

# **BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED**

*What God's Word teaches about*

## **HELL**

**Gordon Lyons**

**KJV Edition**

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### Hell

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# Contents

## Hell

<b>BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>HELL</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Important Notice</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Copyright Notices</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Principal Works Consulted</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Part 1</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Synopsis: Hell</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Note 1 .....	1
Different Concepts Inaccurately Translated as 'Hell' .....	1
Note 2 .....	1
Hell is Not Annihilation .....	1
Scripture References: Note 2 .....	1
Note 3 .....	2
No Companionship in Hell .....	2
Scripture References: Note 3 .....	2
Note 4 .....	3
Location of Hell Not Specified .....	3
Scripture References: Note 4 .....	3
Note 5 .....	3
Hell is a Literal Reality .....	3
Scripture References: Note 5 .....	3
Related Bible Doctrines .....	4
<b>Part 2</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Doctrine of Hell</b> .....	<b>5</b>
The Sufferings of Hell .....	5
Summary .....	5
State of the Believer's Soul after Death .....	5
Absent from the Body, Present with the Lord .....	5
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Heaven .....	6
The Psalmists Believed in Immediate Glory .....	6
Enoch, Moses and Elijah in Heaven .....	6
Mistaken Belief in an Intermediate State .....	6
Different Meanings of the Word, 'Hell' .....	7

**Part 3.....9**

**Four Words Translated 'Hell' .....9**

Sheol .....9

    Meaning of the Word 'Sheol' .....9

    Sheol Meaning 'The Realm of Departed Spirits' .....10

    Sheol Meaning 'The Land of Gloom and Deep Shadow' or 'Deepest Night,' etc. ....10

    Sheol Meaning 'The Grave' .....11

    Sheol Meaning 'The State of Death'. ....11

    Sheol Possibly Meaning 'Hell' .....12

    Sheol, the Abode of Departed Spirits .....13

        Scripture References .....13

    Death and the Grave ('Sheol') is Not the End of Life .....14

Hades .....14

    The Rich Man and Lazarus .....14

    Hades is a Place of Separation from God .....15

    Christ has the Keys of Hades .....15

Gehenna .....16

(Valley of Ben Hinnom, and Tophet) .....16

    Tophet, the Place of Fire .....16

    Tophet, the Place of Child Sacrifice .....16

    Gehenna, the Continually Burning Fire .....17

Tartarus .....18

    Tartarus, and the Abyss or Bottomless Pit .....18

**Part 4.....21**

The Bible's Teaching About Hell .....21

    Hell is Not Annihilation .....21

    Hell was Prepared for the Devil and his Angels .....21

    Satan Does Not Rule in Hell .....21

    Satan's Influence Extends Over This World .....22

    Satan will be Consigned to Hell .....23

    Hell is the Destiny of Impenitent Mankind .....23

What The Bible Teaches About Hell .....24

    Common Biblical Phrases Signifying Hell .....25

        1. Hell Denoted as 'Outside, into the Darkness' (NIV) .....25

            (Or 'outer darkness' - KJV) .....25

        2. Hell Denoted as 'A Fiery Furnace' (NIV) .....26

            (Or, 'furnace of fire' - KJV) .....26

        3. Hell Denoted as 'Unquenchable Fire' (NIV & KJV) .....26

        4. Hell Denoted as 'A Lake of Fire' (NIV & KJV) .....27

            ('burning sulphur') .....27

    God's Wrath Burns Like Fire .....28

    God's Judgment is Certain .....29

    Everlasting Separation from God .....30

    Everlasting Conscious Torments .....30

    Who Will be Sent to Hell? .....30

    Impenitent Mankind Will Perish in Hell .....31

    Hell is the Just Penalty for Sin .....31

    God is Not Willing that Any Should Perish .....31

Epilogue .....32

## Part 1

### **Synopsis: Hell**

Hell is the place of endless suffering that God has prepared for Satan and the fallen angels, and for fallen and impenitent mankind. Hell has been reserved for all those who *wilfully refuse* to repent and seek God's mercy through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is also for all those who *carelessly neglect* to seek God's mercy. This includes everyone whose name has not been written in the Lamb's book of life. Hell is that place and state of everlasting condemnation and separation from God, and from his redeeming love, mercy and compassion. It is a place and state of exposure to the endless mental torments of an accusing and unforgiven conscience. Hell is often likened to a place of burning, or a lake of fire. This is because those who are consigned to hell suffer the same intensity of torments as one would endure if cast alive into a lake of fire—for all the ages of eternity. In hell, the wicked cannot die, but must forever endure the righteous wrath of Almighty God in body and soul. Similarly, the demons—who do not possess a material body—will suffer eternally as fallen spirits.

### **Note 1**

#### **Different Concepts Inaccurately Translated as 'Hell'**

In the King James Version of the Bible (AV/KJV), the word *hell* is used as a translation for several different Hebrew and Greek words. Some of these words, however, do not refer to hell, but to the state of death, the grave, or the realms of the dead. When the word *hell* is used to translate *death* or *the grave*, this is bound to lead to some misunderstanding and confusion. *Hell* should be used to refer only to that place of eternal conscious torments that the Bible clearly teaches is the final destiny of the wicked: i.e., of everyone outside of Christ—both fallen angels, and fallen and impenitent mankind.<sup>1</sup>

### **Note 2**

#### **Hell is Not Annihilation**

Consignment to hell does not mean—nor does it result in—annihilation of the soul or of the body. However much they may desire it and however much they may be exposed to the anguish of hell, those who have been consigned to that place can never cease to exist. Rather, for all eternity, they must endure the endless conscious torments that are associated with the just punishment of their sin. (Matt. 13:42,50; Mark 9:47-48; Rev. 14:10-11)

#### **Scripture References: Note 2**

Matthew 13:42

<sup>(42)</sup> And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.24-30,36-43)

Matthew 13:50

<sup>(50)</sup> And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.47-49)

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<sup>1</sup> See further below under *Different Meanings of the Word 'Hell'*.

Mark 9:47-48

<sup>(47)</sup> 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: <sup>(48)</sup> Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. {*Isaiah 66:24*} (See Mark 9:42-50; see esp. vv.43-46)

Revelation 14:10-11

<sup>(10)</sup> The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: <sup>(11)</sup> And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. (See vv.6-12)

### **Note 3**

#### **No Companionship in Hell**

Unbelievers often imagine, vainly, that they will be able to continue their sinful way of life in hell, and to enjoy themselves in the company of others of like mind. Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who are received into hell will never again know anything but eternal anguish of soul, together with endless suffering, misery, sorrow, and pains of both body and soul. In order to gain any meaningful conception of what these torments will be like, hell must be compared to a lake of fire: a perpetually burning lake where no one can die, but must suffer eternally. In the course of such unending suffering, no one will be concerned about others in their company. They will be too consumed with their own sufferings and misery to show the least interest in their fellow-sufferers. (Luke 16:19-31; Rev. 20:10,15; 21:8)

#### **Scripture References: Note 3**

Luke 16:23-24

<sup>(23)</sup> And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. <sup>(24)</sup> And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. (See vv.19-31)

Revelation 20:10

<sup>(10)</sup> And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:15

<sup>(15)</sup> And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (See vv.7-14)

Revelation 21:8

<sup>(8)</sup> But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (See vv.6-7)

## Note 4

### Location of Hell Not Specified

Although sometimes described as occupying the nether (lower) regions, hell must not be understood in a strictly local geographical sense as a place somewhere beneath the earth. The Bible does not say where hell is located, and it certainly cannot be located in the lower regions of this planet. Suffice it to say, that hell—as a place or state—exists; and that clearly it must be vast enough to contain the great multitudes who will be consigned there for their wilful unbelief and sin. Although spirits do not require or occupy physical space (or volume), yet physical space (volume) may be required for the vast numbers of fallen mankind who will be cast into hell—once body and soul has been reunited. (Matt. 25:41,46; 2 Pet. 2:4,17)

#### Scripture References: Note 4

Matthew 25:41

<sup>(41)</sup> Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

Matthew 25:46

<sup>(46)</sup> And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (See vv.31-45)

2 Peter 2:4

<sup>(4)</sup> For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell [Gk., *Tartarus*], and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; (See vv.1-10)

2 Peter 2:17

<sup>(17)</sup> These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest: to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever. (See vv.10-22)

## Note 5

### Hell is a Literal Reality

Again, hell must not be understood symbolically or metaphorically. Certain descriptive terms referring to hell—such as ‘a lake of fire’—may be understood as figurative or symbolic terms. However, the very purpose of using such vivid symbolism is to press home the terrible reality of the real and literal hell. If a place of burning or a lake of fire suggests to the mind terrible sufferings, then the realities of hell’s torments must be understood as being equal to, or greater than, the symbolic or illustrative language often used to describe it. (Matt. 3:12; 8:12; 22:13; Rev. 19:20)

#### Scripture References: Note 5

Matthew 3:12

<sup>(12)</sup> Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (See vv.7-11)

Matthew 8:12

<sup>(12)</sup> But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.5-13)

Matthew 22:13

<sup>(13)</sup> Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.1-14)

Revelation 19:20

<sup>(20)</sup> And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. (See vv.11-21)

### **Related Bible Doctrines**

The Doctrine of Hell stands closely related to the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection, and the last judgment. The second coming of the Lord is followed by the resurrection of the just and the unjust. At the judgment seat of Christ, all mankind will be required to give an account of their lives and deeds to God. Those who have neglected to concern themselves with Jesus, the Son of God, or who have rejected God's Son, will be condemned to hell. This is the only just punishment for those who are presently abiding under the wrath of God because of their sin. In addition to continuing impenitent in their sins, they have neglected to seek God's mercy or to acknowledge their sins and call upon his name for salvation. They are, therefore, guilty of despising the grace, mercy and love of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See further on *Bible Truths Explained: The Second Coming; The Resurrection; The Last Judgment*, by Gordon Lyons.

## Part 2

### ***Doctrine of Hell***

#### **The Sufferings of Hell**

##### ***Summary***

In his account of the final judgment, the Lord Jesus says that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. (Matt. 25:46)

According to the Scriptures, the sufferings of the finally impenitent may be summarised as follows:

- The loss of all earthly good.
- The exclusion from the presence, favour, and love of God (everlasting separation from God).
- The withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from, and the utter reprobation of, the wicked.
- The abandonment of the wicked to the consequent unrestrained dominion and slavery of sin.

The restraining effects of their consciences finally will be removed. In addition, their consciences will accuse them continually of sin, and will remind them constantly that there is now no remedy for their sin and no hope of alleviation from the justly inflicted torments of hell. This will lead to never-ending despair and anguish of soul. This will be in addition to the endless pains that they will be enduring in their bodies.

The wicked will be abandoned to the company of their evil associates; but this will afford them absolutely no comfort, since all alike will be enduring the torments of eternal punishment.

They will be exposed to the positive sufferings inflicted upon them as the due penalty for their sin. The sufferings of hell are perpetual: i.e., they will continue unabated throughout the everlasting ages.

#### **State of the Believer's Soul after Death**

##### ***Absent from the Body, Present with the Lord***

Upon the death of the body, the soul of every believer is received into the presence of God in heaven. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. (2 Cor. 5:6,8) To live is Christ, and to die is gain—for to depart this life is to be with Christ, which is better by far for all those who belong to him. (Phil. 1:21,23)

This is the teaching of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. However, certain elements of this teaching were not apprehended fully or clearly by many believers living in the Old Testament era. Although the Old Testament Scriptures asserted the principles of this truth, many of God's people were apparently influenced or misled by the fallacious beliefs of their pagan neighbours. The pagans thought that—when a person died—his soul (or spirit) was received into the 'underworld'. Thus, many of God's people held to the mistaken idea that—when a person died—his soul was received into an intermediate place. The Jewish people referred to this place as *Sheol*. At times, *Sheol* was conceived of as something akin to the underworld of the pagans.

*Sheol* is the Hebrew near equivalent of the Greek term *Hades*. We will consider both of these terms more fully below. Firstly, however, we will show what the Bible says about the eternal state or condition of God's people who lived and died before the incarnation of Christ.

### ***Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Heaven***

Concerning the fact that the Old Testament believers were received into the immediate presence of God upon their death, God said to Moses:

Exodus 3:6a

<sup>(6a)</sup> Moreover he said, I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob... (See vv.1-10)

The Lord Jesus quoted this same Scripture to the Sadducees. (The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, or in angels or spirits.) (Acts 23:8) However, when the Lord quoted this passage to them in proof of the resurrection, he added the words shown below in italics:

Matthew 22:32

<sup>(32)</sup> I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. {Exodus 3:6} *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* (Italics added; see vv.23-31)

“...*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*”

By saying this of those who previously had died, the Lord Jesus was showing to the Sadducees that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were even then alive in the presence of God; and, for all eternity, they would continue to dwell there. They had not been confined at any time to some intermediate place or state such as Sheol was considered to be. Neither had they died, never to rise again—as the materialistic Sadducees believed and maintained.

### ***The Psalmists Believed in Immediate Glory***

Again, concerning the fact that—on their death—the soul's of God's redeemed people are received into his immediate presence, it is written in the Psalms,

Psalms 17:15

<sup>(15)</sup> As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. (See vv.1-14)

Psalms 49:15

<sup>(15)</sup> But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah. (See vv.13-14)

Psalms 73:24

<sup>(24)</sup> Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me *to glory.* (See vv.21-26)

### ***Enoch, Moses and Elijah in Heaven***

Other Old Testament believers now in the presence of God include Enoch, whom God took (Gen.5:24), and Elijah who was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. (2 Kings 2:11) Similarly, the fact that both Moses and Elijah appeared with the Lord Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration shows clearly that these Old Testament saints were—and are—alive in the presence of God. (Luke 9:28-36)

### ***Mistaken Belief in an Intermediate State***

From these, and many other Scriptures, it is clear that the Old Testament taught that those who died believing in God were taken into his immediate presence. This is the teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments concerning the state of the soul after death. Granted, there may be even greater glo-

ries ahead for the believer when soul and body are reunited at the resurrection. In this more restricted sense, the believer's *present* state may be considered as an 'intermediate' state. This, however, is a very different thing from saying that the souls of believers, who have departed this life, are held in some intermediate location between heaven and earth, or between heaven and hell.

Nevertheless, in spite of the clear teaching of God's Word, many Old Testament believers imagined that—when a person died—he went to *Sheol*. Sheol was considered as the realm of the dead. As we shall see, however, the term 'Sheol' had various shades of meaning, including both 'the grave' and 'the state or location of departed souls'—intermediate between heaven and hell.

A number of the early church fathers also held to a mistaken belief in an intermediate state of the soul. From this mistaken idea of an intermediate state are derived several false or erroneous doctrines, including the doctrine of satisfactions (or the doctrine of purgatory), and the teaching concerning prayers for the dead.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Different Meanings of the Word, 'Hell'***

In the King James Version of the Bible, the words translated *hell* do not always refer to that eternal hell into which ultimately the lost will be cast. The KJV translators sometimes used the word 'hell' rather freely to render words that actually mean 'the grave,' or 'the state of death,' or 'the realm of the dead.' To use the word *hell* with such a wide latitude of meaning is an unfortunate, misleading, and confusing use of a word. This is especially true since, elsewhere, the word *hell* is understood to mean that place of eternal punishment depicted at times as a lake of fire.

In an effort to deny the doctrine of eternal punishment, some people would indicate that *hell* might mean nothing more than the grave, or the state of the dead—rather than a place of eternal conscious suffering. However, these people fail to acknowledge the distinctly different meanings sometimes assigned to the word *hell* in the King James Version of the Bible. They also fail to acknowledge the clear teaching on the doctrine of eternal punishment in many other places of God's infallible and unchangeable Word. As we shall see from the teaching of the Scriptures, hell—as a place of eternal conscience torment—is a dreadful reality. The Lord's words alone should make this fact unmistakably clear.

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<sup>3</sup> See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Heaven*, by Gordon Lyons.



## Part 3

### **Four Words Translated 'Hell'**

The King James Version of the Bible (AV/KJV) translates four different words as 'hell.' These words are *Sheol*, *Hades*, *Gehenna*, and *Tartarus*. We will consider the significance of each of these words below, beginning with the Hebrew word 'Sheol'.

#### **Sheol <sup>4</sup>**

In the King James Version of the Bible, the word *Sheol* is translated as 'hell', 'the grave', or 'the pit'. On the vast majority of occasions where the KJV translates the word 'Sheol' by 'hell', it is not the place of eternal punishment to which reference is being made. Rather, it is the grave, or the state of the dead, that is meant. Only very occasionally do the Old Testament writers use the word 'Sheol' to refer to the place of eternal punishment (hell, properly so-called). Similarly, in the New International Version of the Bible (NIV), the word 'Sheol' is frequently translated as 'the grave'. This rendering, too, can be misleading: For, although frequently 'Sheol' does refer to the grave, it very often has a much wider meaning than the English word 'grave' conveys.

#### **Meaning of the Word 'Sheol'**

As an example of what is meant by the Hebrew word 'Sheol' (שְׁאוֹל), or by its Greek near-equivalent, *Hades* (ᾍδης), we cite the following passage from Isaiah. This passage refers to the fall and destruction of the king of Babylon. In this instance, we will quote from both the King James Version and the New International Version of the Bible.

In the KJV, the passage begins:

Isaiah 14:9 KJV

<sup>(9)</sup>*Hell* <sup>5</sup> [Heb., *Sheol*] from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones <sup>6</sup> of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. (Italics added; see vv.3-15)

Or, as rendered by the NIV:

Isaiah 14:9 NIV

<sup>(9)</sup>*The grave* <sup>7</sup> [Heb., *Sheol*] below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones—all those who were kings over the nations. (Italics added)

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<sup>4</sup> Sheol: See also *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* under *Sheol* for a discussion of this subject from a Jewish perspective. Web site link: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=614&letter=S>

<sup>5</sup> Hell: or, *The grave* [KJV footnote to Isaiah 14:9]

<sup>6</sup> chief...: Heb. *leaders*, or, *great goats* [KJV footnote to Isaiah 14:9]

<sup>7</sup> Hebrew *Sheol*; also in verses 11 and 15 [NIV footnote to Isaiah 14:9]

It should be noted that, in the KJV of this passage, Sheol is translated by the word 'hell'; and, in the NIV, it is translated by the phrase, 'the grave'. Neither of these expressions, however, adequately reflects the full meaning of the Hebrew word 'Sheol'.

### ***Sheol Meaning 'The Realm of Departed Spirits'***

To help illustrate the meaning of the word 'Sheol' as used in the above passage, we now quote the passage more fully (from the NIV):

Isaiah 14:9-11 NIV

<sup>(9)</sup> The grave<sup>8</sup> below<sup>9</sup> is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones—all those who were kings over the nations.

<sup>(10)</sup> They will all respond, they will say to you, "You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us."

<sup>(11)</sup> All your pomp has been brought down to the grave, along with the noise of your harps; maggots are spread out beneath you and worms cover you. (NIV; see also Job 26:5; Prov. 2:18; Ezek. 32:17-32)

It may be argued that the above passage and other similar passages are merely poetic expressions of death or the grave, and should not be understood otherwise. However, this is true only in part. Although sometimes expressed poetically, these passages contain beliefs that were commonly held among the Israelites of that time. Granted, their understanding of the afterlife was flawed. Some of it was based on the teaching of their Scriptures, and therefore was accurate. However, they had obtained other elements of their belief in the afterlife—not from God's revelation in Scripture—but from their pagan neighbours. Nevertheless, they did believe that Sheol represented not only the grave but also the abode of the dead (i.e., of the spirits of the dead). They believed that—after the death of the body and its committal to the grave—their spirits continued to live in the shadowy, dreary and silent existence of Sheol (Sheol here understood to mean both the grave and also the 'underworld' or place of the spirits of those who had died).

Bearing this in mind, the passage quoted above speaks not merely of burial in the grave but of continued existence after death. Clearly, then, the reference is not only to the *body*, which has died and has been laid in the grave, but also to the *soul*. Until the resurrection, only the soul (or spirit) continues to live. From this and many other passages, therefore, it is evident that Sheol (or the 'netherworld') was considered to be more than the grave alone. In the minds of the sacred writers, Sheol was thought of as the place where the spirits of the departed went. In Sheol, these spirits were said to continue in conscious existence. By later generations, this was understood to mean that some were in a state of happiness, and some in a state of misery.

Sheol (like its Greek counterpart *Hades*) was thought of as a place of dark or shadowy existence in the 'underworld'.

### ***Sheol Meaning 'The Land of Gloom and Deep Shadow' or 'Deepest Night,' etc.***

We need only consider another passage of God's Word to gain a better understanding of what was sometimes meant by the word 'Sheol'.

During his time of great trial and distress, Job cried out to God:

Job 10:18-22

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrew *Sheol*; also in verses 11 and 15 [NIV footnote to Isaiah 14:9]

<sup>9</sup> *The grave below*: or, The nether-world from beneath. (Jewish Publication Society OT, 1917)

- (18) Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me!
- (19) I should have been as though I had not been; I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.
- (20) *Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little,*
- (21) Before I go *whence* I shall not return, *even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death;*
- (22) *A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness. (Italics added; see vv.1-17; see also Job 3:11-19)*

In his deep distress and bitter anguish of soul, Job had been thinking that it would have been better had he never been born, but that his life had been received into the bleakness of Sheol. Although the word 'Sheol' is not actually used in this passage, Job's words describe the commonly held view of that place.

For an example of other uses of the word 'Sheol', or related expressions, we need only consider a few more passages of Scripture.

### ***Sheol Meaning 'The Grave'***

Believing his son Joseph to have been killed by wild animals, Jacob cried out in bitter anguish of soul:

Genesis 37:35

- (35) And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into *the grave [Sheol]* unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. (Italics added; see vv.31-36)

And, many years later concerning his son Benjamin, Jacob declared:

Genesis 42:38

- (38) And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to *the grave [Sheol]*. (Italics added; see vv.29-37)

In these, and many other passages of God's Word, Sheol is translated as 'the grave'—the meaning required by the contexts. However, it should be borne in mind that when the ancient writers were speaking of 'the grave', they often meant much more than that word conveys in English. Frequently, they would be thinking not merely of the place where the body was laid, but also of the place where they believed departed spirits dwelt (Sheol here understood as including both the grave and also the 'nether-world' or 'underworld').

### ***Sheol Meaning 'The State of Death'***

The Scripture says:

Psalms 16:10

<sup>(10)</sup> For thou wilt not leave my soul *in hell* [*Sheol*, or 'the underworld'; NIV, *the grave*]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. (Italics added; see vv.7-11; cf. Acts 2:27)

Psalms 89:48

<sup>(48)</sup> What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of *the grave* [*Sheol*]? Selah. (Italics added; see vv.46-51)

In the KJV of Psalm 16:10 above, Sheol is translated *hell*—where 'the grave' (as NIV) or 'death' would have been more appropriate. Psalm 16:10 is applied to Christ in Acts 2:27 and 13:35. However, the passage is not implying that Christ entered hell—the impression given by the KJV translation. The Lord Jesus entered the state of death; and from that state, he arose on the third day.

As far as his soul was concerned during this period, we need only recall the Lord's words to the dying thief:

Luke 23:43

<sup>(43)</sup> And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me *in paradise*. (Italics added; see vv.39-42; cf. 2 Cor. 12:2,4; Rev. 2:7)

It is true that the Scriptures tell us that Christ ...*went and preached*<sup>10</sup> *to the spirits*<sup>11</sup> *in prison*... (1 Pet. 3:19 NIV; cf. 2 Pet. 2:4) This, however, does not necessarily imply that the Lord Jesus descended into hell (properly so-called).

### ***Sheol Possibly Meaning 'Hell'***

For a third (possible) meaning of the word 'Sheol', we cite the following passages of God's Word:

Job 26:6

<sup>(6)</sup> *Hell* [*Sheol*; NIV, *Death*] is naked before him, and *destruction* [*Abaddon*] hath no covering. (Italics added; see v.5; cf. Rev. 9:11)

Psalms 9:17

<sup>(17)</sup> The wicked shall be turned into *hell* [*Sheol*; NIV, *the grave*], and all the nations that forget God. (Italics added; see v.18)

Proverbs 9:17-18

<sup>(17)</sup> Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

<sup>(18)</sup> But he knoweth not that the dead *are* there; and that her guests are in the depths of *hell* [*Sheol*; NIV, *the grave*]. (Italics added; see vv.13-16)

Proverbs 15:24

<sup>(24)</sup> The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from *hell* [*Sheol*, or *'the nether world'*; NIV, *the grave*] beneath. (Italics added)

Although the NIV translates 'Sheol' as 'death' or 'the grave' in each of the above, in all or most of these verses Sheol may refer to hell—properly so-called: i.e., to the place of eternal perdition.

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<sup>10</sup> *preached*; or, *heralded* or *published* [GL]

<sup>11</sup> *spirits*; or, *fallen angels* [GL]

As we have seen, the word 'Sheol' may be used in several distinct, but related, senses. The context, and the analogy of Scripture, must determine which of these different senses is intended by the sacred writers in any given instance.

### ***Sheol, the Abode of Departed Spirits***

In the Old Testament, Sheol is represented as the general receptacle or abode of departed spirits who were taken there in a state of conscious, but nevertheless, shadowy, existence. Some of these spirits were believed to be in a state of happiness, while others were considered to be in abject misery. When, therefore, the Old Testament spoke of the dead as 'going to their fathers,' this was commonly understood to mean that the dead descended into the invisible state called *Sheol*—or which, in Greek, is called *Hades*.

Again, in later Jewish thought, it was believed that Sheol was divided between the place of the righteous dead (paradise) and the place of the wicked dead (gehenna or Tartarus). In the New Testament, both paradise and gehenna (or Tartarus) assume a very different meaning; and the true state of the righteous and the wicked is more clearly and fully revealed.

From the teaching of the Lord Jesus and his apostles, it is evident that the souls of the righteous dead are not detained in some dreary intermediate state, such as Sheol or Hades was imagined to be. On the contrary, according to the Scriptures, the souls of the righteous dead pass immediately into the presence of God. The Lord Jesus referred to this place as *paradise* (rather different, however, from the Jewish concept of paradise). (Luke 23:43; see also 2 Cor. 5:6-8; 12:2-4; Rev. 2:7)

The following Scriptures illustrate these points:

#### **Scripture References**

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

<sup>(6)</sup> Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: <sup>(7)</sup> (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) <sup>(8)</sup> We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be *absent from the body*, and to be *present with the Lord*. (Italics added; see vv.1-10; see also Phil. 1:21-24; cf. Heb. 11:13-16; 13:14)

Luke 23:43

<sup>(43)</sup> And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, *Today* shalt thou be with me *in paradise*. (Italics added; see vv.39-42)

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

<sup>(2)</sup> I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such a one *caught up to the third heaven*. <sup>(3)</sup> And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) <sup>(4)</sup> How that he was *caught up into paradise*, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (Italics added; see vv.1-6)

Revelation 2:7

<sup>(7)</sup> He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, *which is in the midst of the paradise of God*. (Italics added; see vv.1-6)

## ***Death and the Grave ('Sheol') is Not the End of Life***

Concerning both the grave, and the state of death, the Scripture says:

Hosea 13:14

<sup>(14)</sup> I will ransom them from the power of *the grave [Sheol]*; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; *O grave [Sheol]*, I will be thy destruction... (Italics added; see vv.1-16; see also Hos. 6:2; Isa. 25:8; 26:19; Ezek. 37:12; cf. 1 Cor. 15:55)

From this, and many other passages of God's Word, it is clear that Sheol refers most frequently to the grave. On many other occasions, Sheol refers to the state of death, or to the realm of departed spirits (as conceived of by the Old Testament believers). Very occasionally, the word 'Sheol' may refer to that eternal hell which the Lord Jesus depicts as a '*fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*' (Matt. 13:41,50) However, it is also clear from this passage that death is not the end of life, nor the cessation of existence. The body rests in the grave, but the soul continues to live. At the glorious second coming of the Lord Jesus, those whose bodies have been committed to the grave (or to the flames, or to the sea), will be reunited with their immortal souls.

Although rarely referring to hell, as we understand it, the Hebrew word *Sheol* is almost equivalent to the Greek word *Hades*. In the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word 'Sheol' is usually translated by the Greek 'Hades.'

### **Hades**

Hades [Gk., *Haidēs.*], like Sheol, is another word that sometimes is rendered 'hell' in the King James Version of the Bible.

In pagan Greek mythology, Hades (Roman mythological name, *Pluto*) was a person: a son of the Titans, Cronus and Rhea, and lord of the lower world (or 'the underworld'), which was known as *the house of Hades*. In later usage, the name *Hades* was transferred from the person himself to the mythological kingdom that he represented. Then, Hades became known as 'the world of the dead', ruled over by Pluto and Persephone.

In the Bible, however, *Hades* has no mythological connotations, nor is it in any way associated with the pagan mythological person of that name. The Hades of the Bible denotes a place. 'Hades' is used as the near equivalent to the Hebrew word, 'Sheol'—Sheol, in this case, being understood to mean the state of the dead, or the realm of departed spirits.

'Hades' is the Greek term for the state of the dead, or for the place of departed spirits of the lost. Before Christ's resurrection and ascension, Hades (like Sheol) was also considered as the place of the righteous dead. In Biblical usage, Hades is clearly associated both with punishment and with endless suffering. In Luke chapter 16, the Lord Jesus uses the term *Hades* (translated 'hell' in both the KJV and NIV) concerning the death of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man was received into Hades, and the beggar, Lazarus, was received into 'Abraham's bosom'; i.e., the paradise of God, where Abraham dwells. (Cf. Matt. 8:11)

(In Jerome's Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, the rich man is referred to as 'Dives'. *Dives* is the Latin equivalent for 'rich man' in English. Consequently, this narrative is sometimes referred to as that of 'Lazarus and Dives'.)

### ***The Rich Man and Lazarus***

During his lifetime, the rich man had indulged himself freely. He had neglected his spiritual and moral welfare, and he had neglected to show compassion to others; including the beggar Lazarus who had lain at his gate starving and covered with sores. When the rich man died, he was consigned to Hades. When the beggar died, he was carried by the holy angels to Abraham's side: i.e., into the immediate presence of the God of Abraham. The Scriptures refer to this place as 'paradise', 'the paradise of God',

or 'heaven'. (In like manner, one of the dying thieves was taken into paradise: i.e., into the immediate presence of the Lord. (Luke 23:43))

However, concerning the rich man, the Scripture says:

Luke 16:23-24

<sup>(23)</sup> And in hell [Gk., *Hades*] he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. <sup>(24)</sup> And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. (See vv.19-31)

But what is Abraham's reply?

Luke 16:25-26

<sup>(25)</sup> But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. <sup>(26)</sup> And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence.

From these verses, it is evident that Hades is not merely the shadowy realm of the dead. Rather, it represents a place where the lost remain fully conscious of their surroundings and condition, and where they endure indescribable torments of body and soul. This is why we should be deeply concerned for those who are perishing: For, except a person be redeemed by the sovereign grace of God, he will pass from this life into the life of eternal torments.

### ***Hades is a Place of Separation from God***

As we have said, and depending on the context, Sheol was considered to mean 'the state of death', 'the grave', 'the pit', 'the realm of the dead', or 'the place of departed spirits'. Hades assumes this latter meaning: i.e., it was considered as the place of the dead, or the place of departed spirits (but not the grave).

Jewish people thought of Sheol or Hades as being divided between the place of the righteous dead and the unrighteous dead (as the account of the rich man and Lazarus illustrates). It should be noted, however, that the souls (or spirits) of the righteous dead do not go to Hades. Rather, they are received into the immediate presence of God.

According to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, Hades is a place of the lost: a place of separation from the presence and favour of God. It is a place of endless conscious torments. Those torments are so severe that the Bible repeatedly likens them to the sufferings one would endure in a perpetually burning furnace or lake of fire. At the Last Judgment, death and Hades (personified) are said to be cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:14)

### ***Christ has the Keys of Hades***

Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords: i.e., he is absolute Sovereign over all creation, and over all realms of creation, including Hades. Thus, concerning Christ's sovereign dominion over Hades, the Scripture says:

Revelation 1:18

<sup>(18)</sup> I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [Gk., *Hades*] and of death. (See vv.9-20; cf. Matt. 16:18)

Christ the King holds the key of Hades: i.e., he has been invested with all authority, power and dominion over the realm of Hades. (Cf. Phil. 2:9-11)

Both the Hebrew word 'Sheol' and its Greek counterpart 'Hades' refer to the state of the dead. In the Bible, however, another Greek word refers more explicitly to the eternal sufferings of the lost, and this word is more nearly equivalent to our understanding of the word 'hell.' The word is *Gehenna*.

## **Gehenna**

### **(Valley of Ben Hinnom, and Tophet)**

As with Sheol and Hades, the word *Gehenna* is translated as 'hell' in the King James Version of the Bible. *Gehenna* itself does not mean 'hell', but it clearly alludes to that place. *Gehenna* (or 'Ge-henna') is probably derived from the name of the deep ravine that lay to the south-west of Jerusalem. This ravine was known as the Valley of Ben Hinnom or the Valley of Hinnom (Hebrew, *ge hinnom*—from which is derived the Greek term, 'Ge-henna' or 'Ge-enna').

During the reigns of the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh, the Valley of Hinnom was used as a place to offer child sacrifices to the Ammonite god, Molech.<sup>12</sup> Tophet<sup>13</sup> (or Topheth)—which was associated with this place of child sacrifice—was located within the Valley of Hinnom. (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 19:1-6) Tophet itself was probably a fire pit. Thus, by association, Tophet in the Valley of Hinnom (Gk., *Ge-henna*) was understood to be a place of burning, or a place of fire.

### ***Tophet, the Place of Fire***

Concerning God's impending judgment on the nation and king of Assyria, the prophet Isaiah said:

Isaiah 30:27

<sup>(27)</sup> Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning *with* his anger, and the burden *thereof* is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire:

Isaiah 30:31

<sup>(31)</sup> For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, *which* smote with a rod.

Isaiah 30:33

<sup>(33)</sup> For Tophet <sup>14</sup> *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 LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it. (See vv.19-32)

### ***Tophet, the Place of Child Sacrifice***

In the Bible, God had expressly forbidden and utterly condemned the abominable practice of child sacrifice. (Lev. 20:1-5; Deut. 12:31; Ps. 106:34-43; Jer. 32:30-35) However, in spite of God's utter con-

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<sup>12</sup> Molech; or, *Milcom* [GL]

<sup>13</sup> Tophet: so called from [Heb.] Toph—a drum. "It is the prevailing opinion among Jewish writers that the cries of the terrified children made to pass through the fire in that place of idolatrous horror were drowned by the sounds of that instrument." [JFB on 2 Kings 23:10]

<sup>14</sup> Tophet: "lit., 'A place of abomination'; the valley of the sons of Hinnom, south-east of Jerusalem, where Israel offered human sacrifices to Moloch by fire; hence a place of burning (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31) Latterly, Ge-hinnom or Gehenna, i.e., valley of Hinnom, was the receptacle of the refuse of the city, to consume which fires were constantly burning. Hence it came to express hell, the place of torment..." [JFB]

demnation of this practice, the people had followed the example of their pagan neighbours. Thus, the Scripture says:

Jeremiah 7:30-32

<sup>(30)</sup> For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the LORD: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. <sup>(31)</sup> And they have built the high places of Tophet, which *is* in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded *them* not, neither came it into my heart.

<sup>(32)</sup> Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place. (See Jer. 7:20 - 8:3)

Because of its regular use for offering human sacrifices to Molech, the god of the Ammonites—sacrifices that God utterly detested and forbade—Tophet in the Valley of Ben Hinnom (Gehenna) had become a place of endless burning. The smoke of this burning would rise continually, as from the constant smouldering of a large city incinerator and refuse dump. The fire and smoke would be visible for miles around.

### ***Gehenna, the Continually Burning Fire***

Because of its association with a continually burning fire, Gehenna became one of the words used to illustrate hell. Thus, the Scripture says:

Matthew 5:22b

<sup>(22b)</sup> ...and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire [Gk., *gehenna*]. (See vv.21-26)

Again, consider the Lord's solemn words to any person who caused those who believed in him (especially children) to sin:

Matthew 18:7-10

<sup>(7)</sup> Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

<sup>(8)</sup> Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. <sup>(9)</sup> And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire [Gk., *gehenna*].

<sup>(10)</sup> Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (See vv.1-14)

And, on another occasion, the Lord Jesus said:

Luke 12:4-5

<sup>(4)</sup> And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. <sup>(5)</sup> But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell [Gk., *gehenna*]; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. (See vv.1-9)

It must be noted, however, that hell is very much more than the word *Gehenna* conveys. Unlike Tophet in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, hell is a place—not only of endless ‘burning’—but also of everlasting suffering. Those who suffered in the Valley of Ben Hinnom died within a short space of time. Those who suffer in hell can never die.

## **Tartarus**

Another term that is translated ‘hell’ is the Greek word *Tartarus*. This term was used to designate that place where the most wicked spirits were consigned—although, clearly, Satan himself and many of the demons have not yet been sent there.

Concerning Tartarus, the apostle Peter writes:

2 Peter 2:4

- <sup>(4)</sup> For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell [Gk., *Tartarus*], and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; (See vv.1-10)

This is the only reference in the Bible to *Tartarus*. (Mythological connotations are irrelevant here.) Apparently, however, *Tartarus* is a place where many of the fallen angels are being held to await the Last Judgment and their consignment to the lake of fire, as the following Scripture indicates:

Jude 1:6

- <sup>(6)</sup> And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (See vv.3-7)

## ***Tartarus, and the Abyss or Bottomless Pit***

Whether Tartarus is the same as the Abyss or bottomless pit that the demons greatly feared, cannot be determined with certainty from the Word of God. However, concerning consignment to the Abyss, we should consider the Lord’s words to the demon-possessed man:

Luke 8:28-31

- <sup>(28)</sup> When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. <sup>(29)</sup> (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he broke the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)
- <sup>(30)</sup> And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.
- <sup>(31)</sup> And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into *the deep* [Gk., *Abyss*]. (Italics added; see vv.26-39; cf. Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20)

And, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John says:

Revelation 20:1-3

- <sup>(1)</sup> And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of *the bottomless pit* [Gk., *Abyss*] and a great chain in his hand. <sup>(2)</sup> And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, <sup>(3)</sup> And cast him into *the bottomless pit* [Gk.,

*Abyss*], and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. (Italics added; see vv.4-10; see also Rev. 9:1-11; 11:7; 17:8)



## Part 4

### The Bible's Teaching About Hell

#### ***Hell is Not Annihilation***

Hell, or consignment to the lake of fire, does not result in annihilation, either of the soul, or of the body. The soul, being spirit and immortal, cannot be annihilated. The body, being raised from the dead and translated, will no longer be subject to ageing, decay or decomposition. It will be a body suitably adapted for eternal existence. In the case of the redeemed, this will be eternal life *in* the presence of God. But, in the case of the lost, this will be eternal suffering and separation *from* the presence of God. It should be remembered that death is not the end of life. For the lost, death is the state of continued and eternal existence, apart from God, in the lake of fire. In Revelation, this state is called the 'second death.' (Rev. 20:14; 21:8)

#### ***Hell was Prepared for the Devil and his Angels***

Hell is the place of final and everlasting punishment—prepared by God before the creation and fall of man—for the devil and his (fallen) angels. Thus, the Scripture says:

Matthew 25:41

<sup>(41)</sup> Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (See vv.42-45)

Matthew 25:46

<sup>(46)</sup> And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Jude 1:6-7

<sup>(6)</sup> And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. <sup>(7)</sup> Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (See vv.3-13)

#### ***Satan Does Not Rule in Hell***

It is supposed commonly, but mistakenly, that the devil rules in hell. At the present time, however, the devil is not in hell. Before the creation of mankind, Satan was cast out of heaven and down to the realms of this world. Following Christ's victory at Calvary, the devil's power and dominion was substantially curtailed; but, as yet, not totally destroyed. (Col. 2:15)

The Scripture says:

Revelation 12:7-12

<sup>(7)</sup> And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, <sup>(8)</sup> And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. <sup>(9)</sup> And the great dragon

was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil,<sup>15</sup> and Satan,<sup>16</sup> which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. <sup>(10)</sup> And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. (See vv.1-11; cf. Luke 10:18)

Revelation 12:12

<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. (See vv.13-17; see also Rev. 13:1ff)

### ***Satan's Influence Extends Over This World***

At present, Satan exercises his limited—but nonetheless powerful—dominion over this earth. In the Bible, the devil is called ‘the prince of this world’, ‘the ruler of the kingdom of the air’, and ‘the god of this age.’<sup>17</sup> (John 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2)

Therefore, the Scripture says:

Ephesians 2:1-2

<sup>(1)</sup> And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins  
<sup>(2)</sup> Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (See vv.3-10)

And the apostle Peter warns the people of God:

1 Peter 5:8-9

<sup>(8)</sup> Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: <sup>(9)</sup> Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (See vv.10-11; see also James 4:7)

Satan has been ‘bound’. He is a defeated, but dangerous, enemy who is endeavouring, albeit futilely, to maintain a rearguard action. His final defeat is certain—for Christ will subdue all his enemies beneath his feet. At this moment in time, however, Satan has not yet been cast into the lake of fire, or hell.

Concerning the binding of Satan, God’s Word says:

Matthew 12:28-29

<sup>(28)</sup> But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. <sup>(29)</sup> Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man and then he will spoil his house. (See vv.22-32; cf. Luke 11:21-22)

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<sup>15</sup> Greek, *accuser, slanderer*

<sup>16</sup> Heb., *adversary*

<sup>17</sup> KJV, *this world*

Luke 10:17-18

<sup>(17)</sup> And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

<sup>(18)</sup> And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. (See vv.1-20)

Colossians 2:15

<sup>(15)</sup> *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it [NIV, *the cross*]. (See vv.13-14)

Revelation 20:1-3

<sup>(1)</sup> And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. <sup>(2)</sup> And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, <sup>(3)</sup> And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. (See vv.4-10)

### ***Satan will be Consigned to Hell***

Concerning Satan's future banishment to the torments of hell, God's Word says:

Romans 16:20a

<sup>(20a)</sup> And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly... (See vv.17-19)

This verse reflects the culmination of the protoevangel, or first announcement of the Gospel, given in the Bible. (Gen. 3:15) Ultimately, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, together with all who have been deceived by him or who have followed him. Thus, the Scripture says:

Revelation 20:10

<sup>(10)</sup> And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever (See vv.7-9; see also Rev. 19:20)

Satan certainly will not rule in hell. For when he is finally committed to that place, he will suffer eternally with all the lost. He will be in no state or condition to exercise any form of dominion. Hell will be his final and everlasting doom—a doom from which he can never be delivered for all eternity.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Hell is the Destiny of Impenitent Mankind***

Although hell was prepared for Satan and the fallen angels, it is also the place where all mankind who are outside of Christ will be consigned. Those who have rejected the one and only way of salvation have brought upon themselves the due penalty and judgment for their sin.

All unbelieving and sinful mankind perished in the Flood because they refused to accept God's appointed way of deliverance by means of the ark. In a similar way, all unbelieving and sinful mankind will perish in hell because they have refused to accept God's appointed way of salvation through repentance and faith in his only Son. (2 Pet. 3:5-7)

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<sup>18</sup> See further on *Bible Truths Explained: The Defeat of Satan and the Demons*, by Gordon Lyons.

Regarding the lost, Jesus' solemn words on the Day of Judgment will be:

Matthew 25:30

<sup>(30)</sup> And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.14-29)

The unprofitable *servant* is the one who proves to be unfaithful with his master's gifts. The unprofitable *person* is the one who has spurned the grace of God and rejected his gifts—refusing to apply the knowledge that he had, in order to seek further knowledge of God and his ways. For those who reject the grace that God gives them, there can be no other sentence justly imposed upon them but that of eternal condemnation.

The *darkness* of hell is the 'darkness' of eternal separation from a loving and compassionate—but also a holy, righteous and just—God; a God who will by no means clear the guilty. It is the darkness of utter despair; the unremitting despair of a life cut off from all hope of salvation, and doomed to the suffering of hell's torments throughout all the ages of eternity.

Although there will be varying degrees of punishment in hell, no one will escape the fire of God's holy and righteous wrath. Those who have rejected God's one and only Son, must bear upon themselves the penalty for despising the Lord Jesus' atoning blood. They will be held accountable for their own sin, and especially for the sin of neglecting or rejecting the Lord Jesus who died as a substitute for sinners. (Luke 12:47-48; John 3:18,36)

Thus, God's Word says:

Luke 12:47

<sup>(47)</sup> And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. (See vv.35-46; cf. Matt. 24:50-51)

This reflects the degree of punishment meted out by the Lord at the last day.

## **What The Bible Teaches About Hell**

In the Gospels, the Lord Jesus makes frequent reference to hell, and he illustrates the terrible nature of that place by the use of vivid imagery. But it must be remembered that this imagery does not reflect a hyperbolic or exaggerated state of affairs. It illustrates solemn truth. It is the truth of a terrible reality conveyed in language that is readily apprehended and understood. If hell is likened to 'a fiery furnace' or 'a lake of fire,' then the reality must be equal to, or greater than, the literal or metaphorical expressions used to illustrate it.

### ***Common Biblical Phrases Signifying Hell***

In the Bible, certain recurring phrases are used to denote the terrors of hell. We will consider some of these on the pages that follow, under these four sub headings:

<b>Terms (NIV)</b>	<b>Equivalent Terms (KJV)</b>	<b>Related or Associated Phrases</b>
(1) outside, into the darkness	outer darkness	'blackest darkness'; 'weeping and gnashing of teeth', etc.
(2) a fiery furnace	furnace of fire	'weeping and gnashing of teeth', etc.
(3) unquenchable fire	unquenchable fire	'unquenchable fire'; 'everlasting fire', etc.
(4) the lake of fire	the lake of fire	'lake of burning sulphur'; 'lake of fire'; 'fiery lake of burning sulphur', etc.

#### **1. Hell Denoted as 'Outside, into the Darkness' (NIV)**

***(Or 'outer darkness' - KJV)***

Hell is sometimes spoken of as a place *outside, into the darkness* (KJV, *outer darkness*). That is, it is regarded as a place where the separation from God and his love is felt so intensely that it envelops the soul in the thick mental darkness of unremitting despair and intolerable anguish. No physical darkness could induce greater fear, apprehension or foreboding in the minds of those who are cast into the 'outer darkness' of a lost eternity. Thus, the Scriptures solemnly declare:

Matthew 8:11-12

<sup>(11)</sup> And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>(12)</sup> But the children of the kingdom shall be *cast out into outer darkness*:<sup>19</sup> there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Italics added; see vv.5-13)

Matthew 22:13

<sup>(13)</sup> Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and *cast him into outer darkness*; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Italics added; see vv.1-14)

Matthew 25:30

<sup>(30)</sup> And cast ye the unprofitable servant *into outer darkness*: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Italics added; see vv.14-29)

2 Peter 2:17

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<sup>19</sup> *cast out into outer darkness*: "The expression is emphatic—'the darkness which is outside.' To be 'outside' at all—or, in the language of Revelation 22:15 [KJV], to be 'without' the heavenly city, excluded from its joyous nuptials and gladsome festivities—is sad enough of itself, without anything else. But to find themselves not only excluded from the brightness and glory and joy and felicity of the kingdom above, but thrust into the region of 'darkness,' with all its horrors, this is the dismal retribution here announced, that awaits the unworthy at the great day." [JFB on Matt. 22:13]

<sup>(17)</sup> These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest: to whom the *mist of darkness* [NIV, *Blackest darkness*] is reserved forever. (Italics added; see vv.1-22)

Jude 1:13

<sup>(13)</sup> Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the *blackness of darkness* forever. (Italics added; see vv.3-16)

The graphic figure of speech, ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth,’ is indicative of the indescribable anguish, despair and torments that will be endured by all those who are consigned to hell. The last two passages quoted above refer to the punishment awaiting those who have forsaken the way of righteousness to teach the way of unrighteousness, and to lead the people of God astray by their immoral lives and teaching. These are the men and women within the church who are bringing the name of Christ into disrepute. Such people are denying the faith, and are proving themselves to be false professors. They are the kind of people who claim to have faith in Christ, but who have never experienced the saving and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

## **2. Hell Denoted as ‘A Fiery Furnace’ (NIV)**

**(Or, ‘furnace of fire’ – KJV)**

At the resurrection, and before their consignment to hell, the bodies of the wicked will be adapted (transformed) so that they cannot die or be annihilated. No matter how much suffering they endure, they will never cease to exist. For all eternity, they will be exposed to the full torments of hell, in body and soul.

Concerning the fate of the finally impenitent, God’s Word says:

Matthew 13:41-42

<sup>(41)</sup> The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; <sup>(42)</sup> And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.24-30,36-43)

Matthew 13:49-50

<sup>(49)</sup> So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, <sup>(50)</sup> And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.47-48)

John 15:6

<sup>(6)</sup> If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. (See vv.1-8; cf. Ezek. 15:1-8)

Those who do not abide in Christ do not belong to Christ. At the Last Judgment, they—together with the remainder of the wicked—will be cast into the ‘fiery furnace’.

## **3. Hell Denoted as ‘Unquenchable Fire’ (NIV & KJV)**

The dreadful reality of hell is that there is no end—and never will be—to the sufferings that will be endured in that place. Like a fiercely burning fire, which defies all attempts to extinguish or contain it, so will be the fiery torments of hell. And although these torments of body and soul will be ‘unquenchable’, yet neither body nor soul will be annihilated by the intensity of these sufferings. Terrible indeed is the

fate of the lost. Great beyond measure is the responsibility of the saved to warn them of this certain and unending judgment. Thus, the Scripture solemnly forewarns:

Isaiah 66:23-24

<sup>(23)</sup> And it shall come to pass, *that* from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. <sup>(24)</sup> 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. (See vv.17-22)

And concerning the LORD who executes judgment upon all mankind, the Scripture says:

Matthew 3:12

<sup>(12)</sup> Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (See vv.7-11)

Matthew 25:41

<sup>(41)</sup> Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (See vv.31-46)

The last two passages quoted above depict the Last Judgment. Christ will sift everyone who appears before his judgment seat. The wheat (the righteous) will be gathered into his barn (his eternal heavenly kingdom). But the chaff (the unrighteous) will be separated from the wheat and cast into the unquenchable fire of hell.

Again, concerning the unquenchable nature of the fire of hell, the Lord Jesus declares:

Mark 9:43-44

<sup>(43)</sup> And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: <sup>(44)</sup> Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (See vv.42-50; see esp. vv.47-48)

We must remember, of course, that expressions such as 'their worm will not die', and 'unquenchable fire', are symbolical expressions that are being used to portray a dreadful reality. The 'unquenchable fire' speaks of the searing intensity of God's righteous wrath, and of the degree and duration of suffering that will be endured by the wicked. The pains of hell will be exactly analogous to the pains that would be endured in an unquenchable fire. The 'worm' that will not die represents the life (or existence) that cannot die. Thus shall it be in the torments of hell.

#### **4. Hell Denoted as 'A Lake of Fire' (NIV & KJV)**

##### ***('burning sulphur')***

As a place of never-ending torment, hell is often likened to a *lake of fire*. If a person were to be cast alive into a lake of fire, that person would very soon die in the flames. However, those who will be cast into hell will never die. Their bodies will no longer be mortal and perishable, nor will they be subject to physical injury, decay or destruction.

A number of Scripture passages refer to the lake of fire, as the following examples from God's Word indicate:

Revelation 14:10-11

<sup>(10)</sup> The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with *fire and brimstone* [NIV, *burning sulphur*] in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: <sup>(11)</sup> And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. (Italics added; see vv.6-12; cf. v.10 with Ps. 75:8)

Revelation 19:20

<sup>(20)</sup> And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into *a lake of fire burning with brimstone*. (Italics added; see vv.11-21; cf. Rev. 13:14)

Revelation 20:10

<sup>(10)</sup> And the devil that deceived them was cast into *the lake of fire and brimstone*, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever (Italics added; see vv.7-9)

Revelation 20:14-15

<sup>(14)</sup> And death and hell were cast into *the lake of fire*. This is the second death. <sup>(15)</sup> And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into *the lake of fire*. (Italics added; see vv.11-13)

Revelation 21:8

<sup>(8)</sup> But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in *the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone*: which is the second death. (Italics added; see vv.1-7)

Probably, the phrase, *lake of fire*, should be understood as a metaphor or figure of speech. This would be in keeping with many of the other figurative expressions used in the book of Revelation. If, however—in his Revelation to John—the Lord Jesus thought it necessary to liken the torments of hell to the sufferings caused by a lake of fire, this clearly indicates how intense and unbearable hell's sufferings must be. This is because the illustration must bear a corresponding likeness to the reality; otherwise, it loses its significance as a warning message.

### **God's Wrath Burns Like Fire**

It is a futile hope to imagine, as many do, that a God of love would never punish anyone for all eternity in a place like a lake of fire. The Scriptures clearly reveal and assert the contrary. God is love; but God is also light. Those who reject the mercy and love of God must—of necessity—endure the righteous judgment and wrath of God. The God of infinite love and mercy is also the God of infinite justice and holiness. And a holy and righteous God can by no means acquit the guilty. Those are guilty of a crime demanding eternal punishment who have neglected or rejected the one and only, and eternal, Son of God

Concerning God's avowed intentions to execute righteous judgment on the ungodly, the Scripture warns:

Psalms 11:6

<sup>(6)</sup> Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: *this shall be* the portion of their cup. (See vv.4-7)

Isaiah 66:15-16

<sup>(15)</sup> For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.

<sup>(16)</sup> For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.

Jeremiah 7:20

<sup>(20)</sup> Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched. (See vv.1-19)

Zephaniah 1:18

<sup>(18)</sup> Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD 's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Zephaniah 3:8

<sup>(8)</sup> Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination *is* to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, *even* all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. (See vv.6-17; cf. Isa. 30:18-33)

Some of the above passages refer to God's temporal judgments. Others, however, refer to the Judgment at the Last Day. But, whether it be temporal or eternal, God's righteous judgment will surely fall on those who reject his love and mercy. The wrath of God will be visited in full measure upon the impenitent, and the fire—or fury—of God's wrath will endure forever in the 'flames' of hell's torments.

### ***God's Judgment is Certain***

God's judgment has been clearly prefigured in events such as the Noachic Deluge, and the destruction of such cities as Sodom and Gomorrah. In the light of these former temporal judgments, God's Word warns of another final and eternal judgment on mankind's sinful behaviour:

Jude 1:7

<sup>(7)</sup> Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh [NIV, *sexual immorality and perversion*], are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (See vv.3-6; see also Gen. 19:1-29)

Hell, therefore, is very much a reality. Hell's torments are a reality. And the everlasting nature of hell's sufferings is a reality.

Let us never forget this Scripture:

Hebrews 12:28-29

<sup>(28)</sup> Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: <sup>(29)</sup> For our God *is* a consuming fire. {*Deut. 4:24*} (See Heb. 12:14-27)

### ***Everlasting Separation from God***

Apart from the *physical* pains that the wicked will endure in hell, there are also *mental* pains to be endured. The anguish and despair of a soul separated from God, from his love, and from all hope of redemption, scarcely can be imagined. To have to endure that separation throughout the endless ages of eternity is a fearful thought indeed.

### ***Everlasting Conscious Torments***

As has been clearly shown from the numerous passages quoted from the Word of God, hell is a place of everlasting suffering in body and soul. From these sufferings, there will be no respite 'day or night.' The following passages from the Scriptures indicate the perpetual nature of the torments of hell:

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

<sup>(6)</sup> Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; <sup>(7)</sup> And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, <sup>(8)</sup> In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>(9)</sup> *Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord*, and from the glory of his power; <sup>(10)</sup> When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (Italics added; see vv.3-5)

Revelation 14:11

<sup>(11)</sup> And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. (See vv.6-13)

Revelation 20:10

<sup>(10)</sup> And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. (See vv.7-9)

Hell's torments are torments that will know no end. They will continue unabated throughout the ages of the ages: i.e., for all eternity.

### ***Who Will be Sent to Hell?***

We have already mentioned that God prepared hell for the devil and all the fallen angels (or demons). These higher orders of created, rational and intelligent beings will suffer for all eternity in the torments of hell.

Hell, however, is not only for fallen and evil spirits. It is also for fallen and sinful mankind. Because of our sin, rebellion and impenitence, all of us—i.e., all humankind—would have been destined to perish in hell. This is the just and requisite punishment for our sins. However, in his abundant and undeserved love, mercy and grace, God chose to redeem unto himself a vast multitude from among every nation on earth. So immense is this multitude, that the redeemed of the Lord cannot be numbered by any human being. But God has called them to faith in his Son, and has forgiven their sins and iniquities through their faith in the atoning work of Christ.

No one who has been redeemed by Christ's atoning blood will ever see hell. Rather, these are the beloved of the Lord, and they are assured of a place in the kingdom of God and of his Christ.

However, no one who remains outside of Christ will ever see heaven. They will be consigned to that place that has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

### ***Impenitent Mankind Will Perish in Hell***

When we say that all mankind will perish in hell, we mean all mankind who have not repented of their sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ: in other words, all unregenerate mankind. Millions of people believe sincerely in their religion—but that religion will not save them if they have not been regenerated and justified through faith in Christ. However sincere they may have been in their beliefs, they will perish in hell.

Again, millions of people have clung tenaciously to some form of ‘fundamental religion’. They have been willing to die—and to kill others—in the name of their religion. But since they knew nothing of the true God or of Jesus Christ his only Son—or since they rejected the knowledge of the truth concerning the Son of God—these people, too, will perish in hell.

All people in all nations of the world will be included, no matter what their beliefs may have been. Unless they turn to Christ, they will perish. No one will be excluded. All who are outside of Christ’s redeeming work will be lost forever.

### ***Hell is the Just Penalty for Sin***

Not a single person will be sent to hell unjustly. Those only will be sent to hell who have neglected or rejected the love, mercy and grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thus, the Scripture clearly asserts:

John 3:16-18

<sup>(16)</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. <sup>(17)</sup> For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. <sup>(18)</sup> He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (See vv.14-21)

“God so loved...that he gave.” He gave all that love could give to redeem men and women from the just penalty of their sin and rebellion. God gave all, when he gave his only begotten Son. But for those who neglect, despise or reject the Son of God, there can be only one just punishment: and that punishment is death—spiritual, physical, and eternal death. This is why the Scriptures solemnly warn those who reject God’s redeeming love, and who refuse to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ:

John 3:36

<sup>(36)</sup> He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (See vv.31-35)

It is a dreadful and fearful thing to fall under, and to remain under, the wrath of God. For, at the Last Judgment, God will execute his wrath—certainly and finally. Then, the impenitent will be consigned forever to the dreadful torments awaiting them in hell.

### ***God is Not Willing that Any Should Perish***

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that God does not desire the death and perdition of anyone. Rather, he is concerned that people should turn from their evil ways and live. Thus, the Scripture says

Ezekiel 18:23

<sup>(23)</sup> Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? (See vv.19-24)

Ezekiel 18:30-32

<sup>(30)</sup> Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. <sup>(31)</sup> Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? <sup>(32)</sup> For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn *yourselves*, and live ye. (See vv.25-29; see also Ezek. 33:11)

God calls upon everyone everywhere to repent. This is the message of both the Old and the New Testaments: repent and live—repent and believe the Gospel. Repent and your sins will be blotted out. (Isa. 55:6-7; Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38-39; 3:19-20)

Clearly, then, God does not desire that anyone should be consigned to hell. Thus, the Scripture says:

2 Peter 3:9-10a

<sup>(9)</sup> The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

<sup>(10a)</sup> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night... (See vv.3-13)

The day of the Lord—which includes the day of final judgment—will surely come, as God promised. However, while it is still the day of grace, those who repent and believe the Gospel will never see hell. Every one will be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Those, however, who continue in their sin, refusing to call upon the name of the Lord, must one day answer for their evil deeds. But since, on that day, no answer will avail (reducing sinful and impenitent mankind to utter silence in the presence of the Lord), they must concede that they have been justly sentenced to spend all eternity in that place prepared for the devil and his angels.

## **Epilogue**

Let all of us who know Jesus as our Saviour and Lord thank God for the abundance of his mercies in that he has given his one and only Son for our redemption, and that by his sovereign grace, he has called us to himself through faith in his Son. Let us thank him also, and praise his holy name, that he has granted us eternal life; and that—by the gift of his Holy Spirit—he has sealed us unto himself and guaranteed us a place among the redeemed of the Lord in the glories of heaven above.

