

Hell



The Bible Hell - Sheol, Hades

First, it should be noted that "hell" is a Scriptural word and, as such, must be fully explained. Secondly, it also should be noted that the traditional explanation of hell as a place of eternal torment is NOT Scriptural. It was borrowed from pagan religions and is a concept of blasphemy toward God and of extreme distaste to anyone of reason and sensibilities, religious or atheist.

It should be clear to all, and particularly to those who worship a god of any merit, that no crime deserves a punishment of eternal suffering and torment. Those familiar with church history know that the teaching of eternal torment was found useful to apostate churchianity as a tool to keep parishoners "in line." In the centuries of dark-age superstitions, it was not too difficult to convince the masses of uneducated folk that all sorts of "mysteries," magic, and absurdities somehow were true.

The Great God of the Bible, on the other hand, was furious with Israel who caused very temporary suffering to their children whom they offered as burnt offerings. God called this an abomination which never entered His heart or mind. (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:9, 10; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35)

Among other things, the doctrine of a hell of eternal torment makes God look weak. According to those who believe the doctrine, God loses more humans than He saves—and loses them to the worst of all miseries. We cannot support this concept morally or Scripturally. According to the Scriptures, we have no immortal

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souls which can go anywhere, thus negating the very need for a hell of torment. According to the Bible, the punishment for sin is death—extinction, NOT a continuance in misery. (See **DEATH** and **IMMORTALITY** and **SOUL**.) As Ecclesiastes 9:5 reports the matter, "The living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything." Psalm 146:4 reports of man, "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Psalm 6:5 adds, "In death there is no remembrance of thee." See also Job 3:11-19. Ecclesiastes 9:10 is especially helpful because it actually uses the word "hell," though it is not obvious to most readers because translators used the word "grave" instead. But in the Hebrew it is the identical word translated "hell" elsewhere. It reads: "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave (hell) whither thou goest."

This brings us to a consideration of the word itself. In Hebrew it is SHEOL; in Greek it is HADES. They are exact equivalents. In the Hebrew Scriptures (the "Old Testament"), SHEOL is translated "hell" 31 times, "grave" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times in the King James translation. It is as if the translators figured that they ought to say "hell" if bad people were involved, "grave" if good people were involved, and "pit" when they weren't quite certain. But the fact is, EVERYONE was going there! This helps us immeasurably in understanding what the word REALLY MEANS. It means the condition of temporary oblivion when a man dies. It is extinction until the resurrection. It is a simple, Scriptural, rational definition.

The word never occurs until it is used by Jacob in Genesis 37:35 where he says he will go there where (as he thought) his son, Joseph, was. These were good men; but Jacob, that great servant of the true God, thought his good son was already in sheol, and he would join him there soon. It is extremely revealing that this statement by Jacob was made more than 2000 years after Adam. According to Biblical chronology, mankind has been on earth now only a little over six-thousand years. Therefore, "hell" (sheol) WAS NEVER MENTIONED by anyone until more than one-third of man's history was past! What an oversight by God if the traditional hell were the destiny of most of the race!

In the Greek Scriptures (the "New Testament"), three different Greek words are translated "hell." This further adds to the confusion. The word GEHENNA often is translated "hell fire." Gehenna actually a Hebrew word. It was the name of the valley outside the walls of Jerusalem which functioned as the city dump. In it fires were constantly consuming the trash and worms were helping to decompose matter which was not burned. (Mark 9:48)

Jesus made frequent symbolic use of the term Gehenna but NEVER linked it to the word HADES. (E.g., Luke 12:5.) Jesus was introducing a new concept. He wanted to teach that eventually some of mankind would become so incorrigible that they would not profit from the awakening out of HADES that all would experience. These people would eventually end up in the garbage dump of God's plan—total and eternal extinction. These are mentioned in Acts 3:21-23, in Jesus' parable of the

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Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-46), and in Revelation 20:14, 15 where their punishment is called "second death" because "hell" or hades was the first death.

It is important to note that hell (hades) is TEMPORARY. It delivers up the dead which are in it. (Revelation 20:13) It itself, is DESTROYED in second death. (Revelation 20:14) Second death, like Gehenna, is symbolized as "a lake of fire" because fire is the most destructive force man knows. It totally consumes and makes non-existent whatever it burns. This is why Jesus used the fires of Gehenna to symbolize this eternal extinction of second death. By the way, in Revelation 20:14 it is interesting to note a distinction. BOTH death and hell are cast into second death--BOTH will be destroyed. Hell represents those who had already died, the GRAVE condition. DEATH represents those who are yet walking around but have not yet received eternal life—the DYING condition. Both conditions will be exterminated.

A rare word translated "hell" only once is TARTAROO. The Apostle Peter uses it in II Peter 2:4 to explain how the fallen angels are restricted to the earth's atmosphere—banished from heaven. (See article on **GHOSTS**, etc.) Peter borrowed this word from Greek mythology which probably refers historically to the same event. It has nothing to do with hell in any sense.

Many have been troubled by the passage in Luke 16:19-31, the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus. This is part of a series of parables which Jesus gave to show that Israel's exclusive relationship with God was about to pass away so that Gentiles would have an opportunity to become a part of the promised "seed of Abraham."

In this parable the rich man represents the nation of Israel which was about to lose its polity—prophetically to enter a "pit wherein is no water." (Zechariah 9:11) Lazarus represents the Gentiles who, up until this point, could only know God by receiving the crumbs of knowledge which fell from the rich man's table. (See Matthew 15:21-28.) As the Gospel Age was about to begin, Jesus was teaching that the Gentiles would now have the honor of being a part of the promised seed of Abraham. (Galatians 3:7-9, 28, 29; Romans 11:7-25)

In this parable (Luke 16:19-31) we see Israel's grief in not understanding why they had been cast off and why God seemed now to be working with the heathen (16:23). We see the rich man (Israel), dead to its former favor, tormented by its own national destruction (flame), wanting some comforting truth—"water" (16:24). But God explains that Israel had its opportunity, and it was time to seek some faithful from among the Gentiles (16:25). Israel's loss was because they could not accept Messiah, thus creating a "great gulf" between them and God (16:26). God pointed out that Israel had failed to hear their own prophets (16:29) and even to recognize the incredible sign when Jesus rose from the dead (16:31).

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Thus this parable uses "hell" to represent the oblivion of the old Kingdom of Israel—a nation buried in the Diaspora until it would again rise in the 20th Century to be a part of God's plans and purposes. (See **ISRAEL**.)

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This subject is not complex, but it is large and important. It is treated in complete detail in a booklet entitled, "What Say the Scriptures Concerning Hell?" and in Volume 5 of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES—both available from this website. See **Available Literature**.