

Understanding HELLFIRE

Translators of the King James and other English versions used the single word "hell" to translate various Hebrew and Greek words that are not synonymous. Partly because of this error, universal confusion exists over the state of the dead. Now you can understand the truth about hell and know what really happens when we die. Several hundred years ago the belief in hell as a place of ever-burning torture and torment was almost universal throughout all Christendom. Today, there is much less teaching about "hellfire and brimstone" than in the past. Yet Christianity still either implicitly or explicitly maintains that upon death the good go to heaven while the souls of the unsaved go immediately to "hell."

There amid scorching heat and sulfurous smoke the damned writhe in anguish for an eternity. With deafening screeches and haunting wails, these pathetic wretches agonize over their past sins, having no hope for relief from their pain, let alone redemption.

Among Roman Catholics, the teaching is that many will go to purgatory, to be purified of their sins first, before passing on to heaven.

Hellfire and brimstone sermons of many years past have dangled unsaved sinners over the eternal fires of hell, even as they were implored to "come up front and be saved." If sinners did not take immediate steps to get "saved," they may never have another opportunity to get to heaven. The procrastinator was warned that he might miss out.

But Are We Immortal?

Any examination of the traditional heaven-hell concept must first establish whether we humans have souls that continue on living after our physical bodies die. If not, then the point about going to either heaven or hell right after death is moot.

The teaching that the "saved" go to heaven while those who are not saved go to hell (or purgatory) at death is based on the concept of an immortal soul. It is rooted in what Satan told Eve, that contrary to what Yahweh had warned, she would not surely die if she partook of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:3-4). Thus the first-ever lie, told by Satan himself, has been embellished by pagan beliefs and customs and preserved to our day through traditional teachings.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our doctrine of eternal hell fire as the immediate and everlasting fate of the wicked at death. Satan's tale is embraced, while what Yahweh had said – that all life stops at death – is ignored. Satan is therefore called a liar and murderer from the beginning, John 8:44.

Rather than accept death as the cessation of life, people choose to believe that a part of our being, known as the soul (conceived as the real "us"), leaves the body, goes to heaven or hell, and becomes more alive than ever. They believe that this conscious, immortal soul is like a spirit and can move around freely outside the body, completely unhindered by physical limitations.

How this soul-spirit can suffer agony in a physical hell fire is not explained. Obviously it would first have to be reunited with a physical body in order to experience pain in fiery flames. And if physical, it would almost instantly be destroyed in those flames, not continue to exist forever.

The word "immortal" occurs only once in the Bible, 1 Timothy 1:17, in reference only to the King of the universe. The word "immortality" is found five times, referring either to Yahweh

Himself or to a condition man must seek and "put on." We do not already have immortality residing within us. (These five places are: Rom. 2:7, 1Cor. 15:53, 54; 1Tim. 6:16; 2Tim. 1:10.) Nowhere in the Bible are the words "immortal" and "soul" found together – that is, neither the expression nor the idea of an "immortal soul" exists anywhere in Scripture.

The Spirit (Breath) in Man

The Bible does teach, however that we are a fleshly, living body. We have a spirit within us. In the Hebrew this spirit is called the *ruach* or *neshamah*, meaning breath of life. It is the life-force that brings us life and makes us who we are. The spirit relates to our mind, our attitude, our thinking, our ambitions, our inclinations, and our hopes. Our attitude determines whether we are "low in spirit" or "high spirited."

In death this spirit or life-force goes back to Yahweh. "Then shall the dust [the physical body] return to earth as it was; and the spirit [*ruach*] shall return unto Elohim who gave it," Ecclesiastes 12:7.

The corresponding Greek word for spirit in the New Testament is *pneuma*, from which we get words like "pneumatic" and "pneumonia," relating to air or breath.

Notice what The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament says about *pneuma* or spirit in the New Testament (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance No. 4151): "A movement of air, (gentle) blast; the vital principle by which the body is animated. To breathe out the spirit, to expire" (p. 520).

New Testament usages of *pneuma* (spirit) include references to Elohim (John 4:24); Messiah (2 Cor. 3:17); the character expressed by actions (Rom. 8:15), and expression of the whole person (Luke 1:47).

Soul Means Basic Life Itself

Aside from the body and spirit, Scripture also talks about soul. "*And the very Elohim of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray Elohim your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Sovereign Yahshua the Messiah*" (1 Thess. 5:23. See also Heb. 4:12). The soul is our living, breathing self. We often speak of a ship sinking and a number of "souls" lost.

The word "soul" is *nephesh* in the Hebrew [Strong's Concordance No. 5315], properly meaning an air-breathing creature. It includes the animals. *Nephesh* is better understood as life and should be so translated. Nowhere does the Bible say a soul is immortal; nowhere do we find that the soul is a separate entity that continues to live forever either separated from or as another being inside a person, an animal or an insect. Neither do we find that the soul cannot die. In fact just the opposite is true, a soul (life) can indeed die or cease to exist. Notice:

"Behold, all souls [nephesh] are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4)

Nowhere does the Bible say a soul is immortal; nowhere do we find that the soul is a separate entity that continues to live forever.

Notice also verse 20: *"The soul [nephesh] that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him"* (Ezek. 18:20).

The Savior Yahshua expounded further, showing that the same life that animates the body can be restored again: *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but*

rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna] (Matt. 10:28). (More later on what "gehenna" is.)

Even in our English the noun "soul" is used for life, not a separately existing life entity. Soul is defined by The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius in these ways: "That which breathes, the breathing substance or being; the *nephesh* becomes a living being; a living being whose life resides in the blood; the *nephesh* as the essential of man stands for the man himself," pp. 659-660.

Yahweh can put life into a dead body, as He did with Adam, forcing air (spirit) into his lungs (*neshamah*, No. 5397, breath of life; vital breath), and raise dead bodies from the grave. Thus, He will restore life at Yahshua's return.

If He does not raise the dead, and they continue to remain in the grave, they are considered destroyed and deceased. Therefore the sentient being, the life (the *nephesh* – air-breathing creature) is destroyed.

The distinction between soul and spirit is brought out in Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: "Generally speaking the spirit is the higher, the soul is the lower element. The spirit may be recognized as the life principle bestowed on man by [Yahweh], the soul as the resulting life constituted in the individual, the body being the material organism animated by the soul and spirit..." (p. 54, "Psuche").

Hell: It Means to Cover, Conceal

The Bible clearly teaches the existence of hell both in the Old and New Testaments. We cannot deny that hell exists, but we intend to give the proper, Scriptural understanding of what Yahweh's Word has to say about hell.

Because of traditional teaching, as well as myths and legends, many have the gross misconception that hell is a place of eternal torture of humans, a place where Satan reigns supreme. Yet nowhere does the Bible teach such a thing, or even that Satan lives in hell.

At the root of the confusion about the nature of hell is how some English versions render the concept. Translators chose the single word "hell" to translate no fewer than four Hebrew and Greek words with different meanings: the Hebrew *sheol* and the Greek *hades*, *gehenna*, and *tartaroo*. Because of this deficiency by the translators, confusion and false ideas about hell prevail to this day.

In Old English usage, hell meant primarily to hide, conceal, to cover. Thus, hell is a hidden, concealed or covered place. Old English literature describes the "helling" of potatoes, which meant putting potatoes into pits in the ground; or the "helling" of a house, meaning to cover or thatch it.

The English word hell was properly translated from the Hebrew *sheol* and Greek *hades* as a grave or pit, signifying the secret or hidden condition of a dead person.

The Hebrew *sheol* occurs 65 times in the Old Testament. The King James translates it hell 31 times; grave 31 times; and pit three times. Yet it is the same Hebrew word and means "the grave"

Hades is the exact Greek counterpart to the Hebrew *sheol*. *Hades* also signifies the grave.

Worldly Notions of Hell

Erroneous notions about the Biblical hell have made their way into dictionaries and other references. Yet we can see the proper meaning come through in the root words themselves.

The American Heritage Dictionary renders the following under hell:

- A. The abode of condemned souls and devils in some religions; the place of eternal punishment for the wicked after death, presided over by Satan.
- B. A state of separation from G-d.
- C. The abode of the dead, identified with the Hebrew *sheol* and the Greek *hades*; the underworld. [Christian Science] Mortal belief, sin or error.

Interestingly, this dictionary also gives the root word of hell as *Kel*, meaning to cover, conceal, save: From *Kel* comes *Hel*; from Old Norse *Hel*, the underworld, goddess of death. From Germanic **haljo*, the underworld, concealed place."

Smith's Bible Dictionary agrees with many others in stating of hell: "This is the word generally and unfortunately used by our translators to render the Hebrew *Sheol*. It would perhaps have been better to retain the Hebrew word *Sheol*, or else render it always by 'the grave' or 'the pit.'"

Sheol and Hades

The only Old Testament Hebrew word translated hell is *sheol* (Strong's No. 7585), which corresponds to the New Testament Greek *hades*. Both simply mean "the unseen state." The King James Bible translates *sheol* as hell 31 times; grave 31 times and pit 3 times.

The marginal reading of hell in many Bibles often reads, "or, the grave." This can be seen in the following: Psalm 49:15; 55:15; 86:13; Isaiah 14:9; John 2:2; 1Cor. 15:55; Rev. 20:13. It is clear that *sheol* means the place of the unseen dead, the pit and grave. The Revised Standard Version left the word "*sheol*" untranslated throughout the Old Testament. The Catholic Douay Version renders *sheol* as hell 63 times, pit once and grave once.

Strong's Concordance No. 7585 says of *sheol*: "from No. 7592; hades or the world of the dead (as a subterranean retreat), include its accessories and inmates:-grave, hell, pit."

Two other Hebrew words, *qeber* (or *keber*, Strong's No. 6913) and *qeburah*, *qeburah* (Strong's No. 6900) designate ones' earthly burying place. These are translated as "grave" 39 times, as "sepulchre" 31 times; 7 times as "burying place," and 4 times as "burial"

The New Testament equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol* is *hades*, No 7592, the abode of the dead before Judgement Day. *Hades* is translated 10 times as hell, and grave once.

Hebrew is rich in figurative words and metaphors. Both *sheol* and *hades* are examples. *Sheol* and *hades* are to the unseen world what *qeber* (the grave) is to the corpse, seen by the living.

Biblical Hell a Place of Silence

The Bible nowhere describes hell as a place of living beings in torturous fire. Neither is Satan said to be there with his red body suit and pitchfork! Such concepts came from Greek paganism and particularly 13th century poet Dante Alighieri's epic poem, The Divine Comedy. In this work is a section called The Inferno, in which Dante gives his own ideas of hell, graphically portraying the sufferings of the damned.

Hell as a place of endless suffering was adopted by Christianity in the Dark Ages. It was used to strike fear in the hearts of people, and helped give the Roman Church more power and influence over the masses.

The Bible's teachings about hell and the state of the dead are considerably different from the common ideas. Notice what Ecclesiastes 9:10 says about the state of the dead: "...*there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [sheol], whither you go.*" Now read Psalm 6:5: "*For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave [sheol] who shall give you thanks?*"

Death obviously is not a place of continued existence in another form. We are not aware of anything in the grave. That is why death is compared to sleep, where all conscious of the world around us ceases and we are in effect dead to anything happening around us.

Notice what the prophet Isaiah reveals about death (the grave): *"For the grave [sheol] cannot praise you, death cannot celebrate you..."* (Isa. 38:18). Once we die, all conscious awareness stops. The Bible says *"the dead know not anything"* (Eccl. 9:5), and *"the dead praise not Yahweh, neither any that go down into silence"* (Ps. 115:17).

Neither are patriarchs and peoples of old living in and watching from heaven: *"though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: you, O Yahweh, are our father, our redeemer, you Name is from everlasting"* (Isa. 63:16).

Notice what Peter tells us about King David: *"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day...For David is not ascended into the heavens..."* (Acts 2:29, 34). If David himself has not yet risen from the grave, why do people today think they are destined for heaven (or hell) when they die?

Notice the following Scriptures describing what happens to human beings when they die:

"Will you show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise you?" (Psalm 88:10)

"His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his THOUGHTS PERISH." (Psalm 146:4)

"And many of them that SLEEP in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan. 12:2)

Both Good and Bad Go to Hell (Sheol, Hades)

The Bible says *"the dead know not anything"* and *"the dead praise not Yahweh."* Upon death everyone goes to *sheol* [hell], according to the Bible, both the good and the bad. Jacob knew that he would go to *"sheol"* mourning for his son: *"And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will do down into the grave [sheol] unto my son mourning..."* (Gen. 37:35b). *"It shall come to pass, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and your servants shall bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave" [sheol]* (Gen. 44:31).

The Psalmist says the wicked go to THE GRAVE at death, not to hell fire: *"Let me not be ashamed, O Yahweh; for I have called upon you: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave" [sheol]* (Ps. 31:17).

Examples of Resurrection from the Grave

David knew where he was at death, and it was not heaven. Notice: *"Nevertheless man being in honour abides not: he is like the beasts that perish...like sheep they are laid in the grave [sheol]...and their beauty shall consume in the grave [sheol]...But Elohim will redeem my soul [David] from the power of the grave [sheol]..."* (Ps. 49:12-15).

Yahweh promises that Ephraim (Israel) will be resurrected from *sheol*: *"I will ransom them [Israel] from the power of the grave [sheol]; I will redeem them from death...O grave [sheol], I will be your destruction..."* (Hos. 13:14).

The Savior Himself tells of the coming resurrection, both those who have done good and those who have done evil. Notice, He speaks of those who are buried and in their graves here on earth. There is no hint of any who are in heaven returning to get into their resurrected, glorified bodies:

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

Yahshua plainly says it is those IN THE GRAVES who "hear His voice," who shall come forth, He does not call them from heaven or even hell. The bodies are in the grave, remaining there until the resurrection at the return of Yahshua when they are given the breath of life or *ruach* and come up out of the graves.

In the Book of Revelation we learn that one group (the saints) will be resurrected when Yahshua returns, and still another resurrection will take place a thousand years later:

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such a second death has no power, but they shall be priests of Yahweh and of Messiah, and shall reign with him a thousand years" Revelation 20:5-6.

Yahshua resurrected Lazarus from the grave. Lazarus came forth from the grave, not down from heaven: *"And when He thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Yahshua said unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:43-44).*

The Old Testament says David is in the grave asleep in death with his fathers: "And when your days be fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers..." (2Sam. 7:12).

David prayed for Yahshua's return when his soul (life) would be delivered at the resurrection: *"Return, O Yahweh, deliver my soul: O, save me for your mercies sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Ps. 6:4-5).*

Job knew that he would remain in the grave until the time of Yahshua's presence, when Yahweh will destroy those who destroy the earth. Then comes the resurrection when Job (along with the saints) will be changed and only then made immortal:

"O that you would hide me in the grave (sheol), that you would keep me secret, until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live [again]? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. You shall call, and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands." (Job 14:13-15)

Both the wicked and the saints go to the grave at death. Both are buried and unconscious until the resurrection. The Bible calls it a sleep of death. Man does not have an immortal soul: *"The wicked shall be turned into hell (sheol), and all the nations that forget Elohim" (Ps. 9:17).*

The Dead – Good and Bad – Are Asleep

The Bible does not differentiate between the righteous and wicked at death, for both are asleep and buried as we see from both the Old and New Testaments: *"Saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4).*

"Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Manasseh slept with his father, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead" (2Kings 21:17-18).

Yahshua referred to the death of Lazarus as a sleep: *"These things said he: and after that he said unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Master, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Yahshua spake of his death: but they*

thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Yahshua unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (John 11:11-14).

The Apostle Paul spoke of the dead as those who are asleep: *"But I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others have no hope. For if we believe that Yahshua died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Yahshua will Elohim bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of Yahweh, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of Yahshua shall not prevent them which are asleep. For Yahshua himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of Elohim: and the dead in Messiah shall rise first"* 1Thessalonians 4:13-16.

Paul says that as certain as Yahshua arose from the dead, so will those believers asleep in Him be resurrected: *"for if the dead rise not, then is not Messiah raised: And if Messiah be not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Messiah are perished"* (1Cor. 15:16-18). Yahshua was raised *ek nekron* in the Greek, meaning "out from among the dead," Romans 6:4,9 (also see Isa. 53:9).

Because of King Josiah's goodness, Yahweh's wrath is withheld until after Josiah dies. From THE GRAVE he will not be aware of what Yahweh's wrath brings upon the people: *"Behold therefore, I will gather you unto your fathers, and you shall be gathered into your grave [sheol] in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again"* (2Kings 22:20).

Yahweh redeems the dead from the power of the grave (by raising them from the dead). He does not deliver them from eternal torture or everlasting punishing. In the grave there is no activity. The life (soul) is in the sleep of death to be awakened by Yahshua's return.

Bodies Decay in Hell

Isaiah says Yahshua *"poured out His soul unto death,"* 53:10-12. But His soul (His life, His being) was not left in hell: *"For you will not leave my soul in hell; neither will you suffer you Holy One to see corruption"* (Ps. 16:10). See Acts 2:31.

Before decay could set in, Yahshua was resurrected on the third day and came forth with a changed spirit body whereby He could become flesh and bone at will, or become spirit and be invisible. This glorified body is also promised to us, 1Corinthians 15:51-52.

Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged under "Hell" says: "from helan, to cover, conceal." Our word hell simply meant to hide or to cover – helling potatoes did not mean to roast them, but to put them in a pit! The word hell was therefore properly used as the secret or hidden condition of death, and has no reference whatever to a place of torture until that meaning was applied to it by misguided theologians of the Dark Ages. The translators were influenced by the pagan concept that a soul was immortal and hell was a place of ongoing, continuous, burning agony and torture.

According to the Bible, hell (*sheol* and *hades*) means the unconscious, oblivious condition of death, where all souls, both good and bad, go upon dying. Only the awakening or resurrection by Yahweh from death can result in everlasting life.

Adam was told by Yahweh that the penalty of his sin was *"you shall surely die [cease to live]."* Adam was told that because he had eaten the forbidden fruit that he would live forever in the torture of hell fire. (The Hebrew reads, *"dying, you shall die,"* meaning the process of death would begin.)

If the penalty for the sin of Adam and his race had been eternal torment in an ever-burning hell, Yahshua would have had to suffer an eternity of torture to pay the penalty for our sin. But the Bible says, "*the wages of sin is death*" (Rom. 6:23). Yahshua died for our sins (Rom. 5:8) and His death paid the redemption price for us. He was raised again that we might have everlasting life. We are given resurrection life through the Savior, the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6.

Dante's Delusions

In his epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, medieval Italian poet Dante Aligheri gave his view of hell. Influenced by Greek and pagan mysticism, Dante's unscriptural notions of Satan, eternal hellfire, and everlasting suffering are the basis for popular beliefs today.

Heathen, Fanciful Notions of Hell

As we have seen, the Hebrew *sheol* simply means "the unseen state" applied to the dead. The word "hell" in the Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew *sheol*. All who die in the Old Testament go to *sheol*, whether or not their remains are interred in a *keber* or *keburah* (also *qeber* or *qeburah*), meaning grave.

The New Testament Greek has three words translated "hell": *hades*, *gehenna*, and *tartaroo*. The latter *tartaroo*, deals with the spirit realm, and appears only in Peter's writings, which we will examine later.

When it comes to popular notions, the Encyclopedia Americana gives us some intriguing insight: "While there are many and significant variations of detail, the main features of hell as conceived by Hindu, Persian, Egyptian, Grecian, Hebrew and Christian theologians are essentially the same." The Grolier Universal Encyclopedia (1965 ed., Vol 5, p. 205) notes, "Hindus and Buddhists regard hell as a place of spiritual cleansing and final restoration. Islamic tradition considers it a place of everlasting punishment.

Their concepts conditioned by pagan teachings, both Dante in his epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, and Milton in *Paradise Lost* influenced the translators' perception of *sheol*, *hades*, and *gehenna*. Those translating the Bible into English mistook Yahshua's words as describing horrors found in pagan lore and myth. The Bible nowhere projects an image of *sheol*, or *hades* as a place of burning fire. Nor are Satan and his demons pictured as having their abode in either *sheol* or *hades*. Such is mere human superstition.

The translators of the New Testament did not differentiate between the Greek words *hades* and *gehenna*, which brings confusion. *Hades* is the Greek counterpart of the Hebrew *sheol* and is used in the New Testament quotations of the Hebrew *sheol*. In the *Koine* (common) Greek we are told it means "the underworld" or the "unseen world."

Notions Of Hell: A Mishmash Of Myth

"When Christianity spread over Northern Europe it came into contact with the Teutonic and Celtic nations, who added new ideas to its system and transformed several characteristic features of its worldview. Christianity today is essentially a Teutonic religion.

"Not only were the old pagan feasts changed into Christian festivals; the Yuletide became Christmas and the Ostara [Easter] feast in the spring was celebrated in commemoration of [Messiah's] resurrection; but the individual features of the evil powers of the North were also transferred to Satan and his host.

"...Teutonic legends and fairy tales frequently mention the Devil, there he possesses many features that remind us of Loki [evil god of fire]. In addition, the ice giants of the Norsemen, the Nifelheim of the Saxons, the Nether-world of the Irish, all contributed their share to the popular notions of the Christian demonology of the Middle Ages. The very name 'hell' is a Teutonic word which originally signified a hollow space or a cave underground and denotes the realm of Hel, Loki's daughter.

"Dr. Ernst Krause...has undertaken the work of proving the Northern influence upon Southern fairy tales and legends.

"Dr. Krause proceeds to prove that that the conception of hell as depicted in Dante's *Divina Comedia*, which may be regarded as the classical conception of Roman Catholic Christianity, is in all essential elements the product of a Northern imagination.

"Dante followed closely Teutonic traditions, which in his time had become a common possession in the Christian world through the writings of Saxo Grammaticus, Bede Venerabilis, Albericus, Caedmon, Caesarius of Heisterbach, and others. It is especially noteworthy that the deepest hell of Dante's *Inferno* is not...a burning sulphur lake, but the wintry desolation of an ice-palace."

"Dante's vision is by no means the product of his own imagination. It embodies a great number of old traditions." From *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil*, by Paul Carus, pp. 245-248.

Hades: Where We Cease to Be

In the New Testament *hades* is translated "hell" ten times. It is also translated "grave" in 1 Corinthians 15:55: "O death, where is your sting? O GRAVE, where is your victory?" Strong's Greek Dictionary lists *hades* as No. 86: *hades*, properly unseen, i.e. "Hades" or the place (state) of departed souls: grave, hell.

Below we list each time the Greek *hades* appears in the New Testament. Note that the meaning of *hades* is to come to an end, to cease, to exist no more. It refers specifically to the grave:

"And you, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to HELL [hades]: for if the mighty works, which have been done in you, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matt. 11:23).

Because the people of Capernaum rejected Yahshua's Word, their lives would come to an end. Capernaum has, in fact, come to an end. It has been buried and forgotten except for archaeological discoveries.

"And I say also unto you, that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my assembly; and the gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

Yahshua trained 12 disciples to carry out the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. They established assemblies that multiplied and now encircle the world. The truth of His Word is still being preached. At the root of that truth is that all the Commandments are to be proclaimed, including the Sabbaths and the sacred Name.

The gates of the grave have not swallowed up or stopped Yahweh's Assembly In Yahshua from preaching truth. We may have a little flock (Luke 12:32), but we are promised victory in the end. Those of the assembly who die off are replaced by other sincere, faithful believers who carry on the work.

"And you, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shall be thrust down to hell [hades]" (Luke 10:15). *Unless Yahweh is behind or approves the building of a house or a city, they labor in vain who build it* (Ps. 127:1).

"And in hell [hades] he lifts up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:23).

This parable refers to the rich man being resurrected in the second resurrection and sees the glory of Abraham and the saints, afar off, and he is crestfallen and morbid because he did not have his house in order and was not in the first resurrection.

"Because you will not leave my soul in hell [hades], neither will you suffer you Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27). This is a promise that Yahshua would be resurrected from the grave, even before decay had set in. (Resurrected the third day...)

"He seeing this before spake of this resurrection of Messiah, that his soul was not left in hell [hades], neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:31).

Both of these verses quoted by Peter refer to the Savior's being brought back to life from the grave by the Father.

"I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [hades] and of death" (Rev. 1:18). This refers to Yahshua Who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by Him," John 14:6. Through Him we are called from the grave and aroused from the sleep of death.

"And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and hell [hades] followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (Rev. 6:8).

The rider of the pale horse apparently signifies pestilence and disease. The people die, and the people make their abode in the grave. *Hades* simply means they are buried, interred.

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (Rev. 20:13).

This is generally known as "The White Throne Judgment," when all the spiritually ignorant who lived and died upon earth will be resurrected and taught Yahweh's way and then judged to determine their destiny.

"And death and hell [hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Rev. 20:14).

There is coming a time when death will be abolished. In Yahweh's grand plan, righteousness will reign supreme. There will be no more dying, no more graves. Paul wrote in 1Corinthians 15:26 that the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

It is plain to see from the above Scriptures that the words *sheol* and *hades* mean the grave, the interment of the dead. All human life is destined to die in due time. The present society will be replaced by a right and proper civilization – with Yahweh in full control.

Gehenna and the Lake of Fire

But what about the "burning" Yahshua spoke of? Did He not warn of burning fire? Let us examine the meaning of the Greek word *gehenna*, mistranslated "hell" in its 12 appearances. We should first, however, understand the Savior's references to a "consuming fire." For that we must go back into history.

Strong's Concordance gives *gehenna* as No. 1067: "Of Hebrew origin (1516 and 2100); valley of (the son of) Hinnom; *gehenna* (or Ge-hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem, used (fig) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment: "-hell.

Just why the translators chose to translate the Greek "*gehenna*" as hell is interesting. A better word to convey the sense and meaning would be DESTRUCTION. That is because *gehenna* was in the area of Topheth, in the Valley of Hinnom, the historic garbage dump of Jerusalem. It is symbolic of the ultimate destruction of the wicked in the lake of fire at the end of the age. The people of Yahshua's time and could identify with this fire as symbolism.

The history of this place goes back to 2Kings 22-23, where righteous King Josiah restored True Worship in Jerusalem and tore down the pagan shrines of heathen worship which were rampant during this father Manasseh's rule. Upon cleansing and restoration of the Temple, ridding it of all pagan relics and utensils, the book of the law was found. A time of reestablishment of pure worship followed.

Heathen worship of Moloch, god of the Ammonites and Phoenicians, included child sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom. The giant face of this idol had a furnace of fire burning from the chasm at its back. Babies were sacrificed into the yawning, fire-belching mouth of the grinning idol and burned to death. The beating of drums drowned out the shrieks of the babies and cries of the mother.

Josiah desecrated the area of Topheth in the Hinnom Valley, and it became the city dump. The bodies of criminals considered unworthy of a resurrection, along with dead animals and other refuse, were burned there. Flies and maggots were plentiful. The valley of Hinnom was known as "Ge-Hinnom" in Greek and became "Gehenna," a place where refuse and garbage was burned up.

Gehenna is translated "hell fire," but Yahshua referred to its burning as a destructive cleansing. In each case where the word *Gehenna* appears the meaning points to a complete consuming in a fiery garbage dump. Notice the 12 references to the burning destruction of *gehenna*:

- *"But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of hell [gehenna] fire" (Matt. 5:22).*

We are not to be angry with our fellow man, but are to treat others as we expect to be treated. We are to exhibit love to others who are also created in the image of Elohim.

- *"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 hell [gehenna]" (Matt. 5:29).*

We must eliminate any bad habit that is contrary to Yahweh's Word and that may cause us to stumble. Our desire should be to Yahweh and not to earthly pursuits or obsessions, which deter us from doing Yahweh's will.

- *"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 your whole body should be cast into hell [gehenna]" (Matt. 5:30).*

"Gehenna" pictures complete destruction of the wicked, just as the refuse thrown into the burning garbage dump was destroyed in flames.

- *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna]" (Matt. 10:28).*

The burning fires of the garbage dump consumed the trash and garbage, where even dead bodies of animals and criminals were consumed. The fires burned completely and were not quenched or put out.

- *"And if your eye should offend you, pluck it out, and cast it from you: it is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell [gehenna] fire" (Matt. 18:9).*

Yahshua is here again speaking of entering the coming Kingdom. He means we must be willing to sacrifice and get our priorities straight. We are better off to discipline ourselves now to enter the Kingdom than to miss out entirely.

- *"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 hell [gehenna] than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15).*

Yahshua condemns the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Broadening the borders of their garments; wearing phylacteries; paying too much attention to trifles and flaunting their "righteous" acts and deeds before the public – all these and more become their obsession. Their desire to impress mankind made them candidates for destruction.

- *"You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell [gehenna]?" (Matt. 23:33).*

Matthew's 23rd chapter is a scathing rebuke of the selfish, ostentatious attitude of the hypocritical Pharisees and Scribes who sought the praise and adulation of men.

- *"And if your hand offend you, cut it off: it is better for you to enter in to life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell [gehenna], into the fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:43).*

The term "never shall be quenched" simply means it will not be prematurely put out, but will keep burning until it consumes everything. The next verses repeat the same rebuke as in Matthew's account:

- *"And if your foot offend you, cut it off: it is better for you to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire [gehenna] that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:45).*
- *"And if your eye offend you, pluck it out: it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of Elohim with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell [gehenna] fire" (Mark 9:47).*
- *"But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, which after he has killed has power to cast into hell [gehenna]; yea, say I unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:5).*

Luke is calling attention to Yahweh's omnipotence, that we should strive to be aware of Yahweh's awesome power to resurrect and destroy and not be concerned about impressing mankind.

- *"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setting on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell [gehenna]" (James 3:6).*

James the brother of Yahshua, warns of a biting, lying, gossiping tongue. We should consider and choose our words carefully lest the following applies to us:

- *"For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue" (Psalm 5:9).*

Notice that the Greek word *gehenna* carries the concept of destruction, getting rid of that which interferes with our right relationship to Yahweh. We are to turn from that which will lead us down the wrong path, and away from His Kingdom.

The King James translators translated both *gehenna* and *tartaroo* with the word "hell," thereby confusing a burning garbage dump and a place of restraint (for fallen angels) with the grave!

If the penalty for the sin of Adam and his race had been eternal torment in an ever-burning hell, Yahshua would have had to suffer an eternity of torture to pay the penalty for our sin.

Tartaroo – A Place For Fallen Angels

Another Greek word, *tartaroo*, is also mistranslated hell. *Tartaroo* is said to be a place or restraint specifically for the wicked angels. It is Strong's No. 5020, *tartaroo*, from the Tartaros (the deepest abyss of Hades); to incarcerate in eternal torment: -cast down to hell."

"For if Elohim spared not the angels that sinned, but cast [them] down to hell [tartaroo], and delivered [them] into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgement" (2Peter 2:4).

Tartaroo is rendered hell only in this verse. Satan, that old serpent called the devil, along with his demons, will be chained and restrained when Yahshua returns, Revelation 20:1-2. Only in *tartaroo* do we find an abode, for the fallen angels, with no evidence that human beings have ever been or will ever be incarcerated there.

The translators have done truth an injustice by translating *tartaroo* as "hell." Hell by its meaning should be reserved for *hades* and *sheol*, the grave, the unseen place of the human dead. *Tartaroo* is a restraint only for the spirit realm – Satan and the angels that sinned.

Satan and his demons do not dwell in *hades* or *sheol* (the grave), nor in the *gehenna* garbage dump. Satan is alive and well on planet earth, and continues to seek those he can devour.

The King James translators translated both *gehenna* and *tartaroo* with the word "hell," thereby confusing a burning garbage dump and a place of restraint (for fallen angels) with the grave!

The end of the age will bring a rebellion against Yahweh's rule, but Yahshua will destroy those who destroy the earth (Rev. 11:18). Isaiah foretells the end of those who rebel. Notice that it is similar to Yahshua's description of *gehenna*. The maggots feeding on dead flesh will not die, but will turn into flies that lay eggs and start the cycle over again. The fires will not be quenched or put out, but will burn until all is consumed:

"And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that 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. 66:24).

Satan and his demons do not dwell in *hades* or *sheol* (the grave), or in the *gehenna* garbage dump.

No Fire Burning in Hell or Hades

The "lake of fire" (*limne tou puros*) is another phrase often brought into a discussion of hell. It is assumed to be the same as *hades* or *gehenna*, but is never called such in the Greek, nor in New Testament English. It occurs in Revelation five times.

As will be seen in the following verses, the "lake of fire" deals with the final demise at the end of the age of the beast and the false prophet, as well as those who are not recorded in the book of life, Revelation 20:15:

"And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20).

The devil is also cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone:

"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet [were], and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

We are also told that death and the grave are to come to an end and will be no more. The second death is assuredly the final death, a cessation even of death itself.

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15).

When the new earth will be perfected there will be no more death.

"But 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 of fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8).

“Eternal” “Unquenchable” Fires

Not a single account or passage in the Bible shows that there is a fire burning in sheol or hades. The popular notion of "hell fire" is a misnomer for a whimsical idea right out of Dark Ages.

The Home Bible Study Dictionary by A.R. Fausset comments on the changing meanings of hell in our culture: "Our present meaning of 'hell,' then, applies to gehenna, but not to the other word hades or sheol. Hell formerly did apply when the A.V. of the Bible was written; it then meant 'hole,' 'hollow,' or unseen place. Sheol comes from a root that means 'to make hollow.'" *Gehenna* is often mistaken for the final consuming "lake of fire."

The lake of fire is the ultimate cleansing fire at the end of the age that will burn up all the corruption and wickedness. This fire will cleanse the earth of man's mistake, pollution, and evil, allowing for a fresh, Edenic start with renewed vigor and right living according to Yahweh's way of life.

When Yahshua comes with the voice of the archangel, a trumpet and a mighty shout, the saints, both those in the graves and those yet alive, will all be changed to spirit beings.

The following verses does not refer to the dead in the grave, but the vengeance taken upon a wicked generation at the return of Yahshua who will destroy those who destroy the earth: "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not Yahweh, and that obey not the evangel of our Sovereign Yahshua Messiah" (2Thess. 1:8).

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when Lot and his family were rescued from that sinful place, was by fire. The fires are no longer burning in these once wicked towns, even though called "eternal fire." Their destruction has been thorough, however, and they are at the bottom of the Dead Sea today:

"Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" Jude 7. "Eternal" is the Greek word *aionios* and means of or belonging to an age.

"Eternal fire" simply means a fire whose results are permanent. This is evident in what Peter wrote: "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ENSAMPLE unto those that after should live wickedly" (2Pet. 2:6).

Obviously, their fate serves as a warning for our time of loose morals and rampant sin.

When the Bible speaks of an unquenchable fire, it refers to a fire that is not extinguished before it consumes what it burns.

An example is in Jeremiah 17:27, where Yahweh promises that unless Israel obeys Him, "I will kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" This prophecy was fulfilled a few years later when fire destroyed all the houses of Jerusalem (Jer. 52:13). It was "unquenchable fire," but that fire is not still burning in Jerusalem today! And neither will the destructive fire at the end of the age burn endlessly.

In Malachi 4 we read that the wicked will be reduced to stubble and ashes and be "burned up" when Yahweh cleanses this earth with fire. He "shall leave them neither root or branch," meaning nothing of them would survive, not even their souls, verse 1.

“Out Of The Body Of Hell”

The account of Jonah and the great fish offers an example of hell as a place of death, not of unending torture. We read in Jonah 2:1-2 that Jonah prayed after he was swallowed by the fish: *"I cried by reason of mine affliction unto Yahweh, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell [sheol] cried I, and you heard my voice."* (Jonah 2:2)

Here is proof that hell is not an ever-burning place of endless torture. Jonah is in the belly of "hell," the stomach of a fish. His hell is a dark, covered place of death, just as is the grave.

Lessons From A Rich Man – Yahshua’s Parable

Some are confused by two Scriptures, one in the Old Testament, the other in the New. The first is a picturesque way of describing the thoroughness of Yahweh’s destruction and cleansing of the earth and its pollution:

"For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell [pit], and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundation of the mountains" (Deut. 32:22). This passage says nothing about an ever-burning hell fire of torture, but speaks of CONSUMING fire.

In Luke 16 Yahshua told a parable about Lazarus and a rich man to keep us ever striving to overcome selfishness and to exercise humanitarian concern for others. Beginning in verse 15, Yahshua speaks directly to the Pharisees, and his comments are an affront to these men who flaunted their position before others.

The rich man (Pharisees) was selfish and arrogant, and missed out on the first resurrection. He was aghast to think he was not favored. This is the same point Paul makes in Romans 11:9-10 – showing that the Pharisees believed their prosperity was a sign of Yahweh’s blessings. We see his mental agony, with his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth, as he realizes he has in fact missed the opportunity for salvation: *"And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame"* (Luke 16:24). If he were in the destroying flame of Gehenna fire he would ask for barrels of water! A drop of water on his parched tongue would bring some relief to his dry mouth only. "Tormented" is the Greek *odunaomai* and means the grief or sorrow. He is sorry for his past actions once he realizes what he has done, as prophesied for all those who are like him, Ezekiel 36:31. The "gulf between" (verse 26) means he is rejected and not of the elect. The word flame is *phlox*, referring to a flame’s brightness – the flash – not to the fire, which would have been the word *puros*. His past life is revealed in the bright light (*phlox*) of truth.

Nothing about this parable tell us that the rich man was paying for his sins in eternal hellfire. In fact, his sins are not even mentioned. He has died and is in HADES, the unseen place, the

grave. He has a body, not a soul, with eyes, ears, mouth, and a tongue. He sees Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, a Hebraism meaning dead with Abraham and awaiting to share in Abraham's promises. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus "from the DEAD" to his five brothers to warn them to change their ways before it is too late and they end up shut out of the promises like himself, verses 27-28. (Pharisees have no promise of everlasting life, Matt. 5:20.)

This parable is not about literal punishment in hellfire. Yahshua was making a point about Judah, who fared sumptuously and sought to keep the promises to themselves, while shutting out the Gentiles. This is just one in a series of parables or story illustrations that Yahshua was using to make various points.

Nothing about the parable of Lazarus and the rich man tells us that the rich man was paying for his sins in eternal hellfire.

Origin Of The Word Hell

"Etymologically, hell is a "hidden place." It goes back ultimately to Indo-European kel- "cover, hide," which has contributed an extraordinary number of words to English, including apocalypse, cell, cellar, conceal, helmet, hull, pod, occult, and possibly colour and holster. Its Germanic descendant was *khel-. *khal-, whose derivatives included *khallo and *khaljo. The first became modern English hall, the second modern English hell – so both hall and hell were originally 'concealed or covered places,' although in very different ways: the hall with a roof, hell with at least six feet of earth." (from Dictionary of Word Origins, John Ayto)

Quick Facts – A Review Of Hell And Hellfire

Hell (*sheol, hades*) is the state of the dead, for both the good and the bad (Ps. 49: 12-15).

Hell (*sheol, hades*) is the state of total corruption where life is suspended until the resurrection. We are resurrected from the GRAVE, not from heaven or hellfire (Hosea 13:14; 1Thess. 4:16; John 5:28-29; 1Cor. 15:51-52).

Yahshua died and was placed in hell (*hades, the grave*) for our sakes (Isa. 53:9; Acts 2:27; 1Cor. 15:20). He arose from the DEAD, not from hellfire (1Cor. 15:12).

The dead of all the ages, both good and bad, are still in the grave (Deut. 31:16; John 5:28-29; Ps. 9:17; 139:8; Acts 2:34; Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:13).

"Bodies" will be changed to spirit only at the resurrection. Hell – the grave — will be emptied at judgement day, never to exist again (Rev. 20:14).

Neither demons nor Satan exists in hell (*hades, sheol*); the fallen angels are destined for *tartaroo* (2Pet. 2:4), and Satan and the wicked will be put in the lake of fire to be DESTROYED (Rev. 20:10, 15; Mal. 4:1; Heb. 2:14).

The lake of fire is the cleansing fire at the end of the age (Rev. 20:14).

The fact that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of "eternal fire" shows that the RESULTS are eternal, not the fire, because the fire is not still burning today.

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