interpreting verse 13 to fit a preconceived idea.
 - i. Verse 13 was part of a discourse that Jesus had with Nicodemus which started with him saying to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God..." (**Joh 3:2**).
 - ii. Jesus then explains the new birth to Nicodemus (vv. 3-8).
 - iii. Jesus said that he was testifying of what he knew and had seen (**Joh 3:11 c/w Joh 3:31-34**).
 - iv. Jesus was the only prophet that had seen God and declared Him (**Joh 1:18**).
 - v. Other prophets spoke by inspiration of God, but none had ascended into heaven (nor could they) and got the revelation personally from God and came back down (**Joh 3:13 c/w Deu 30:12**).
3. When read in context, it is clear that Jesus was not speaking of where men's souls went when they died, but rather the unique origin of the revelation that He was declaring.