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THE REALITY OF HELL

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Is There a Place of Literal Fire Where Lost Sinners Will Be Confined throughout Eternity?

“HELL” “SHEOL” “HADES” “GEHENNA” “TARTARUS”

The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew (Old Testament), Chaldee (portion of Daniel), and Greek (New Testament). The Bible that we have today is a translation of the Hebrew, Chaldee, and Greek writings into our language. There are many translations of the Bible, the most popular being the King James Version, which you probably own.

The Word “Hell” in the King James Version

There are four words in the KJV translated “hell.” Of these four words, only one of them is used in the Old Testament. That word is the Hebrew word “Sheol.”

In the New Testament, the three words translated “hell” are “hades,” “gehenna,” and “tartarus,” all Greek words.

What do these words mean?

1. The Hebrew word “sheol” is translated as follows.

“Hell”—31 times, as in Psalm 9:17: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

“Grave”—31 times, as in Ecclesiastes 9:10: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

“Pit”—3 times, as in Job 17:16: “They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust.”

But actually, the Hebrew word “sheol” does not mean either “hell,” “grave,” or “pit.” It means “the unseen world” or “the place of departed spirits.” Notice how it is defined:

Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary says that “sheol” is “the world of the dead.”

Young’s Analytical Concordance says that “sheol” is “the unseen state.”

Smiths Bible Dictionary says that “sheol” is “always the abode of departed spirits.”

Fausset’s Bible Dictionary and Encyclopedia says that “sheol” is “the common receptacle of the dead.”

So *sheol* does not strictly refer to hell, but to the place of departed spirits, irrespective of whether saved or lost. Sheol is simply a term meaning “the state of the dead in general, without any restriction of happiness or misery” (Smith). In many instances where the word is used, however, the reference is clearly to that compartment of *sheol* where the wicked are punished. For example:

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psa 9:17).

2. “Hades” is the Greek word in the New Testament which corresponds to “sheol.”

It is translated as follows:

“Hell”—10 times, as in Matthew 11:23: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

“Grave”—1 time: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1Co 15:55).

But *hades*, like *sheol*, does not strictly or exclusively refer to hell. *Hades* is the corresponding Greek word to the Hebrew word *sheol*, and both have the same meaning.

Strong’s Greek Dictionary of the New Testament says that *hades* is “the place [state] of departed souls.”

Young's Concordance: "the unseen world."

A. T. Robertson, world-renowned Greek scholar: "Hades is technically the unseen world, the Hebrew *sheol*, the land of the departed" (from *Word Pictures*).

The reader is urged to read Luke 16:19-31, where a perfect illustration of *sheol* (*hades*) is given. This passage draws back the curtain and lets us have a look into both sides of "the land of the departed."

3. "Gehenna" or "the Gehenna of fire," is the Greek word that strictly means "hell."

It is never translated by any word but "hell," and eleven of the twelve times the word is used, it is used by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Here are a list of the passages in which the word "gehenna" appears: Matthew 5:22, 29, 30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6.

The word "gehenna" is of Hebrew origin and derived from "valley" and "Hinnom." "*Gehenna* is the Valley of Hinnom where the fire burned continually" (A. T. Robertson).

The Valley of Hinnom was a place near Jerusalem where Ahaz introduced the worship of fire gods, the sun, Baal, and Moloch. The Jews under ungodly Manasseh offered their children as burnt offerings in this idolatrous worship (Jer 7:31). This cruel worship was finally abolished, and later Josiah made the place a receptacle of dead carcasses and the bodies of malefactors (criminals), in which worms were continually generating. A perpetual fire was kept to consume the putrifying matter. The place was still in existence at the time of Christ, and the Saviour illustrated somewhat the condition in eternity, in "the Gehenna of fire," by reference to this valley.

The Lord Jesus referred to hell as the "Gehenna of fire," into which "both body and soul" will be cast. He said that it is "unquenchable fire" and that "the worm [man] dieth not" in the flame, just as the three Hebrew children of Daniel's day did not die when cast into the fiery furnace (Dan 3).

Hell is no myth as infidels, Russellites, Universalists, and Modernists would have you believe. Christ did not warn of hell simply to scare men. He warned of hell because it is a reality!

4. "Tartarus," the fourth word translated "hell," is used only once in the New Testament (2Pe 2:4).

Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament says that "tartarus" is "the deepest abyss of Hades," and that the word means "to incarcerate [imprison] in eternal torment."

A. T. Robertson: "The dark and doleful abode of the wicked dead, like the Gehenna of the Jews."

Fausset's Dictionary: "The deep, or abyss, or bottomless pit."

So this word strictly refers to the place where the unsaved are confined in divine judgment.

Fire in Hell?

Leaving the passages that contain these four words translated *hell*, notice some passages which teach of hell in words that even a child can understand.

Matthew 13:49-50: "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Revelation 9:2: "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."

Revelation 14:10-11: "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

Revelation 20:10: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Revelation 19:20: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet...These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." (Also Rev 20:14-15, 21:8; Mat 5:22, 18:8, 25:41; 2Pe 3:7; Jude 7).

Be not deceived by the deniers of hell-fire. Such false teachers serve Satan and are enemies of your soul. Read these passages for yourself, and cast into the fire the deceptive literature that cunningly "explains away" plain statements of God's Word.

"Everlasting Fire"

I have a Watchtower (Russellite, or so-called "Jehovah's Witness") book that tries to do away with the fact that the Bible means what it says in such passages as the following:

Matthew 18:8: "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee: cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire."

But Russellism is wrong. Consider: You've heard it said, "Death ends all." But does it?

The Greek word for "everlasting" is *aiōnios*. The word means ageless—without beginning, without ending, or both. It is used in Romans 16:26 of God: "the everlasting [*aiōnios*] God." This use of the word should clearly show us the meaning of the word "everlasting."

The Greek scholar A. T. Robertson says of the word: "It comes as near to the idea of eternal as the Greek can put it in one word. It is a difficult idea to put into language."

The very same word (*aiōnios*) is used to describe the future life of the righteous and the future punishment of the wicked in Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." If the punishment of the wicked is limited, we may likewise limit the life of the righteous! But such can not be done.

"For Ever and Ever"

This phrase, "for ever and ever" (*eis tous aionas aionon*), occurs 20 times in the New Testament:

- of God—16 times;
- of saints' future blessedness—1 time;
- of punishment of the wicked and Satan—3 times.

Is it likely that the phrase means "absolute eternity" 17 times, and only a limited period the other three times? Nonsense!

"Death"

Death is never an annihilation, or a ceasing to exist. It is always a *separation*.

- Adam's death was a separation from God (Gen 2:17, 3:23-24).
- Christ's death was a separation from God (Mat 27:46).
- Physical death is a separation of the soul from body (Luk 16:22-23).

The second death is the final and eternal separation of the unsaved in the "lake of fire" (Rev 20:11-15). That the second death is not annihilation, see Revelation 19:20 and 20:10.

Neither does "destruction" mean annihilation. Something can be destroyed without being annihilated. There is much destruction of property, goods, buildings, etc., in war, but such things are not annihilated.

It will certainly be destruction for the unsaved in hell—destruction of peace, joy, happiness, pleasure, rest; destruction from all that the saints of God have in heaven—but no annihilation. The unsaved still exist.

If you are lost, reader, then you are doomed to eternal separation from God in the *Gehenna of fire*, unless you trust Him Who was separated at Calvary's Cross that sinners might have eternal life in heaven.

Consider your guilt before Him, and the fact that you deserve nothing but hell because of your sins against the Holy and Righteous God. Listen:

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom 5:8-9).

Christ suffered hell—separation from God—for all who will depend wholly upon Him.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1Pe 3:18).

"For God hath made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2Co 5:21).

Look to Him for redemption from sin, death, and hell. Thus realizing your need, submit by faith to Jesus Christ as your Lord, and receive forgiveness of all your sins. ☞