

Summer 2013 Newsletter
Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia

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“Hell” of the Dark Ages

(written in 1300 A.D.
by the imperfect man, Dante)



The Bible “Hell” [sheol]

(written starting in 4128 B.C. in the Bible,
by God’s holy prophets)

The Truth about “Hell”

“The Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” Isaiah 29:13

ONE of the widespread blights upon religious thinking in the world today is fear. Fear darkens the mind and hinders one from attaining a true knowledge of the God of love revealed to us in the Bible. Almost universally fear is employed by the proponents of religion as a means of making converts and as a motive for belief and righteous living. Our text emphasizes that this is wrong, that fear toward God is induced by the precepts of men, and by those who, in their hearts, come far short of really knowing the true God of the Bible, and of worshiping him in spirit and in truth.

One of the traditions of men which has contributed greatly to this unholy fear in the professed Christian world is the false teaching that the divine penalty for sin is eternal torture, and that those who die without accepting Christ are doomed to this fiery hell of torment, where they will have to suffer excruciating pain throughout the endless ages of eternity. Many people have been taught this tradition of a fiery hell of torment.

Let us examine the Word of God in order to determine what it really teaches concerning the divine penalty for sin. The proper place to begin this examination is with the Book of Genesis, with its record of the creation, transgression, and fall of man. We can rest assured that whatever God there stated to be the penalty for transgressing his law has never been changed, for God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Malachi 3:6).

The first mention we have in the Bible of punishment for sin is in Genesis 2:16,17 “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The marginal translation reads, “dying thou shalt die,” meaning that if Adam disobeyed he would at once begin to die, and finally succumb and return to the dust from which he was taken.

Here the Lord explained very clearly what the penalty for sin would be, and there seems no good reason for

misunderstanding his words. But they have been misunderstood, and grossly false teachings have been based upon them. Death, it is claimed, does not mean death as we know it, but separation from God in a hell of fire and torment. By attaching this false meaning to the word death, the entire testimony of the Bible on this subject becomes confused and distorted.

But, thank God, this is not the teaching of the Bible! The Bible does teach that there is a hell; but the hell of the Bible is not eternal torture, but the state of death, so that the united testimony of the entire Bible is that "the wages of sin is death."—Romans 6:23

Hell in the Old Testament

Original manuscripts of the Old Testament were written in the Hebrew, and in the Old Testament there is only one Hebrew word which is translated "hell." This is the word *sheol*. This word "*sheol*" appears 65 times in the Old Testament, 31 times it is translated as the word "hell", 31 times it is translated "grave", and 3 times it is translated "pit". In the Revised Version it is left untranslated.

How does the Bible define this Hebrew word *sheol*? Ecclesiastes 9:10 reads, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [*sheol*] whither thou goest." Here are the words of the wisest man mentioned in the Old Testament, one who also wrote under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, and he informs us that there is "no work, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in *sheol*." If language has any meaning at all, this explanation means that *sheol*, the only hell of the Old Testament, is a state of complete unconsciousness.

The Prophet Job evidently understood the matter in the same way, for when he was suffering physical pain from head to foot, and being mentally tortured by his would-be comforters, who actually were accusing him falsely of gross sin, he asked God to let him die and go to *sheol* where he could be at rest. Job said to God, "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave [*sheol*], that thou wouldest keep me in secret, until thy wrath be past..."—Job 14:13

Here in the Bible we find a righteous servant of God asking that he be allowed to die and go to the Bible hell (*sheol*) in order to escape God's wrath. How terribly the traditions of men have distorted the truth of the Word of God!

The "wrath" of God mentioned here by Job is the penalty of death which rests upon the whole world of mankind. Incident to the carrying out of this penalty there is much suffering, and Job wanted to fall asleep in death until the time came in the plan of God when the penalty would be

removed. He knew that in "*sheol*," the Bible hell, there would be no pain.

The Hebrew word *sheol* is again used in Psalm 16:10. This is a prophecy of the death and resurrection of Jesus, in which we are assured that Jesus' soul would not be left in hell, in *sheol*. On the Day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter quoted this prophecy (Acts 3:25-31), and in his quotation used the Greek word *hades* to translate the Hebrew word *sheol*. From this we know that it has the same meaning as *sheol*. The Greek word *hades* is the one most frequently translated as the English word hell in the New Testament.

It is this word that is used in Revelation 1:18, where Jesus informs us that he has "the keys of hell [*hades*]". It is also the Greek word used by Jesus when he spoke of "the gates of hell [*hades*]" which would not prevail against the church. (Matthew 16:18) *Hades* is also the Greek word used in Revelation 20: 13, where we are informed that "hell [*hades*]" will give up its dead. In verse 14 of this same chapter we are assured that "hell [*hades*]" is to be destroyed, that it will be cast into "the lake of fire ... the second death." Tradition would have us believe that the lake of fire is hell, but according to this text, hell is destroyed in the "lake of fire," fire being used here to symbolize destruction.

The Rich Man in Hell

In Luke 16:19-31 we have Jesus' Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. We are told that the rich man died, and that in "in hell [*hades*]" he lift up his eyes, being in torments..." The advocates of the 'eternal torment in hell' tradition have seized upon this verse to prove their point. They insist that this is not a parable, but a literal statement of facts. However, the only thing in the parable they actually believe is literal is the word "torment."

The 'eternal torment in hell' tradition is associated with the belief that the righteous go to heaven when they die and the wicked go to hell. But this is not taught in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. It does not say that the rich man was wicked. No advocate of the 'eternal torment in hell' tradition believes that a person will be tormented forever simply because he was rich when he died, yet the parable says nothing more about this "certain rich man" than that he fared sumptuously every day and allowed beggars to eat the crumbs which fell from his table.

Nor does the parable teach that the righteous go to heaven when they die. The beggar is not said to be righteous. No advocate of 'eternal torment in hell' believes that being a beggar qualifies one for an eternity of bliss in heaven.

The parable does not say that the beggar went to heaven. Instead, it declares that he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. We doubt if there has ever been an advocate of the 'eternal torment in hell' theory who believed that at death a person is carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. To our knowledge, no one believes this. Besides, it could not be true, for Abraham's bosom decayed and returned to the dust thousands of years ago.

We will not here discuss the meaning of all the details of this wonderful parable, referring the reader instead to the booklet, **The Truth About Hell**. Briefly we understand that the rich man of this parable is symbolic of the Jewish nation, the riches of which consisted of the favors and blessings of God. The beggar, we understand, symbolized the Gentiles, who up until the time of Jesus did not enjoy the favor of God, although many individual Gentiles were glad to partake of some of the "crumbs" of favor that fell from the rich man's "table."

"The Gift of God"

The Apostle Paul wrote that "the wages of sin is death," not torment. To this he added, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Life and death are the two alternatives presented to us in the Word of God, not bliss in heaven and torment in hell. God warned Adam that death would be the penalty for disobedience, so when he disobeyed he was sentenced to death. This plunged the whole race into death, because all have been born in a dying condition. "By man came death," wrote Paul, and "by man came also the resurrection of the dead." To this Paul added, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Corinthians 15:21,22

The receiving of life through Christ will be by means of a resurrection of the dead. Believers in this age receive life by faith, but it will be in the resurrection that faith will be rewarded with actual life—immortality for those who prove to be faithful followers of the Master in this present Gospel age. These will live and reign with Christ and, during the thousand years of his kingdom, will be associated with him in dispensing the blessings of life to "all families of the earth."—Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:27-29

The general resurrection of all the dead is described in Revelation 20:13 as a returning from **hell [hades]**. When Jesus died as the world's Redeemer he purchased, as it were, the "keys of hell," and he will use these "keys" to set death's captives free. After his resurrection Jesus said, "I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen: and have the keys of **hell [hades]** and of death."—Revelation 1:18

Jesus told Peter that the "gates of **hell [hades]**" would not prevail against the church. (Matthew 16:18) Paul explains that the "church"—from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning called out ones—is composed of those who are baptized into Christ, and who accept his headship over them. In Galatians 3:27-29 these are referred to as being "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The promise to Abraham was that his "seed" would bless all the families, or nations, of the earth.—Genesis 12:3; 22:18

But all the families of the earth are either dead or dying. These can be blessed with life only by being raised from the dead, and Jesus assured us that this would be accomplished, that the "gates of hell" would not forever hold death's prisoners, that Jesus, who has the "keys," together with his true followers, will throw open the "gates." It will be then that **hell** will give up its dead.

Do any of your friends or relatives fear the supposed torments of hell? Tell them to fear not; **because hell is not a place of torment, but the state of the dead**, and we are rapidly approaching the hour when God's due time will have arrived to begin the restoration of all the dead to life upon the earth. The beginning of this glad time of resurrection is nigh at hand. Let this be our hope and our strength in this time when man's world is falling down around him. God has his own world, a new world, a world to come "wherein dwelleth righteousness." – II Peter 3:13 And in that world we will meet our loved ones who have died and will forever rejoice in God's loving-kindness in sending his Son to be our Redeemer and Savior.

Send in your request for a copy of the booklet **The Truth about Hell**. It is free and without any obligation.

Please send me the following booklet
FREE for the asking:

The Truth about Hell

Mail you request to:

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