

A STUDY OF THE BIBLICAL ACCURACY
OF WORDS TRANSLATED
HELL

by
Patrick D. Malone

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Chapter One

Introduction

Traditionally, "hell" has been a subject that has provided some of the greatest misconceptions of all time. The picture conjured up in most minds by the mention of the word "hell" has little to do with the truths described in God's Word. Nevertheless, that picture still clouds the understanding of Christians regarding Biblical passages containing this word. Lacking understanding of these passages, believers today remain confused and uncertain on truths central to the return of Christ and God's judgments.

Background of the Problem

The erroneous views of what "hell" represents stem from the failure to regard the Bible as the primary source and authority on all doctrinal matters.

Man's basic spiritual problem is not believing the integrity of the Word of God. Very few people believe that the Word of God is accurate, that it means what it says and that it says what it means. Thus man is in a constant dilemma in his quest for truth; he has no touchstone for truth because he will not go to the Word and study its integrity and accuracy.¹

God uses words with exactness. Furthermore, the Word of God defines the words it employs. Therefore the confusion

¹Victor Paul Wierwille, Power For Abundant Living (New Knoxville, Ohio: American Christian Press, 1971) p. 93.

does not stem from any ambiguity in the Scriptures, but rather man's failure to carefully consider this primary source.

Having strayed from the fountainhead of truth, voluminous inaccuracy has infested the religious teaching of this subject for centuries. Blended with mythological thought, "hell" became viewed as an unyielding, imminent fate for the evil doer. The so called "higher powers" in the church used "hell" to breed fear and bring the commonalty into subjection. "Fire and brimstone" preachings of condemnation propagated the misconception of hell through the centuries.

The essence fabricated in ecclesiastical commentary took form in the arts. Classical literature portrayed in extensive detail the ominous, yet erroneous portrait of "hell." Envisioned was a world of eternal flames occupied by red creatures with horns and tails carrying about tridents, existing somewhere beneath the earth's surface. This underworld has been described as the permanent residence of the Devil and his cohorts; it is also considered the possible occupance of any person upon dying.

Much of the existing error relates itself to an even larger field of inaccuracy. The wrong teaching that one is made alive immediately upon dying inextricably entwines itself with the consideration of this subject. Attempts to support the belief that the dead are not really

dead, fostered the misinterpretation and even mistranslation of many scriptures. Such practices as spiritualism, seances, and the black arts are the offspring of such parentage.

Not the scriptures, but man's interpretations and mistranslations, coupled with supernatural experiences contrary to God's Word, have muddied the lucidity of Biblical statements.²

Delimitation

The greater subject area of what occurs after death has been admirably covered in the book, Are the Dead Alive Now? This book carefully considers the Word of God, clearly illustrating that the dead are dead and remain so until the return of Christ. All relevant scripture central to this thesis are carefully examined leaving no room for uncertainty on this major point. However, concerning specific understanding of the meaning and usage of the English word "hell," a further developmental study is in order. The basis of understanding this subject is sketched out in Appendices III and IV of Are the Dead Alive Now? However, because of limited time and space this topic has not been exhaustively covered.³ In order to answer every question of the serious Bible student, leaving no room for confusion and uncertainty, this paper will endeavor to fully cover this aspect.

²Victor Paul Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now? (Old Greenwich, CT: Devon-Adair Co., 1971), p. 14.

³Ibid., p. 101.

Objectives

The clear understanding of what "hell" is comes from a careful analysis of the individual Hebrew and Greek words from which it is translated: sheol, hadēs, gehenna, and tartarus. The definitions of these words is discovered within the Word of God itself when principles of Biblical research are applied.

The definition offered for sheol and hadēs as the "gravedom" will be carefully and thoroughly documented from the Word of God. Each use of these words will display itself with the rendering of "the grave." Gehenna will be explained in light of all scripture relevant to the subject it deals with. It will be demonstrated who gehenna deals with and what it involves. Tartarus will also be considered, distinguishing its meaning from the other words translated "hell."

Overview

An examination of the various beliefs concerning "hell" and their origins will be considered in Chapter Two of this study. This will take the form of both an historical review and a critical examination of selected expositions pertaining to the thesis.

Chapter Three will set forth an elucidation of what is represented by the English word "hell." Individual concepts collectively denominated "hell" will be distinguished and defined in this chapter. Detailed documentation will

verify these definitions.

This information will be summarized in the final chapter. Conclusions drawn from the study will be described as well as recommendations for future research and study.

Significance of the Study

Through a careful examination of the topic of "hell," clear and accurate understanding will be achieved. Regarding the Bible as the authoritative source and perceiving the exact usage of words it displays, the error that has pervaded the minds of so many for so long will be eradicated. This developmental study, springing off the groundwork laid out in Are the Dead Alive Now? should eliminate any confusion or uncertainty still existing in the mind of the serious Biblical student.

Chapter Two

Historical Development of "Hell"

Webster defines "hell" as the place where devils live and to which, variously sinners and unbelievers are doomed to eternal punishment after death."¹ This concise definition expresses the essence of theological and popular belief on the subject. The current impression of "hell" issues from a queer conglomeration of Biblical exegesis, classical mythology, theological speculation and literary license. A study of the development of this dogma is crucial to understanding its fallacy.

"Hell," semantically is from the Anglo-Saxon "helle" meaning a hidden place.² The etymology of this word can be traced further back to "... the common teutonic name for the place that was, according to the ancient German mythology, the abode of the dead, like Hebrew sheol and Greek Hadēs. Nowadays, however, the word is used to signify the place of the damned."³

Interpretation of what "hell" comprises began with discourses on the origins of the words sheol and hadēs. The derivation of these words largely colors the meaning attached to them in most exegesis.

¹Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 1976, s.v. "hell."

²The Companion Bible (reprinted., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), app. 131.

³The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VI (Washington D.C.: McGraw Hill, 1967), p. 1006.

Concerning sheol, J. D. Douglas in The New Bible Dictionary notes:

The derivation of the Hebrew word sheol is uncertain. Two main theories have been proposed. A. It has been held to be derived from the root ש'-ל, meaning "ask" or "enquire." In this case it may have been originally the place of inquiry, where oracles could be contained... B. The second main theory is that sheol is derived from the root ש'-ל, from which came the words for a hollow hand and a hollow way. In post biblical Hebrew saal means the deep of the sea. If this derivation is correct the original sense will be the hollow, or more probably deep place.⁴

Fitting with the erroneous teaching that the dead are alive, most scholars have supported the former theory. If this theory were to be accepted, it would then establish a doctrinal basis for spiritualism, in addition to the misconception of the scriptural rendering of sheol.

In The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible this exposition is offered:

Sheol... It's etymology and hence it's precise meaning is disputed. The most plausible view is that it derives from the root "ask, inquire" and was originally applied to the realm of the dead where oracles were sought from them... Like all other ancient peoples, the Hebrews believed that the dead, though ending earthly life, did not relinquish existence per se. Somewhere in a region outside the earth but accessible to God they lived on.⁵
... the soul of both the righteous and unrighteous went directly to sheol at death, there to remain

⁴J. D. Douglas, ed., The New Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), s.v. "sheol."

⁵The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), s.v. "sheol."

forever as disembodied spirits, or perhaps spirits with shadowy bodies. Sheol was conceived of as a dark, dreary, dismal place under the earth where no real life was possible.⁶

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible adds:

The Hebrews evidently shared with their pagan neighbors a concept of the region occupied by the dead as a shadowy underworld existence... An important question regarding sheol is this: At death did the Old Testament believers go to such a place of gloom or did they go to be with the Lord immediately? Both views contain considerable difficulties.⁷

These views do contain considerable difficulties in that they do not line up with the clear accuracy of the usage of sheol in the scriptures. Nor do they fit with the greater subject of what occurs after death documented with detailed accuracy in Are the Dead Alive Now?⁸ However, they do begin to explain the formulation of traditional eschatology.

Just as erroneous ideas connected with sheol have affected the meaning attached to it, hadēs brings its own semantic problems. "The Greek Hadēs is human in its origin and comes down to us laden with centuries of development in which it has acquired new senses, meanings, and usages."⁹ "The Greek

⁶Ibid.

⁷Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. V (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1980) s.v. "sheol."

⁸Victor Paul Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now? (Old Greenwich, CT: Devon Adair Co., 1971), p. .

⁹The Companion Bible, app. 131.

hadēs represents the underworld or realm of the dead in the classics."¹⁰

In Greek mythology, hadēs was a proper noun used of both the underworld and the god of this world.

Hadēs was the god of the dead in Greek mythology. He ruled the kingdom of the dead, which had the same name... The kingdom of Hadēs was a neutral region reserved for the souls of people who deserved neither punishment nor rewards upon death... The Greeks believed that Hadēs was beneath the earth.¹¹

Theologians have incorporated extraneous mythological backgrounds of hadēs into their dissertations on "hell."

Theological Development

Weaving these various notions sheol and hadēs in with gehenna and other related scriptures, the present view of "hell" emerged in the dogma of the Patricians and later theologians. Within the writings of the early church fathers, some disputation did occur, however, on some particular points, such as the immediacy of the retribution of hell. In the second century, Justin held that "the punishment of the demons and the damned is delayed until after the final judgment... Justin's opinion was widespread in the West until after the sixth century, when the teaching of Gregory the Great caused it to be discarded."¹²

¹⁰J. D. Douglas, ed., The New Bible Dictionary, s.v. "hadēs."

¹¹The World Book Encyclopedia, 1974, s.v. "hadēs."

¹²The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VI, p. 1007.

The Councils of Lyons in 1274 and 1385 AD declaratively stated that retribution takes place immediately after death. This was supported by the Constitution of Benedictus Deus in 1336 AD.¹³ These tenets resulted from the consolidation of beliefs about sheol, hadēs, gehenna, and tartarus. Hence, in present day translations of the Bible all of these words have been rendered "hell" in many versions.

Origen also had considerable influence on beliefs about "hell." His writings opened the way for views of remedial punishment and purgatory. The works of Jerome, Ambrose, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Lombard all have contributed to the shaping of modern theological thought on the subject.¹⁴

Literary Contributions

Adding to the aforementioned contributions to present day impressions of hell have been various secular literary works. The work having the greatest impact perhaps, is Dante's Inferno. A part of the Divine Comedy, written in 1308, its main theme is life after death and Dante himself is the main character.

Dante, lost in the dark forest symbolizing his own unworthy life and the evil in society, on Good Friday meets the Roman poet Virgil, who promises to lead him out of the forest. They reach "Hell," a horrible pit shaped like a

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

cone, deep in the earth... where Dante and Virgil visit crowds of suffering individuals tormented by monsters and devils.¹⁵

Set in graphically descriptive language, the poet Dante Alighieri portrays in vivid detail the horrendous picture of "hell."

I am in the third circle of the torments, here to all time with neither pause nor change, the frozen rain of Hell descends in torrents. Huge hailstones, dirty water and black snow pour from the dismal air to putrefy the putrid slush that waits for them below.¹⁶ ... With their palms they beat their brows, with their nails they clawed their bleeding breasts, and such mad wails broke from them...¹⁷

The uneven tombs cover the uneven plains; such fields I saw here spread in all directions, except that here the tombs were chests of pain; for in a ring around each tomb, great fires raised every wall to a red heat. No smith works hotter iron in his forge. The biers stood with their lids upraised and from their pits an anguished moaning rose on the dead air from the desolation of tormented spirits.¹⁸

Summary

Traditional teaching depicts "hell" as the torturing blazes of eternal punishment beneath the earth's surface for demons and sinners alike. It is ruled by the Devil

¹⁵The World Book Encyclopedia, s.v. "the Inferno."

¹⁶Dante Alighieri, The Inferno, trans. John Ciardi (New York: Mentor Classics, 1954), p. 66.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 92.

himself, engulfing the wayward with its fiery jaws upon the moment of their death. Here, unimaginable horrors occur to torment the wrongdoers. This imagery is the result of hermeneutical error, mythological influence, theological speculation, and literary license. The teaching on this subject is warped and perverted beyond any resemblance to Biblical truth. A careful study of all scripture relevant to this topic must be considered to arrive again at the clarity and accuracy of God's Word.

Chapter Three

Biblical Accuracy of "Hell"

The term "hell" is not depictive of one concept or place. It has been erroneously applied in the King James Version and others to denominate several distinctly different particulars. In so doing, the translators have caused apparent contradictions and errors concerning what occurs after death and the judgments of God.

First of all, when a passage of the Word of God is not clear or is contradictory with other scriptures, a student of the Word should look at older, more nearly original texts (such as Estrangelo Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek) to see if the translation is as clear in English as it was in the earlier texts. Look at the translations of older texts to see if they are more clear.¹

Such is the case here. An accurate understanding of what is represented by the word "hell" can be gained only through a careful study of the individual Hebrew and Greek words from which it has been translated: sheol, hadēs, gehenna, and tartarus.

The meaning of these words can be ascertained from the Word of God itself when Biblical principles of interpretation are strictly utilized. One of the principles vital in this study is that individual verses must be in harmony with all other Biblical references on the same topic.² In

¹Victor Paul Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now? (Old Greenwich, CT: Devon-Adair Co., 1971), p. 15.

²Victor Paul Wierwille, Power For Abundant Living (New Knoxville, Ohio: American Christian Press, 1971), p. 151.

conducting a study of any of the individual words in question here, its meaning must be viewed in the framework of all scriptural reference dealing with that specific topic. When encountering a difficult verse, the further tenet applies:

When there are an abundance of clear scriptures regarding an identical situation or person and only a few apparently contradicting scriptures, the many clear ones must not be subordinated or rationalized while the few are exclusively adhered to or allowed to dominate, but rather the few must fit with the many.³

By applying these keys to this study of all words relevant to the subject of "hell," the accuracy of God's Word will be seen regarding the individual concepts represented by this term.

Sheol and Hadēs

As illustrated in Chapter Two of this study, much error has surrounded the meaning of the Hebrew word sheol and the Greek word Hadēs. The meaning of sheol does not depend upon theological speculation. Nor does the use of Hadēs in classical Greek literature determine that word's usage in the Bible.

The meaning which the Greeks put upon it [Hadēs] does not concern us; nor have we anything to do with the imaginations of the heathen, or the traditions of Jews or Romanists, or the teachings of demons or evil spirits, or of any who still cling to them.⁴

³Victor Paul Wierwille, Jesus Christ Is Not God (New Knoxville, Ohio: American Christian Press, 1975), p. 30.

⁴The Companion Bible (reprinted., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), app. 131.

As Hadēs (a word of human origin) is used in the New Testament, as the equivalent for the Hebrew Sheol (a word of Divine origin) its meaning can be gathered, not from human imagination, but from its Divine usage in the Old Testament.⁵ The Old Testament Biblical usage must settle the meaning of the heathen (i.e., the Greek) usage of the word Hadēs, because the Holy Spirit uses it of His own Hebrew word Sheol in Acts 2:27 by quoting Psalm 16:10.⁶

Acts 2:27 is a direct quote of Psalm 16:10. Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [hadēs in Greek; sheol in Hebrew], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Hence both of these words must be defined according to their Biblical usage.

Hadēs or Sheol is never the place of destruction; it is always the continuing state of the dead. The most accurate translation of hadēs and sheol would be "gravedom." Gravedom is the state in which all dead dwell; it is not a geber, a spot where the body is buried on land or sea. The Biblical description of gravedom (the kingdom of all those in the grave -- the dead), sheol or Hadēs, is a place where there is no consciousness and thus no remembrance.⁷ The Hebrew Sheol, and the Greek Hadēs are rendered thirty-one times the grave, thirty-one times hell, three times pit, sixty-five times in all. Four times the grave is put in the margin for hell which increases the rendering the grave to thirty-five times, and reduces the rendering hell to twenty-five times.

⁵E. W. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament, 10th ed. (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1971), s.v. "hadēs."

⁶E. W. Bullinger, How To Enjoy the Bible (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1970), p. 257.

⁷Victor Paul Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now? (Old Greenwich, CT: Devon-Adair Co., 1971), p. 22, 23.

On the face of the matter this gives the preference to the grave, not "a grave," for which there are other words: but "THE grave" for which there is no other word.⁸

It is interesting to note that the American Revised Version does not translate the word sheol in the Old Testament but simply transliterates it "sheol." The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts, a translation by George M. Lamsa leaves the word sheol for both the Old Testament uses of sheol and New Testament occurrences of hadēs. Significantly, James Murdock in his translation, The New Testament: A Literal Translation from the Syriac Peshitta Version renders the word "grave" in each of its occurrences in the New Testament. The evidence here from the Aramaic supports the equivalency of sheol and hadēs, and the subsequent translation of "grave."

With regard to the word "pit," it will be observed that in each of the three cases where it occurs (Numbers 16:30, 33; and Job 17:16), "the grave" is so evidently meant, that we may at once substitute that word, and banish "pit" from our consideration as a rendering of sheol. As to the rendering "hell" it does not represent sheol, because both by Dictionary definition and by colloquial usage "hell" means the place of future punishment. Sheol has no such meaning,⁹ but denotes the present state of death.

By examining each of the occurrences of Sheol the following will be evidenced:

⁸Bullinger, How To Enjoy Bible, p. 257.

⁹Bullinger, Lexicon and Concordance, s.v. "sheol."

- (a) That as to direction it is down.
- (b) That as to place it is in the earth.
- (c) That as to nature it is put for the state of death.
- (d) As to relation it stands in contrast with the state of the living; see Deuteronomy 30:15, 19; and I Samuel 2:6-8.
- (e) As to association, it is used in connection with mourning (Genesis 37:34, 35), sorrow (Genesis 42:38; II Samuel 22:6; Psalms 18:5; 116:3), fright and terror (Numbers 16:27, 34), weeping (Isaiah 38:3, 10, 15, 20), silence (Psalms 31:17, 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:10), no knowledge (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10), punishment (Numbers 16:27, 34; I Kings 2:6, 9; Job 24:19; Psalm 9:17).
- (f) And, finally, as to duration, to dominion of Sheol or grave will continue until, and end only with, the gathering together and resurrections, which are the only exit from it (see Hosea 13:14 etc.; and compare Psalm 16:10 with Acts 2:27, 31; 13:35).¹⁰
- Hadēs can mean only and exactly what sheol means, the place where "corruption" is seen; and from which the gathering together and resurrections are the only exit.¹¹

Where sheol is translated "hell," in most instances when "the grave" is substituted the meaning is immediately clear.

Psalm 16:10

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [the grave]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Proverbs 5:5

Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell [the grave], going down to the chambers of death.

The abundance of clear verses evidence the meaning of "gravedom." However, there are some verses that appear

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

difficult to understand at a cursory reading. Nevertheless, a detailed study of these verses will establish the rendering of "the grave." Two of these occurrences are found in Isaiah 14:9, 15.

Isaiah 14:9-11, 15

Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Verse ten has presented difficulty to some, for here it represents the dead as speaking out of "hell." This is the figure of speech prosopopoeia.

Prosopopoeia or personification is a figure by which things are represented or spoken of as persons; or by which we attribute intelligence by words or actions to inanimate objects or abstract ideas.

The figure is employed when the absent are spoken of (or to) as being present; when the dead are spoken of as alive; or when anything (e.g., a country) is addressed as a person.¹²

Examples of this figure of speech can be seen throughout the Word.

Job 28:22

Destruction and death say, we have heard the fame thereof in our ears.

Genesis 4:10

And he said, what hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

¹²E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Grand Rapids: Beker Book House, 1968), p. 861.

In the account of Isaiah 14:9-11, 15 dead people in the grave are represented as speaking, and sheol or the grave (margin) is represented as being moved or stirred. That it is the grave is clear from the reference to the "worms."¹³ Also note that the word "grave" in verse eleven is also the word sheol.

Another such occurrence is found in Ezekiel 32:21.

Ezekiel 32:21

The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword.

Here again dead people are represented as speaking out of sheol. From the context of the record it is clearly the grave. Verses 22-32 are about those who have been slain with the sword, and are fallen and lying in their graves. This is again the figure of speech prosopopoeia.¹⁴

Prosopopoeia as personification is used in connection with sheol or hadēs in the following verses: II Samuel 22:6; Psalm 18:5; 89:48; 116:3; 141:7; Proverbs 1:12; 30:16; Song of Solomon 8:6; Isaiah 5:14; 14:9, 10; Isaiah 28:15, 18; 38:18; Ezekiel 32:21; Jonah 2:2; Habakkuk 2:5; Luke 16:23; Revelation 6:8; 20:13. Only four of those places represent the dead as speaking out of sheol. Concerning the record in Luke 16:23, which is one of these occurrences it must be remembered:

¹³Ibid., p. 865.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 866.

We must note first of all that this scriptural passage is a parable, which again is a figure of speech... A parable is an extended simile: the resemblance is usually in one specific characteristic... This parable does not say that Jesus believed in immediate rewards and punishments after death; this is what the Pharisees believed. Jesus uses this parable to condemn the Pharisees and to catch them in their own erroneous beliefs.¹⁵

After examining the most difficult verses containing the translation of sheol and hadēs as "hell" in light of figures of speech, they are easily construable as fitting the definition of "gravedom." These words should never be translated "hell," but always "the grave" representing the dominion or state of the dead.

Gehenna and The Lake of Fire

Distinctly differing from sheol and hadēs is another word translated "hell," the Greek word gehenna.

Gehenna (Greek) which is ghi-hinnom in Hebrew, is also translated "hell" but is not the grave (hadēs or sheol). Gehenna is the place of destruction, hell-fire. The word comes from the Valley of Hinnom where carrion is forever burning.¹⁶

The word gehenna used in the New Testament actually is the Greek transliteration for the Hebrew word ghi-hinnom. Literally, this is the Valley of Hinnom, an actual geographic location existing in Israel. There are

¹⁵Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now?, p. 73.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 22, 23.

differing views as to the origin of the word "Hinnom." While some scholars believe it to mean "lamentation,"¹⁷ others claim it is "the name of a person of whom nothing is known."¹⁸ Whatever the case, the Valley of Hinnom, otherwise called the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom is:

A deep and narrow ravine, with steep, rocky sides to the south and west of Jerusalem separating Mt. Zion to the North from the "hill of evil counsel," and the sloping rocky plateau of the "plain of Rephaim" to the South. The earliest mention of the Valley of Hinnom is in Joshua 15:8; 18:16, where the boundary line between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin is described as passing along the bed of the ravine.¹⁹

That this valley separated these two tribes is interesting in light of its future usage and the later history of Judah and Benjamin. The son of God came out of the tribe of Judah, while the tribe of Benjamin was almost eradicated because of the sons of Belial from this tribe as recorded in Judges.

Tracing the history of this valley through the Old Testament uncovers some pertinent information to understanding the New Testament application of ghi-hinnom.

¹⁷Joseph Henry Thayer, ed., The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Lafayette, IN: Christian Copyrights, Inc., 1979) s.v. "Hinnom."

¹⁸Robert Young, ed., Analytical Concordance to the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1970) s.v. "Hinnom."

¹⁹William Smith, ed., A Dictionary of the Bible (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1884), s.v. "Hinnom."

In I Kings 11:7, on the southern brow, overlooking the valley at its eastern extremity, Solomon erected high places to Molech, an idol having the form of a bull. This he did for his idolatrous wives who offered sacrifices to Molech in the valley. Molech was a fire-god requiring the offering of human sacrifices.

Many instances of human sacrifices are found in ancient writers, which may be compared with the description of the Old Testament of the manner in which Molech was worshipped. Molech was the lord and master of the Ammonites; their country was his possession.²⁰

In Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2-5 God expressly forbids any such sacrifice to Molech making violation punishable by death. This horrid practice continued under the reign of Ahaz who "caused his children to pass through the fire to Molech" in II Kings 16:3 and II Chronicles 28:3. Following in his footsteps, Manasseh committed the same abomination according to II Chronicles 33:6. To put an end to these atrocities, Josiah rendered the valley ceremonially unclean by spreading over it human bones and other corruptions depicted in II Kings 23:10, 13, 14 and II Chronicles 34:4, 5.

Resulting from the abominations carried on by Israel in this valley it becomes associated as the site of God's judgment against the unrighteous. Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesy concerning Tophet, the southeast extremity of the

²⁰Ibid., s.v. "Molech."

of the Valley of Hinnom:

Isaiah 30:27, 28, 30, 33:

Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burning thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: and his breath as a overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err.

And the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstone.

For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the land, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.

Jeremiah 19:2; 7:30-33:

And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee,

For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord: they have set their abominations in my house which is called by my name to pollute it.

And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, neither come into my heart.

Therefore, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place.

And the carcasses of their people shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall fray them away.

In our Lord's day the idolatry had ceased, but the fires were still continuously burning there for the destruction of the refuse of Jerusalem.

Hence, gehenna was used for the fires of destruction associated with the judgment of God.²¹

The use of the word gehenna by Jesus Christ then was not some newly coined abstract. It was the name of an actual geographic location already associated with the judgment of God, depicted by devouring fire, for the deeds of the wicked and unrighteous. In speaking of Gehenna as the place of eternal destruction, the idea here was not that the Devil, his host, and the unrighteous would be cast into that literal valley. Physical fire would have no affect on spirit. Nor will that place exist in the new earth as evidenced by Revelation 21:4.

This use of gehenna is the figure of speech "metalepsis" or "double metonymy."

The figure is so called because something more is deficient than in metonymy, which has to be supplied entirely by the thought, rather than by the association or relation of ideas, as in the case of metonymy. This something more that is deficient consists of another metonymy which the mind has to supply. Hence metalepsis is a double or compound metonymy, or a metonymy in two stages, only one of which is expressed.²²

Here gehenna is used by metonymy to represent the devouring fire related to it, and that is used by the further metonymy to the idea of God's judgment.

²¹The Companion Bible, app. 131.

²²Bullinger, Figures of Speech, p. 609.

Gehenna, the Valley of Hinnom, itself is not the ultimate site of destruction. It portrays in concrete terms the greater concept of God's devouring fires of judgment. In defining gehenna in Are the Dead Alive Now?, the following verses are given: Matthew 13:39, 40; Luke 17:29, 30; Matthew 25:41.²³

None of these verses actually mention the word gehenna. Matthew 13:36-43 explains the parable of the tares and the sower. At the end of the world, the children of the wicked one will be cast into a furnace of fire. Luke 17:24-37 describes the day of the Lord when he returns with his saints to execute judgment. The unrighteous are spoken of as being taken by fire and brimstone. Matthew 25:31-46 foretells of the great white throne judgment when all nations shall be gathered before the Lord, and he will divide the sheep from the goats. The unjust are sent into "everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels." These go to everlasting punishment, but the righteous to everlasting life.

The idea represented by gehenna is the everlasting fire of destruction. This representation of fire in the sense of judgment is evidenced throughout the whole Word of God. Fire is represented as the symbol of Jehovah's presence and

²³Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now?, p. 22, 23.

the instrument of His power in the way either of approval or destruction.²⁴

This aspect of fire was seen in the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Tophet. It is illustrated in Deuteronomy 4:24; II Samuel 22:9; Psalm 78:21; Ezekiel 15, just to name a few of the many uses in the Old Testament of fire representing judgment. Connected with fire in this sense is "brimstone." In each of its fourteen uses in the Bible it always depicts the wrath of God (Psalm 11:6; Luke 17:29).

A verse that illustrates the use of fire is Matthew 3:12: "... but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

In the Old Testament, chaff is used in the figures simile and hyperbole to represent the wicked, lawless, persecutors, ungodly, strangers, adversaries, tyrants, idolaters, and kingdoms on earth. It is always used of the natural, carnal man who is unacceptable to God. Now the chaff which has been separated and placed in a heap is burned with fire because it is of no value. This fire cannot be extinguished until it has completely destroyed the chaff upon which it feeds.

In the east, fire is a cleansing agent used to get rid of waste. Hence, it is an image or symbol of thorough cleansing resulting in purity. Here we have fire burning the chaff; leaving the pure, good grain gathered together in the garner.²⁵

²⁴Smith, Dictionary of Bible, s.v. "fire."

²⁵Idioms in the Bible Explained, 2nd ed., p. 61, quoted in Walter J. Cummins, ed., The Living Word Speaks (New Knoxville, Ohio: American Christian Press, 1981), p. 32.

This is the representation of fire throughout the Word of God. It is what gehenna denotes. This interpretation is also the concept demonstrated by another term associated with "hell": the lake of fire. The lake of fire appears five times in the Bible, all of which occur in the Book of Revelation. Three of those verses connect brimstone with fire.

Concerning all cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 state "this is the second and final death." This is the eventual outcome for the beast [Anti-Christ] and the false prophet (Revelation 19:20); the Devil (Revelation 20:10); the fearful, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars (Revelation 21:8); death, and "the grave" [hadēs] (Revelation 20:14); and whosoever was not found written in the book of life" (Revelation 20:15).

The Book of Life is referred to in Exodus 32:33; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:13; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27; 22:19. It contains the names of the righteous from each administration. The lake of fire like gehenna describes the concept of God's presence in purity of judgment. Specifically, these concern the judgment that will occur in the Lord's Day.

The Church of the Body will have been gathered together by Christ before the great and notable day of the Lord comes to pass, which is the day

of wrath also called the Lord's Day.²⁶
 The Lord's Day is the Book of Revelation period
 when Christ comes as king of kings and Lord of
 Lords.²⁷

This event is clearly set forth in II Thessalonians 1:7, 8.

II Thessalonians 1:7, 8
 And to you who are troubled rest with us,
 when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven
 with his mighty angels.
 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that
 know not God and that obey not the gospel of
 our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the teaching of II Thessalonians to the Way Corps,
 Dr. Wierwille stated:

I do not believe that this flaming fire has
 anything to do with burning anybody or giving
 them a hot foot. He is coming in judgment as
 the king of kings, God's righteous judgment.
 ... The fire was simply God's presence made
 manifest. It isn't the flame of fire taking
 vengeance. It's the Lord taking vengeance.
 "Taking" equals rendering. It is a legal
 term that is used when a judge renders a
 decision.²⁸

Gehenna and the lake of fire represent the judgment
 that will take place and the penalty that will be exacted.
Gehenna, as well as the lake of fire, has been described
 as "a place of torment." This is true but torment must
 also be defined.

²⁶Victor Paul Wierwille, God's Magnified Word, Studies in Abundant Living, Vol. IV (New Knoxville, Ohio: American Christian Press, 1977), p. 206.

²⁷Ibid., p. 207.

²⁸Victor Paul Wierwille, "II Thessalonians 1:5-10" (Transcript of Way Corps Teachings, Indiana Campus, 1977).

"Torment" appears twice in connection with the lake of fire. In Revelation 14:10 those that wear the mark of the beast are tormented with fire and brimstone. The Devil is tormented in the lake of fire in Revelation 20:10.

The word "torment" is the word basanizō. It comes from the root word basanōs, the touchstone. [called also basanite, Latin lapis Lydius]²⁹ Lapis Lydius, a species of stone from Lydia, which being applied to metals was thought to indicate any alloy which might be mixed with them, and therefore used in the trial of metals.³⁰ Basanizō then is "to rub upon the basanōs, or touch stone, hence to put to the test, prove, to examine closely, cross-question."³¹ In the spiritual sphere it has the figurative sense which is closely related to the original meaning of a means of testing.³²

The meaning of "torment" in these verses is to put to the test or examine closely. The purity of God's judgment does just that; it examines closely and indicates any impurity. The impure elements are separated out like the chaff from the wheat, to be taken out of the way. This is the destruction of the "fires," the penalty for those whose names do not appear in the Book of Life.

²⁹Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "torment."

³⁰Harold K. Moulton, ed., The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), s.v. "torment."

³¹Bullinger, Lexicon and Concordance, s.v. "torment."

³²Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols., trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-76), s.v. "torment."

Matthew 10:28

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.

If the natural man remains unsaved, Satan will have succeeded in not only killing but also destroying that man.³³

The word "destroy" in Matthew 10:28 is the word apollumi in the Greek. "The fundamental thought of that word is not annihilation, but ruin, loss, perish, and to come to an end."³⁴ It is a form of the word apollyon meaning destruction, which is the equivalent to the Hebrew word abaddon, as evidenced by Revelation 9:11.

A literal translation of Matthew 10:28 correlated with the record from Luke 12:4, 5 reads:

Be not terrified of those whose hands are able to kill your body, who after your death can do no more to you. But, be alert, because you know the terrifying result of the one, the devil, who has the authority to cast (destroy) the total natural (unsaved) man of body and soul over the brink of destruction into the continual fires of the refuse.³⁵

Destruction, understood in its proper sense is the final result of the purity of God's judgment made manifest, the denotation of gehenna and the Lake of Fire. That destruction seen in Matthew 10:28 is ruin or loss but not annihil-

³³Wierwille, Are Dead Alive Now?, p. 104.

³⁴Bullinger, Lexicon and Concordance, s.v. "destroy."

³⁵Wierwille, Are Dead Alive Now?, p. 105.

ation. Another Greek word translated "destruction" and very similar in its meaning to apollumi is olethros. It occurs in II Thessalonians 1:9, providing more detail as to what eventuates with the judgment of God. With this occurrence comes the final understanding of what the fires of judgment convey.

II Thessalonians 1:9

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.

"Destruction" is olethros, in other places translated ruin, but no place that I've been able to check in the Word does it imply annihilation or extinction. It seems to imply at least without question separation; namely lost to contact with the true God and the sweet fellowship that the believers have with the true God... I learned in science to the best of scientific knowledge, nothing is ever totally destroyed. It just changes form... I would say to you tonight that I cannot understand it in the sense of it being final or permanent. I can understand it in the sense of separation, and I cannot understand it in the sense of a burning in hell-fire... I do believe that I Thessalonians 4:17 gives just the opposite of the word "destruction." "So shall they never be with the Lord." In my heart and mind and from my knowledge of the Word, the greatest destruction that I can think of tonight is to be separated from God and His love, from the fellowship of believers in the gathering together.³⁶

Tartarus and Abussos

There is little that can be added to what has already been written about these two words in Are the Dead Alive Now? No real problem exists concerning these words so long as

³⁶Wierwille, "II Thessalonians 1:5-10."

it is realized that they are distinct and separate from one another and the other words already discussed.

Tartarus is used once for "hell" in II Peter 2:24. I Peter 3:18-20 and Jude 6 must be taken into consideration with II Peter 2:24. Only the evil spirits that corrupted the earth before the flood are the so-called "imprisoned evil spirits." Tartarus denotes the bounds or limits of those evil spirits. In II Peter 2:24 the word for "hell" tartarōsas is a nominative singular masculine participle in the first aorist tense meaning a one time (once and only once) action with continuing results.³⁷

The verb tartaroō translated "cast down to hell" in II Peter 2:24 signifies to consign to Tartarus, which is neither Hadēs nor Hell [gehenna] but the place where those angels whose special sin is referred to in that passage and are confined "to be reserved unto judgment."³⁸

I Peter 3:18-20 shows Jesus Christ in his resurrected body testifying to those spirits that tried to prevent his coming by cutting off the Christ line at the time of Noah, that they had failed. He was risen, and they had forever lost. II Peter 2:24 and Jude 6 state that these spirits will remain in their confine until the day of judgment. At that time the truths set out in the study of gehenna and the lake of fire will apply to them as well.

Abussos translated "the deep" and "bottomless pit" is the abyss.

³⁷Wierwille, Are Dead Alive Now?, p. 118.

³⁸W. E. Vine, ed., An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1966), p. 213.

The abyss is a place of torment where some devils are now confined. Devils begged Christ not to send them to the abyss or to torment them before their time (Matthew 8:29; Mark 5:7; Luke 8:26-31). Twice the spirit of Antichrist is spoken of as coming out of the bottomless pit (Revelation 11:7; 17:8). The abyss is a prison where Satan and his angels will be bound for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-7).³⁹

Although this term also refers to a place of confinement for devil spirits, it must be kept separate from Tartarus. Tartarus was a one time occurrence with continuing results for those spirits responsible for the flood only. The abyss has the broader application defined above. However, like tartarus at the time of the Revelation period the abyss will have also yielded its members over to the lake of fire to be destroyed (Revelation 21:15).

Results

The systematic study of the words sheol, hadēs, tartarus and abussos demonstrates that these words collectively translated "hell," are, in fact, distinctly different. They do not describe the same concept, but rather vary widely in their meanings. By the careful working of these individual words their definitions according to scriptural usage has been documented and explained.

Sheol and hadēs have been interpreted as "the gravedom," the state of the dead. The wrong rendering of "hell" has

³⁹Wierwille, Are Dead Alive Now?, p. 118.

been handled in even the most difficult verses. Gehenna and the lake of fire are clearly construed as symbolizing the purity of God's judgment manifested. Tartarus and abussos were shown to be confines for devil spirits only, yet distinct from one another. Any uncertainty or confusion previously existing concerning what is represented by the word "hell" should be eliminated.

Chapter Four

Summary

The traditional concept of "hell" developed through the fallacious consolidation of the various words: sheol, hadēs, gehenna, and tartarus. Devilish error concerning the derivation of sheol, combined with the mythological background of hadēs strongly influenced theological thought in the development of the dogma of "hell." The emerging representation of a place of eternal torture for "demons and the damned" was further promoted by the graphic portrayal in literary works.

The detailed study of all words and scriptures relevant to the subject demonstrated the meaning of the individual concepts represented by the term "hell." Sheol and hadēs were considered at great length. Their definition was documented in great detail according to the way the Word of God defines them. Figures of speech frequently associated with these words and affecting their understanding were displayed. Difficult verses were considered and proven to fit with the abundant clear verses on the subject.

Gehenna and the lake of fire were considered in harmony with other words and verses related to the subject. The Old Testament background of those words was revealed as well as a solid understanding of what these words rep-

resent figuratively. Tartarus and abussos were also handled in this study.

Conclusions

Application of the word "hell" for sheol and hadēs is in every instance totally in error. A detailed study of each occurrence coupled with the understanding of the figure of speech prosopopoeia corroborates their true Biblical meaning. These words should always be rendered "the grave" representing the state of the dead.

Gehenna is used figuratively in the Bible. It represents the devouring fires of God, which itself is representative of the purity of His judgment manifested. This idea of fire is demonstrated throughout the Word of God. This is the interpretation of the lake of fire as well. The essence of that "destruction" is at least without question seen as separation. Nothing in the Scriptures imply that this separation is in the sense of annihilation or extinction. The loss and ruin results from the unsaved being cut off from the presence of God and His glory.

Tartarus, the other word represented as "hell," describes the confines of spirits imprisoned in the days of Noah. It refers to a one time action. This place is not to be confused with the "abyss" spoken also of as a confinement for devil spirits.

Recommendations

The truth of God's Word dealing with "hell" is clear when allowed to speak for itself. These scriptures should be studied and taught by serious students of the Bible. Once understanding these truths, the believer will gain a greater appreciation of salvation, the comfort of the hope, and the rest the Body of believers have in his return.

Further study is needed in the area of God's judgments. If any added light could be shed on the destiny of the unsaved, a thorough understanding of judgments would be prerequisite. All such study to be of value should be conducted in the light of the truths already established in the field of the hope.

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VITA

The author graduated from the Power For Abundant Living class in 1973 while attending Cuyahoga Community College. He later attended Kent State University majoring in English. While attending Kent State University he served as a twig coordinator and a College WOW Ambassador.

In 1975-76 the author became a WOW Ambassador in Norfolk, Virginia. This also marked his apprenticeship year for the Seventh Way Corps. He entered in-residence in 1976 at the Way College of Emporia. His interim year of the Way Corps was spent as a twig area coordinator in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Graduating from the Way Corps in 1979 with an Associate degree in Theology, the author accepted assignment to West Haven, Connecticut as a twig coordinator. Later he served in Bridgeport and Waterbury, Connecticut as a twig area coordinator. In February, 1983 the author entered the in-resident Corps Grad program. Upon completion of that further training he will be moving on to a new assignment as twig coordinator in Old Saybrook, Connecticut.