

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

40.2 Is Hell a Reality or a Myth?

Part II

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31

God is love. Everyone of us is somewhat familiar with that statement. Well then, what about hell? If God is love, hell must be a myth. The love of God forbids the idea of hell and makes the existence of hell impossible. Does it? This is what our study is about this morning. It is about hell and the love of God.

We have begun by saying that it is necessary to have our vocabulary in order. A word which occurs more than sixty times in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word Sheol. During the Old Testament period the spirits of all who died went to this place. Death and Sheol are linked together in such verses as Psalm 89:48, 6:5, 18:5, Song of Solomon 8:6 and Isaiah 28:15. We also noted that the word appears to have a variety of meanings. It is used to describe the place of the unbelieving dead (Psalm 55:15, 9:17) as well as the abode of the departed believer (Genesis 37:35; Psalm 88:3). Sheol is further represented as being associated with sorrow (II Samuel 22:6), a feeling of desire (Habakkuk 2:5), and distress (Psalm 116:3). It is also pictured as a kind of neutral place where all men are, the great and small, and where a kind of half substantial existence is experienced, where people are without strength. (Job 3:11-19) Yet, it is a place of conscious existence. (Job 10:18-22) Here are descriptions of the place of the dead. One other aspect of Sheol is the fact that entrance is irreversible. Note, Job 7:7-10.

Another word we considered was the word **Hadees**. This is a Greek word and is important to us because it is the word the apostles and Jesus used. Alexander the Great's conquests from 334 B.C. introduced Greek thought into Bible lands with the result that the Old Testament was translated into Greek before 150 B.C. This translation was known as the Septuagint (LXX). This version was familiar to Jesus and the apostles and the one they quoted from. Both Sheol and Hadees describe the same place and are translated Hell in many versions. Hades is better carried into English by transliteration which means a similar word sound, rather than by translation which is identical meaning with a different phonetic sound as in the case with Sheol.

3. There Is the Greek Word Gehenna:

It is used twelve times in the New Testament and is the Greek form of the Hebrew GE-HINNOM. It originally described the land of Hinnom, a beautiful valley belonging to Hinnom and to his sons. (Jeremiah 19:2) A look at some maps of the city of Jerusalem reveals that three valleys were present at one time. The Valley of Kidron separated the old City of David from the Mount of Olives and in the time of Jesus there was the Tyropoean Valley which ran through the lower city. Below the city the Kidron Valley connects with the Valley of Hinnom. In this valley a high place was built into which a hole was dug and wood was placed and ignited. The wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh caused children to be burned there as offerings to the idol Moloch. (Isaiah 30:33; II Chronicles 28:1-3; 33:6)

The prophet Jeremiah declared that God would visit this place with destruction. It would become the valley of slaughter. (Jeremiah 7:31-34) According to II Kings 23:10 it was the godly King Josiah who stopped the sacrifices there. With the abominations having ceased, the area became a rubbish heap. In the Jewish mind Gehenna was associated with the judgment of God, destruction, fires which burned continually, and a depository for things worthless. The twelve occurrences of the word in the New Testament are Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 18:9; 10:28; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:45, 47, 43; Luke 12:15; and James 3:6. By adding these various historical facts together, we can only imagine what must have gone through the minds of people who heard Jesus use this term as he so often did. We might note here that Hades and Gehenna described the same place as they were used by Jesus. It seems that when Hades was used, the meaning had to do with the place of the departed dead. When Gehenna was the term chosen, the reference was to the nature of the place. Having investigated the meaning of these three words often translated hell, there is one other to be mentioned.

4. There Is the Greek Word Tartaros:

This word occurs only once in the New Testament. Jude 6 reads, *“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.”* Peter tells us the name of this prison house of fallen angels. *“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (tartaros) and delivered them unto chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment,”* Is the

way II Peter 2:4 reads. Tartaros is not the place to which the spirits of the unbelieving go, it is rather the abode of fallen angels and where they are kept. Having defined these four words, let us go on to understand something of their significance.

It has been noted that Paul does not use the word although he refers to the idea contained in it. This is seen in Philippians 3:19 for instance, *"Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things."* Also, II Thessalonians 1:9, *"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."* The same is true concerning the writings of John although he uses several terms which are descriptive of Hell. The expression *"lake of fire"* is found in Revelation 19:20, 20:10,14-15, 21:8) In each instance, according to the above references, the word hell is used by Jesus Himself.

Notwithstanding its use or lack of use by others, the fact that Jesus made such reference to it is reason enough to take the term very seriously.

III. HELL IS SPOKEN OF AS A PLACE:

We have all heard the word hell used in daily conversation. Very often people refer to it in order to describe some horrible condition in which they find themselves. They use the term to describe some physical disease, pain, suffering, marital experience or heartache they are experiencing. Sometimes people say, "All the hell we will know is in this life." The only problem with that reasoning is that it does not fit what the Bible has to say about hell. The Scriptures use local terms in speaking about hell. It speaks of hell as Gehenna, the literal valley, outside the wall of Jerusalem. Jesus speaks of it as being a furnace in Matthew 13:42. *"And shall cast them into a furnace of fire."* There are several prepositions which are used in connection with hell which lead to this same observation of it being a place.

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