

To Hell and Back

Is god an angry judge who tortures helpless sinners ages without end? If hell does exist, where is it - and can those who are there ever get out? Read here about the true biblical hell - from one who has been there!

(Note: This Booklet by **Keith W. Stump, Herbert W. Armstrong and Roderick C. Meredith** was actually composed of three (3) individual articles)

Read here about the true biblical hell-from one who has been there!

by Keith W. Stump

ON SUNDAY, July 12, I went to hell. On that day Jerusalem's sun stood directly overhead as I paused to recheck my map. If my bearings were correct, hell's very threshold lay before me! I had just left the Old City of Jerusalem through the Dung Gate, one of the eight gates in the old Turkish wall. I had headed west on the road paralleling the wall, then around the area known today as Mount Zion. From there I began my descent into the Lower Regions.

The "House of Hades"

The notion that a mortal might actually visit hell and return-has been a source of fascination to people of almost every age. Since ancient times, the abode of the dead has been viewed as lying deep underground, with various en-trances on the earth's surface-through caverns, volcanoes, underground rivers and the like. Ancient peoples-Greeks and Romans especially reveled in fanciful accounts of heroes who dared pass through these fearful portals and into the Dark Realm.

One of the earliest accounts of such a journey is found in *The Odyssey*. It is an ancient epic poem by the Greek poet Homer (8th century B.C.). Homer writes of the Greek hero Odysseus (Ulysses), the lost king of Ithaca, who wandered the seas in search of his home for 10 years following the fall of Troy. In desperation, Odysseus reputedly found his way into the "abode of departed spirits" to learn from the ghost of a famous seer how he might find his home.

The underworld described by Homer was a shadowy place of dreary darkness lying beneath the secret places of the earth. Though a place of gloom, it was not pictured as one of punishment and torture as is the traditional Christian or Oriental hell.

Homer called the place of the dead the "House of Hades." Hades (the Romans called him Pluto) was the Greek king of the underworld, god of death. Eventually, Hades became the common name for the underworld itself.

The ancient classicists believed that five rivers flowed through the underworld. The principal one was the Styx, across which the aged boatman Charon ferried the souls of the dead. (The Styx was an actual stream that disappeared underground in Arcadia in Greece.)

In the *Aeneid*, an epic by the Roman poet Virgil, the Trojan hero Aeneas, fleeing the burning ruins of Troy after the Greek victory, successfully besought the ferryman Charon for passage into the infernal region to consult his dead father. (Virgil preferred the name Tartarus to Hades for the fabled infernal region.) Aeneas entered the underworld through a cavern at a foul-smelling lake near Naples in Italy. Descending on a road wrapped in shadows, he encountered numerous horrors and frightful terrors.

Tartarus (or Tartaros) was a name used by the later classical writers such as Virgil as another name for Hades. Homer, on the other hand, described Tartarus as a different place, lying as far beneath Hades as Hades is beneath the earth. It was in this bottomless pit of Tartarus, according to classical mythology, that the Greek god Zeus confined those who had resisted him.

Another hero of ancient Greece, the legendary Hercules, also reputedly traveled to the lower world. One of his famous Twelve Labors was to fetch up from Hades the triple-headed, dragon-tailed dog Cerberus, the feared guardian of Hades' gates.

Many other ancients are said to have made the fearsome journey into Hades, including Theseus of Athens, Orpheus the musician, the princess Psyche and the twin Pollux, in search of his dead brother Castor.

The Inferno

Possibly the best-known "journey" of all is that of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), the medieval Italian poet. His travels among the damned are recorded in *The Inferno*. It is the first part of his three-part *Divine Comedy*, an account of his imaginary journeys through hell, purgatory and heaven.

Dante is conducted through hell by the spirit of the Roman poet Virgil. The trip begins on Good Friday, A.D. 1300, in a wooded area near Jerusalem. Over the gate of hell the two travelers find a fearful and now famous inscription, in today's words: ABANDON EVERY HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE.

Dante then witnesses in his imagination the eternal torments of the wicked. He describes hell as being divided into various levels, descending conically into the earth. Souls suffer punishments appropriate to their sins. Hypocrites, for example, wear gowns brilliant outwardly, but made of heavy lead instead of cloth. They must bear the weight of them forever. Gluttons are doomed to forever lie like pigs in a

foul-smelling sty under a cold, eternal rain. Dante's descriptions are vivid--and frightening.

Though Dante's primary purpose in writing the poem was to satirize persons and circumstances of his day, the theology of his work is based firmly on the system of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Italian theologian and philosopher. *The Divine Comedy* is a relatively accurate dramatization of medieval Christian theology. Some simpleminded of Dante's day actually believed Dante had really visited hell! His work had a tremendous impression and influence on popular Christian thought.

Concentration Camp?

Dante's medieval picture of hell as a gigantic concentration camp-a nightmarish place of eternal torment, horrible beyond imagination, presided over by Satan and his demons-largely represents the thinking of significant groups of professing Christians to this day.

The concept of a "hell" can be found in one form or another among all the world's principal faiths. Multiple billions around the world have lived and died over the millennia believing in - and in fear of - a place of eternal torment and punishment. Many today continue to wonder,

"Is there *really* a hell?" and "Will *I* end up there?" Many are curious about just what hell might be like. It was with questions such as these in mind that I set out to investigate the subject - and to make an attempt to actually *visit hell!*

Three hells!

The starting point for such an investigation can be none other than the very book from which Christians profess to derive their doctrine of hell - the Bible! By scrutinizing its pages, one can strip away the theological trappings of ancient and medieval myth and fabrication and discover the true teaching on the subject.

One's first surprise is that the Bible speaks of not one but of *three different "hells"!* In the widely used King James Version, three totally different Greek words - words with totally different meanings-are translated by the one English word *hell*. The three words are *hades*, *tartaros* and *gehenna*.

In biblical usage, the Greek word *hades* - used only II times in the New Testament - is roughly equivalent to the Old Testament Hebrew word *sheol*, meaning grave or pit (compare Acts 2:27 with Psalm 16:10). *Hades* may be likened to a hole in the ground. In the Bible it has nothing to do with *fire*.

Most modern biblical translators admit that the use of the English word *hell* to translate *hades* and *sheol* is an unfortunate and misleading practice.

Why?

Because in seeing the word *hell*, many readers impute to it the traditional connotation of an ever-burning inferno - when this was never remotely intended in the Greek language or in Old English!

In its true biblical usage, *hades* does indeed refer to the state or abode of the dead - but not in the sense of spirits walking around in some sort of "shadowy realm." Hades is simply the abode we call the *grave*. *All* the dead go to this hell.

The Second Hell

The second hell of the Bible, *tartaros*, is mentioned *only once* in scripture - in II Peter 2:4: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [*tartaroo*], and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment.

Following their rebellion to unseat God from His throne (Isa. 14:12-14; Rev. 12:4), the archangel Lucifer (now Satan) and a third of the created angels (demons) were ejected from heaven (Luke 10:18). They were cast down to *tartaros*, a place or condition of restraint that God has imposed on the mutinous angels as they await ultimate judgment (Jude 6; I Cor. 6:3).

Tartaros, then, is a "hell" that applies only to evil, rebellious angels or demons. It is interesting that the ancient Greeks used this word to describe the place in which Zeus confined the rebellious Titans. Nowhere in the Bible is there any mention of *men* being put into this particular "hell."

The Third Hell

So far, we have seen that the first hell of the Bible - *hades* - is simply the grave. The second hell - *tartaros* - a place or condition of restraint for demons. What, then, is the third hell of the Bible?

Surely, it *must* be the old fashioned Bible "hell"- the literal ever-burning inferno, the place of eternal torment of the damned!

Or is it?

Did you ever notice that the Greek word used by the writers of the New Testament for this third hell is *gehenna*? It comes from the Hebrew *Gai Hinnom*, meaning "valley of Hinnom." Hinnom is a deep, narrow ravine located to the south and southwest of Jerusalem. It is to *this* hell that I recently traveled. But what does this valley have to do with the traditional Christian concept of "hell"? The answer may surprise you!

Lunch in Hell

Gehenna - the valley of Hinnom - is today a relatively pleasant place. In recent years, grass and even

some flowers have taken over portions of the valley floor, and there are plenty of trees to provide shade from the scorching sun (see photos on these pages - {Editor's note: Sorry, pictures not included.}).

I descended into the valley by means of a rocky dirt path. A small dog - no three-headed Cerberus! - barked briefly, then returned to scavenging in a small cave near the path. Further on down the valley two boys were kicking a soccer ball between them.

I sought refuge from the heat of the noon sun under a large tree, and took out my lunch. A few birds came by for a handout. The surroundings were not unlike those of a typical city park.

After enjoying a leisurely lunch, I headed up out of the valley and proceeded unimpeded toward the Jaffa Gate. My memory of the valley is one of a pleasant and relaxing haven in the midst of a hot and tiring walking tour of Jerusalem.

Gehenna, in short, is a far cry from the hell of Dante or from what this valley was like in Jesus day!

The valley was not always such a pleasant place. In the Old Testament it was a place of abominable pagan rites, including infant sacrifice. It was there that the apostate kings Ahaz and Manasseh made their children "pass through the fire" to the god Molech. The rites were specifically celebrated in Tophet, the "place of abhorrence," one of the chief groves in the valley

King Josiah of ancient Judah finally put an end to these abominations. He defiled the valley, rendering it ceremonially unclean (II Kings 23:10). Later the valley became the cesspool and city dump of Jerusalem - a repository for sewage, refuse and animal carcasses. The bodies of despised criminals were also burned there along with the rubbish. Fires burned continuously, feeding on a constant supply of garbage and refuse.

Aceldama, the "field of blood", purchased with the money Judas received for the betrayal of Christ (Matt. 27:8) was also in part of the valley of Hinnom.

Gehenna-and the Lake of Fire

What, then, does this valley called *gehenna* have to do with hell?

Notice. At the end of this age, at the crisis at the end of this world's civilization, the prophesied Beast of the book of Revelation - a Satan-inspired political dictator and a miracle-working religious figure, the False Prophet, working with him will resist the re-establishment of the government of God by fighting against Jesus Christ at His Second Coming. Their fate is revealed by the apostle John: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet.... These both were cast alive into a *lake of fire* burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20).

Where will this temporary lake of fire - this "hell" - be?

The prophet Isaiah wrote of this lake of fire prepared for the Beast: "For Tophet [in the valley of Hinnom] is ordained of old, yea, for the king it is prepared, he hath made it deep and large, the pile thereof is fire and wood, the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it" (Isa. 30:33).

One thousand years later, Satan himself will be cast into this rekindled fiery lake where the Beast and False Prophet were cast! (See Revelation 20:10.)

But what of the wicked who have died over the many millennia? Does the Bible say that they are *now* suffering fiery punishment for their sins in a lake of fire?

Absolutely not!

In the sequence of Revelation 20 - read it for yourself - the incorrigibly wicked are resurrected to be thrown into the lake of fire *after Satan is cast there!* Read it, in Revelation 20:15.

What, then, will become of these wicked? Will they writhe in flames for eternity?

No!

The wicked will be *burned up* in the intense heat of the coming gehenna fire on earth. They will be *consumed, annihilated, destroyed!*

This punishment will be *everlasting* - permanent and final. The Bible calls it the "second death" (Rev. 20:14; 21:8) - from which there is no possibility of a further resurrection.

The Bible does teach eternal punishment, but not eternal punishing.

The prophet Malachi provides a graphic description. "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up... (4:1). To the righteous, God says that the wicked shall be "ashes under the soles of your feet . (Mal. 4:3).

IS THERE A HELL?

If hell does exist, where is it-and can those who are there ever get out?

by Herbert W Armstrong

WILL THOSE in hell *leave* hell at the time of the resurrection-or are they confined eternally to hell, so that they shall be UNABLE to take part in the resurrection?

What did Jesus mean when he said in John 5:28-29:

"... the hour is coming when *all* who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth ... those who have done evil, to the RESURRECTION OF JUDGMENT" (RSV)

If "those who have done EVIL" - the Unsaved - shall come forth in the RESURRECTION OF JUDGMENT, what is the connection between that resurrection of the UNsaved, and their being in an eternal hellfire?

It's about time we took this question out of hiding, and took a good look at it! *What* is the TRUTH?

Common Idea of Hell

First, what is the generally accepted common belief in our Western world about hell? Here's the terse and brief summation of this popular belief, which I quote from the *Encyclopedia Americana*:

"... As generally understood, hell is the abode of evil spirits; the infernal regions . . . whither lost and condemned souls go after death to suffer indescribable torments and eternal punish . . . Some have thought of it as the place created by the Deity, where He punishes with inconceivable severity, and through all eternity, the souls of those who through unbelief or through the worship of false gods have angered Him. It is the place of divine revenge, untempered, never ending."

Now where, and how, did this popular belief about hell originate?

The *Encyclopedia Americana* states further: "The main features of hell as conceived by Hindu, Persian, Egyptian, Grecian *and* Christian theologians *are essentially the same*. The Western religious leaders from Roman times through the Middle Ages borrowed the doctrine of eternal torture from the pagan philosophers. Certain writers of the Middle Ages had such tremendous influence on the Christian-professing world, that their writings and teachings came to be generally accepted and believed, until it became the doctrine of the Christian-professing world. Among these influential writers were Augustine and Dante Alighieri.

Some years ago, I ran across a book in a large library, titled *Dante and His Influence*. It summed up the history of the Christian-professing doctrine of *hell*. This factual history is rather amazing! Dante lived A.D 1265 to 1321. Dante, remember, wrote a tremendously popular book, titled *Divine Comedy*, in three parts-"Hell," "Purgatory" and "Paradise."

From the Pagans

Now I quote from the aforementioned book of history: "Of all poets of modern times, Dante Alighieri was, perhaps, the greatest educator. He possibly had a greater influence on the course of civilization than any other one man since his day. [He] wrote, in incomprehensible verse, an imaginative and lurid

account of a dismal journey through a lurid hell - a long poem containing certain phrases which have caught the attention of the world, such as,

'All hope abandon, Ye, who enter here.' " This had a tremendous impression and influence on the popular Christian thought and teaching. His *Inferno* was based on Virgil and Plato.

Dante is reported to have been so fascinated and enraptured by the ideas and philosophies of Plato and Virgil, pagan philosophers, that he believed they were divinely inspired. Here is a comment on Virgil, from the *Americana*: "VIRGIL, pagan Roman poet, 70-19 B.C. Belonged to the national school of pagan Roman thought, influenced by the Greek writers. Christians of the Middle Ages, including Dante, believed he had received some measure of divine inspiration."

Plato was a pagan Greek philosopher, born in Athens, 427 B.C., a student of Socrates. He wrote the famous book *Phaedo*, on the immortality of the soul, and *this* book is the real origin of the modern belief in the immortality of the soul.

There is the general statement of the popular belief about hell, and where that belief came from - actually from the imaginations of pagans who knew not God!

What About the Millions of Heathen?

In spite of missionaries from the West, actually *more than half* of all the people on this earth *have never so much as HEARD* the ONLY name by which men may be SAVED - the name of Jesus CHRIST! Now is there some *other* way by which men may be saved? The Bible says there is NOT!

That means that thousands of millions of people on this earth have lived, and DIED, without ever having known anything about Christian salvation - without SAVING KNOWLEDGE - never having heard the ONLY name by which men may be saved! Now think what that means! IF all unsaved go immediately to hell at death - the hell commonly believed in - then more than HALF of the people who have lived on this earth have been consigned there - and they are there, now, without ever having been given so much as a CHANCE to escape it!

Ask yourself candidly, do you believe THAT is the plan by which an all - wise, all - merciful, loving God is working out his purpose here below?

Now *what is the TRUTH?*

We face this alternative: Either the Holy Bible is the inspired Word of God, BY WHICH THE CREATOR *reveals* the TRUTH on the subject, or else we must fling up our hands and confess WE JUST DON'T KNOW - we are *ignorant* on the question - because no one has ever COME BACK from such an ever-burning hell to tell us about it, and SCIENCE knows nothing about it. We must believe what the BIBLE says, or we can believe *nothing*, if we are rational and honest!

Hell Fire in the Bible

Jesus said in a passage very often quoted: "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt" (Mark 9:47-49).

Now exactly what *is* this hell fire? This word *hell* is an English word. Mark wrote, originally, in the Greek language. The word originally inspired, which Mark actually wrote, was the Greek word *gehenna*, which certainly does refer to FIRE.

But in *most* passages in the New Testament where the English word *hell* is found in our English translations, the original Greek word was a *different* word, *hades*-which does NOT refer to FIRE at all, but has an altogether different meaning.

Incorrectly Translated "Hell"

Remember we merely read a translation of the Bible from its original languages. A leading Bible dictionary, called *A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by James Hastings, says this:

"In our Authorized Version the word 'hell' is unfortunately used as the rendering of *three distinct words, with different meanings*. It represents, (1) the 'sheol' of the Hebrew Old Testament, and the 'hades' of . . .the New Testament... It is now *an entirely misleading rendering*. especially in the New Testament passages. The English revisers, therefore, have substituted the original Greek word 'hades' for 'hell' in the New Testament. In the American revision the word 'hell' is entirely discarded in this connection. . . . The word 'hell' is translated (2) as the equivalent of the Greek word *tartaros*, (II Peter 2:4; compare with Jude 6), and, (3) as the equivalent of the Greek word 'gehenna.'"

Hell is an old English word, and 370 years ago, when the Authorized Version was translated, the people of England commonly talked about putting their potatoes in HELL for the winter - a good way of preserving potatoes - for the word then meant merely a hole in the ground that was covered up - a dark and silent place - a GRAVE.

And now the Greek word *gehenna*. I quote from Hastings:

"Gehenna: the word occurs twelve times in the New Testament. This term 'gehenna' represents 'the Valley of Hinnom' (Nehemiah 11:30, II Kings 23:10, etc.). The place was . . . a deep narrow gorge in the vicinity of Jerusalem, understood to be on the south side.

It is repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 19:6, etc.). It became an object of horror to the Jews, and is said to have been made the receptacle for bones, the bodies of beasts and criminals, refuse and all unclean things. The terrible associations of the place . . . the *fires* said to have been kept

burning in it in order to *consume* the foul and corrupt objects that were thrown into it, made it a natural and unmistakable symbol of dire evil, . . . ABSOLUTE RUIN. So it came to designate the place of future punishment."

Hell-a Place of Destruction

Gehenna was a place of DESTRUCTION and DEATH - not a place of living torture! Jesus was talking to Jews who understood all about this Gehenna or Valley of Hinnom. Utter DESTRUCTION by fire was complete. NOTHING was left, but ashes!

Every text in the Bible translated from this Greek word *gehenna* means complete destruction - not living torture - NOT eternal LIFE in torment! THE BIBLE says, in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is DEATH" - not ETERNAL LIFE in torture. The PUNISHMENT revealed in the BIBLE is DEATH - the *cessation* of life. Eternal life is the GIFT or GOD!

Then WHY have we been believing that PUNISHMENT is ETERNAL LIFE in fire? And WHY have we been believing we already *have* eternal life and don't NEED to come to God through Christ to receive it as HIS GIFT?

The PUNISHMENT is DEATH. It is the *second* death, from which there shall be no resurrection! The PUNISHMENT is for ETERNITY - DEATH for eternity - ETERNAL punishment - but NO where does THE BIBLE say anything about the PAGAN teaching of eternal punishING. It's eternal punishMENT, *not* eternal punishING!

When Jesus spoke of being cast into "gehenna FIRE," he was using this expression as an illustration of the LAKE OF FIRE, which THE BIBLE reveals is to be THE PLACE of this final punishment - this second DEATH. He referred to Revelation 20:14: "And death and hell were

cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." THAT fire will be much *hotter* than Dante's imaginary HELL!

What happens to "Hell"?

Do people go at DEATH to the fictitious hell of Dante's imagination to be TORTURED by flames of fire *forever* - and then are they to be brought OUT, to go into a JUDGMENT, to see if God had made a mistake in having punished them so long in this "hell"?

Notice Revelation 20:13-15: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and *hell delivered up the dead* which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. *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 or life was cast into the lake of fire." The LAKE OF FIRE which JESUS referred to is a place of DEATH, not of eternal life - the SECOND DEATH - ETERNAL punishment!

Notice what Jesus said in Matthew 10:28: ". . . fear him which is able to DESTROY both soul and body in [GEHENNA]." Here in plain language JESUS said the SOUL could be *destroyed* - *and* that it would be DESTROYED in the GEHENNA that has been falsely translated by the English word *hell*! Gehenna is a place of DESTRUCTION!

Again Jesus used this word *gehenna* as quoted in Matthew 23:33: "Ye serpents," he said to the Pharisees, ". . . how can ye escape the damnation of [GEHENNA] ?" - the second DEATH - eternal PUNISHMENT!

The ancient rebellious cities Sodom and Gomorrah suffered, as we read in Jude 7, the vengeance of ETERNAL FIRE. But they are not still burning. They were burned up FOREVER - eternal DESTRUCTION!

Now what happens in this "hell" - derived from the Greek word *gehenna*? Let the Holy Word of God answer: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 4:1-3).

God Is Love - and Justice!

God is a God of LOVE - or MERCY, as well as a God of ABSOLUTE JUSTICE! If he were the vain, angry, unjust god pictured by the pagans who invented this popular conception of heaven and hell, then, according to the common belief of the illustration of Lazarus and the Rich Man, saved mothers up in heaven are hearing the shrieks, seeing the indescribable AGONY, *writhing*, of their own lost children down in hell - actually able to carry on a conversation with them - yet UNABLE to help them. Would THAT be the heavenly BLISS it is generally represented? Psalm 37 OUGHT to make plain to us this matter of heaven and hell. Notice! "For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off! The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever" (Ps. 37:9-12, 20, 22, 29). And notice Psalm 104:35: "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. And now, Isaiah 66:24: "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."

Never to Be Quenched?

"Neither shall their fire be QUENCHED." Does that mean burning forever and never burning up? Try this test: Put a piece of paper in a pan. Light it with a match. Now, don't QUENCH that fire! Don't put it out - for that's what "quench" means. Very soon the paper will *burn up*. Then put it down on the floor and step on it! Now it's merely ashes under the sole of your feet - precisely as THE BIBLE plainly says the wicked shall be! In Jeremiah 17:27, God warned the Jews that Jerusalem would be *burned*, and the fire would *not be quenched* - unless they repented. In Jeremiah 52:13, you read the account of the burning of Jerusalem. That fire was NOT QUENCHED! It is NOT still burning! Do you know that THE BIBLE teaches the *resurrection* of *all* who die? The apostle Paul said his HOPE was the hope of the RESURRECTION! As the resurrection is true doctrine, then the pagan myth of an eternal TORTURE, beginning at death, is as deceptive as Satan himself! If all Unsaved - even all who never *heard* the ONLY name Jesus Christ - are roasting, screaming, in such a hell, and can never get out, HOW can there be a RESURRECTION? *Thank* God! - there is to be a resurrection to JUDGMENT, as well as a resurrection to eternal life of the dead IN Christ! Yes, thank GOD, he so LOVED the world - we NEED not perish, but through Christ we may have EVERLASTING LIFE!

HELL - MAN IDEA VS. THE BIBLE

Is God an "angry Judge" - who tortures helpless sinners ages without end?

by **Roderick C. Meredith**

YOU HAVE probably never heard where your ideas about "hell" came from. So open your mind to some startling truth you may not have understood before!

You probably have heard of the idea of a horrifying, nightmarish place of never-ending torture for lost sinners. Atheists say religious people use this concept of "hell" as a means of playing upon the emotions of people who are sincerely trying to find God's will.

But where did they - and where did you - learn these ideas?

[RETURN TO BOOKLETS AND ARTICLES INDEX](#)

God's Purpose

The primary reason so many men and organizations of men have a false conception of hell is that they view it just as an isolated doctrine. God created man in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). In the garden of Eden, he told man the way that would lead to eternal life. Then he told man that going the

wrong way - the way of selfishness and greed - would lead to DEATH (Gen. 2:17). But Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44), told the woman, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). "You have an immortal soul." Man has been believing that lie about the immortal soul ever since!

God's purpose is to develop holy, righteous character in man. God gave ancient Israel his Ten Commandments, "that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever" (Deut. 5:29).

God's decrees are always for man's good. They are not designed as arbitrary decrees that God uses as an excuse for plunging men into flames of fire! Notice that God offered Adam and Eve life on the one hand, and death on the other. Adam and Eve would not have been offered LIFE if they already were immortal souls. Man was created mortal and in need of eternal life from God through his Spirit.

If man rebelled against God and made himself miserable through sin, then the kindest thing that God could do would be to let man die. Then, stubborn, sinning man would be unable to bring any further misery on himself or others by his wrong ways. He would just cease to exist, and would thus not interfere with the happiness of others who sought eternal life. That is why we read that the SOUL that sins shall die (Ezek. 18:4).

But men have disagreed with God and his Word, and have come to believe in an entirely different reward for the wicked. So, where do men get their ideas of "hell"?

What Is "Hell"?

You will be surprised to learn that Jesus Christ himself went to "hell" when he died! In Peter's inspired sermon on the day of Pentecost, he said, "He [David] seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:31).

So - according to your Bible - Jesus went to hell!

The "hell" where Jesus was for three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40) after his crucifixion is translated from the Greek word *hades*. *Hades* simply means "pit" or "grave." When the Authorized Version of the Bible was made, Englishmen commonly understood that "hell" could mean a grave, pit or hole in the ground. They often spoke of burying their potatoes in hell for the winter. The "hell" where Jesus went was simply the grave - the rock hewn sepulcher where he was buried. Unless you live until Christ comes and are changed from mortal to immortal (I Cor. 15:53), you will go to this same "hell."

The second Greek word translated "hell" is *tartaros*. It is used only once in the Bible (II Pet. 2:4) and refers to the condition of restraint of the fallen angels. It never refers to men.

Gehenna is the third Greek word translated "hell." *Gehenna*, or the Valley of Hinnom, was located out-side of Jerusalem. It was a place where trash, filth and the dead bodies of animals and despised

criminals were thrown. It was like some of our city dumps today. Ordinarily, everything thrown in this valley was destroyed by fire - completely burned up.

In Jewish thought, this burning, smoking Valley of Hinnom was associated with the future punishment of the wicked. So it was natural for Jesus and the apostles to use the word *gehenna* - derived from the Valley of Hinnom - when referring to the lake of fire, which will be the fate of the wicked. This lake of fire is described in Revelation 20:14-15.

These, then, are the three Greek words that are translated into the word "hell" in our Bibles. In the Hebrew there is only one word that is translated "hell." That word is *sheol*. It corresponds to the Greek word *hades*, meaning the grave, or pit.

Worms In Hell?

A familiar passage is found in Mark 9:43-48. Jesus was showing that it was better to rid ourselves of anything - even a job, an association or a habit that we loved as much as our right arm - than to let it cause us to disobey God and thus be cast into hell (*gehenna*), "into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

The "hell" to which Jesus referred was *gehenna* - deriving its name from the Valley of Hinnom. There were ledges along the edge of this valley.

Smith's Bible Dictionary gives a description of this valley. If anything, especially a dead body, landed on a ledge above the fires, it would be devoured by many worms or maggots that were kept alive by the animal and vegetable substances deposited there.

It was to these worms that Christ was referring when he said, "Their worm dieth not." But Christ didn't mean that each individual worm continued to live forever! He wasn't teaching the immortality of worms!

Actually, these worms, or maggots, are the larvae that develop from eggs deposited by flies. They continue for only a few days in this larva form, then pupate and finally emerge as flies, later dying.

The Greek word that was inspired and translated into the English word "worm" in this passage simply means a grub or maggot. It is a collective expression for all the worms that devour dead matter. These worms do not die, but pupate and become flies. Later, these flies like all other animals will return to the dust from which they come. "All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccl. 3:20).

The "fire that never shall be quenched" is a description showing that God will permit nothing to put out or quench this fire. It will simply burn up the bodies of the wicked. Naturally, those who preach "hell fire" use this passage to frighten unthinking people into believing that sinners will suffer eternal torment in hell fire - evidently with worms chewing on them at the same time!

Whom Do You Fear?

Instead of fearing what some misguided preacher may tell us about hell, let us see what Jesus said to fear. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him [God] which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [*gehenna*]" (Matt. 10:28). Here we find the clear statement that God can destroy both our body and soul in Gehenna, or the lake of fire. There is no mention made of burning forever and ever, and yet never quite burning up. But it does speak of destruction.

Recall that God told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed him, they would surely DIE. Their lives would be cut off - destroyed. Jesus told his disciples: ". . . wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction [not eternal life in "hell fire"], and many there be which go in thereat" (Matt. 7:13). Then he said, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (verse 19). What happens to a tree when it is cast into the fire? Why, it is burned up - destroyed.

Speaking of the harvest of the righteous and wicked, Jesus said he would tell the reapers, "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. 13:30). The tares, of course, refer to the wicked, and the wheat to the righteous. When literal tares are burned, they are BURNED UP. What about these types of sinners that are burned up? Was Jesus using wrong examples, or did he mean what he said?

The obvious answer is Jesus meant exactly what he said. The fate of the wicked will be Gehenna, or the lake of fire that the Bible mentions. But this fire is a lot hotter than most people think!

The wicked are human, mortal beings. Flesh and blood is subject to burning up. When the wicked are cast into the lake of fire, they will be burned up - destroyed!

From Genesis to Revelation, life and death are set as the two opposites - the fate of the righteous and the wicked respectively. God told Adam, ". . . dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). No mention here of being plunged immediately into "hell fire." The reward for disobedience was death.

Later, David wrote of the wicked, ". . . into smoke shall they consume away" (Ps. 37:20).

Still later, Malachi speaks of the fire that will burn the wicked: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall BURN THEM UP, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this . . ." (Mal. 4:1, 3).

Can anything be plainer than that the wicked are to be burned up - completely destroyed? That is why Jesus said, ". . . fear him which is able to DESTROY both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

Wages of Sin

The apostle Paul summed up the whole matter of man's reward for sin when he wrote, "For the wages of sin is DEATH; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). If you believe this scripture means what it says, then you know the truth. But, unfortunately, theologians often fail to understand what Paul said.

Could anything be more clear than this scripture? The wages, or reward, of sin is shown to be death, and eternal life is stated to be a gift from God - not something we already have.

Death means just that - the cessation of life and consciousness - total oblivion! In spite of the vain attempt of many preachers to make death mean separation from God, you cannot reconcile this with Scripture. Neither does death mean eternal life in nightmarish torments of an imagined "hell."

This "hell-fire" doctrine that is used to frighten so many ignorant human beings is a LIE. Its author is the father of lies - Satan the devil! If you are one who has gullibly swallowed that doctrine and suffered mental agonies from the fear of a man-made "hell-fire," God help you to study all the scriptures on this subject and find his truth.

But remember that the penalty of death will be caused by fire. Paul warns in Hebrews 10:26-27:

"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation, which shall DEVOUR the adversaries."

This is a FEARFUL WARNING to those who know God's truth and still refuse to obey it! This is not an unreasoned fear of a harsh, stern God who delights in punishing sinners. Rather, it is the sober realization that unless we surrender to God's will and his way of love, and refuse to let anything turn us aside, God will take away the life he has given us.

Yet this same passage shows God's infinite LOVE. He will not take away people's lives because of ignorance or weakness, but because they willfully and knowingly refuse to obey their Creator. This rebellious attitude in itself would bring them, and those about them, nothing but eternal trouble and misery if they were allowed to live forever. So God in his mercy and supreme wisdom has decreed the penalty of DEATH for such people.

The Lake of Fire

When the Bible says, "The wages of sin is death," it is not referring to the death we see around us every day. This death is referred to in I Corinthians 15:22, which says, "In Adam all die," and in Hebrews 9:27, which says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." These passages describe the first death - a death caused by a person wearing out physically and from

which he can be resurrected.

Revelation 20 shows the time of later resurrections, and when the wicked are cast into the lake of fire. Study it carefully. The first three verses describe Satan being bound for a thousand years, and the resurrected saints, who are in the first resurrection, ruling the world under Christ.

So according to your Bible - Jesus went to hell! . . . where Jesus went was simply the grave - the rock hewn sepulcher where he was buried.

The first part of verse 5 is an inserted thought that tells us, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." So the heathen, the atheists and all who were not called to a full knowledge of God's truth, are not resurrected until after the thousand-year reign of Christ. This is the second resurrection. For them the book of life is opened for the first time (Rev. 20:11-12).

But just before then, at the end of the thousand years of peace in the world tomorrow, the devil will go forth to deceive the nations who were not imbued with God's Holy Spirit. He will be overcome and "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" (verse 10). Notice that the word *are* is in italics in the Authorized Version. It is an inserted word to complete the meaning, and should be rendered "were cast" - because the beast and the false prophet are human beings who will be burned up when they are cast into the lake of fire just before the thousand years begin (Rev. 19:20).

At this point, you may be thinking about the parable of Lazarus and the rich man - and wondering if the rich man wasn't pictured as being forever in eternal torment. He definitely was not! But he was in mental torment as the fire of *Gehenna* was about to end his life. For the full and interesting proof of this, write immediately for our free booklet titled *Lazarus and the Rich Man*.

Now continuing in Revelation 20, notice in verse 13 that the remaining dead are raised in a third resurrection and are judged "according to their works." These are the wicked who were called *in this life* and who rebelled. Verse 14 continues, "And death and hell [*hades*, the grave] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." Here is a plain statement revealing that *Gehenna*, or the lake of fire, IS the SECOND DEATH.

Truth Makes Free

The Bible reveals a very different God from the one so often preached today.

It seems that men either try to do away with God's power altogether by preaching as though God had gone "way off" and left man to work things out according to human reason, or they go to the opposite extreme and look upon God as an "angry Judge" who is just waiting for an opportunity to punish

helpless sinners throughout all eternity.

The Creator of heaven and earth is now permitting man to sin and suffer in order to learn certain lessons. If man will accept God's truth as it is revealed, learn these lessons God intended, he will be given eternal life in God's kingdom. But if he stubbornly persists in going the way that leads to wretchedness and misery for himself and others, God in his mercy will cut off his life by casting him into the lake of fire - which is the second death.

Untold suffering and mental anguish have been caused by the false doctrine of an angry God plunging everyone who did not follow certain denominational teachings into a terrifying "hell fire" of everlasting torments.

Most people have been bound by denominational teachings, and too few have been willing to study all the scriptures on the subject to see what the Bible really says. But Jesus said of those who were willing to continue in his word, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).