

THE DESTINY OF THE UNBELIEVER

Last month we wrote of the destiny of believers. We think it important to consider the destiny of the unbeliever. Ask anyone, believer or unbeliever, “what happens to the un-believer when they die?” and the answer will be, “Hell, where they will burn forever and ever in eternal fire.” Ask the believer why they believe in Hell and the answer will, of course be, “It’s in the Bible.” Now we are going to make a shocking statement that might make some ask, “Has he lost his mind?” The truth is that the word “hell” is not found in the Old Testament, written in Hebrew, and neither is it found the New Testament, written in Greek. So neither the Hebrew Bible nor Greek New Testament contain the word “Hell.” Hell is neither a Hebrew nor a Greek Word. It is a word the translators have used to describe four different words, none referring to eternal fire. British Scholar W.E. Vine in his *An Expository Dictionary of Greek New Testament Words* describe four different words, none referring to eternal fire. In the King James Version the word *Sheol* (grave) is translated “Hell” 31 times in the Old Testament, *Hades* (grave) 10 times in the New Testament, *Geenna* represents the Hebrew *Ge-hinnon* (the valley of Tophet) is found 12 times in the Gospels and 1 time in James. *Tartaros* (where the sinning angels are confined in chains until the judgment (II Pet. 2:4). The King James version is the only version to translate *Sheol* as “Hell.” Most Dictionaries and Encyclopedias and any commentary on the Bible give the accepted definition of the word, that is, a place of eternal punishment of the wicked in fire that burns forever. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines hell as “the nether world (realm) of the devil and the demons in which the damned suffer everlasting punishment.” However, in the small print above this definition states: “Old English and Old high German *helon* to conceal, Latin *celare*, Greek *kaluptein*.” The kin word of the Greek is *kalupto*, according to *Kittel’s Dictionary of the New Testament* means “hiding and burying in the earth, to conceal or cover.” *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* states the word “Hell is derived from the Saxon *helan*, to cover; hence the covered or the invisible place.” The *McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia* states: “Hell is a term which originally corresponded more exactly to ‘Hades,’ being derived from the Saxon *helon*, to cover, and signifying merely the *covered*, or invisible place the habitation of those who have gone from this visible terrestrial region to the world of spirits. But it has long been appropriated in common usage to the place of future punishment for the wicked, that its earlier meaning has been lost sight of. In the English Bible it is used in a wider sense.” From these definitions it is easy to see why the translators chose the word *hell* to describe the place of the dead.

Even today with so many translations available, it is hard to get some people to understand that the King James translators were not inspired of God in contrast to the those who originally penned the scriptures under the divine inspiration of God. Many people believe that the King James Bible is God’s perfect restoration of His word. (Case in point: The bumper sticker: “If it’s not the King James Version, it is not the Bible.” *This is ignorance gone to seed...HB*). The following paragraphs show how three different words are translated *hell* in the Bible that causes us to ask the simple question: Why did the translators not

leave the words as they were, without being given a meaning they did not convey?

SHEOL: In the Old Testament *Sheol* used 66 times, it is translated “Hell” 31 times in the KJV and “death and the grave” 35 times. This shows the inconsistency of the translators. How could it mean *hell* 31 times and something else 35 times? It is never used in reference to punishment by fire.

GE-HINNA: (*geenna*) Is translated “hell” twelve times and is used only by Jesus and once by James. James 3:6 hell is described as the source of the evil done by misuse of the tongue; in this passage the word stands for the powers of darkness, describing “the world of iniquity.” “Gehenna” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word “Hinnom” and is described by Strong’s Lexicon as “a valley S.W. of Jerusalem” said to be “Ben-Hinnom” in the O.T. It was part of the inheritance of Judah (Joshua 15:8). Jeremiah calls it “valley of the slaughter” because Israel “burnt their sons and daughters in the fire and the dead bodies will be food for birds of the sky, and for beasts of the earth” (Jer. 7:31-33). Gehenna was not a place for the living. The fire that burned there was never quenched because its purpose was to consume all that was cast into it. However there is no fire burning in that valley today. It burned out centuries ago and the garbage dump no longer exists in that place. How do we reconcile the verses stating gehenna is unquenchable and eternal fire (Matt 18:8; Mark 9:43) with the fact there is now no fire in the valley? Let scripture interpret scripture. Sodom and Gomorrah are said to “be exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of *eternal fire*” (Jude 7).

HADES: The word “hades” is used 10 times in the New Testament and is always rendered “hell” in the KJV and nine times in the Living Bible, “death” one time; always “hades” in the NASV; “hades” nine times in the RSV “death” one time; and in the NIV “hades” four times; “grave” two times, “depths” two times with a marginal note “hades”, and “hell” two times marginal note “hades.” The word is used four times in the Gospels, always by the Lord. It is not used in either Mark or John. It is used two times in Acts referring to the resurrection of Christ when Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-10 and translates *sheol* as *hades*. In Revelation it is personified as the destiny of the wicked.

Luke 16:19-31 uses the word *hades*, translated “hell” in the KJV, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. In order to understand this passage we must include its context, something traditionalist conveniently ignores. Jesus has spoken of covetousness and stewardship (16:1-13). When the Pharisees scoff at Jesus’ teaching (ver. 14) He warns them against self-justification, reminding them that God knows their hearts and that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God (ver. 15). The rich man and Lazarus provide a perfect illustration of this truth. This passage is usually said to prove the immortality of the soul. Some go to Hades and some to Paradise. Therefore it is not accepted as a parable, but a reality. Some say it is not a

parable because Jesus does not say it is a parable. Jesus never said that all the parables he spoke were “parables.” For example in Matthew 15:13,14 Jesus teaches about the blindness of the Pharisees and says nothing about a parable but in verse 15 Peter said, “Explain the *parable* to us.” In Mark 7 Jesus teaches about the tradition of the Elders and does not mention that his teaching is a parable, yet in verse 17, “His disciples questioned him about the *parable*.” In Luke 12:35-40 Jesus teaches about slaves being ready for the return of a master. He does not say it is a parable but in verse 41 Peter asks, “Lord are you addressing *this parable* to us or everyone else as well?” Mark 4:34 states that “He was not speaking to them without parables, but He was explaining everything privately to his own disciples.” This was because the majority of the people’s hearts were hardened.

The moral of this story is stated in Luke 16 31: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.” It was unbelieving Israel, especially the Pharisees and the leaders, that did not listen to Moses and the Prophets. They are represented by the rich man because Israel was the most favored people on earth (Rom. 9:3-5). Lazarus, on the other hand, represents the Gentiles who were without hope until the gospel was revealed (Eph. 2:11,12). The “crumbs from the rich man’s table and the dogs” is descriptive of how the Jews thought of the Gentiles (Matt.15:21-28). Abraham’s bosom shows that the Gentiles became children of Abraham and heirs of the promise, which the Jews claimed as being exclusively theirs (Gal. 3:26-29). When the rich man died and lifted up his eyes in hades represents the fact that he died having no relation to Abraham, thus the unbelieving Jews were cut off from the covenant (Matt. 21:43); while the Gentiles were given salvation (Rom. 11:11-15). The gulf between them is the division made by acceptance or rejection of Christ. To this day the Jews are in torment, weeping at the wailing wall in Jerusalem, weeping over the loss of their once exalted position. Nothing in the context remotely suggest the final state of the wicked. The context is the wrong thinking of the Jews.

Not only have the interpreters failed to clarify the meaning of Biblical words but the commentators and religious writers have neglected the importance of the plain statements of Scripture. For example, note two well-known and much used passages: Romans 6:23 “For wages of sin is *death*, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Apostle did not say the wages of sin is eternity in Hell. Were that true, Jesus’ death could not pay the debt we owe. Also, the much loved and quoted John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in him will not *perish* but have eternal life.” The wording is plain; it does not say the believer will not spend eternity in hell, rather the believer will not *perish*.

My friend, the late Curtis Dickinson wrote extensively concerning this subject in his monthly paper, *The Witness*. The following quotations are taken from *The Witness*.

“No man on earth, no matter how blinded by some religious creed, would say that it would be just and right to keep a person alive in order that he might suffer endlessly. Certainly man has no right to ascribe to his Father in heaven actions any human being would shrink from in horror. No trace of endless punishment is found in the Old Testament. Moses, who did know of its existing among the Egyptians, repudiated it by his

silence. The law did not mention it among all its warnings. Job, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, the Prophets made no mention of such a horrible thing. The flood is an example of the worst wickedness found in the Bible (Gen. 6-8). If endless punishment awaits the sinner, surely it would be mentioned here. Details are given: the height of the water above the mountains, the number of days it prevailed, etc. If these people were all to be subjected to endless punishment, what is to be made of the fact that it is not even mentioned? In the case of Sodom, and Gomorrah, God said, “Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do...?” (Gen. 18:17) The destruction of this wicked people is expressed in the terms such as “consume,” “slay” and “destroy.” (ver. 17-22). They were destroyed by fire, but nothing is said about them being subjected to an endless fire after death. Jude 7 tells us that they are “set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” Eternal fire and endless fire are two different things. Eternal fire means that the effect of the fire is eternal, just as scripture speaks of eternal salvation and eternal judgment. The fire destroyed them forever, but the fire did not continue to burn. It could not be an example if there was some part of man that was to suffer endlessly after death, as taught in most churches today.

“How, then did the doctrine ever become so widely accepted by Christians, since it is not taught in Scripture? Tertullian is said to be the first Christian leader to teach eternal torture, around 200-220 A.D. Augustine was the next leader to champion the doctrine. The Catholic Dictionary says: “So great a punishment, says St. Augustine, that no torment known to us can be compared to it.” Augustine was an avid fan of Plato, who is known for the pagan doctrine of an ‘immortal soul.’

“When Jesus used the word *perish*, he used one of the strongest words in the language to convey the thought of death. There are fourteen different Greek words used in the New Testament to express the doctrine of the final destruction of the sinner. Translated into English these words mean: *consume, death, ruin, destroy utterly, expire, corrupt utterly, cut off, burn up, consume thoroughly, abolish, etc.* The word *apollumi*, used 23 times in the New Testament is the strongest word in the Greek language to denote final and complete end, to bring to naught, to utterly destroy. It is this word Jesus used to solemnly declare that God can “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Another verb and noun for “destroy:” is *exolothreuo* and *olethros*, signifying utter destruction by death. Thus God had said to Moses “every soul which will not hear that prophet (Christ) shall be destroyed (*exolothreuo*) from among the people” (Acts 3:23), and the wicked “shall be punished with everlasting destruction (*olethros*) from the presence of the Lord” (II Thess. 1:9, I Tim. 6:9).”

Some concluding thoughts: The common misconception among some people, including ministers, is that Jesus talked more about hell than he did about heaven. A quick survey showed 58 times the word hell, damnation and punishment are used and the words Heaven, kingdom, kingdom of heaven, paradise, kingdom of God is used 242 times.

Hell was never mentioned of Adam and Eve through whom sin passed upon all men (Rom. 5:18), although one of my professors spoke of them both being in hell now, nor of Cain, the first murderer, nor of people in the Great Flood, nor the people of Sodom and Gomorrah nor of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.