

What the Bible really says about

Hell

by John Clark, and “the boys”

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ISBN-13: 978-1-934-78200-2

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Burlington, NC 27216-0099

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all wrongs repented of and forgiven

This book is dedicated, first, to those faithful saints of God who lived their lives so that they did not end up in Hell.

I thank them for their happy, holy examples.

Secondly, the book is dedicated to those who are searching for answers to the most important issues of life, and who want to know what is true about invisible things.

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INTRODUCTION

“The boys” and I had not long begun our study of early American history when we read the diary of Mary Rowlandson. She was a young frontier wife and mother taken captive from her Lancaster, Massachusetts home and held for ransom by Indians. Her devotion to God during the ensuing months and her prodigious knowledge of the Scriptures impressed us. And our admiration of her deepened as we read of her humble repentance for relatively minor offences of her former life (such as pipe smoking and ingratitude for friends and the ordinary comforts of home) and of how sincerely she dedicated herself anew to God.

Mary was an exceptionally observant and perceptive young woman. Her diary, written after she was ransomed by her husband from the Indians, includes insightful and detailed descriptions of the Indians’ way of life. One night, she recorded how her captors danced wildly in the camp:

“There was [near] by a vacant house (deserted by the English before, for fear of the Indians). I asked them whether I might not lodge in the house that night, to which they answered, "What, will you love English men still?" This was the dolefullest night that ever my eyes saw. Oh the roaring, and singing and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell.”

As the boys and I were reading that section of Mary's diary, we fell into a discussion of how people in our culture typically imagine Hell. I pointed out to this small group of homeschoolers that, as a whole, Western society's concept of Hell from the time of the Middle Ages actually has its roots more in Christian myth than in biblical truth. It is still true, for example, that when provoked by doctrines that displease them, many Christians contemptuously scorn those teachings as "doctrines from Hell", or they may respond to an especially atrocious deed as having been inspired by "demons from Hell". And yet, the Bible clearly states that the Devil and his angels came to earth from heaven, not from Hell (Isa. 14:12; Rev. 12:7-12).

The notion that anything on earth is from Hell is completely non-biblical. That idea originated in the mythology of ancient Classical culture and was infused into the Western psyche by Christian theology and poems, such as Dante Alighieri's masterful work, *The Divine Comedy*.

When asked if they would like to read Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the boys eagerly accepted the offer. Afterward, however, I had second thoughts. How could I justify exposing their impressionable young spirits to such a powerful, godless myth-maker as Dante before they were established in the truth revealed in the Scriptures? I could not. I was loathe to renege on my offer to read Dante with them, but I also knew that I could not foist on them Dante's powerful, mythological vision of the underworld (and heaven) without first making certain that they possessed a steady plumb line by which to judge his work. They had to have a sure knowledge of what the Bible reveals about the places Dante would pretend to take them. That was the genesis of this study, and as it progressed, it proved to be more beneficial to us all than I expected; so, with good

confidence in the benefit of the enterprise, we determined to pass along to you what we learned.

It seems odd that the study of Hell and the other gruesome places of spiritual damnation could inspire a gentle and deep loving care for others, and yet, that is what we experienced. How could such a thing be? Holy love is perceived generally to be such a tender thing, and, by contrast, Hell is a place where tenderness can only be remembered, never experienced. Nevertheless, this study produced in us a sense of the love and goodness of God that is always directed toward men. In truth, and to our happy surprise, this work proved to be more a story of God than of Hell.

This study had its roots in the love of God and a desire to attain to the knowledge of His truth, and we found that as we pursued it, the truth bore for us a fuller measure of the sweet, peaceful fruit of love and hope for those who will read what we have written.

This book, dear Reader, is humbly offered to you in the love of Christ, as a service to your faith, which love always produces an earnest hope for others' eternal blessing and peace.

The boys and I greet you and wish for you only the best in Christ Jesus, the Son of God and only Savior of mankind.

John Clark, and "the boys":

Elijah Clark, Aaron Nelson, Josiah Payne.

OUR PURPOSE

Our objective in this study was to find out what the Bible really says about the abode of the dead so that we can separate fact from fiction. No tradition, no belief, no opinion was immune from critical examination in the light of what we would find in the Bible.

To ancient people, including those of the Bible, the abode of the dead seems not to have been quite the place that modern men imagine it to be. For example, in our culture, a visit from a ghost is generally held to be a “spooky” experience. In the literature available from the ancient world, however, we do not typically find that to be the case. The ghost (or “shade”) of a dead person returning to the land of the living was not necessarily frightful; it was merely a visit from a person who dwelt in another realm and in a different form. The reason the witch of En-dor screamed when she saw the deceased prophet Samuel coming toward her was not that she was afraid of ghosts. She screamed because the appearing of Samuel revealed the identity of King Saul who was there with her, and who had decreed that all such witches be put to death (1Sam. 28:9). It was a fear of the living, not the dead, that made her scream.

Additionally, it seems obvious that although most ancient people did not understand Hell to be a fiery place of torment, they still did not view life in Hell as preferable to life on earth. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, when the Greek hero Odysseus made his famous visit to Hades, his former comrade-in-arms, Achilles,

told him, “*I’d rather be a day-laborer on earth working for a man of little property, than lord of all the hosts of the dead*” (*Od. 11:489-491*).¹

Achilles had that attitude not because he was being tormented in eternal flames of damnation; he simply preferred to be among the living rather than among the dead. For Abraham, no mythological character but a man who had been in Hell over a thousand years when Homer composed the *Odyssey*, the words of Jesus in John 8:56 show that Achilles’ attitude toward life in Hell was a fairly accurate reflection of Abraham’s.

It should be added here that in the Old Testament, the only word translated as “Hell” is the Hebrew word *Sheol*. So, in this booklet, every reference to “Hell” is from the word *Sheol* if our quote is from an Old Testament book. For the most part, I will use *Sheol* instead of “Hell” when quoting those verses.

There are verses in the Old Testament which associate God’s fiery wrath with punishment in Hell, so we cannot say that righteous men and women had no clues as to what lay beyond the grave. But all those verses lack the “plainness of speech” that we find in Jesus’ parable of the evil rich man in Luke 16. Still, even with that lack of clear information, no person in the ancient world, Jew or Gentile, desired to go to the place of the dead, for it was believed by all to be an unhappy place. The Psalmist is typical in his feeling about it: “*The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of Sheol got hold upon me*” (Ps. 116:3; cp. 2Sam. 22:6 and Ps. 86:13).

Of course, there were exceptions. One exception to the rule of ancient characters not desiring to go to Hell was Job, who begged God to send him to *Sheol* so that he could escape his earthly agonies (Job 14:13). How horrible must Job’s suffering have been for him to plead with God to send him to the place to which almost all the living dreaded to go!

The attitudes of godly men and women toward the place of the dead serve as a beacon for all who are pursuing the truth about life after death. We followed the light of that beacon wherever it took us, and where it eventually took us was to a better understanding of much more than Hell, for we gained in our journey a far deeper appreciation for both the love and the fear of our God.

Words

There are several Old Testament words translated, with varying frequency, as “the Pit” when referring to the place of the dead. We will examine those words carefully. In the New Testament books, there are three different words translated (or mistranslated) as “Hell”, and we will discuss all three of those words in depth as well.

Finally, I want to mention that in the book of Acts, the author, Luke, tells us that during Peter’s famous sermon in chapter 2, that apostle quoted David, from Psalm 16:10. Now, Peter would not have even thought to speak Greek to this multitude of Jews in Jerusalem. Both Peter and David, and not least of all the multitude gathered in Jerusalem from many nations, spoke a common language – Hebrew. Therefore, when Peter quoted David’s Psalm, he used the same Hebrew word for Hell that David and those thousands of Jews gathered for Pentecost used: *Sheol*. But Luke translated Peter’s Hebrew into a language his readers could understand; that is, Greek. And when translating Peter and David’s *Sheol*, Luke used the Greek word *Hades*.

Luke’s choice of *Hades* in translation reveals that the sophisticated physician Luke understood the *Hades* of the Greeks to be equivalent to the *Sheol* of the Hebrews. This knowledge was crucial for us when we studied the words of Jesus concerning the places of the dead.

WHERE IS HELL?

Jacob, Hannah, David, Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and other godly and wise people of the ancient world referred to Hell as being “down” from the surface of the earth. God Himself did the same in Numbers 16:30, as did the Son of God, both before his first advent (Ps. 30:3) and while he was here among us (Mt. 11:23). Jesus told his disciples, in Matthew 12:40, that he would go down for three days into “*the heart of the earth*”, and his doing so fulfilled the prophecy that he would descend into Hell (Ps. 16:10). It was also revealed to Paul that before Jesus ascended into heaven, he “*descended into the lower parts of the earth*” (Eph. 4:9-10).

As might be expected, in those Old Testament scriptures where Hell is referred to as “the Pit”, it is also said to be “down” from the earth’s surface (Ps. 30:3; 88:4; 143:7; Prov. 1:12; Ezek. 32:30). Common sense dictates, when David speaks of the Pit being dug for the wicked (Ps. 94:13), that the digging was in a downward direction. The Pit is repeatedly said by Ezekiel to be “*in the lower parts of the earth*” (26:20; 31:14-18; 32:18), and David even mentions “*the lowest Pit*” (Ps. 88:6), suggesting that there are levels within the Pit – a topic which we will examine.

So, the answer to the question, “Where is Hell?” is that Hell is “down”; that is, underneath the earth’s surface, somewhere in the heart of the earth.



WHO IS IN CHARGE OF HELL?

All the biblical evidence points to the conclusion that God is in complete control of Hell. For a start, Solomon said, “*Sheol and Destruction lie open before the LORD*” (Prov. 15:11), and Job said, “*Sheol is naked before Him*” (Job 26:6). Reason tells us that if Hell is “open and naked” before God, then He knows everything that happens there and knows everyone who is in it, and that implies control. But in 1 Samuel 2:6, Hannah settled the issue when she said, “*The LORD kills, and makes alive. He brings down to Sheol and brings up.*” Later in Israel’s history, David and Ezekiel were among those who agreed with Hannah that God is the one who casts people down into Hell (Ps. 55:23; Ezek. 31:16).

David made it plain, as Job and Solomon did, that if anyone thinks he can hide from God in Hell, he is badly mistaken. He wrote in Psalm 139:8, “*If I ascend up into Heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there.*” The Lord Himself said of certain wicked people, “*If they dig down to Sheol, from there my hand will take them; if they climb up to Heaven, from there I will bring them down*” (Amos 9:2). And in the last book of the Bible, Jesus declared conclusively, “*I hold the keys of Death and of Hell*” (Rev. 1:18). One last bit of biblical information showing that God’s power over Hell is absolute is found in Hosea 13:14. There, God promised that at some time in the future, He will utterly destroy that awful place.

Exactly how God will accomplish this mighty feat is revealed only near the end of Revelation.

Surprisingly, the Scriptures do not paint a picture of Satan as having anything to do with Hell. In fact, virtually all of the evidence shows that he will never even go there². According to Satan's own words to God (Job 1:7; 2:2), he is "*roaming through the earth and walking around on it.*" If the Devil was in Hell, there would be no point in the apostle's warning, "*Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, is walking about, seeking whom he may devour*" (1Pet. 5:8). The Bible is consistent in maintaining that when the Devil was cast out of Heaven, he was cast onto the earth, not into Hell (Rev. 12:7-12), and there is no indication that he has dwelt anywhere else but on earth since the time he was cast out of God's presence. Moreover, at the close of this age, Satan will still not be cast into Hell but will be cast directly into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10), which is not Hell but a place into which Hell itself will ultimately be cast (Rev. 20:14). This is how God will fulfill His promise to destroy Hell; He will cast it into the Lake of Fire.³

So, the answer to our question, "Who is in charge of Hell?", is that God alone is in charge.



WHO GOES DOWN INTO HELL?

First, we find in the Bible the obvious fact that people have to die in order to go to Hell. Living people do not go there. This has been the case from the very beginning, apparently, for God revealed through Ezekiel that people from ancient times were in Hell (26:20). This requirement of death in order to descend into Hell is shown in Revelation 6:8, where Hell is described as *following* death, not preceding it. It is not surprising to find David poetically describing dead men's bones, scattered around a grave, as lying at the mouth of Hell (Ps. 141:7). So, the biblical evidence leads us to conclude that no living person can enter into Hell by his own will, cunning, or power; God must first end a person's earthly life and then choose to send that soul into Hell. This biblical truth proves that Homer's story of the hero Odysseus briefly visiting Hell while he was still alive is not true; it is a myth.

That having been said, the only way to completely answer the question, "Who goes down into Hell?", is to divide the answer into two periods of time: the time before Jesus ascended into Heaven to offer himself to God for our sins, and afterwards.

PARADISE AND TORMENT

As strange as it may first sound, the Scriptures undeniably maintain that until the New Testament began in Acts 2:4, the righteous descended into Hell when they died. In Genesis 37:35, Jacob said, "*I will go down into Sheol unto my son*

mourning.” This shows that when Jacob thought his son Joseph was dead, Jacob assumed that (1) Joseph had gone down into Hell and (2) that he would join Joseph in Hell when he died. Later in Israel’s history, the ailing King Hezekiah wept and cried out, “*I shall go to the gates of Sheol*” (Isa. 38:10). In 1Samuel 28:14-15, God brought the righteous prophet Samuel up out of Hell to rebuke the backslidden King Saul and to tell him that he would be killed the next day and then join him in Hell. Lastly, in Psalm 16:10, Christ spoke through David and declared that God would not leave his soul in Hell (cp. Ps. 18:5-19; Ps. 30:3). This indicates that although Jesus was sinless, he too went down into Hell when he died.⁴ Such verses make it convincingly clear that the righteous who lived before the time of Jesus went down into Hell at the moment of their death.

As for the wicked of that same period, Psalm 9:17 says bluntly, “*The wicked shall be turned into Sheol and all the nations that forget God.*” David warned his children that immorality would take them into the depths of Hell (Pro. 5:3-5; 7:27; 9:18). And Job said, in Job 24:19, “*Drought and heat consume the snow waters; so doth Sheol those who have sinned.*”

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus told the story of two men: one, a destitute, righteous beggar, and the other, a wealthy, wicked man. After these two men died, they both found themselves in Hell. This story from Jesus confirms the Old Testament information concerning the destination of the righteous and the unrighteous after death; namely, they all went down into Hell when they died. But more than that, Jesus’ story reveals that at that time, Hell was divided into at least two parts: Paradise, the place of comfort for the righteous dead, and Torment, the place of punishment for the wicked. Moreover, in his story Jesus also reveals that there, in the heart of the earth, the righteous and the

wicked could see and talk to each other, although they were permanently separated by an uncrossable, wide gulf.

AFTER JESUS ASCENDED

So, part of our question, “Who goes into Hell?” has been answered, for before the New Testament was instituted, all souls were taken into Hell when they died, both the righteous and the unrighteous. The righteous were carried by the angels (Lk. 16:22) into the Paradise portion of Hell, and the wicked were cast, also by God’s angels (Mt. 13:41-42; 49-50), into the portion of Hell called Torment. However, what we find after Jesus instituted the New Testament is that at the moment of death, evildoers are still cast into Hell, but the upright are taken into the presence of the Lord.

In the ages before the New Testament, as the righteous were dying, they would say, “I am going to be with my fathers” (Gen. 15:15). No dying righteous person who lived before the New Testament ever said on his deathbed, “I am going to be with the Lord.” It is only in the New Testament writings that we begin to read statements such as, “*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord*” (2Cor. 5:8, paraphrased). This is a momentous change for New Testament saints. And this change concerning where saints go when they die indicates that at some point in salvation history, the Paradise portion of Hell was removed from underneath the earth and transferred to Heaven, “*where Christ sits at the right hand of God.*” But when did that transfer take place?

It is only Jesus’ ascension into heaven after his resurrection from the dead that satisfactorily explains why the Old Testament’s description of Hell as a place inhabited by both righteous and unrighteous souls does not carry over into the New Testament. Jesus must have transferred Paradise into Heaven, and of course, along with it, he must have transferred

the righteous who were there. This transfer of Paradise seems to be what Paul was alluding to when he said that when Jesus ascended on high, he “*led captivity captive*” (Eph. 4:8). Paul’s words imply that before Jesus came, righteous men and women in Paradise, though “comforted” by God (Lk. 16:25), felt some sense of being in captivity. And that would explain why Abraham (and others like him in Hell) were so very happy to see the day of God’s Messiah come (Jn. 8:56). Jesus said, “*Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.*”

This rejoicing on Abraham’s part implies that Abraham sensed, at least, that part of Jesus’ mission was to deliver him from the “prison” of having to look continually upon the agony of multitudes of damned people and to hear their useless cries for help, some of whom he would have known personally, including, no doubt, some of his own relatives. The New Testament is very clear in teaching that Jesus paid the price for the washing away of all sins (if the sinners repent), both those sins committed before he came to earth and those committed afterward. In Paul’s discourse on the Jews’ need of a Savior, though they had the Law, Paul said that Jesus’ sacrifice brought about “*remission of sins that are past*” (Rom. 3:25), and the author of Hebrews declares that Jesus’ death and sacrifice brought about “*redemption of transgressions that were under the first testament*” (9:15).

God certainly forgave transgressions under the Law, as well as transgressions committed before the Law was given, but the New Testament teaches us that every instance of mercy that God ever showed to repentant men before Jesus came was shown to them only on the condition of his coming.⁵ The New Testament reveals to us that everything depended on Jesus. Christ Jesus is Lord of all. He is the only means of salvation for all people, whether or not they lived on earth before he did. This is why Abraham and other righteous souls like him in Paradise rejoiced

to see Jesus' day; they all must have understood that Jesus was the key to all their hopes for eternal life, even if they did not know exactly how Jesus would go about securing that hope. The gospel's claim is that if Jesus had not paid the price for man's guiltiness before God, then *no one's* sins would ever have been washed away, and that there has never been a sin blotted out of God's book unless it has been blotted out by the blood of the sinless Lamb of God.

FORETOLD

God's transfer of Paradise from the heart of the earth to Heaven was foretold by the prophets, even though, as with so many other prophecies about the coming Messiah, those wonderful prophecies were not understood, even by those who spoke them. Zechariah said, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you! He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass. . . . As for you [this is the Father speaking to the Son], by the blood of your covenant, **I have sent forth your prisoners out of the Pit wherein is no water***" (9:9, 11). In Isaiah, too, we find the Father speaking to the Son: "*I the LORD have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, and will keep you, and give you for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, **to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house***" (42:6-7).

We also find the Son speaking through Isaiah of wonderful things the Father had promised him, "*Listen, O isles, unto me! And hearken, you people, from afar! The LORD has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has He made mention of my name. And He has made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of His hand has He hid me and made me*

a polished shaft; in His quiver He has hid me. And He said to me, You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

*“And He said, It is a light thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, **and to restore the preserved of Israel.** I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”* And then the Father: *“Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to a servant of rulers: kings shall see and arise; princes also shall worship because of the LORD who is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose you. Thus says the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you, and I will preserve you for a covenant of the people . . . **that you may say to the prisoners, Go forth! and to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves**”* (excerpts, Isa. 49:1-9).

After Jesus was anointed with power and sent by God to “do good and heal all that were oppressed by the Devil”, he returned to his hometown of Nazareth. There, on the Sabbath day, “he went into the synagogue and stood up to read, and there was handed to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, **and the opening of the prison to them that are bound***” (Lk. 4:16-17; Isa. 61:1).

Everyone in Hell was a prisoner there, whether in Paradise or Torment, but because the righteous had a promise from God that they would be delivered, they were called “prisoners of hope” (Zech. 9:12). Those in Torment, being damned, had no hope.

God is merciful; He will set His prisoners free (Ps. 146:7; 69:33), but there is not a soul that has ever become a prisoner of Satan's delusive power whom he has willingly released (cp. Isa. 14:17). The release of Hell's prisoners by Jesus was an expression of the Father's love and care for the righteous and an indication of the vast difference between our heavenly Father's goodness and the Devil's cruelty to those under his power.

THE WICKED DEAD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Surprisingly, hardly a thing is said in the New Testament books about where the wicked go when they die, but we can make some deductions based on the Scriptures we have. We know that Hell still exists because John's Revelation speaks of Hell still in use at the end of the world. At that time, John said, "*Death and Hell delivered up the dead that were in them.*" This one verse (Rev. 20:13) is the only explicit reference in the New Testament to people being in Hell after Jesus ascended into Heaven, but it shows conclusively that (1) people are in Hell now just as they were before the New Testament began and (2) they will be there until the end of this age. Furthermore, since the Bible thus states that Hell will exist until the end of this age, and since we know that Jesus took all the righteous out of Hell, it must be that the dead whom John saw in Hell in his Revelation were only the wicked dead, for they are the only ones Jesus left down there when he ascended.

So, the final answer to the question, "Who goes down into Hell?", is that, before Jesus ascended into Heaven to offer his atoning sacrifice to God, everyone went down into Hell when they died, either to Paradise or to Torment. However, since Jesus transferred Paradise into Heaven, only the wicked who die are cast into Hell.



CAN ANYONE ESCAPE FROM HELL?

Even in the ancient world, men wondered if anyone could return from the place of the dead. Job asked, “*If a man die, shall he live again?*” (Job 14:14). Both Job and Hezekiah described Hell as having “bars” or “gates” (Job 17:16; Isa. 38:10). (Jesus, too, mentioned the “gates” of Hell (Mt. 16:18), but only as a symbol of the most extreme, though futile, opposition to God’s Word.) Job knew that, apart from a mighty work of God, existence in Hell was a permanent condition, for he said in 7:9, “*As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to Sheol shall come up no more.*” Ethan, one of King David’s song leaders from the tribes of Levi, sang (Ps. 89:48), “*What man is he that lives and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol?*” The expected answer was “no”.

In Ecclesiastes 3:14, Solomon said that whatever God does is eternal and that no man can alter His work. He said, “*I know that whatever God does shall be forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. And God has done it so that men should fear before Him.*” That being true, and since sending men into Hell is one of the things God does, we know that man can neither alter nor undo it. The wisest thing that a man can do in response to what God does is to fear what God will choose to do with him, for whatever God chooses to do with any one of us will be forever.

Still, the ancient righteous hoped in God. Job, for example, knew that God would never forsake those who trust Him. He said, *“I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God”* (Job 19:25-27). Job obviously believed that just as God has power to send men into Hell, so He has power to deliver men from it and enough love for the righteous to do so. Much later, through Hosea (13:14), God actually did promise to ransom some people from Hell, but long before that, Job already had faith that it was possible to be ransomed from the dead, for he once prayed (Job 14:13), *“O that you would hide me away in Sheol, that you would keep me secret until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!”*

JESUS' ESCAPE

Paul testified of Jesus' rescue from Hell when he wrote that before Jesus ascended into Heaven and carried captivity captive, he *“descended first into the lower parts of the earth”* (Eph. 4:9), after spending three days there (1Cor. 15:4), just as Jesus had predicted (Mt. 12:40). But Jesus escaped Hell because he trusted God to deliver him. Through David, Christ confessed to the Father, *“You will not leave my soul in Sheol!”* (Ps. 16:10). And in Psalm 49:15, he confidently declared, *“God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me.”* Again, in Psalm 86:13, the Son prophetically rejoices in triumph: *“Great is your mercy toward me! You have delivered my soul from the lowest Sheol.”*

On other occasions, such as Psalm 69:15, we hear the Son of God crying out to the Father, somewhat as he cried in the Garden of Gethsemene: *“Let not the Pit shut her mouth on me!”* In Psalm 142:7, he offered another of his many humble prayers: *“Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name. The*

righteous shall compass me about, for you will deal bountifully with me.” And from Psalm 71:20-21, we are given, long before the words were actually spoken, this humble prayer of the Savior, perhaps offered to God from the heart of the earth during the three days he was there: *“You, who have shown me great and sore troubles, shall bring me to life again from the depths of the earth. You will increase my greatness and comfort me on every side.”* This prayer was fully answered forty days after Jesus was resurrected, when he was taken up into heaven to return to the Father who had sent him from glory to earth, down into Hell, and then back up to earth again.

LET’S PAUSE A MINUTE TO HONOR GOD

It is only right that we study these enlightening biblical passages, to search them out diligently and weigh their meaning; at the same time, we must avoid the pitfall of pride, lest our study become merely an academic exercise. It is easy to dig past the treasure if we become impressed with our ability to dig. Many a celebrated scholar has prided himself on the huge pile of excavated earth on his shelves and in his head, instead of simply being awed and humbled by the love of God, expressed in the painful labor and ultimate glory of Jesus.

We are loved by God! That glorious truth canopies everything the Bible has to say, and those who know the Bible best ought to feel it most. Too often, however, that is not the case. Let’s not fail to get the point as we learn new things about Hell, in particular, the fact that Jesus suffered and died to save us from that awful place.

The central point of our learning should always be to imitate the life of Christ Jesus because he *is* the point. He is *“the way, the truth, and the life.”* When we truly understand life, we love Jesus and bow in awe at the terrible suffering he endured on earth to bring us eternal life. And we value as well

the suffering of the Father in Heaven, who restrained Himself as His beloved Son was abused and murdered by wicked men. They both paid a price of incredible, innocent pain for our salvation. We have hope of eternal life because of the willingness of both the Son *and* the Father to suffer. We already mentioned these compelling words of the Father to His Son through Zechariah: “*By the blood of your covenant, I have sent forth your prisoners out of the Pit, wherein is no water.*” But all too often, such scriptures remind us only of the suffering of the Son and not of the Father, who “*bowed the heavens*” (Ps. 18:9) to be close to His Son when his agony was at its greatest.

So, we give praise and honor to both the Father and the Son for the pain they endured to bring about “*so great a salvation.*”

EVERYONE DELIVERED

As to the question, “Can Anyone Escape From Hell?”, the answer is found in a phrase from Jesus, “*With men it is impossible, but with God nothing is impossible.*” And we have seen that God did bring Jesus up out of Hell, and because of him, God also transferred Paradise and the righteous who were in it from Hell into His presence.

That answer notwithstanding, in order to answer the question completely, we must look even further in time and consider the final end of the wicked. According to John’s Revelation, the final destination of those who are now in Hell will be a place far worse than Hell. Here is John’s description of their dreadful, final judgment from God: “*Death and Hell delivered up the dead that were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works. And Death and Hell were cast into the Lake of Fire. . . . The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the Lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the Second*

Death” (Rev. 20:13; 21:8. In the next chapter, we will learn more about the Lake of Fire.)

Incredible as it may seem, the Bible plainly teaches that the wicked dead will be removed from Hell at the end of the age. And so, we are forced by the Bible’s testimony to conclude that every person who has ever been in Hell either will be, or has already been, delivered out of it. The ancient righteous who were in Hell have already been transferred out of it by Jesus. The wicked who are there now – both those who were left in Torment by Jesus when he transferred Paradise from Hell to Heaven and those who have been cast into Hell since that time – will also be “delivered” from Hell, so to speak. But when they are delivered *out* of Hell, they will be delivered *into* a much worse place: the Lake of Fire.

This last prophecy from the book of Revelation is an example of what God said He alone can do; that is to “*declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done*” (Isa. 46:10). He has been declaring the end “*by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:21), as evidenced by the very ancient suggestion from Job that Hell is only a place where the wicked are presently being preserved by God until the day of destruction (Job 21:28-32).

So then, the absurd-sounding but complete answer to the question, “Can Anyone Escape From Hell?”, is that, in time, everyone in Hell will be delivered out of it.



IS HELL THE LAKE OF FIRE?

There are some similarities between the Lake of Fire and Hell. In Luke 16 the rich man in Hell begged Abraham for a mere drop of water to cool his tongue, for, he said, “*I am tormented in these flames*” (16:24). A condition of extraordinary, tormenting heat also exist in the Lake of Fire. The lake is, after all, the “*Lake of Fire*”. Jesus used the phrase “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” only in reference to the Lake of Fire (Mt. 24:51; Lk. 13:28), but some degree of “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” is the inconsolable condition of all the wicked dead, wherever they now are or will be in the future, whether in Hell or in the Lake of Fire. So, the most obvious similarity between Hell and the Lake of Fire is the element of fire itself. But beyond this, similarities are few.

One of the major differences between these two places of the damned is suggested by Jesus when he said, “*Children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; in that place shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Mt. 8:12; cp. 22:13 and 25:30). With the words, “outer darkness”, the Lord presents us with oft-overlooked information about the Lake of Fire; namely, it is filled with a fire that burns *with no light*.

Unlike Hell, the Lake of Fire is a place of eternal, absolute, and oppressive darkness. Psalm 49:19 tells us that the damned in that place “*shall never see light.*” By these things, we know that the “*outer darkness*” and the “*blackness of darkness*” of which Jesus and Jude spoke (Mt. 22:13; Jude 13) are references

to the Lake of Fire, not to Hell, because in Hell the condemned can see (Lk. 16:23).

The Lake of Fire burns “with brimstone and fire”. Brimstone is sulfur, and anyone who has ever had fumes from burning sulfur rise up into his nostrils knows that it has a suffocating effect. This may have been what Peter was referring to when he described the eternal place of the damned as “*a mist of darkness*” (2Pet. 2:17), as if the darkness in that place will have a quality of thickness to it. This feeling is consistent with Jesus’ declaration that the damned will be “*bound hand and foot*”. Concerning the condemned wedding guest, the Lord commanded, “*Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; in that place shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Mt. 22:13). This binding of hands and feet suggests that in the Lake of Fire there is an eternal and absolute absence of choice such as has never been known on earth, so that the damned will never be able so much as to change body positions and that they will suffer excruciating pain in the tormenting blackness forever.

Of course, from the Lake of Fire there will never be any escape or relief. Unlike Hell, it is the permanent home of the damned. The wicked will be tormented in the pitch black flames of God’s wrath “*day and night for ever and ever*” (Rev. 20:10). It is a place of endless, absolute hopelessness and suffering. It is a place to which no one wants to go, and to which no godly person would want anyone else to go.

So, the answer to our question, “Is Hell The Lake of Fire?”, is “No.” Hell is not the Lake of Fire. Hell is a terrifying, painful holding pen for the wicked dead until the Day of Judgment. At the Final Judgment, the wicked will all be taken out of Hell to be judged, and, after that, they will all be cast into the Lake of Fire, along with Hell and Death (Rev. 20:14).

ARE THERE DEGREES OF SUFFERING IN HELL?

As we have seen, within Hell (the *Sheol* of the Old Testament) were located both Paradise and Torment. According to Jesus (Lk. 16:23), Paradise was located far above Torment, for Jesus described the tormented rich man as “lifting up his eyes” to see Abraham “at a great distance”. As we have said, those in Paradise were not suffering as were those in Torment; still, they did not want to stay where they were. This ancient division within Hell itself is the first indication that within it, there are degrees of discomfort.

Secondly, degrees of torment are suggested by biblical phrases such as “the depths of *Sheol*” (Prov. 9:18), or “the lowest *Sheol*” (Ps. 86:13; Deut. 32:22). Jesus plainly revealed that this is the case by saying, and saying repeatedly, that it would be more tolerable for some than for others in the Day of Judgment (e.g., Mt. 11:24). The phrase, “more tolerable”, tells us that there are degrees of pain imposed on sinners, a righteous judgment based on each individual’s deeds, in conjunction with the level of his understanding. Jesus said, “*That servant who knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required*” (Lk. 12:47-48).

The Bible consistently maintains that God’s eternal judgment of us will be based on our deeds (e.g., Jn. 5:28-29;

Rom. 2:5-10). And James cautions his readers not to pursue positions of authority among the saints, for a greater condemnation awaits those who do wrong while occupying higher places in the kingdom of God (Jas. 3:1). So, it is clear that just as there are sins that are forgivable and sins that are not (Mt. 12:31-32), there are also sins worthy of greater punishment than others. Jesus, you will remember, told Pontius Pilate that the sin of the Jews (in turning him over to the Romans) was greater than Pilate's sin (in holding the Son of God prisoner). Jesus also taught that there were some commandments of God that were "weightier" than others (Mt. 23:23). Several times, Jesus stated quite plainly that it would be "more tolerable" for some than for others on the Day of Judgment (e.g. Mt. 10:15).

Isaiah 10:4 suggests that when unfaithful leaders among God's people have run their ungodly course and died, they are consigned to the deepest parts of Hell, below others who are there: "*Woe unto them who decree unrighteous decrees and that write grievousness that they have prescribed. . . . Without me, they shall bow down **under the prisoners**, and they shall fall **under the slain***" (Isa. 10:1, 4). In Isaiah's time, this meant, at the very least, that false prophets in Israel would be cast into that part of Hell which is far beneath the prisoners in Paradise. But it also meant much worse than that; that is, they would be cast into a more painful, or "lower" place in Hell than other sinners. Simply put, Isaiah's words mean that false teachers among the saints will receive, as James put it, "*the greater condemnation*" among the damned (3:1).

So, the answer to the question, "Are There Degrees of Suffering in Hell?", is a definite "Yes."



IN HELL, WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO?

In Psalm 6:5, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” wrote, “*In death there is no remembrance of you. In Sheol, who will give you thanks?*” The word “remembrance” here refers to worship, but in using it, David was not suggesting that those in Hell forget about God; rather, he was saying there is no worship of God in Hell. Other verses in the Bible also use “remembrance” this way, such as Hebrews 10:3: “*In those sacrifices, there is a remembrance made of sins every year.*”

By such Scriptures, the Reader is at first left with the impression that in Hell there is no worship of God at all. That would certainly be the case if we were speaking only of the worship God ordained in the Old Testament, with its animal sacrifices, holy days, circumcision, and water cleansing rituals, etc. obviously, there cannot be any of that kind of worship offered to God from Hell. But it is equally true that in Hell, there is no worship of God such as He has ordained in this New Testament. Jesus described the only acceptable form of New Testament worship: “*True worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.*” Now, there may well be some true confessions in Hell because everyone in Hell, like the rich man in Luke 16, is forced to acknowledge their miserable spiritual condition, but there is no holy Spirit within people in Hell to

sanctify their worship, thereby making it acceptable to God (Rom. 15:16).

Paul taught that Christ living within us is our “*hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27). Then, if those in Hell have no hope, Christ cannot be living within them. If while on earth, any damned people belonged to Christ, then in Hell they are temples that have been abandoned by the Spirit of God. It is probably the case that such unfaithful saints were abandoned by the Spirit before they even died. At any rate, we know they are without the Spirit once they are in Hell itself, for the Spirit gives us hope, and Hell is the home of the hopeless. Those in Hell who refused Christ while on earth never received the Spirit at all, but children of God who are cast into Hell at the end of their earthly lives are “reprobate”, as Paul would put it, for Christ no longer dwells within children of God who are reprobate (2Cor. 13:5).

From at least the tragic story of Aaron’s two foolish sons in Leviticus 10, and throughout the rest of the Bible, we are repeatedly warned that worship is acceptable only if God’s Spirit inspires it (Rom. 15:16); that is, worship is acceptable to God only if it is offered as God wills. Then, another reason there is no acceptable worship in Hell is that God no longer communicates His will to the dead. After all, what is there that God desires any dead man to do? The land of the living is the only place where there is hope, and therefore, labor. Job said of death, “*There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master*” (3:17-19). For those who have died, all deeds are done, and their judgment is set. The wicked man’s degree of torment is already determined, being based on the deeds he performed while living on earth. Therefore, God does not speak to him. David seemed to understand this: “*Unto you will I cry, O LORD my rock! Be not*

silent to me; lest if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down into the Pit" (Ps. 28:1).

Prayers on earth that receive no response from God are a warning; they are an earthly foretaste of Hell. A truly godly life is characterized by responses from God to one's prayers (Isa. 58:6-9a; 1Jn.3:22). And such communion with God is an earthly foretaste of the heavenly world to come.

NOBODY?

Isaiah joined his voice with others concerning what souls in Hell can and cannot do when he said (38:18), "*Sheol cannot praise you. Death cannot celebrate you.*" But this declaration, repeated by others in the Old Testament, brings up a question as to whether this inability to praise God applied to all who were in Hell at that time or just to the wicked dead. Rhetorical questions about this were asked by David and others. David strongly suggested that to go down into Sheol was to go into a dreadful place where God is praised by no one. In Psalm 30:9, David sang, "*Shall the dust praise you? Shall it declare your truth?*" In Psalm 88:10-11, David's friend Heman asked, "*Shall the dead arise and praise you? Shall your lovingkindness be declared in Sheol or your faithfulness in destruction?*" And in Psalm 115:17, David stated plainly, "*The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.*" So, it appears that neither the righteous nor the unrighteous dead praised God in Sheol.

Solomon said, "*Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in Sheol where you are going*" (Eccl. 9:10). The curse of God on man after Adam's sin was that he must labor (Gen. 3:19). In Hell, that is one curse from which man is released forever, for in Hell there is no labor. There are no occupations or professions, nor philosophical or scientific

inquiry, nor clever invention, nor even a thought for learning and growing in knowledge. There will be degrees of suffering in Hell, but there is little indication of any other distinctions among the damned. Earthly prestige and position will be forever lost and will mean nothing. No one will be intimidated or ruled over by anyone else. The earthly kings in Hell offered this greeting to the once feared king of Babylon when he descended into it: “*Are you also become weak as we? Are you become like one of us?*” (Isa. 14:10). All his fearsome glory and power were gone. They were left on earth for some other proud fool to glory in; there is no such glory in Hell.

To have God, by His Spirit, reaching out to us, willing to teach us, warn us, correct us, and guide us in His holiness and truth, is an element of earthly life that is so common that it is routinely taken for granted and vastly undervalued. Carnal men, because of covetousness and ignorance of holy things, pant after rare earthly objects rather than humble themselves to receive the free gift of God. God’s great kindness in pursuing us, the living, so completely envelopes all mankind that we cannot even imagine what it would be like to live in a place where He is altogether and forever silent. But untold millions are experiencing that fearful reality right now. The Word of God no longer comes to the wicked dead. It was with that knowledge that Isaiah said to God, “*They that go down into the Pit cannot hope for your truth*” (38:18). Those seeking to know the truth should be warned to seek it here and not to wait to obtain the knowledge of God in the grave.

THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE

In Hell, then, without the Word of God, people are forever damned to call on God, to “worship”, so to speak, however they think is best. Each person in Hell seeks God – earnestly, unashamedly seeks God – in whatever way he thinks will best

serve his own desperate purpose. Alas, they have no other choice, for the damned are liberated forever from the holy Spirit's pressure to worship God as He demands. This means, of course, that they are cursed forever to follow the advice of some well-intentioned religionists today who exhort men here on earth to do such things as "worship with the church of your choice." If a fundamental part of the damnation of Hell is the absence of the opportunity for true worship of God, then lost souls will be forced forever to worship, so to speak, "with the church of their choice."

Contrary to what I stated earlier, the Lake of Fire will offer its inhabitants a choice, but only this one. In that place of final punishment for the wicked and unbelieving, the damned will be granted the choice of how they would like to worship God. But damnation will also impose upon them this restriction: they may only worship God as they see fit to do so because the way God sees fit for men to worship Him will no longer be an option. That opportunity is only for the living.

The condition of people in Hell is reminiscent of the sad comment at the end of the book of Judges, describing the miserable confusion of God's people at that time: "*Every man did what was right in his own eyes.*" Not one of the rebellious Israelites who was living according to "*what was right in his own eyes*" understood the danger of self-willed service to God. Self-willed hearts cannot understand that to live as it seems best to oneself is rebellion against God.

But, what of it? What does it matter that the wicked cannot understand? Are men to be judged merely by what they understand, by the standards they set for themselves, or by the standards for human conduct established by the Creator? At the time of the Judges, the wise were earnestly asking, as the wise are always asking, "What does God say?" for they knew that what God says is the standard by which we will all be judged.

If those ancient, rebellious Israelites never repented of worshiping God as they thought best, rather than as God commanded them to worship, then it is certain that they are still worshiping God that way now, as they writhe in the tormenting flames of Hell. And, Reader, if you are worshiping God now in a way that you have chosen instead of worshiping in the way that God has ordained, then you are already experiencing a foretaste of the Hell to which you are headed.

In ancient Athens, Paul declared that God, in ages past, tolerated some errors in worship among men but that since the time God's Son gave his life for our sins, "*God . . . commands all men everywhere to repent*" (Acts 17:30). No man now has the right, the authority, or even the permission to worship the Creator as seems right to himself. Throughout the Bible, the death penalty hung over the head of anyone among God's people who dared worship God in a way God had not ordained (e.g., Lev. 10:1-2). But it is Hell, and afterward the Lake of Fire, that will be the supreme display of God's righteous judgment on those who worship and live as they see fit while on earth. On them, God will have the last laugh. "*Because I have called, and you refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded (but you have made light of all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof), I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear comes . . . Then they shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD. . . . Therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices*" (excerpts from Prov. 1:24-31).

The next time you see a sign or bumper sticker that reads, "WORSHIP WITH THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE", know that you are seeing with your own eyes an invitation to enjoy a little bit of Hell on earth.

WHAT, ME CHOOSE?

Man cannot possibly choose the right way (Mt. 19:25-26); he does not possess such wisdom. “*Where shall wisdom be found?*” asked Job. “*And where is the place of understanding? Man knows not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth says, ‘It is not in me’; and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’ It cannot be gotten with gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. . . . Whence then cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding, seeing it is hidden from the eyes of all living and kept close from the fowls of the air? Destruction and Death say, ‘We have heard the fame of it with our ears.’ God understands the way thereof, and He knows the place thereof. . . . And unto man He said, Behold! The fear of the LORD, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding*” (excerpts from Job 28).

Even a man of small intelligence, if he believes these verses, can comprehend the fact that if wisdom “*is not found in the land of the living*”, then the wisest and most diligent of living men will be unable to find it. A truly wise man, then, confesses the uselessness of his own wisdom, and while there is hope, he cries out to God for true wisdom, knowing that it is not to be found anywhere on earth. This path to holy wisdom, this way of humble, child-like supplication to God for help is hidden from the proud and worldly wise, and Jesus rejoiced in that: “*I do praise you Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the learned and intelligent and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for so it was pleasing in your sight*” (Mt. 11:25-26).

God must choose you (Jn. 15:16) and draw you to the light of His Son, Jesus Christ (Jn. 6:44); otherwise, you will never find it. Man cannot even guess what is right about God. It is hidden, and there is not in any man the ability to discover by his

own work and wisdom the holy truth of Christ. We must be invited and then guided to the throne of grace.

So, the answer to the question, “What can people do in Hell?” is this: Not much, other than to suffer helplessly and worship in their own way. And after that, when the damned have been cast into the Lake of Fire, they will be able to do even less than they could do in Hell.



GEHENNA

About seventy-five percent of the time when Jesus himself referred to the place of punishment for the wicked dead, the actual word used is neither *Sheol* nor *Hades*. It is instead the Hebrew word *Gehenna*, which is derived from the Old Testament name of a valley outside Jerusalem, the Valley of the Son of *Hinnom* (more about this shortly). This *Gehenna* proves to be, upon close examination, not a reference to Hell but to the Lake of Fire. The evidence for this is overwhelming.

First, whenever Jesus mentions people being cast into Gehenna, Jesus always says simply “cast into *Gehenna*”; he never mentions one being cast *down* into *Gehenna*, as he does when he mentions *Hades* (e.g., Mt. 11:23).

Second, the similarity between Jesus’ description of *Gehenna* and God’s description of the Lake of Fire through the prophet Isaiah is undeniable. Jesus said, “*It is better for you to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into Gehenna, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die,⁶ and the fire is not quenched.*” Compare that description with this from Isaiah (66:24), remembering that Isaiah is speaking of the way things will be in eternity after the Final Judgment and after Death and Hell have been cast into the Lake of Fire: “*They [God’s saints] shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me, for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.*” This must be a

reference to the Lake of Fire because the only place after the Final Judgment where the saints could possibly view souls in torment is in the Lake of Fire; Hell will have already been destroyed.

Thirdly, note that, in the world to come, *Gehenna* will be located just outside the holy city of God, where the saved will gather to worship the Lord. Isaiah states that when the saved gather, they will “*look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed*” (Isa. 66:23-24). The location of this future place of eternal torment was perfectly prefigured by the Valley of Hinnom. It was also located just outside the holy city of God: Jerusalem.

Lastly, Jesus describes the fire in *Gehenna* as “everlasting” (Mt. 18:8). He adds that this fire “*shall never be quenched*” (Mk. 9:45). These phrases cannot describe the fires of Hell, if Hell itself will be destroyed (Rev. 20:14).

Here are the eleven places where Jesus used the word *Gehenna*:

Matthew 5:22

“But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca’, shall be in danger of the council. But whosoever shall say, ‘You fool’, shall be in danger of *Gehenna* fire.”

Matthew 5:29-30 (= Matthew 18:9)

“And if your right eye offend you, pluck it out, and cast it from you, for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into *Gehenna*. And if your right hand offend you, cut it off, and cast it from you, for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into *Gehenna*.”

Mark 9:43-44 (= vv. 45-46 and 47-48)

“And if your hand offend you, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into *Gehenna*, into the fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

Matthew 10:28 (= Luke 12:5)

“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in *Gehenna*.”

Matthew 23:15

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of *Gehenna* than yourselves.”

Matthew 23:33

“You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of *Gehenna*?”

TOPHET IN GEHENNA

The word *Gehenna* has a history that is as intriguing as it is obscure. In the beginning of Israel’s history as a nation, when Joshua and Eleazar were dividing the land of Canaan among the twelve tribes, there lived, or had lived, a man named Hinnom. We know almost nothing about him, even whether or not he was an Israelite. What we do know is that he had at least one son. Just once, late in Israel’s history, “children of Hinnom” is mentioned (2Kgs. 23:10), but that could be a reference to Hinnom’s grand-descendants and not to his immediate sons; so, whether Hinnom sired more than one son must remain a mystery. The name of Hinnom’s son, or of any other relative of his for that matter, also remains unknown.

The little piece of Canaan belonging to the son of Hinnom was the valley just south of the walls of the city that would later be called Jerusalem. God led Joshua and Eleazar to make this Valley of the Son of Hinnom the dividing line between the tribe of Benjamin to the north and Judah to the south (Josh. 15:8; 18:16). The Valley of the Son of Hinnom, then, became a significant place on the map early in Israel's history in Canaan.

In time, sadly, this valley became notorious as a place devoted to the Ammonite god, Molech, who required child sacrifices to be offered by his worshipers. But one such altar proved to be insufficient, for the Israelites were zealous worshipers. Multiple altars for Molech's worship were constructed in the valley at a place called Tophet (Jer. 7:31) in order to accommodate the multitude of Israelite parents eager to offer their children to Molech, or to Baal, another god for whom altars for child sacrifice were built there (Jer. 19:5). Even some of the kings of Judah joined the crowds who descended into that horrible valley to burn their children to blood-thirsty gods. King Ahaz (2Chron. 28:1-3) and King Manasseh (2Chron. 33:1-6) are named specifically as visiting Tophet to sacrifice their children, but there can be little doubt that there were other kings and many princes who did the same.

God sent Jeremiah to Tophet one day to prophesy against the people who worshiped there, and in the smoky haze, the Spirit cried out through the embattled prophet, "*They . . . have filled this place with the blood of innocents!*" (Jer. 19:4).

God angrily denounced this cruel, senseless practice of child sacrifice and swore that he would fill the Valley of the Son of Hinnom with so many dead Israelite bodies that it would be impossible to bury them. He said, "*The days come, says the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but The Valley of Slaughter. . . . I will break this people and this city as one breaks a potter's*

vessel, that cannot be made whole again, and they shall bury them in Tophet until there be no place to bury” (Jer. 7:32; 19:6, 11). This God would do “because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face, though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction” (Jer. 32:32-33).

Next, before Jeremiah turned and walked out of that miserable valley, God warned the people and priests who were there that He would do in Jerusalem what they had done to their sons and daughters in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; He would make the whole city of Jerusalem like Tophet, a wretched place of burning bodies and filthiness (Jer. 19:12-13). The priests and people there that day probably laughed Jeremiah to scorn, or ignored him. *“Then came Jeremiah from Tophet, whither the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the LORD’s house and said to all the people, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold! I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words” (Jer. 19:14-15).*

This Tophet, the gruesome place of cruel, wicked worship by God’s own people, was used at least once by God as a figure for the Lake of Fire. When the Spirit proclaimed through Isaiah that *“Tophet is ordained of old” (Isa. 30:33)*, it was not of the Jews’ Tophet in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom that the Spirit spoke, but of God’s Tophet, the hideous place of everlasting fire that Jesus said was created *“for the Devil and his angels” (Mt. 25:41)*. Isaiah’s prophecy was this: *“Behold, the name of the LORD is coming from afar, burning with His anger, and the*

burden thereof is heavy. His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue as a devouring fire. . . . And the LORD shall cause His glorious voice to be heard, and He shall show the lighting down of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. . . . For Tophet is ordained of old. Yea, for the king it is prepared. He has made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood. The breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it” (Isa. 30:27, 30, 33).

The events that transpired in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and in Tophet particularly, when taken together with the revelation that God has a Tophet of His own, make an even more compelling case for interpreting Jesus’ *Gehenna* as a reference to the Lake of Fire rather than to Hell.



TARTARUS

In addition to *Hades* and *Gehenna*, one other word, used but once in the Scriptures (2Pet. 2:4), is translated as “Hell” in the King James and other versions. This word is *Tartarus*, and it is a word that never refers to Hell. References to Tartarus anywhere in the ancient world are infrequent, but here is one from Homer’s *Iliad* (8.13), written as much as a thousand years before Peter penned his second epistle. In this scene from *The Iliad*, Zeus, the Greeks’ supreme god, is threatening any of the gods who disobey his command, “*I’ll catch him and throw him down into Tartarus! A black hole that! A long way down! A Bottomless Pit under the earth! Iron gates and brazen threshold! As far below Hades as Heaven is above the earth!*”⁷

Tartarus, to the Greeks, was an indescribably gloomy and horrible place, reserved for the very most wicked of mortals and for the most dangerous enemies of Zeus among the immortals, in particular, the Titans (including Zeus’ father who, according to Greek mythology, ruled the universe before Zeus overthrew him). There is some truth to this general concept.

Peter used a verb form of Tartarus when he wrote (2Pet. 2:4), “*God did not spare the angels who sinned, but He gave them over to chains of darkness, consigning them to Tartarus to be preserved until the Judgment.*” It sounds a little odd to translate the phrase, “*consigning them to Tartarus*” as “*God tartarized them*”, but that is actually what Peter wrote. So, from here on, I will use the word as a verb, as Peter did.

If the evil spirits, or demons, mentioned throughout the Bible are, in fact, the angels⁸ who were cast out of Heaven with Satan (Rev. 12:9), and since those fallen angels have already been “tartarized”, or consigned to Tartarus, as Peter said, then Tartarus is not a place of fiery torment but a place of utter hopelessness. Tartarus, then, is not a location but a spiritual condition, a living damnation. It is the very worst of all spiritual conditions, for reasons we will now explain.

Demons are undeniably in Tartarus right now, as Peter said. However, they have not yet been cast into Torment, as they themselves acknowledged to Jesus in Matthew 8:28-29: *“And when Jesus had come to the other side into the territory of the Gergesenes, two demoniacs, coming out of the tombs, met him, so extremely fierce that no one could pass by along that road. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”*

Peter’s description of Tartarus, where fallen angels now dwell, matches what Jude said in verse six of his brief epistle: *“And the angels who did not retain their original office, but abandoned their home, God has retained in eternal chains, beneath darkness, until the Judgment of the great day.”* First, note that Jude taught that fallen angels are at this time “beneath darkness”. This suggests (and even Homer felt the truth of this) that Tartarus is a place worse than the typical fiery punishment of dead sinners; that is, worse than Hell. God’s judgment of His unfaithful angels, then, is that Hell is too good a place for them. And that means that Tartarus is the worst of all places to be, a place to which only the creatures most abhorred by God are consigned, being held in the chains of that darkness until the time comes for their torment to begin.

One’s first reaction to this might be that Tartarus does not seem that bad, since the flames of Hell are presently being

escaped. But wisdom teaches us not to be so hasty in reaching such a conclusion. The fundamental difference between Hell and Tartarus, and the thing which makes Tartarus a far worse place than Hell, is that, since no one in Hell can any longer do anything, it is impossible for those who are in Hell to sin any more, while in Tartarus, just the opposite is true. In Tartarus, *it is impossible to stop sinning*. Those in Tartarus are condemned to live, but to live in sin only, continually storing up an increasingly horrific punishment in the Lake of Fire.

The beauty and goodness of life on earth is that it is a place of almost boundless hope, a place of opportunity to do the will of God, a place of opportunity for growth in understanding and in goodness, a place of hope for correction and for change, a place where choices are still available and responses can still be made to God's love. Not one of these precious blessings exist in Hell; they are reserved only for those still living on the earth. But in Tartarus – and tragically for those condemned to dwell in it – some of these wonderful blessings are still available. That is what makes Tartarus the most horrible of all conditions.

God hates wickedness, of course, but He hates a mixture of wickedness and goodness even more. He forbade the Israelites so much as to wear a garment woven with two kinds of cloth (Dt. 22:11), and He strictly forbade yoking different kinds of animals together, such as an ox and a donkey. There was a half-hearted shepherd in Laodicea who mixed love for God with love for the world. Jesus said to him, *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I prefer that you be either cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth”* (Rev. 3:15-16). Yes, God abhors a mixture, and “mixed” is an apt description of Tartarus. It is a mixture of blessings and curses, and it is the most hated of all places. It is the most despised of all spiritual conditions, reserved for the most abhorred of all creatures, and

from which there is no hope of escape – until the time comes for those unfaithful angels to be cast into the Lake of Fire.

True repentance (one of the precious blessings available to people on earth) is not something men are capable of doing on their own; it is the work of God within the heart. The very earliest believers understood this well. When the believing Jews in Jerusalem heard that some Gentiles had been converted, they rejoiced – but not because the Gentiles had decided to repent and believe the gospel! Rather, they rejoiced because, as they said, “*God has granted repentance to the Gentiles*” (Acts 11:18). They understood that true repentance is something that must be granted by God. In Tartarus, fallen angels are not allowed to repent, for God refuses to allow them ever to feel compunction for wrongdoing. Nor can Satan, the fallen cherub who is tartarized along with the angels who followed him, feel shame for his evil-doing. The condition of his heart toward God is described well by Job: “*His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the lower millstone*” (41:24). Neither Satan nor his angels are restrained in wickedness, as men are, by the influence of God’s holy Spirit, and being no longer under any law from God, they cannot possibly do good in God’s sight, only evil.

Everything Satan or the fallen angels do is sin, no matter what they do. They cannot cease from sin because God will not grant them grace to stop. They are cursed with the most terrifying of all of God’s curses; namely, a combination of God’s refusal to allow them to repent and God’s refusal to let them die. Those who are in Tartarus are blessed with life but cursed with the kind of life they must live. They are also blessed with the ability change, but without any grace from God, they can only change for the worse. They retain the blessing of liberty to make choices, but with no help from the Spirit, they can choose nothing but what is ungodly. They can still grow

(they have no choice about that), but with no mercy from God, they can only grow more wicked – and this they constantly do.

This partial liberty, this mixture of good things and bad, is what makes Tartarus so much worse than Hell. Those in Hell can sin no longer, and for that, they should be grateful. The degree of their final suffering is set and will not change, but those in Tartarus are cursed to continue living sinful lives as long as God chooses to impose upon them His blessing of life. They are doomed to constantly add to their record of sin in God’s books (Rev. 20:12) and, so, to make their eventual judgment and torment far worse than if God would bless them with death so that they could stop sinning. In Hell, as the Scriptures say, souls are “preserved” in death, for they are locked into the ungodly condition in which they died. In Tartarus, however, spirits are “preserved” *in life*, to commit ever more iniquity and, so, to become worthy of an ever greater damnation. For the souls in Tartarus, death and Hell would be a blessing.

2PETER 2: “CURSED CHILDREN”

It would be misleading for me to leave the topic of Tartarus without pointing out the unsavory biblical fact that Satan and the fallen angels are not alone in the place of extraordinary damnation they inhabit. It is a fact that Peter’s reference to God’s tartarization of fallen angels is found in a chapter that is not focusing on the spiritual condition of angels at all; rather, that entire chapter concerns the spiritual condition of certain of God’s own children who are still living on earth. Peter’s description of the state of fallen angels is only one illustration among several that he employed in that chapter to show how severely God deals with treachery in His family. Peter’s whole point in bringing up the issue of God’s tartarization of treacherous angels and their present state is to emphasize a far

more important point for us; namely, that some of God's own children are tartarized just as the treacherous angels are.

In this 2nd chapter of his 2nd epistle, Peter's entire focus was to warn the body of Christ that it is possible for children of God to provoke the Almighty to such wrath that they, too, may be "*preserved [in life] unto the Day of Judgment to be punished*" (2Pet. 2:9). Such reprobate brothers and sisters are, Peter said, "*cursed children*", who, like the fallen angels, "*cannot cease from sin*" (2Pet. 2:14) because God will no longer extend to them His grace. Peter described them in much detail. The following information about tartarized children of God is gleaned from 2Peter 2:10-13:

Cursed children of God "*walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government.*" Incredibly, Peter says they are "*made to be taken and destroyed.*" (I could hardly have believed that such people existed in the body of Christ unless it had been written in Scripture.) They unwisely "*speak evil of things they do not understand*", and "*they shall utterly perish in their own corruption*", receiving "*the reward of unrighteousness.*"

They consider "*public luxury a delight,*" and their exalted opinion of themselves notwithstanding, they are "*spots and blemishes*" in the assembly of the saints, presuming too much about their standing before God and "*reveling in their lusts while they feast with you.*" When Jude spoke of these fallen saints, he called them, "*trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots*" (v. 12), and the author of Hebrews held out no hope for those who are already dead a second time (Heb. 10:26-31), ending that portion of his letter with the oft-quoted warning: "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"

SWIFT DESTRUCTION?

In the main, Jude and Peter were speaking of believers who function as ministers, those dedicated but deluded workers who are the New Testament equivalent of ancient Israel's "false prophets". This is the awful conclusion forced upon us by the opening words of this incredible second chapter of Peter's second epistle: "*But there were false prophets also among the [Old Testament] people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. Through covetousness, shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you, whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation does not slumber*" (2Pet. 2:1-3). This condition would be a terribly tragic end to a life once sanctified by the holy Spirit of God, but we must confess that it happens. To deny it is heresy.

For years I wondered, if it was true that these false teachers are still functioning as leaders of God's people and are prospering among the saints, how could Peter say that "*swift destruction*" had come upon them and "*their damnation does not linger*"? Now, I understand. And tartarization is the answer. A tartarized minister may prosper in Christianity, may be zealous and happy, and may be confident in his relationship with God. But the blindness to his true condition is part of the curse. That is why, as Peter would also say of them in this chapter, "*They sport themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you.*"

Our point is that brothers and sisters in this state are in a spiritual condition similar to that of fallen angels; that is, they are now in that place called Tartarus. Being alive on earth, they

are no more in torment than are the fallen angels, and despite any pleasant circumstance in their lives, “*their damnation*” really “*does not slumber*” because they are in Tartarus. They live out their damnation every day, ever confident, but supremely blind to their spiritual state, and they are now used by God only as stumbling-blocks for the purging of others who still have hope. Jesus spoke of what will happen to them when, shortly before his return, God will have finished using them to try the faith of the upright: “*The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and those who commit iniquity, and they shall cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Mt. 13:41-42; cp. 49-50).

In the last half of 2Peter 2, Peter continues his description of children of God who are in Tartarus by saying that these cursed children are ministers who have followed Balaam’s example (2Pet. 2:15-16). Balaam was an ancient prophet of God who lived in Mesopotamia. His story is recorded early in the Bible, in Numbers. He was not an Israelite, but he did serve the true God and became famous because of his many true prophecies. Balak, king of Moab, sent to Balaam and offered him great wealth if he would make the long trip south to Moab and prophesy against Israel, but God would not allow Balaam to curse His chosen people.

Balaam, frustrated at his lost opportunity to gain wealth, immediately consulted with some nearby Midianites (the cleverest people on earth), and together they devised a plan to gain for Balaam the reward that Balak had promised. Realizing that God was never going to allow him to curse Israel for Balak, Balaam, with the Midianites, counseled Balak not to fight Israel but to humble himself (or so it would appear) to blend his nation with Israel through intermarriage and a mixed worship of Jehovah and the gods of Moab. It was extremely crafty and

wicked advice, and when Israel fell into the pretty trap, Balak was pleased and Balaam secured his reward. But his plan inflicted a deep wound on Israel's spirit that was never completely healed. So, through Balaam's counsel, King Balak conquered God's people through peace, a cunning tactic prophesied to be used by Satan again to confuse and subdue the people of God (cp. Dan. 8:25). Balaam's sin was so heinous a crime against God that Jesus still spoke of it with indignation in the last book of the Bible (Rev. 2:14).

Balaam was driven by a desire for earthly gain to the extent that he was willing to teach what he thought would bring it to him. In short, he became what Jesus called a "hireling" (Jn. 10:12); he agreed to perform a religious service to the wicked for money and position. He became a purveyor of false hopes, a professional liar, using his gifts and closeness with God to obtain earthly riches.

THE WAY OF BALAAM

Ministers among God's people now who are hired to teach a particular brand of doctrine are also walking in the way of Balaam (cp. Rev. 2:14), and Paul prophesied that many such men would be needed in the future in order to satisfy the lust of fallen saints for pleasant doctrines (2Tim. 4:2-3). Borrowing some imagery from Solomon (Prov. 25:14), Peter calls such ministers "*wells without water*" (2Pet. 2:17a), for their sermons can raise hopes, but they can never satisfy souls hungry for the true knowledge of God. They are "*clouds that are blown about*" by an impressive wind, clouds that betoken showers of blessing, but the rain never comes (2Pet 2:17b). They are speakers who can enthrall audiences, but only "*through lusts of the flesh*" (2Pet 2:18). But most tragically, for those who have newly been converted to Christ, such ministers are an especially dangerous attraction (2Pet. 2:18b), promising to lead those "*babes in*

Christ” into liberty while they themselves have actually “*returned to their own vomit*” and have again become “*the servants of corruption*” (2Pet. 2:22, 19).

WORST AMONG THE WORST

As awful as the tartarization of fallen angels and the Devil is, the tartarization of cursed children of God is actually worse. And what makes the curse of God’s unfaithful sons so much worse than the curse on unfaithful angels is that the angels know they are damned; whereas, from everything we see in the New Testament writings, and in life, it appears that when sons of God are tartarized, they think they have actually taken a step forward in grace. Paul called this a “strong delusion” sent by God (2Thess. 2:11). Like Samson when he awoke from his nap on Delilah’s lap thinking God was still with him, they do not even realize that God has forsaken them and that their hearts have been cursed with hardness against the light of God. God looked on in deepest grief while Israel (often called “Ephraim” in the book of Hosea) became ever more hardened, to the brink of being forsaken by the God who had loved them so long and so dearly. “*Strangers have devoured his strength,*” said the Lord, “*and he knows it not. Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not*” (Hos. 7:9). Finally, the awful day of the curse came, and with a heavy heart, God resigned Himself to the fact that His people just did not love Him: “*I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face*” (Hos. 5:15). With His withdrawal came the loss of holy correction and guidance. “*I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery. . . . The people who do not understand shall fall. . . . Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone*” (Hos. 4:14, 17). Jesus, with the heart of God, knowing that many in Israel were about to be turned over forever to the ceremonial forms

they had chosen instead of life with him, sat on the hill overlooking the holy city and wept aloud, “*O Jerusalem! Jerusalem, that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to you! How often I would have gathered you together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*” (Mt. 23:37-38).

This curse of a rock-hard, misguided confidence in one’s standing with God is without doubt the most fearsome curse imposed upon any of God’s creatures, but it is the real condition of some believers, as many Scriptures indicate. Under this curse, “blind guides” consider themselves to be apostles of the Lord Jesus (2Cor. 11:13), and, like their Old Testament counterparts, they run when God has not sent them (Jer. 23:21). What they run with is humanly devised doctrines. They run, as Isaiah put it, with their own “fire”, setting others on fire around them with their lies, who in turn become little sparks reflective of their leader and who then pass on to others that self-willed style of worship and service to God (Isa. 50:11). Jesus bluntly and roundly condemned such religious zeal among God’s people (Mt. 23:1-33). Under this curse, many leaders of God’s own people had spent their lives and fortunes reaching out to others with their own ideas about God, but Jesus was not impressed: “*Woe unto you . . . for you compass land and sea to make one convert, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of Gehenna than yourselves!*” (Mt. 23:15).

A man under this curse does not know that his leader is the Devil and that the voice guiding him is Satan’s voice, speaking as “*a messenger of light*” (2Cor. 11:14). Under this curse, God’s own sons become “*ministers of Satan*” (2Cor. 11:15), and, “*thinking to do God a service*”, with a heart cursed to be as hard as Satan’s, they disparage “*the way of truth*” and persecute the upright – all in the name of the Lord.

This is the greatest curse of all, the same curse which Christ besought the Father to impose upon the Jews who turned him over to the hands of sinners (Psalm 69). In that Psalm, Christ prayed that God would turn His blessings to Israel into curses; that is, that He would turn into a stumbling-block the very things God had given to Israel for their blessing: *“They gave me also gall for my meat, and for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink. Let their table [of shewbread] become a snare before them, and that which should have been for their welfare [the law of Moses], let it become a trap. Let their eyes be blinded, that they see not. . . . Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your wrathful anger take hold of them. . . . Add iniquity unto their iniquity, and let them not come into your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the Book of the Living, and not be written with the righteous”* (excerpts, Ps. 69:21-28).

This astonishing prayer of the Messiah for God’s greatest curse to come upon rebellious, unbelieving Jews was answered after the elders and people of Israel rejected Jesus, choosing instead to continue in those things he came to fulfill: the temple worship, robes and incense, holy days, and the other ceremonies that the Law commanded them to keep. All these things were holy blessings, but they were intended by God to be prophetic signs of the work and majesty of their coming Messiah. And by rejecting him and clinging to the now worthless works of the Law, their greatest blessings were transformed into their greatest curse – just as the Son of God had prayed. They gave their hearts to the works of the Law instead of to the One to whom those works pointed. Tragically, instead of submitting to their own Messiah and being filled with God’s Spirit, they spent the rest of their lives performing the now dead ceremonial works that Christ had fulfilled, in rebellion against the God who had given them the ceremonies to keep.

Through Jeremiah also, the Spirit of Christ cried out for God's help for his soul in Hell and for God's curse upon those who had persecuted him. Listen to his story: *"My enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon and cast a stone upon me. . . . I called upon your name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon [the heart of the earth]. You have heard my voice; hide not your ear at my breathing, at my cry. You drew near in the day I called upon you; you said, 'Fear not!'*

*"O LORD, you have pleaded the causes of my soul; you have redeemed my life. O LORD, you have seen my wrong; judge you my cause. You have seen all their vengeance and all their imaginations against me. You have heard their reproach, O LORD, and all their imaginations against me, the lips of those who rose up against me, and their device against me all the day. Behold their sitting down and their rising up; I am their music. **Render unto them a recompense, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. Give them [hardness] of heart, your curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD**" (Lam. 3:52-66).*

As for the traitor Judas, after the Son of God prayed for God's vengeance against him (Ps. 109), that poor man had no hope whatsoever. Jesus prayed that the Father would make even Judas' prayer to be sin (v. 7). *"As he loved cursing,"* Christ prayed, *"so let it come unto him"* (v. 17). And it did.

Judas had walked closely with Jesus for years and probably was wise enough to realize, at least to some extent, that he had been tartarized by God and, so, he could never again do anything but sin. What a terrifying place for a man to find himself! It is not surprising that this doomed disciple chose to commit suicide rather than to live out his earthly life in Tartarus with the fallen angels, constantly sowing seed for a greater damnation in the Lake of Fire.

How well David understood the value of being chastened and allowed to repent! *“Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O LORD, and teach out of your Law, that you may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the Pit be dug for the wicked”* (Ps. 94:12-13). And how true are the Master’s words, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”* If you have ever done wrong and felt conviction enough to repent for it, fall on your face and give God glory! You have been loved! Those who are cursed with God’s greatest curse are not loved, and God in His righteous fury has so blinded them that, more often than not, those tartarized children of God think they are still blessed. Didn’t Peter tell us that they *“sport themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you”*? The chief priests who helped kill Jesus no doubt made sacrifices to Jesus’ Father the next morning, kneeling and thanking Him for finally being rid of the troublesome carpenter’s son from Galilee.

“BETTER NEVER TO HAVE KNOWN”

Jesus taught that to whom more is given, more is required (Lk. 12:48), and believers in this New Covenant have been given much more than angels in heaven have ever been given. *“Behold,”* wrote John, *“what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!”* (1Jn. 3:1). Ours is a relationship with God about which angels know nothing. In fact, angels long to understand our relationship with God (1Pet. 1:12). Then, because the sons of God are more blessed than angels, more is required of them than of angels. From that, it is easy to see that unfaithful sons of God are worthy of a far greater damnation than are unfaithful angels. And that greater damnation expresses itself on earth in fallen saints’ joy while in Tartarus. Their great blindness makes them happy to be where they are, and zealous to do such religious works as God hates, *“thinking to do God service.”*

Peter's final words concerning these tragically fallen saints are sobering: "*If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment given unto them*" (2Peter 2:20-21). Because of what eternity now holds for them, it would have been better for the fallen angels if they had never been created at all. And because of the special damnation waiting for the tartarized children of God in the Final Judgment, it would have been better for them if they had never even heard of the name Jesus. Their own new birth experience will testify against them.

Paul pointed out the justice of such terrible judgment from God in his second epistle to the saints in Thessalonica. There, Paul shows that God is neither cruel nor unjust in His tartarization of especially stubborn and rebellious saints; quite the contrary, it is manifestly just to turn over to darkness those who are given light but choose not to walk in it, but cling to darkness instead. Paul said that it was "*because they did not receive the love of the truth*" that God would "*turn them over to a strong delusion.*" And God will thus curse these formerly loved sons and daughters "*so that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*" (2Thess. 2:10-12). We cannot help but see and say that this is harsh; nevertheless, we cannot call God unjust.

The wise humble themselves to confess this simple truth, and it is a truth that makes every wise soul tremble: No matter what God decides to do with any of us, it will be a perfectly just judgment. That always will be true because God Himself is always perfectly just.

DURING THE THOUSAND-YEAR REIGN

Finally, as to God's future dealing with fallen angels, it appears that during the thousand years that Jesus reigns on the earth, they, like their leader, the Devil, will be rendered inoperative, so far as earth is concerned. We know that at the beginning of Jesus' thousand-year reign, John saw "*an angel come down from Heaven, having the key to the Bottomless Pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the Bottomless Pit, and shut him up and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years should be fulfilled. After that, he shall be loosed a little season*" (Rev. 20:1-3).

It stands to reason that if the ruler of demons is kept in prison until God visits him and releases him for a short time, then his followers would be imprisoned, too. That scenario certainly makes part of the prophecy from Isaiah concerning the end of the world understandable: "*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the Pit, and shall be shut up in prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancient ones gloriously*" (Isa. 24:21-23).



THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

Peter states unequivocally that fallen angels are in Tartarus now, but neither Peter nor any other New Testament writer ever explicitly states that Satan is consigned to that place with them. That biblical fact notwithstanding, we must assume he is there because (1) God will not grant him repentance any more than He will the fallen angels, and (2) Satan is still wandering about on the earth, constantly doing evil, whatever he does. And if Satan is now in Tartarus with his fallen angels, as he certainly is, then contrary to what Zeus said in Homer's *Iliad* (see page 43), Tartarus is not the same place as the Bottomless Pit, for Satan will be cast into the Bottomless Pit only after Jesus returns to earth (Rev. 20:1-3).

Except for the mysteries of Babylon (Rev. 17:5) and Tartarus, the Bottomless Pit may be the least understood of all the ethereal places mentioned in the Bible where evil creatures dwell. The Bottomless Pit is not mentioned by that name until the ninth chapter of Revelation, and only four times afterwards; still, it plays a significant role in end-time events, and what was revealed to John about it is astounding.

The first time we read of the Bottomless Pit, we are told that a "star" (an angel) fell from Heaven "*and to him was given the key of the Bottomless Pit.*"⁹ *And he opened the Bottomless Pit, and there arose a smoke out of the Pit, as the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the Pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts*

upon the earth, and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only those men who have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it, and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them” (Rev. 9:1-6).

These are fearsome creatures such as mankind has, to date, never seen, unless they were seen in ages past and no record was left of their existence. *“The shapes of the locusts were like horses prepared for battle, and on their heads were, as it were, crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. They had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. They had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails, and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the Bottomless Pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue his name is Apollyon” (Rev. 9:7-11).*¹⁰

Where did these bizarre creatures come from? Did they live on earth in a previous age and, like Satan after Jesus returns, were imprisoned in the Bottomless Pit to be released at the end time to serve God’s purposes? Or did God create them from the smoke that arose from the newly opened Bottomless Pit? We are given no answers. These creatures are mentioned here for the first and last time in Scripture. Fortunately, however, we are given more information about the Bottomless Pit.

In Revelation 11:7, John makes a comment, almost as an aside, that is striking. In the course of telling about God's two special witnesses that will come and prophesy in Jerusalem before the end of the age, John informs us that those two holy men will be slain by "*the Beast that ascends out of the Bottomless Pit.*" This, by itself, may not seem so amazing, especially after reading about the locusts that came out of the Bottomless Pit, but when other information about the Beast is added, it is simply astonishing.

The other information is this: First, the Beast is a man; he is not a "beast" as we typically use the word. John also indicates that the Beast is human by telling us the Beast "*rose up out of the sea*" (Rev. 13:1), the sea representing people of earth (Rev. 17:15).

But the Beast is not an ordinary man. He is mysteriously intelligent (Ezek. 28:3-5; Dan. 8:23) and an uncommonly twisted and devious man who, at least from the perspective of the last days of earth, has already reigned as a king at some point in human history, but who somehow ceased to live here on earth (Rev. 17:8). According to the vision given to John, the Beast will *return to earthly life* from out of the Bottomless Pit where he had been held. It will not be his first experience of earthly existence.

In his wicked heart, the Beast has the same virulent hatred for Jews that Satan has. In fact, he is in such harmony with Satan that when he is released from the Bottomless Pit to reign on earth again, Satan gives the Beast "*his power, his throne, and great authority*" (Rev. 13:2). He is so intent on accomplishing his evil purposes, especially his goal of eradicating the Jews, that the passion consumes him; he cares nothing at all for women or normal family life (Dan. 11:37). He is Satan's all-time favorite person, his most reliable, pliable tool.

Whoever the Beast is, or was in history, his kingship did not come to an end because he died (though history books may say that he died when his kingdom fell). It is much more likely that he was taken from this life before he died¹¹ and that he was then imprisoned in the Bottomless Pit, to be held until God's appointed time for him to return. This Beast of John's Revelation is an extraordinary prophetic figure, a man who has reigned on earth (or who will have already reigned by the time of the end), was cast by God's angels into the Bottomless Pit, and is (or is to be) kept there until very late in earth's history.

Based solely on the information given to us in Revelation, the Bottomless Pit comes across as God's recycle bin for especially destructive and wicked beings. The Devil, we know, is to be put there during the thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth, and then brought out again "for a season" (Rev. 20:7). The Beast is also imprisoned¹² in the Bottomless Pit for a time before being brought out again to fulfill God's preordained course for him, a cruel course that will end after a long three and a half years (Rev. 13:5). It was upon noticing that God re-used Satan and the Beast after they had spent time in the Bottomless Pit which caused me to wonder earlier if the dreadfully equipped locusts that Apollyon released from the Bottomless Pit had previously roamed the earth. It would fit the pattern.

It is perhaps significant, though, that John says that when Satan was seized by God's angel in Revelation 20:2-3, that powerful angel cast Satan "*into the Bottomless Pit*", not "down into" it. It was the same with the fallen angels who were tartarized. Peter does not tell us that they were "cast down" into Tartarus, or into Hell (contrary to Zeus and the KJV, respectively). The Bottomless Pit could not possibly be in heaven because the angels who opened the Bottomless Pit came down from Heaven (and to earth!) to open it (Rev. 9:1; 20:1). Further, smoke "arose" and the Beast "ascended" out of the

Bottomless Pit. So, it appears that the Bottomless Pit is somehow positioned earthward from heaven, but that does not necessarily mean that the Bottomless Pit is below the surface of the earth; it only means that, wherever it is, it is down from heaven and it has endless depth. It would surprise me if it were not in some way connected with the earth's underworld, but the Bottomless Pit is such a different breed of spiritual prison that it could well be hidden by God somewhere else.

The information thus far presented is all that is offered to us in the Scriptures about the Bottomless Pit, unless of course it is called by another name somewhere outside the book of Revelation. Precisely where it is located is unclear, and the conditions that exist within it are never described (well, except by Zeus, but he is not a credible source of information).



IS HELL A NATURAL PLACE OR A SPIRITUAL ONE?

If Hell is a spiritual place, then the question must be asked, how can living people, still in their flesh, fall into it, as in Numbers 16:30-33, where we are told that God opened the earth to swallow up Dathan and Abiram after they led a revolt against Moses? The Bible specifically states that those rebels fell alive into *Sheol*. And Dathan and Abiram are not the only examples of people in a physical body being cast alive into fires of damnation. We are told in Revelation 19:20 that when Jesus returns to reign on earth for a thousand years, the Beast and the False Prophet will be “*thrown alive into the Lake of Fire that burns with sulfur.*” And in Psalm 55:15, the Spirit of Christ prayed through David that his enemies would be cast into Hell alive, but we are never told exactly when that prayer for vengeance was answered or upon whom that vengeance fell. In addition, there are several Scriptures suggesting that physical things can descend into Hell. For example, we are told that there are “*things under the earth*” (Phip. 2:10). It is obvious that some of these “things” are the souls of men (Rev. 5:3), but until we are given clearer information, we must leave open the possibility that “things under the earth” includes more than the souls of men (Rev. 5:13). For example, Ezekiel 32:27 says, “*And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to Sheol with their weapons of war.*” In this verse, Ezekiel may have been speaking poetically and *Sheol* might best be translated here simply as

“grave”, but the phrase “*gone down to Sheol*” is normally used in reference to Hell.

On the other hand, if Hell is a natural place, then the question must be asked, how can spirits go there? We know that the souls of men go into Hell on the basis of Scriptures such as these: “*For you will not leave my soul in Sheol; neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption*” (Ps. 16:10); “*But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; for He shall receive me*” (Ps. 49:15); “*You shall beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from Sheol*” (Prov. 23:14). And while Solomon mentioned saving a soul from *Sheol* (Prov. 23:14), he never said anything about saving a body from it. (Of course, it wouldn’t make much sense to think that a body could be saved from *Sheol* if the word *Sheol* only means “grave” as at least one religious sect teaches.)

All things considered, the conclusion that seems most reasonable is that Hell is a spiritual place. Natural law dictates that the earthly, physical bodies of those whom God cast alive into Hell or the Lake of Fire cannot survive without earthly, physical sustenance. Even in the case of the Beast, we are told that those who cast him down to the Pit killed him (Ezek. 28:1-8; the “Pit” mentioned here is not the Bottomless Pit). So, earthly bodies cast alive into the flames of damnation must certainly die quickly, being in a place where there is not so much as a drop of water, not to mention being a place of vehement flames. Then, simple common sense tells us that the natural body dies before the soul enters into Hell itself, though in a few rare instances, a few persons have provoked God sufficiently to cause Him to cast them down to Hell while they still were in their natural bodies.

Of course, God can make exceptions to any natural law so that common sense is useless. Jesus and Elijah (Mt. 4:2; 1Kgs. 19:8) went without food or water for forty consecutive days.

Common sense says that cannot be done. And Moses did this twice while Israel was camped at Mt. Sinai (Dt. 9:1-18), with just a few days between those two forty-day periods.

So, if God is so provoked by any people that He chooses to have them suffer in Hell while in their earthly bodies, He will do so, no matter what the Scriptures or common sense tells us. The Bible is for *us* to live by, not Him. There is nothing I have written here, or that any man has ever written, that binds God to a certain course of action. I am just pointing out the fact that, apart from a miracle on His part, no one can live in Hell or in the Lake of Fire in a natural, human body. It was God, you will remember, who said that man was made from dirt and that to dirt he would return. But, this was said only of man's body. The spirit of life that God breathed into Adam's earthly body was not made from dirt, and that spirit has never become dirt after any man has died. The spirit of man lives on after the body returns to dirt. That is why this study of Hell is even worth taking the time to do.



THE BODIES OF THE DEAD

Paul said that “*not all flesh is the same flesh,*” and “*there is both a natural and a spiritual body*” (1Cor. 15:39, 44). According to Jesus’ parable of the rich man in Hell (Lk. 16:20-31), the dead have eyes (v. 23); the dead have tongues that can sense thirst (v. 24); the dead have fingers (v. 24); the dead have bosoms (v. 23); the dead can speak and hear (vv. 24-26); the dead can feel pain (v. 24); and the dead can remember and have feelings of fear and of compassion for their loved ones still on earth (vv. 27-28). All these things are revealed in that one parable from the Lord. But there is much more revealed by other men of God. Paul said that the dead have knees as well as tongues (Phip. 2:10-11), and Paul and John both suggested that the dead have feet and legs (Rom. 14:10; Rev. 20:12).

When God brought the prophet Samuel up out of Hell to rebuke King Saul (1Sam. 28:7-20), Samuel was in a recognizable form. When the wicked woman being used by God to bring up Samuel screamed, King Saul asked her to describe what she saw. She answered first that she saw “gods” ascending out of the earth. These “gods” were probably angels returning from Hell after carrying souls either into Paradise or Torment. Then the terrified woman added, “*An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle.*” And from her description, Saul “*perceived that it was Samuel.*”

As for the dead still having bodies of some sort, though not of earthly flesh, Isaiah gave us some insight when he prophesied

of how things will be after the Final Judgment. Through Isaiah, the Father spoke to the Son and said, “*For as the new Heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, says the LORD. And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me. For their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched. And they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh*” (Isa. 66:22-24).

By the time this prophecy comes to pass, the saved (those who will view sinners in the Lake of Fire) will have been given bodies like Jesus’ glorified body (Phip. 3:20-21; 1Cor. 15:52; 1Jn. 3:2). They will never again feel any pain or sorrow, nor will they ever die (Rev. 21:4). These glorified bodies are real bodies; they are bodies made of a kind of “flesh” that is not earthly. Beyond that, however, in order for the glorified saints to be able to view souls in the Lake of Fire, as Isaiah clearly said they would, the souls suffering in the Lake must have been in bodies of their own. What those bodies will be made of is unknown, but they have to be observable; otherwise, the saved would not be able to go out and look on them “*from one Sabbath to another.*” Even if it is beyond us to be able to describe the precise quality of the bodies of the damned, we must at least say that the damned have bodies that could be viewed.



HELL IS WELL ORGANIZED

The fact that Hell was originally divided into two distinct parts, Paradise and Torment, is the first indication we have that Hell is a well-organized place. The fact that there are, as we have seen, degrees of suffering, represented by different depths in Hell, is also an indication of a planned order in “*the lower parts of the earth.*” Isaiah (14:15) and Ezekiel (32:23) both mention “*sides of the Pit*”, and Ezekiel adds a fairly lengthy description of souls in Hell positioned in what appears to be a regimented manner, even in Torment, with sinners kept together according to their nationality (32:23-29). In God’s spiritual garbage dumps, He obviously separates the garbage to fit into specific bins. And He even has a bin for recyclables – the Bottomless Pit!

Throughout the Bible, but in John’s Revelation especially, we are given glimpses of God’s orderliness, in Heaven itself, in God’s week of creation, in the Law of Moses, and in every other thing He has done that we can observe, it is manifest that God is the Master of organization. Therefore, it should not surprise us to find that “*the things under the earth*” were also created in a well-organized manner.



FOOTNOTES

¹ (Page 6) Understandably, there have been questions raised as to the appropriateness of using material from ancient heathen mythology in such a study as this. My response is that I have found elements of truth, remnants of truth once revealed but long forgotten, imbedded in many ancient myths. I believe that the evidence shows a significant portion of the mythologies of the ancient world had roots in revealed truth, but truth which had been twisted, and grossly at times, by the vain imaginations of men.

For example, it is a known fact that stories of a world-wide flood may be found in unconnected cultures all around the globe. It seems obvious that there had to have been a common basis for those flood stories and that the common basis for them was the truth about the Flood that is recorded in Genesis 7-9. I also believe that the non-biblical flood stories that existed in ancient heathen cultures were written after Noah's Flood and are perversions of that holy biblical story.

When Homer, Virgil, and other ancient poets and writers began their work, they would open their work with a prayer to certain goddesses called Muses for revelation of the events they were about to relate and for aid in telling the story accurately and well. Inasmuch as Moses, David, Paul and other wise and godly men said that the gods of the Gentiles were in fact demons (e.g., Deut. 32:17; 1Cor. 10:20), I believe that these men were contacting real spiritual beings, and that those spirits really did

communicate historical truths to those poets, mixed, of course, with error. We know that demons can reveal otherwise unknowable information to humans, and even perform miracles through them; the Bible presents us with many examples, such as the fortune-telling slave girl in Philippi that Paul and Silas dealt with (Acts 16:16) and the Egyptian magicians in Exodus 7:11-12. The epic poets, I believe, had a real connection with fallen angels – demons – who sometimes spoke to them, revealing elements of the hidden past and inspiring fanciful elaborations on it.

Because I believe that there was known truth that predated the myths of Classical Greece, I have confidence that once we are grounded in the truth of Christ, we can discern the remnants of truth that exist in those myths. Pride, the product of carnal knowledge (1Cor. 8:1) and the eldest child of the evolutionary mind, tempts modern man to entirely dismiss the works of ancient poets as the childish fruit of an insufficiently evolved species. But history teaches us not to be quite so smug and skeptical. The ancients were not as ignorant and gullible as proud modern man would like to think. Heinrich Schliemann was publicly ridiculed by Classical experts in the late 19th century because of his opinion that Homer's epic, *The Iliad*, had an historical basis, that there were elements of historical fact mingled with obviously fabricated material. When he set sail to search for ancient Ilios (Homer's other name for the city of Troy), no one expected him to discover it, confident as they were that Homer's entire story was a product of a fertile, unsophisticated human imagination. But when Schliemann, following Homer's detailed geographic information, discovered the ruins of the city of Troy in northwest Asia Minor, the entire scholarly world was stunned. Once again, the solemn declarations offered to the world by scholars and experts were proved to have sand as their foundations. And the confidence

and pretensions of scholars and experts were exposed, again, as based more on pride for what little they know than on humility before God for their obvious ignorance.

So, I believe that it can be helpful to refer to truth, or elements of it, regardless of where that truth is found. Doing so can add color to one's story and increase interest; it can give the reader a wider and better perspective of the issue involved; it can enlighten as to how certain issues developed. And, yes, it can also at times turn out to be useless clutter. I hope that I have successfully avoided that last possibility.

² (Page 12) A prophecy in Isaiah 14:4-17 suggests, contrary to what we concluded in this study, that the Devil may actually go, or may have gone, to Hell at some unrevealed point in time. All other biblical evidence agrees that the Devil was cast out of Heaven onto the earth, that he has been walking about on the earth since that time, and that, far from being the ruler of Hell (as Christian myth has it), he has never even been an occupant of it. So when or how, then, this prophecy of Isaiah was or will be fulfilled, I cannot say.

³ (Page 12) The question has also been asked, since there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1), what will become of the heavens and the earth that now exist? We are not told that they will be cast into the Lake of Fire; therefore, I assume they will not be. Jesus told us that "heaven and this earth will pass away" (Mt. 24:35), but he says nothing about *how* they will pass away or what will be done with them. Peter gives us more detail in 2Peter 3:7-13: "*The heavens and the earth which exist now are kept in store by the Word [of God], reserved for fire against the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men. . . . The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat. The earth*

also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. . . . The heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new Heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

⁴ (Page 14) Peter explained that when Jesus descended into Hell, he did so in order to “*preach unto the spirits in prison, who sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing*” (1Pet. 3:19-20).

At first, it is unclear as to who exactly are “those in prison”. We know that they are at least those who lived before the Law was given, for Peter expressly says so. Paul also wrote that “*until the Law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law*” (Rom. 5:13), and so “*death reigned [over man] from Adam to Moses*” (Rom. 5:14). The basic question is, does the phrase “spirits in prison” include those who lived under Moses’ Law or does it refer only to those who lived before it was given? Paul explicitly said that those who lived during the time of Noah (that is, before the Law) had nothing by which they could be judged, and their sins were not imputed to them because God had given no Law to men at that time. However, Jesus plainly told the Jews that Moses would stand in the Judgment against those who transgressed the Law (Jn. 5:45). So, the question is, if those under the Law already had something by which they could be judged, then why would Jesus go preach to them? It seems very unlikely that Jews disobedient to the Law of Moses would be visited in hell by Jesus and given another chance. This seems true for two reasons. First, because Abraham told the rich man in Hell that if the Jews would not hear Moses, they would not hear Jesus (Lk. 16:31). Jesus himself said the same in John 5:46-47. Second, if God has

appointed Moses to stand in judgment against the Jews who lived under the Law, then Moses will judge them by the Law that they transgressed. And if they are given another chance by having Jesus descend to preach to them in Hell, then on what basis could Moses any longer judge them? Would they not then be judged by something greater than the Law because the one greater than the Law had come to them?

When Lazarus, the poor beggar in Jesus' parable, died, he was taken by the angels into the comfort of Abraham's bosom (Lk. 16:22). That scene has been a wonderful encouragement to the poor among men since Jesus described it, but it also raises a question. Lazarus lived and died under the Law, but Abraham lived and died centuries before God gave the Law; and yet, they were together in the same place in Hell. If Abraham is to be counted among "the spirits in prison", then would not Lazarus also be a spirit in prison with Abraham, being in the same place? Unless there was some sort of spiritual difference made between them, of which we are told nothing, the obvious answer is that they were in the same prison.

So, the question, for me, remains unanswered. Did Peter, in the verses quoted, consider Jews who lived and died under the Law to be among "the spirits in prison" in the heart of the earth? We are confronted with information that could lead to conflicting answers, and it is best, in my view, not to speculate too much about such things as God chooses to keep secret (Dt. 29:29).

⁵ (Page 16) The closest thing to one's sin being blotted out before Christ came was when God "put away" David's sins during his wretched affair with Bathsheba. That degree of mercy was not allowed by the Law of Moses. It was a forgiveness completely unexpected because unlawful. It was a shadow of New Testament mercy in an Old Testament setting,

and it was so confusing to the Israelites that it eventually led to a terrible civil war; on one side were those, led by David's own son Absalom, who did not believe that God had shown such mercy to David, and on the other side, much smaller than the first, were those who believed that He had done so, even if they could neither understand or explain it.

⁶ (Page 39) The phrase, "*the worm does not die*" (used by Isaiah, 66:24, and three times by Jesus, Mark 9:44, 46, 48) was in use in the mid-17th century as a reference to a gnawing, guilty conscience. A collection of sayings concerning etiquette for young men, attributed to one Francis Hawkins, included this admonition: "*Labour to keep alive in thy breast that little sparke of Celestial fire called Conscience, for Conscience to an evil man is a never dying worm, but unto a good man it's a perpetual feast.*"

Incidentally, as much as two centuries later, this phrase, with the same meaning, was used by James Fenimore Cooper, America's first great novelist, in his *Last of the Mohicans*.

⁷ (Page 45) It is obvious, from the words that Homer places on Zeus' lips, that in very ancient times, the Greeks believed in this extremely gloomy place, far worse than Hell, called *Tartarus*. The fact that Peter knew and used the word (*Tartarus*) that Homer used many hundreds of years earlier does not mean that Peter was imitating Homer; it only means that there was a basis of truth behind some of Homer's work, truth that was perverted and lost as generations of men after the Flood fell deeper into sin.

Homer's mythological perversion of the truth about the existence of a place worse than Hell does not in the least make that place itself a myth. And Peter's use of the word *Tartarus* (in a verb form) does not mean that he was formulating doctrine based on popular Gentile mythology. He was not; he was an

anointed man of God moved by the Spirit of truth to write the things he wrote. Knowing that some would think otherwise, Peter himself declared to his readers that “*We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2Pet. 1:16).

I believe that Peter was moved by the Spirit of God to tell the unadulterated truth. I also believe that Homer was moved by demons to fabricate myths, sprinkled throughout with vague remnants of truth that demons knew, or truth that had been revealed to men in generations before Homer but had been neglected by them and lost.

⁸ (Page 46) Much of what is said here concerning the place and status of fallen angels hinges on them being the demons mentioned throughout the Bible. The Bible never explicitly states that the fallen angels are demons, and we should at least note that. Of course, the Bible never explicitly states that it was the Devil who deceived Eve, either.

That said, it must be pointed out that we lay a trap for our own feet when we insist that no truth exists unless it is plainly stated in the Bible. Even Paul, in some of his instructions to the saints, felt free to appeal to common sense (1Cor. 11:14) or to offer his own opinions about a matter (1Cor. 7:6-7), even if he had no specific Scripture to prove his point, and even if the Spirit had not revealed anything specific to him about the issue (1Cor. 7:39-40).

⁹ (Page 61) This key to the Bottomless Pit is found in the hand of another angel in Revelation 20:1, an angel about whom nothing is said about falling from Heaven. The first angel who opened the Pit, Apollyon, may have been a fallen angel.

¹⁰ (Page 62) Apollyon, the “king” over the creatures from the Bottomless Pit, seems to be a fallen angel of great authority, one of the most powerful of the “stars” drawn down to earth by the

tail of the dragon (Rev. 12:4). “Apollyon” means “Destroyer”. In the Old Testament, he passed over Egypt to kill all the firstborn of the Egyptians (Ex. 12:23), and he is mentioned elsewhere (Job 26:6; 28:22; Ps. 17:4; Prov. 15:11).

¹¹ (Page 64) I do not insist that Hitler is the coming Beast, but he does serve as an example of how a world ruler could “die”, and yet there be no actual proof of his death. All that was ever found of his body, according to Russian officials and documents, was the very charred remains of a man about his size. Tests performed on bone fragments eventually made available to Westerners after the 1993 collapse of the Soviet Union seem to indicate the body which the Soviets hid from the West was actually Hitler’s. Therefore, it is very possible that Hitler actually did kill himself, as was first announced by the Soviets. On the other hand, it is also possible that the burned bodies they found in a shallow grave outside Hitler’s bunker on that April day in 1945, were not those of Hitler and his mistress Eva Braun.

Again, I do not teach that Adolph Hitler is the Beast of Revelation. I only use him and his mysterious death as an example of how men may assume a death took place when it may not have. At the same time, I should point out that it is not only Hitler’s death that serves as a good example of the kind of man the Beast will be, for Hitler’s deeds while living on earth certainly exhibited enough of Satan’s vicious hatred of the Jews for him to qualify to be the Beast, even if he is not.

One more element important to the Beast’s story that should be noted is that when the Beast returns to live on earth, *he will be recognized as truly being who he claims to be*. This could hardly be the case with any earthly ruler, regardless of how evil and powerful he was, if he lived before the time when pictures or film were invented. For example, if a man arose to power

and claimed to be the Roman Emperor Nero returned to earth, he would immediately be dismissed by all mankind as lunatic. It would be impossible, with the technology and information we have today, for him to prove his claim and convince the masses. But someone such as Hitler would be easily recognizable to billions of people. Television has made his face familiar to people in every culture around the earth. Indeed, because of the obsession with Hitler of many television producers, book publishers, and movie makers, Hitler's face is arguably the most recognizable face of anyone who has ever walked the earth.

Whether or not the Beast proves to be Adolph Hitler, the Beast will be recognizable to the inhabitants of earth as someone who has previously lived and ruled on earth. He will be a well-known ruler in history who is presumed to be dead, but he will re-appear on the world stage, still lusting for earthly political power and still hating the Jews with all his heart.

¹² (Page 64) Hell (1Pet. 3:19) and the Bottomless Pit (Rev. 20:7) are both referred to as prisons.

RESPONSES TO THE STUDY ON HELL

Brother John:

When you were speaking tonight about Tartarus and what the darkness of no conviction for doing evil must be like, I was reminded of something Peter wrote which helps me see what you were saying about the “tartarized” condition of the fallen angels (1Pet 1:12): “*Unto [the prophets] it was revealed that, not unto themselves but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by those who have preached the gospel unto you with the holy Ghost sent down from Heaven, which things the angels desire to look into.*” This shows us that angels (both fallen and faithful) desire to look into the light which we can have in Jesus. This was something God knew before hand, that even faithful angels would have the desire, but not the grace, to understand the gospel and the way of the Spirit.

Jude referred only to fallen angels when he wrote, “*The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, [God] has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day*” (v. 6). However, even though they are “reserved in chains under darkness”, they still have a desire to dwell among the saints. If that were not the case, then why would there be evil spirits hiding amongst us, as we have found out in recent times? They certainly have a desire to be around us. Satan, especially, remembers what it was like to be in the presence of God. He envied and wanted God’s glory while he was there in heaven with God, and he envies

God's glory in us now, and likes to be around it. Yet, he and his angels have lost the opportunity to be blessed in any way by what they see in us. Their desire proceeds from an evil heart. In the "Tartarus" condition, nothing produces in them conviction for evildoing – not even the holiest of things that they might witness among the saints. It must bring an even greater condemnation upon them to see the wonderful blessings from God upon the body of Christ on earth.

Paul said that apostles "*are made a spectacle (Greek theatron) unto the world, and to angels, and to men.*" It appears that God intended from the beginning for men and angels to watch us who have the Spirit, so that in the working out of our salvation, there may be a blessing for upright angels and men, and greater condemnation for ungodly angels and men.

That verse from Jude does not say that God took away the desire of fallen angels to look into the things we have, but when they "*left their first estate*", they lost the opportunity for that desire to lead to any blessing for them. Cast down now into this state of darkness and "chained" to it, they are condemned to become more and More guilty by whatever holy things they witness, but from which they are forever barred. They just can't stop themselves from making it ever worse for themselves in the Final Judgment.

I hope we can live so that we do not disappoint the faithful angels who are watching us, hoping to learn more about their God, if God enables them. We can learn the fear of God from many places, and if we carefully consider these things, we will learn from the example of the wretched angels who followed Satan and were, with him, cast out of Heaven into that place called "Tartarus".

Damien

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Yes, Damien!

And your comments reminded me of what Paul said that faithful saints are doing; that is, educating spiritual powers concerning the things of God: “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in Heavenly places might be known by the Assembly the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:8-11).

jdc

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Dear Brother John,

Last night was so good for me to be able to be with you all to learn about the “abode of the dead”, or Hell (and other places). Reading the handout again this morning, I was very thankful to have been there to hear the truths that were talked about. I would love to pass it on to others.

Some things that stood out and some thoughts I had were:

All who are on the earth are before the Lord, and all who are in Hell are before the Lord. There is no escape from Him in either place. All those who are there (in Hell) know that truth. I have been thinking this morning that only on earth can a wicked person believe that there is an escape from Hell and, so, receive a type of “rest” (from the fear of God). In that way only (believing a lie) is there a sort of rest for the wicked in this life.

I loved learning that Job knew that descending into *Sheol* was a permanent condition, but he still had hope that God would not forsake him. He knew something about what was to come in his prayer written in Job 14:13: “*O that you wouldst hide me away in Sheol, that you wouldst keep me secret, until your wrath be past, that you wouldst appoint me a set time, and remember me.*” He was looking for the appearing of Jesus while he lived, just as we do now. We also are “*looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*” (Tit. 2:13).

Then, hearing how Jesus did remember those held in Paradise was so good. He rescued the righteous. He didn't forget those who trusted in Him. And now for those who belong to Him through the Spirit, He does not delay or withhold Himself when this life is over. There is no waiting anymore.

I also loved learning that God had organization in *Sheol* and that the righteous were separated from the wicked. That was merciful and kind. And now, even for those who waited, the discomfort they felt is at an end.

There are still things that are going around in my head from last night. It was so good. Thank you.

Adam

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Brother John,

I understood tonight that Hell was not created for man, but for the Devil and his angels. Does this mean that the Devil and his angels sinned before Adam and Eve?

Bro Randell

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Hi Brother Randell:

Where in the Bible study did we read that Hell was not made for men? You must be one of those who think that Gehenna is Hell! :)

Matthew 25:41 tells us only that there is a fire prepared for the Devil and his angels (rather than for people, we assume). But which fire is that? Hell or the Lake of Fire? I think the evidence points exclusively to the latter.

But as to your question, yes, the Devil sinned before Adam and Eve did. Otherwise, there would have been no serpent to deceive Eve in the Garden of Eden. As for the angels that followed the Devil in his wickedness, I suppose that they fell into

sin shortly after the Devil fell, but the Bible does not give us a time frame there.

John

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Daddy,

I take it that the Devil and his angels sinned before Adam and Eve but were not cast out of Heaven until Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. I wonder if God even pointed the Devil out in Heaven as “a bad guy”, or if He kept all of it in His heart, letting him deceive those he could of the angels until they were all suddenly gone. . . . Is there any evidence one way or another?

te.

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Hi Token:

The evil spirits were still in God’s presence in Heaven during the Old Testament (e.g. 1Kgs. 22:19-23). At least, they had easy access to the Almighty. God spoke with them, and they with Him. In the case from 1Kings 22, God spoke quite openly with an evil spirit, in what was something like a heavenly counsel, about that demon coming to earth to be a lying spirit in the mouths of the false prophets in Israel. So, all the Heavenly host must have known there was evil among them.

The attitude of the faithful angels, cherubim, seraphim, and other Heavenly creatures is unknown, but we can surmise from certain of Jesus’ teachings that it was one of patience. (After all, who in Heaven has authority to do anything that God has not commanded?) I am thinking in particular of Jesus’ parable of the tares in the field. In that parable, God’s servants wanted to rid the field of the tares immediately upon discovery that they were there. But God forbade them to do so until His appointed

time. The attitude of those servants of God then had to change, and it did, once they heard His voice and learned what His will was.

So, there seems to have been among the faithful creatures in Heaven a knowledge that some of them had become wicked. And when they saw God do nothing immediately about it, they resolved to share Heaven with unfaithful Heavenly creatures in quiet confidence until God's appointed time (whenever that would be). They must have wanted badly for the wicked to be cast out, though, for when the Son of God returned home and Satan and his followers were finally cast out, the faithful creatures rejoiced (Rev. 12:1-12).

You will remember also that Jesus tolerated Judas in silence for years, even to the point of keeping the other disciples in the dark about him. Indeed, even up to the moment Judas exposed himself as the betrayer by leading the mob to arrest Jesus in Gethsemene, the other disciples (with the possible exception of John), thought Judas was a disciple in good standing.

Daddy

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John,

There are many thoughts that arise from last night. Kay and I had a good time this morning discussing it and reading some verses from the Bible.

We read Romans 9:14-23. In particular, these verses stood out (22-23): "What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory."

“Fitted to destruction” reminded me of 2Peter’s statement, “*But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed*”, which is an amazing statement now that we have more understanding of it. These vessels of wrath are not merely endured with longsuffering but with much longsuffering. In doing this, Paul says God is showing His wrath and making His power known; but to whom? Surely to those who are being blessed in the way verse 23 describes. As much as the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are examples to us, so it is when we see someone in this state. I expect that we will see more of it in the future. God wants us to understand it now.

This was the same passage (the one from Romans) that I was considering when the Lord posed two questions to me: (1) “If I told you that, no matter what you did, you would not be saved, what would you do?” This question came with the feeling that I would retain the knowledge of God I had (or at least I thought that I did or that I was right), and (2) “If I showed you a way to be saved, then what would you do?”

I now know the first question was describing the state, or close to it, of being “tartarized”. Utterly helpless and unable to do anything that counted as right before God. Everything wrong in His eyes!

Kay and I also discussed the fact that for a long time Satan and demons, as angels in Heaven, were able to come before God and hear God and even receive instruction in what to do. We wondered about the many ministers of Christianity (Xty) who do hear from God. A “tartarized” person may still be allowed into the presence of God and truly hear from God, and yet it is all damning them the more certainly. It seems to me that Xty itself must be connected to this casting into Tartarus in some way. The rejection of light by early believers was rewarded by God with the darkness of Xty, but still God has a time yet reserved

for His people to get out of it before it is cast into that inescapable place when God sends the “strong delusion”.

The way into Tartarus is to refuse to repent. If that is your heart’s wish, then God will grant it. Getting into Tartarus may be more a process than an instantaneous thing. The mercy of God may just make it that way because “*when He makes a way to His wrath*” there is no escape.

Paul, Peter, John and Jude wrote letters which show that they saw the rising up of this unrepentant spirit. They marveled at it and warned those who could hear them. Clearly, Peter and Jude discerned in the Spirit that some had been abandoned by God. We live in a time when God is revealing truth to us, and it must surely come to pass that this truth will be widely known and taught. The more we have from God, the more is expected of us, and the greater the possible punishments for rejection. These are clear principles in God.

This is wonderful, but so fearful.

Damien

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John:

Damien wrote: “The way into Tartarus is to refuse to repent. If that is your heart’s wish, then God will grant it.”

Wow, John, this was a good insight by Damien. What a thought!

When we refuse to repent, it seems that non-repentance is what we want with “all our heart”. And one day God will give us our “heart’s desire” – just as He said. He will give us a place to live eternally where we will not, and cannot, repent - and all that goes with it.

Gary

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Yes, that comment stood out to me, too.

jdc

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Hey.

Damien wrote: “The way into Tartarus is to refuse to repent. If that is your heart’s wish, then God will grant it. Getting into Tartarus may be more a process than an instantaneous thing.”

Does that mean that people can be in a half-tartarized state?

te.

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No. It’s all or nothing. Either it is hopeless (Tartarus) or there is hope. That said, it is normal that, as with anything else, whether a blessing or a curse, a person would descend slowly over time, by degrees of disobedience and dullness of heart, into the condition in which he would provoke God to curse him like that.

jdc

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Hi:

I loved what you gave us last night about being “tartarized”. It put more fear of God in me than ever, but at the same time, it gives me more encouragement than ever. It makes me want to obey God more than ever. And it feels cleaner than ever. I love that.

During the night, I kept having thoughts about the word “adulterous”. I would have different thoughts all through the night. The first was that a person can be physically close to their spouse – but if they have physically been with someone else, or if in their heart they are not with their spouse – that is

adulterous. Then I remembered how Jesus defined adultery, that even if a man looked and lusted after a woman, he had already committed adultery in his heart. I was also remembering what we read last night in the Tartarus study, how it is better to be one way or the other - but being “mixed” is worse than all. Then I was having thoughts of the great whore in Revelation, Christianity. She is not even married. She is not in covenant with God, but she loves the physical act – Christianity loves the physical act of worshipping God. But that’s all that they have – it is just of the flesh. And then how God is calling His children to “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

It all goes back to the heart! That’s just what we hear God saying to His people through the prophets. I don’t know quite how to put it all together, but it feels like I am learning something.

Donna

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Hi Sister Donna:

Yes, it does feel as if you are learning something.

I would not at all say that the children of God who are still inside Christianity have nothing but the ceremonial forms of the Christian religion with which to worship. After all, to be a child of God means to have the holy Spirit within, by which one can really worship God. But I must say that, being in Christianity, their worship is “mixed”, which to God has always been the worst spiritual state to be in. If the biblical attitude of God holds true in this case, God would rather His children either be nothing but Christians or be completely separated from that abomination (“Come out of her!”). It is God’s children, trying to force a mixture of His Spirit with the great whore’s lovely, wicked spirit, that causes most of the confusion and division that

exists among the saints on earth today. May God save us from that great mistake!

jdc

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John:

I have a question. If a person has been “tartarized”, the way I understand it, there is no coming back. But when I think of the king eating grass several years, would that be an example of reversal?

Wendell

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Hi Wendell:

Since last night, that question has already been asked of me a couple of times.

You were right with your first thought, Wendell. There is no coming back from Tartarus. God doesn't play around with people's souls. He is eternally serious about every judgment He makes. No one in Tartarus can possibly return to this good life where God speaks to man and guides him toward righteousness.

King Nebuchadnezzar was not sent into Tartarus by God when he was given the mind of an animal. I say that with confidence because it is obvious that with the mind of an animal out in the field eating grass, Nebuchadnezzar could not have been sinning at all, just as animals do not sin, and much less was the king sinning constantly, as those in Tartarus are condemned always to do.

I think that anyone who claims that he has been to Tartarus and back is either ignorant or he is trying to impress people with an extraordinary tale and false humility. Or, it could possibly be that he is under the wicked influence of Catholicism, which teaches that “Purgatory” exists. That is an imaginary

place, sort of a half-Hell, invented by ancient religious myth-makers as a destination after death for people who did not obey God in this life but weren't all that bad. Therefore, they are rewarded with a second chance to go to Paradise (after they have been "purged" in Purgatory from their sins by suffering an appropriate length of time). But it is foolish to think that any amount of suffering on our part can purge our sins. Only the blood of Christ can do that for us, and no man of God ever taught that after death, that precious, sin-cleansing blood is still available to sinners.

jdc

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Hello John.

Thank you for your message last night on "tartarization". I am thankful for some meat, John – meat that makes me lie on my bed at night and pray for God to help me, to have mercy on me, to help me love Him more, and to obey Him. Of course, it takes "doing" - and for that, we have the power of the holy Ghost. Most of God's children do not have such a privilege to "eat" what we eat, John. I want to stay VERY thankful for being allowed at this table. May God bless all His children to hear things from Him that we do regularly through you.

John, Wendell's question and your answer brought some thoughts to me of these verses in 2Peter 3:9-11: "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the Heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things*

shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”

Just because God does not immediately strike us dead when we sin (or even when we are weak and sin multiple times), does not mean He is “slack”. It does not mean we have gotten by, or that He does not consider it important.

But God’s longsuffering is SO great, and His offering of repentance is SO generous that it’s hard to take in. But as Peter said, He is not slack either. If correction comes time and time again, and we don’t let the Spirit fix it - what will God’s options be? Either death for our good, or tartarization, or damnation.

My point is this: Personally, since I have been in this truth, I have NEVER seen a situation where you had not been working to correct a person MANY times before God eventually sent them away somewhere (in their heart first, and then in their body). It is just as God says - He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. But there comes “a time”. It has been different with each person - a different level of patience and a different amount of time the door stayed open.

But then, there was a time when it was over. When that time is, God knows. But it’s not something to be played around with or delayed, when correction comes our way. We need to fix it with all our heart, soul, AND BODY! We need to fix it FAST! What manner of people ought we to be in all holiness, godliness, and lifestyle, knowing the time WILL come?

Gary

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Bro. John:

Thank you! I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to proofread your study on *What the Bible really says about Hell*. What a wonderful experience I found in the pages of your study!

First of all, as I read in the beginning how you and the boys began your study, I was not expecting to find a “pause” page that so tenderly spoke of the Father and the Son and the “innocent pain” that they both endured so that we could be where we are today. My! “Innocent pain”. I had never thought of pain in that way, but that is exactly what it was – innocent. Considering the innocent pain they both endured touched me deeply. I felt the love as I read it.

As I continued reading, I found myself not so much “engulfed in the flames” of Hell as I was overwhelmed by the love of God in everything I was reading. I realized that this was not just a study on Hell, but a wonderful Story of God, God’s love, God’s power, God’s righteousness, God’s justice, God’s patience, God’s longsuffering towards mankind – just plain “God”. God is right; God is fair; God is just. God is all powerful. God’s power can destroy or save. I found myself several times stopping and asking myself, “Do you believe what you are reading?” I knew that if I did, it would compel me to live God’s way, wanting only His desires in my heart.

After I completed the reading, I sat soaking in what I had just read. It was a Story of God the Creator. He is the only One with Power to “take and destroy” or “save and restore”. And this side of the grave is the only place we can live according to God’s will. After death, all is said and done. Nothing else can be accomplished. As Brother Darren’s song says: “*How should we live, knowing the soul never dies?*”

Thank you for this Story of God.

Sandy

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Hi John.

This evening I began to read through your Hell study and as I got to around page 22 in the “Can Anyone Escape Hell”

section, I started to have some feelings, and I began to drift into them. You were talking about men of Bible having faith to believe that God would deliver them from Sheol, and then having Jesus deliver them from it, and a feeling of appreciation flooded me. It all depended on Jesus!

I laid the study down on my chest and let gratitude fill me. I thanked God for many things . . . for Jesus, especially that he has made my heart open to the truth, and that He has made my life perfect for me – just because he loves me. He, because it pleased Him, has given me understanding in Him, and a love for truth that many “mighty” earthly men do not have. He has kept me, preserved me, and has created circumstances throughout life that have thus far kept the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life, or any other weakness or sin from sweeping me away. He has given me a holy Spirit that has the power and the love that will keep me from that place I am reading about – Hell. He paid the price. He did it all. These were some of my thoughts as I stopped reading – I just wanted to give glory to Him.

OK, then I picked the book back up and flipped back to page 23. There, I read, “Let’s Pause a Minute to Honor God”!!!! Wow! It goes on . . . “We are loved by God!” . . . “We must avoid the pitfall of pride, lest our study become merely academic” . . . “It was by the willingness of the Son and of the Father to suffer that we may have eternal life” . . . “so, give praise and honor to both the Father and the Son for the pain they endured to bring about so great a salvation”, etc.

It sure was a wonderful feeling to have already done those things when I read it. To be exhorted to do the very thing God had just put in my heart to do, did something in me! That was God putting it in my heart to give Him glory . . . for only He knew what was on the next page! I love His ways and His feelings.

I'm enjoying the book very much. But I really wanted to pause and testify to my experience.

Good night and thank you for your labor.

Gary

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If after reading the book, you feel like offering humble praise to God, then you got the point.

So far, so good – from you and Sandy.

jdc

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Brother John:

When we researched the question, “Do people in Hell worship God?”, we found out that they cannot. From Psalm 6:5, we read, “*For in death there is no remembrance of thee (God); in Sheol who shall give you thanks?*” Wow.

So, my conclusion is that you should do all of your praising God on earth, live right, and then, praise God in heaven with all the others that make it there. Then you won't even have to worry about *Sheol*, much less the Lake of Fire.

Aaron

(one of “the boys”)

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Thanks, Aaron.

I will try to remember to do that . . . while I can.

jdc

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The End