

Hell

Where or What is it?

I am writing this little booklet with the prayerful desire that the readers might be given the opportunity to examine for themselves exactly what the bible says about this much misunderstood and much preached upon subject. I am convinced that I can say with much certainty that what we believe about *hell/hades/sheol* is what we have either heard from preachers/ministers/pastors or what authors have told us in their books. Few of us have taken the time to research the subject to uncover exactly what the Holy Ghost has revealed or what the scriptures actually say.

The Traditional View

Allow me first of all to try as honestly as I possibly can to put forward the view which most Christians hold. They believe that after the unbeliever dies his/her "*soul*" leaves the "*body*" and transfers to this place called *hell/hades/sheol*. In this awful place the "*soul*", (which they believe is the real person), enters into a state of conscious torment along with millions of others who are already there, some in fact for thousands of years writhing in pain with not a drop of water offered them nor any hope of alleviation from their sufferings in sight. Many Christians believe this will be their eternal state while others believe this is only temporal, an intermediate condition which will be changed at a later stage to a new location after the Great White Throne judgement, namely the "*Lake of Fire*". Many also hold the view that before the ascension of Christ there were two compartments situated side by side yet separated by a great gulf, the one side was called "*Abraham's bosom*", another intermediate state where all the righteous dead were housed and the other side was "*hell*", the place of torment and flame, this is based on the narrative found in Luke 16 regarding the rich man and Lazarus. This whole area they tell us was known as "*sheol*" in the Hebrew, the abode of all departed "*souls*" whether good or bad. Such as hold this view insist that at the ascension of Christ those "*souls*" in "*Abrahams bosom*" were led out of this place by the ascending Lord and were transported to heaven, this is based on a portion of scripture found in Ephesians ch 4 v 8 which Paul quotes from Psalm 68, and there they remain along with all others who have gone there in "*soul form*" since.

This I believe is an honest, true and correct account of what I will call the "traditional view", a view I hasten to add I believed for many years.

The question is, does this explanation hold up under the careful scrutiny of Holy Scripture? This we will endeavour to find out with the help of the gracious Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament

I think it best if we should start with the Old Testament what do the O.T. scriptures tell us of this place of torment?

We discover that there are 65 references to this place called "*Sheol*", so it would be reasonable to think that in quite a few of these occasions where the word "*Sheol*" appears there will be some information about torment or fire and perhaps even a mention of Abraham's bosom.

So let us investigate. First of all with regard to the 65 references, we leave this to the research of those who are truly interested, these can all be found in any good lexicon or concordance and are worthwhile searching out. This Hebrew word "*Sheol*" is translated into 3 different English words by the translators of the KJV. It is translated 31 times as "*grave*", 31 times as "*hell*" and 3 times as "*the pit*". Now which is it? Surely all 3 cannot be correct, and if the translators were so sure of its meaning why would they need to use 3 different English words to convey the meaning of this 1 word "*Sheol*" to us? It seems quite obvious that the translators themselves were not sure what this word "*Sheol*" meant. The American Standard Version of the scriptures recognises this fact and instead of translating the word "*sheol*" they transliterated and in the 65 places it appears simply inserted the Hebrew word *sheol* on every occasion.

It appears first in Genesis 37:35, Jacob dismayed by the thought that Joseph was dead said, "*I will go down to the grave/sheol unto my son mourning*". It must be noted that in this instance Jacob could not have been thinking that Joseph was in "*hell*", that place of torment and that eventually he would be in that fiery region with him. Realising the problem this could raise the KJV translators felt it easier to insert the word "*grave*" and this they did 30 times more in our O.T. scriptures.

So where in all of the 65 occurrences of this word "*Sheol*" in the O.T. can we read of a place with 2 compartments where the tormented wicked are separated from the blessed saints by the great gulf? Where can we read of the wicked dead being in torments? Where can we read of Abraham's bosom, where the "*souls*" of all the righteous dead were in blessedness? Where in the whole of the O.T. is

there one reference to any of these? The answer from scripture is plain there is not 1 single reference or mention in all of the O.T. scriptures to any of these subjects. We will of course look at Luke 16 when we come to the New Testament, but for the minute let us be honest about what we have discovered in the scriptures written before Christ came into the world. Not 1 word about Abraham's bosom, nor 1 word about the wicked being in torment, nor of a great gulf fixed between 2 compartments which supposedly held the righteous and unrighteous. Nor is there any warning from God of such a place. In Genesis 6:13 when God made known to Noah His intention to send the flood He does not mention torments or fire which would follow the death of those wicked people who perished in the flood, but simply tells Noah, "*I will destroy them with the earth*". In Genesis 19:29. With regard to Sodom and Gomorrah we read "*God destroyed the cities of the plain*", but there is no reference to the inhabitants being warned that they would be thrown into a place of fire and eternal torment. I could go on citing example after example but there is no need, there is not one word of warning about such a place, not one mention of anyone ever being cast into such a state of suffering. Even the passage in Numbers 26:10 where we read that "*The earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men, and they became a sign*", the fire here is not "*hell-fire*" but fire from God which devoured Korah and the others.

So what are we to think? - that for 4000 years a righteous thrice holy God allowed men and women to drop into this fearful place of torment which He must have prepared, yet He never gives one word of warning about it nor does He mention any details of its existence? Surely such a thought is preposterous?

The New Testament

We now move to the New Testament. What has it to say of this awful, intermediate state of torment?

How often it is said from platforms and pulpits that Jesus spoke more about hell than He did about heaven. Now is this a true statement? If it is then we should preach it faithfully with as much fervour as we can muster, but if not then we are misrepresenting God and His word and actually telling lies. I think if you examine the matter carefully you will find out the statement is completely untrue.

Again we need to recognise that 3 words are translated "*hell*" from the original writings. These words are "*Gehenna*", "*Hades*" and "*Tartarus*".

Hades

Let us look at the word "*Hades*". This is a Greek word and is the equivalent of the Hebrew word "*Sheol*" as we can see by comparing Acts 2:27 with Psalm 16:10. This word "*Hades*" being Greek would never have been used by Christ any more than the English translation "*hell*". He would have used the Hebrew/Aramaic word *Sheol*, however in the 4 Gospels we find that 4 times it is recorded that Christ spoke of "*hell/hades*". These are the only 4 occurrences in the gospels where the word "*Hades*" is used and in each occasion it is translated "*hell*". On examination it will be found that Matthew and Luke record the same event concerning the Lord when speaking of Capernaum with its privileges He said metaphorically that it would be thrust down to "*hell/hades*". This reduces the number to 3. Apart from Luke 16 in none of the other 2 instances is there a thought or a mention of hell fire torment or the like. My point is that although our Lord has the usage of this word "*hades*" attributed to Him the fact is that only 3 times in the 4 gospels does it appear.

With regard to "*heaven*" our Lord spoke over 120 times, check any concordance to verify this. At least let us be done with this fallacy, the Lord Jesus did not speak more about *hell/hades* than heaven, it is simply and totally untrue. Why would such a lie be put before an audience unless to convince them of something that finds no backing from the gospels but is simply the desire of the preacher to promote to fit in with his traditional beliefs?

This brings us to Luke 16. We have already written a booklet on the subject which is available from our website www.loversonofthetruth.net/literature, but we must say a few words here.

This is the most misunderstood passage of scripture in our bibles. It is the only place those who believe in a traditional hell can go to try and prove their case. Let me briefly explain. The Lord Jesus in Luke 16 is speaking directly to the Pharisees v. 15. He is not revealing truth but refuting error. As we have seen the O.T. knows nothing of a place called Abraham's bosom nor of an intermediate place of torment nor of a great gulf fixed. However the Pharisees did believe in such things. Their Rabbinical writings in the Talmud hold a collection of these beliefs. They believed and taught that the dead could communicate in this place, they believed that the righteous could see and hear the damned and that between the 2 compartments there was a great gulf fixed which divided the one from the other and over which no one could pass. Josephus, the first century historian who was himself a Pharisee, in an extract which he wrote to the Greeks concerning Hades writes at length of these beliefs. We have to recognise that in Luke 14:1 - Luke 17:10 we have recorded for us the longest existing discourse between Christ and His greatest

adversaries the Pharisees. In ch.14 Christ exposes their pride. In ch.15 He exposes their self righteousness and at the start of ch.16 He exposes their covetousness and greed. At the end of ch.16 the Lord Jesus deals with their erroneous teachings. First of all with their loose views on divorce and then on their non scriptural views about death and the afterlife. We must remember Christ had pointed out to them that they had made the scriptures of non effect through their vain traditions.

The narrative in Luke 16 raises more questions than it gives answers but these are never brought up by traditional preachers of hell as they are far too busy dangling sinners over the flames in their attempt to scare sinners to Christ, rather than present the all sufficient sacrifice of Calvary and the amazing love of God for a guilty world. They somehow think that the Holy Spirit needs their help to convict sinners in drawing them to the Saviour. The Lord of course knows best, He said "*Lift Me up and I will draw all men unto Me*".

Here are some of the questions raised;

- Are we to believe Abraham could hear the cry of a poor lost man being tormented in a flame and still be happy?
- Are we to suppose that between paradise/heaven and hell the dead can talk with one another?
- Does scripture teach that the angels carry the souls of believers off at death to glory?
- Where did those O.T. saints go who died before Abraham was born, people like Abel and Noah?
- Does being poor mean you will be in heaven and being rich mean you will be in hell?
- Why is God not mentioned in the whole narrative but Abraham seems to carry all the authority in this realm of the dead?
- Where in Luke 16 is there any mention of an "*immortal soul*"?
- Where can we find any gospel content in this entire passage?
- Where do we read of "*Abraham's bosom*" in the O.T.?

I could ask many more questions but these will suffice. This is the only portion that can be appealed to if the traditional view is to be proved, yet rather than prove it to be true it exposes the error of what is almost universally preached from our platforms.

The Lord Jesus uses Abraham to challenge these religious hypocrites. Why would one need to be sent from the dead to proclaim the existence of this place of torment when we are told, "*let them hear Moses and the prophets*"?. We have already looked, Neither Moses in the first 5 books of the O.T., nor any of the writers of the remaining 34 books, give any testimony whatsoever of such a horrendous place existing. Would it not be wise to follow the advise and hear Moses and the prophets and believe their witness?

Is it not interesting that Peter and John who were present when the Lord Jesus spoke these words in Luke 16 and listened to what must have been the most radical teaching they had ever heard, do not find it worth their while to even make mention of this place "*hades*" even 1 time, either in their writings, they wrote 5 epistles between them, or in any words they spoke in the Acts of the Apostles?

Even more strange, Paul, the man who was God's chosen vessel and who wrote 14 of our New Testament epistles does not make 1 mention of such a place, nor in his 11 sermons recorded in the Acts is there 1 syllable uttered about "*hades/hell*". Strange don't you think? When Paul speaks of the afterlife he does not warn sinners that they will drop into a fiery hell to be immediately tormented the moment they die but he instead states, "*God has appointed a day in which He will judge this world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath afore ordained*" (Acts 17.31).

Again I need to remind my readers that Paul could lift up his hands and declare that he was "*innocent of the blood of all men*" and could honestly confess that he had "*not shunned to declare the whole council of God*" (Acts 20.26,27), a statement that would be completely untrue had he known and yet refused to preach about "*hell*" and the "*torments of the damned*". In 1Corinthians 15:55 Paul writes "*O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory*". The word "*grave*" in this verse is actually the word "*hades*", but note how it is translated, it does not appear as hell but as the word "*grave*", this does give us a little insight to its true meaning as we shall see.

Regarding our Lord we read in Acts 2:31, "*His soul was not left in hell*". Are we to think for one minute that our precious Saviour was at one time in this awful

place called hell? Of course He wasn't but this too gives us a little clue as to what "*hades*" is, this we will point out a little later.

Gehenna

There is a second word translated "*hell*", the word "*Gehenna*" so we must try and throw some light on it. The word itself appears 11 times in the New Testament, 10 times in the gospels and 1 time in the epistle of James. Gehenna was a geographical location referred to in the O.T. as the valley of Hinnon. It was here centuries before, under the instructions of King Josiah (2 Kings 23:10,14,16,20), that the ground bones of those wicked Israelites who had offered their children to the pagan god Molech and caused them to pass through the fire were scattered, In later years this place was used as a rubbish dump for the cities refuse, and also the carcasses of dead animals were thrown into it to be destroyed. It was also used for human beings who had committed heinous crimes and who after execution were refused burial, they too were cast on to this burning, smouldering dump. The fires burned in it continually and the maggots fed on the rotting carcasses. What the fires of Gehenna did not consume the maggots devoured. To the Jewish mind there could be nothing more abhorrent than to end up in this abominable place. When the Lord spoke of Gehenna every Jew knew exactly what He meant, an awful place where no self respecting Jew would want to go, where their worm/maggot dieth not and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9.48). I have no doubt that in a metaphorical way it has reference to that awful Lake of fire and brimstone, the destiny of all those who reject Christ which will follow the judgement of the Great White Throne.

However to try and make it the intermediate hell of the traditionalist is a travesty. Gehenna is a literal place outside the walls of Jerusalem and as such should never have been translated to mean something which it is not.

It seems to me very obvious that if "*hades*" is the traditional hell, then "*Gehenna*" cannot be referring to the same place, else the Holy Ghost would have used the 1 word "*hades*" consistently throughout the scriptures of the New Testament.

Tartarus

Finally we have the word "*tartarus*" which appears in 2 Peter 2:4. A simple reading of the passage will show that this place has nothing to do with the intermediate punishment of unbelievers but as the passage shows is the prison house of the angels that sinned who were cast down into "*tartarus*" and delivered into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgement. There is no mention of

fire or torment but simply imprisonment of these spiritual beings who at one time rebelled against God. I don't think I need say more as the scripture here is clear and plain. How sad the translators have once more mislead the English reader by translating a Greek word to mean something it definitely does not mean.

My conclusion is this, the "*hades/hell*" of the traditionalist has no support in all of our bibles. The final destiny of the lost will be the Lake of Fire after they have been judged. To suggest that sinners are being punished before they have been judged flies in the face of justice and is an insult to the righteousness of God.

So what does *sheol/hades* refer to? I have already pointed out that Paul uses the word only once and it is translated "*grave*". I have also made it clear that our Lord Jesus was never in the traditional "*hell*". So what is the answer to this problem?

"*Hades/Sheol*" is simply the *grave*. Please note not "*a grave*" but "*the grave*". It is the state of death in which all who have died remain until resurrection. The psalmist knew more than most Christians do, he wrote, "*God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave/sheol*", Psalm 49:15. In Acts 2:29 when Peter speaks of the patriarch and king David he writes under divine inspiration, "*David is both dead and buried and his sepulchre is with us unto this day*". He then adds these most informative words in v.34, "*David is not ascended into the heavens*". The soul was in fact David himself, and neither Peter nor he were under any illusion that at death David would be anywhere other than the grave. David knew for certain that God would redeem him out of this condition through resurrection. Paul was equally assured because he knew that when the Lord would return the dead would be raised out of their sleep and so would be brought to pass the saying, "*O death where is thy sting, O grave/hades where is thy victory*"?