

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7444 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

OCTOBER 2011

THE HELL THERE IS

There are basically three views of Hell. **Traditional:** This is the view held by the majority of Christians and Commentators. This view holds that every person has an immortal soul and when they die they are immediately judged and given either eternity in heaven or eternity in hell. Hell is a place of literal, physical burning in literal flames of endless torment. Once the person is in hell he is there for all eternity, burning in a lake of fire. The Roman Catholics have invented a purgatory, a place of temporal purification for those who are destined for heaven. **Restorationism or Universalism:** This is the view that all people will eventually be saved because eternal punishment contradicts the love of God, since God wills the salvation of all and His love is stronger than human resistance. If there is a hell, it is not eternal. Punishment is temporary and remedial, and leads the sinner toward repentance and acceptance by God. **Conditional Immortality:** This view holds that the soul is not immortal and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), not eternity in Hell. If the wages of sin is eternal punishment, then Christ would have had to have been punished eternally in order to pay the wages of sin. When he died the wages of sin against the sinner was paid in full. Destiny in eternity is not a question of heaven or hell, but a question of life or death. At resurrection the Christian is given immortality and the sinner perishes. The unrepentant will be punished, but this period of conscious punishment will be temporary then they will be destroyed and cease to exist.

There are many questions and much controversy about the Scriptural teaching on Hell. There are two reasons for this: first, the way three words in Scripture are translated and second, the failure of Bible expositors to identify the meaning of New Testament words with the meaning of the same Old Testament words. II Peter 2:4 the word *Tartaros*, the only place it is used in the New Testament, is translated "hell". "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into *hell* and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment." This word describes only the fate of angels that sinned, not man.

Gehenna (*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; here 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). It was here that Ahaz introduced into Israel the worship of the heathen god Molech, to whom children were burned in the fire. "He burned incense in the valley of son of Hinnom, and burned the children in the fire" (II Chron. 28:3). King Josiah stamped out that worship, and ordered that the valley should be forever after an accursed place. "He also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his

daughter pass through the fire for Molech" (II Kings 23:10). This valley became the place where the refuse of Jerusalem was dumped and destroyed. Evidently Isaiah is referring to this valley when he states: "Then they shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind" (Isaiah 66:24). Jesus quotes from Isaiah's words "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" to describe Gehenna (Mark 9:48). *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* states "a well-founded tradition places the potter's field, bought for the burial of paupers with Judas' silver" was in the valley of Hinnom. The Jews would have understood from the Old Testament that Jesus was referring to this garbage heap outside the city of Jerusalem. Why, then, did the translators translate it "hell" instead of gehenna, or valley of Hinnom, as it is translated in the Old Testament? The answer is probably found in Matthew 18:8 where Jesus uses the term "the eternal fire" instead of "gehenna" as it is used in the parallel passages in Matthew 5:30 and Mark 9:43. Note that Jesus says it is "the whole body" that was cast into gehenna and he states in Matthew 10:28: "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in gehenna." (Also Luke 12:4, 5). The fact that Jesus uses the term "body" in these passages corresponds with Isaiah 66:24 where the word "corpses" is used. 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 is said to "be exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of *eternal fire*" (Jude 7). My friend, the late Curtis Dickinson, commented on this verse in *The Witness*: "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 that fire did not continue to burn. It could not be an example if there was some part of man to suffer endlessly after death, as taught in most churches today." There are examples in the Old Testament where fires were said to be "unquenchable" but eventually went out when they consumed the material that burned (Isaiah 34:10; Jeremiah 17:27; Ezekiel 20:47,48). These passages speak of "unquenchable" fires that God used to destroy certain things. They could not be quenched until all were burned up.

On the subject of man's eternal destiny many profess to believe what the Scriptures say, but proceed to give words a meaning corresponding to their perceived ideas and do not accept them for what they actually say. The Scripture states: "Who (God) alone possesses immortality" (I Tim. 6:16), and it is at resurrection that the Christian who is mortal "shall put on immortality" (I Cor. 15:53). Yet we are dogmatically taught that man has an immortal soul. When we read that "the soul that sins

shall die" Ezek. 18:4, 20) and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), we are told "death" does not really mean "death" and only the body dies and the soul is ushered immediately into heaven or hell. It is at funeral services that we are assured that "our loved one is in heaven because they are not really dead." Billy Graham in a daily newspaper column entitled *In My Opinion* states: "The Bible suggest that those who've entered heaven before us actually may know what is happening on earth" however the scripture says "the dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psalm 115:17) and "the dead know not anything...for there is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going." (Eccl. 9:5, 10).

The destiny of the righteous is said to be immortality at the resurrection (I Cor. 15: 51-56) and the destiny of the wicked is said to be destruction (II Thess. 1:9; I Thess. 5:3; Phil 3:19) yet it is argued that "destruction" does not really mean destruction. The Psalmist wrote: "But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they vanish; like smoke shall they vanish away" (Psalm 37:20). "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall be no more; and you will look carefully at his place, and he will be no more." (verse 10). Some will object upon the basis of Matthew 25:46: "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Does this limit the life of the righteous because the terms are the same for the saved and the lost? There is a difference in the circumstances involved. The saints have received the gift of immortality and are not subject to death. The sinners are mortal and will suffer the wages of sin, death.

But isn't Gehenna the same as the Lake of fire in the book of Revelation? The lake of fire is indeed the final punishment of the wicked as well as the devil, the beast and false prophet (Rev. 21:8; 20:10). But what is the lake of fire? The book of Revelation is a book of symbols. There is no way we can be sure what these symbols mean unless John tells us what they mean. Anytime John interprets a symbol we can be sure of its meaning. For example: "the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20); the bowls of incense is said to be "the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8); the great dragon that was thrown down, the serpent of old is said to be "the devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9); Mystery Babylon the great, the Harlot, is said to be "the great city" (Rev. 17:5, 18) and the great city is said to be the city "where the Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8); the fine linen in Revelation 19:8 is the righteous acts of the saints; John says the bride, the wife of the Lamb is the holy city (Rev. 21:9, 10). He further tells us what the lake of fire is: "And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). John plainly tells us "the lake of fire is the second death." It is common to hear from religious practitioners that death is simply the soul being separated from the body and eternal death is the soul being eternally separated from God in the lake of fire, which is the second death. John says death will be thrown into the lake of fire, if death is "separation" and the lake of fire is "eternal separation" then what sense does it make to say "separation will be cast into separation"? Isaiah said God "will swallow up death forever" (Isa. 25:8) and Paul has written: "the last enemy to be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:26). Death will be no more. **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 equivalent word in the Old Testament is *Sheol* and is used 66 times, always referring to death and the grave. It is never used in reference to punishment by fire. 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 the book of 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."

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.