

Hell Is the Grave

Eternal Torture a Fiendish Invention of the Fleshly Mind

"The dead know not anything . . . There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest"-Eccl. 9:5-10

(It may be thought we are contending with a doctrine no longer believed and taught, but eternal torture of the damned is still Christendom's official creed, and a necessary corollary of the immortal soul theory.)

Of all the false doctrines of orthodox Christendom, or any other system of religious speculation, surely it can be safely said that the hideous conception of eternal excruciating agony for nine-tenths of the human race in the flames of hell has been the most destructive of faith in God and belief in the Bible-the most productive of atheism and skepticism.

There is no greater blasphemy or perversion of Scripture than to attribute such characteristics to God.

True indeed, He reveals Himself as a God of justice and vengeance upon the wicked and disobedient, and His firm declared purpose is to bring every evil work into remembrance and to pour just retribution upon the ungodly.

But He is never portrayed in Scripture as a merciless fiend who delights in the wanton and purposeless eternal torture of His Own creatures.

We are told, on the contrary, that in the great coming day of judgment, the wicked shall, according to their deserts, receive few or many stripes with shame and contempt, and that the end of them all is eternal destruction-a complete blotting out - a consuming into smoke and ashes.

The conception of eternal intense torture for the vast majority of mankind, with the few redeemed forever feasting their eyes on the scene with pitiless satisfaction, is so 'hideous and monstrous that it is difficult to think any rational mind has ever believed it.

Perhaps when some sensational preacher luridly portrays such characters as Hitler and his inhuman accomplices in eternal torments, people in the heat of emotion find it possible to conceive of such things and find satisfaction in them.

But just carry it to its logical conclusion. We are asked to believe by the exponents of hellfire, the people we work with, our neighbors, and those we see and meet from day to day - of these the vast majority will, after a few brief years in which sorrow predominates, go to a hopeless destiny of eternal torment by vicious fiends of evil.

This is the view of the providence of God that we are shut up to if we accept these traditions of immortal-soulism and eternal torment. We would not, upon reflection, wish this fate upon the worst character we could conceive of, yet upon the flimsy basis of a few scraps of misunderstood Scripture, the orthodox churches have, it seems almost eagerly, built up this fiendish and inhuman doctrine, and have wilfully or ignorantly ignored all the plain teachings of the Bible about the dead sleeping, being at rest, knowing nothing, having no thoughts, activities or emotions; and about the wicked being destroyed, consumed into smoke and ashes, being cut off, perishing in their own corruption and like their own dung.

Eternal torment is taught **in** theory. but denied in fact, for actually, no one is ever actually believed to go there. Some redeeming feature **or** deathbed repentance or extreme unction takes them to heaven.

This is one of the system's greatest evils. It is so horrible they are afraid to face it, and they consequently make a mockery of all the principles of equity and justice, and obliterate all distinctions of good and evil, right and wrong, by a thick layer of sentiment.

The Bible teaches plainly that the wicked will be destroyed - and they WILL, to trouble creation no more. This is just, reasonable, scriptural.

HELL

THE original and root meaning of the English word "hell" is "a covered, hidden, concealed, or secret place." As a verb, to hell or to hele is given in Webster, to mean "to cover, conceal or keep secret," and it is still used in this sense in some parts of England, as to hele a house with a roof, or to hele seeds by covering them.

But this word, like many others, has unfortunately acquired a false ecclesiastical color and meaning.

USE IN COMMON VERSION

THE word "hell" occurs in our common version 54 times, 31 in the Old Testament and 23 in the New. It is a translation of 4 different words in the original, one (**Sheol**) in the Old, and three (**Hades, Gehenna, Tartaros**) in the New.

The last, **Tartaros**, occurs but once (2 Pet 2:4).

Gehenna appears 12 times. It is always translated as "hell," and it is always connected with burning and corruption.

Sheol and **Hades**, the other two, are synonymous terms, as will be demonstrated, and altogether occur 76 times. 41 times they are translated "hell," 32 times "grave," and 3 times "pit."

While **Sheol, Hades** and **Tartaros** refer to the same place or state, **Gehenna** is entirely different in meaning.

SHEOL

SHEOL is a term for the place of the dead **in general**, and for this reason "hell" in its original and uncorrupted meaning is a better word for **sheol** than "grave" is "Grave" primarily means the **specific** place of a particular corpse or corpses. The Hebrew for this is **geber**, as-

*"My grave (**geber**) which I dug for me" (Gen. 50:5).*

*"The king wept at the grave (**geber**) of Abner" (2 Sam. 3:32).*

*On the other hand, **sheol** in the Hebrew and "hell" in its primary meaning are **general** terms as (Psa. 6:5)*

*"In the grave (**sheol**) who shall give Thee thanks?"*

*"Hell (**sheol**) and destruction are never full" (Pro. 27:20).*

However, while "grave" used as a general term will well fit all passages where **sheol** occurs, "hell" in the popular sense would be absurd in some places and would immediately reveal the popular error. For example, where Jacob says (Gen. 37:35)-

*"I will go down into **sheol** unto my son mourning."*

And where Job says (14:13)

*"O that Thou wouldst hide me in **sheol**."*

It is not to be supposed that either Jacob or Job anticipated or hoped to go to eternal torment.

In all the 65 places where **sheol** is found, there is not one that gives any countenance to the idea of a place of burning torment of the damned. It is always in the sense of the general hidden state of the dead—all the dead—good and bad alike.

And not only is **sheol** used as the resting place of all the dead indiscriminately, but we have specific mention of **righteous and approved** men going there and **expecting** to go there.

We have seen this of Jacob and Job. Also David (Psa. 88:3), Hezekiah (Isa. 38:10), Christ (Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:31; 3:15), and all the faithful (compare Hos. 13:14 with 1Cor. 15:54-56).

Sheol is a place of silence

*"Let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in **sheol**"* (Psa. 31:17).

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Ps. 115:17).

There is no remembrance there (Psa. 6:5)-

*"In death there is no remembrance of Thee, in **sheol** who shall give 'Thee thanks?"*

Sheol is "in the dust" and there we "rest together" **"in** darkness" (Job 17:13-16). Beauty is consumed there (Psa. 49:14). There is no work or knowledge there-

*"There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in **sheol** whither thou goest"* (Ecc. 9:10).

It is dark there, and is called the "land of forgetfulness," and "destruction"-

"Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise Thee?"

*"Shall Thy loving kindness be declared in **sheol**? Or Thy faithfulness in destruction?"*

"Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Psa. 88:10-12).

The "mighty" are spoken of as lying there with "their swords under their heads" (Eze. 32:27). This is a clear reference to the ancient custom of burying warriors in their graves with their weapons of war, but quite at variance with the traditional hell of torment.

THE STATE OF THE DEAD

AND what we are told elsewhere concerning the state of the dead fully harmonizes with what we have learned about **sheol**. Death is always associated with oblivion, corruption, dissolution, returning to the dust, passing away as a shadow, the end of thought, knowledge, activity or memory.

Consider what Job says of the state of the dead and see how IMPOSSIBLE it is to harmonize with it the tradition of reward or punishment at death-

"But man dieth and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost (gava-expires), and where is he?

"As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayed and drieth up: so man lieth down and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their SLEEP" (Job 14:10-15).

Where is heavenly bliss or torment? He continues-

*"O that Thou wouldest hide me in **sheol**, that Thou wouldest keep me secret, until Thy wrath be passed, that Thou wouldest appoint me a set time and remember me!"*

In his affliction, he looked forward to the unconscious, peaceful rest in **sheol** until the day of resurrection and judgment. He had no illusions about **sheol** or hell being a place of fiery torment. He knew that there the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest, they lie still and are quiet together, for he says (Job 3:11-19)-

*"Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not expire (**gava**) when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? Or why the breasts that I should suck?*

"For now should I have lain still and been quiet. I should have slept, then had I been at rest, with kings and counselors of the earth, which build desolate places for themselves: or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver:

"Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been: as infants which never saw light.

"There the wicked cease from troubling and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, the servant is free from his master."

Such is the great silent congregation of the dead, all together in one sleeping host: kings, counselors, princes. still born infants, the wicked, the weary, the prisoners, the small, the great, the servant and the master. And of them all the preacher says (Ecc. 9:5)-

"The living know that they shall die, but THE DEAD KNOW NOT ANYTHING."

"In death there is no remembrance of Thee" (Psa. 6:5).

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psa. 115:17).

As to any part of man continuing in consciousness after death, the Scriptures rule out any such theory.

All the terms that are used in Hebrew to define the element of life or spirit or breath in man are similarly employed with respect to animals-

Nephesh-"soul, life, body, or person "; Chayiah - "life abstractly considered"; nephesh chayiah-"living soul or creatures"; ruach-"breath or spirit"; and neshamah-"breath."

All these terms are applied to animals just as to man. And of both the preacher says (Ecc. **3:19**)-

*"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts . . . as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath (**ruach**)."*

And what is "death" in the **one** case is "death" in the **other**-the opposite of life, the absence of all life, and of all the things that make up life-vitality, action, knowledge, sensation, emotion, consciousness.

Death is darkness. silence, forgetfulness, corruption, dissolution. smoke, ashes, dust, oblivion-

"All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

All through the Scriptures the picture is the same-

*"Man goeth to his long home, the mourners go about the streets ... then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit (**ruach**-breath) shall return to God Who gave it" (Ecc. 12:5-7).*

*"His breath (same word **ruach**) goeth forth, he returneth to his earth: in that very day his thoughts perish" (Ps. 146:4).*

*"Thou takest away their breath (**ruach**) they (the animals-see context) die, and return to their dust (Ps. 104:29).*

We know the common, simple meaning of death. We use the word without any difficulty, and we use it for animals just the same as for humans.

Again Paul, when comforting the Thessalonians concerning those who had died, does not say that they are in heaven in bliss and full consciousness as all the clergy tell us, and that the living will soon go to join them there.

He never mentions anything like this, strangely enough, but he says, on the very CONTRARY (1 Thess. 4:13-18), that the dead in Christ are ASLEEP, and that at the coming of Christ they will arise from that condition to join the living in his presence.

And many times we find Jesus, Paul, and others in Scripture. speaking of the dead as being asleep, and not only just asleep. but "asleep **in the dust of the earth**" (Dan. 12:2). How can this possibly be if they are wide awake in heaven or even wider awake in hell?

DEATH, NOT TORTURE, IS THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN

SUCH is death, and the Scriptures declare repeatedly that it is death that is the great penalty for sin. Right from the beginning, death is the sentence, and the wording of that sentence as originally given shows clearly what is meant. God said to Adam as a consequence of his disobedience (Gen. 2:17)-

"Thou shalt surely DIE."

There was no threatened eternal torment, but on the contrary Adam was told (Gen. 3:19)-

"In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread, till thou RETURN UNTO THE GROUND: for out of it wast thou taken: for DUST THOU ART AND UNTO DUST SHALT THOU RETURN."

Paul says, commenting upon the Adamic sentence (Rom. 6:23)-

"The wages of sin is death."

"By one man's offense death reigned"(Rom. 5:17).

And Rom. 6:21-

"The end of those things (the works of the flesh) is death"-not eternal living torment, but DEATH.

"Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth DEATH" (Jam 1:15).

The penalty of death and destruction is both just and merciful, the penalty of eternal torture is neither just nor merciful.

THE WICKED DESTROYED, NOT TORTURED

DEATH, we have seen, is oblivion and destruction, and death is the wages of sin. The term "DESTROY" is often used for the fate of the wicked. After the "few or many stripes" of chastisement, the end of all, is destruction.

The popular conception leaves no room for few or many stripes, for it sweepingly gives all the full maximum penalty possible, eternal agony in hell, millions and millions and millions and millions of years for the sins of so brief a lifetime, and this for the overwhelming majority of mankind, for Jesus says (Matt. 7:13)-

*"Broad is the way that leadeth to **destruction**, and **MANY** there be which go in thereat.*

*"And narrow is the way that leadeth unto **life**, and FEW there be that find it."*

But here again we note that in the Bible it is not eternal torment that is threatened but **destruction**, which is something very different.

In Matt. 25:46, Jesus says the wicked go into everlasting punishment," and what this everlasting punishment consists of is explained by Paul (2 Thess. 1:7-9) where he says that when Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, the wicked shall be "punished with everlasting **destruction**." Again (Heb. 10:27)-

"Judgment and fiery indignation shall devour the adversary."

Jesus says (Matt. 10:28) that God is able to -

"DESTROY both soul and body in Gehenna."

And Paul told the Philippians (3:19) regarding the fleshly-minded- *"Their end is destruction."*

Peter uses as strong a word as possible when he says (2 Pet. 2:12)-

*"These, as natural brute beasts ... shall **utterly perish** in their own corruption."*

David declares (Psa. 37:20)- *"The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away."*

And Malachi 4:1-

"For, behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

Psalm 145:20- *"The Lord preserveth all them that love Him, but all the wicked will He destroy."*

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED IS FUTURE

IT will have been noted from many of the foregoing quotations that the judgment and punishment of the wicked is connected with a special day IN THE FUTURE, when Christ will return from heaven.

This is important, for it clearly demonstrates the error of the conception of immediate reward or punishment at death. In Matt. 16:27, Jesus says-

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, THEN shall he reward every man according to his works."

He says in John 5:27-29: *"The Father hath given him (Jesus) authority to execute judgment . . . for the **hour is coming** in the which all that are in the graves*

shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation."

Paul declares (2 Tim. 4:1)- *"He **SHALL** judge the quick and the dead AT HIS APPEARING and his Kingdom."*

And again (1 Cor. 4:5)-*"Judge nothing before the time, UNTIL THE LORD COME, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and THEN shall every man have praise of God."*

And Peter (2 Pet. 3:7) speaks of a FUTURE- *"Day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."*

The word here translated "perdition" is many times translated "destruction." The **future** aspect of this judgment, the fact that it is always connected with the day appointed when Jesus will return from heaven to judge and destroy, should be well noted throughout. Paul says (Acts 17:31)-

"God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained."

Malachi says of the same day, and of the destiny of the wicked (4:1-4)-

"For behold the day COMETH. that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

"The wicked shall be ashes under the soles of the feet of the righteous IN THE DAY that I shall do this, saith the Lord."

Not eternal torture at death, but complete burning destruction in the day of judgment is the consistent scriptural picture.

One of the biggest inconsistencies of the popular belief is the fact that resurrection and judgment at the last day must be either flatly denied, or else it comes after centuries of bliss in heaven or torture in hell.

Where is the necessity or reason for either resurrection or judgment if the dead go to their reward at death? It **would** not only be unnecessary - it would be plain absurdity!

Hell Is the Grave

Eternal Torture of the Wicked False and Unscriptural

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire This is the second death"-Rev. 20:14

PART TWO

WHERE is the necessity or reason for either resurrection or judgment at the return of Christ if the dead go to their reward at death? It would not only be unnecessary-it would be plain absurdity!

RESURRECTION

BUT the Scriptures say there **will** be a resurrection and that it **is** necessary. We find the day of judgment always associated with resurrection of the dead, and we find resurrection from the grave held out as the **only hope of life after death**.

Paul devoted 1st Cor. 15 to refuting the contention that there will be no resurrection. He says (vs. 16-8)-

"If the dead rise not . . . then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

And in v. 32, after describing the perils he encounters, he says-

"What advantages it me if the dead rise not?"

His argument is meaningless if men go to heaven at death for their reward. But **Paul's** whole hope of reward was centered in the resurrection of the last day, as he says in Phil. 3:8-11-

*"I count all things but loss . . . I have suffered the loss of all things . . . if **by any means** I might attain unto the RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD."*

.Jesus said (John 6:39) that all those whom the Father had given him he would-

*"Raise up **at the last day**."*

And in Luke 14:14, he declares that the righteous *"Shall be recompensed AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST."*

And nowhere do we find either reward or punishment promised before then.

HADES

Hades in Greek, as **sheol** in Hebrew, is the general term for the place of the dead. The Greek had another word for "grave" used specifically. This was **mnemcion**, as in- *"Jesus therefore cometh to the grave-mnemeion"* (John 11:38).

"The graves-mnemeion were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matt. 27:52).

Hades appears 11 times in the New Testament, and is always translated "hell" except 1 Cor. 15:55, where it is "grave." This is a quotation from Hos. 13:14, where the original is **sheol**. Acts 2:29-31, where **hades** is used, is also a quotation from the Old Testament (Psa. 16:10) where the original is **sheol**.

So it is definitely established that the Holy Spirit uses the word **hades** as an equivalent for **sheol**. And the Septuagint (Greek translation of old Testament) uses the word **hades** throughout for **sheol**. So whatever **sheol** means, we are to understand of **hades**.

Hades in Greek, has just the same primary meaning as **sheol** in Hebrew and "hell" in English. It is derived, according to the lexicons, from **eidon**, "to see," with the prefix **a**, meaning "not," therefore it means "not seen" or "unseen." All 11 passages where **hades** occurs are consistent with the meaning of **sheol**-the universal hidden resting place of all the dead, and none give any possible suggestion of, or support to, the orthodox ideas of hell, except one, Luke 16:23, the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, which will be examined later.

This is the only instance, of all the 76 occurrences of **sheol** and **hades**, that gives any hint of consciousness or torment, and it **will** be apparent when we examine it that Christ is speaking in parables, and is using a popular superstition to confound its own supporters.

In Rev. 20:13-14, we learn that **hades** ("hell" in our version) is to be "cast into the lake of fire." To the orthodox conception, this presents an absurd paradox. To them, **hades** IS hell, and the lake of fire is hell, therefore hell is going to be cast into hell, and that will be the end of hell-how then can hell be eternal? And what is the hell that hell is cast into in order to destroy hell?

But in the true scriptural picture there is harmony and reason. **Hades** is the grave and the lake of fire is a symbol of everlasting destruction. As the final glorious conclusion, death and the grave, the signs and inseparable accompaniments of this mortal dispensation, are to be abolished, destroyed, consumed. Paul says similarly (1 Cor. 15:26)-

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

When the wicked have all finally been consumed into smoke and ashes, and all of this dying, mortal race have either been immortalized or destroyed, (grave) will have followed all other traces of mortality and evil into eternal oblivion. THIS is **hades** (the grave) being cast into the lake of fire -completely consumed and obliterated.

Paul says later in the same chapter (1 Cor. 15:54)-

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

Jesus said to Peter (Mt. 16:18):

"Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it."

And when he appeared to John in Patmos he said-

"I have the keys of hades and of death" (Rev. 1:18).

Christ's church is never, according to the popular conception, in **hell**, and consequently there would be no point in his having the keys of hell in order to open its gates for them.

But **death** and the **grave** DO claim them, but they do not eternally prevail over them. At his return, he will use these keys, and all whom he calls from the graves will come forth (John 5:28) just as he called Lazarus from the grave and he came forth. To this Paul refers when he says (1 Cor. 15:55-57)-

"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? ...

"Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

To have the keys of death and the grave is to have the power to open its gates and release those held therein. then there will be no more death, no more grave.

GEHENNA

Gehenna appears 12 times, and is always rendered "hell."

It has nothing to do with **sheol** or **hades** and to translate it by the same word as is done in the Common Version is unfaithful and inexcusable.

Gehenna is a proper name, and should be so used. There is no warrant for translating it "hell," just theological bias. It is the name of a place. It appears 13 times in the Old Testament and is always there treated as a proper name of an actual site-the Valley of Hinnom.

And in the New Testament, although truly it is used with a symbolic as well as a literal meaning, still it is on the literal meaning that the symbolic is based, and this cannot be understood if it is falsely translated.

For Jesus' allusions to it to be understood, the facts of the name and place must be known. And one fact we shall find throughout-it was a place of **destruction and corruption, and not of preservation in torment.**

Utter consuming destruction is always the fundamental idea behind this word.

The Greek **Gehenna** is a transliteration of the Hebrew **Gai Hinnom**, meaning "Valley of Hinnom." This valley of Hinnom was the refuse dump of the city of Jerusalem. It can be seen on any map of Jerusalem, curving around the south western corner of the city. The Septuagint translators of the Old Testament into Greek use the word **Gehenna** where "Valley of Hinnom" appears in our version.

Originally, in this valley, there was a place called Topheth, and the history of the valley, as we are interested in it, begins with this place. The word Topheth is generally understood to mean "place of burning," and that is what it was. It was a place where, in the Canaanitish worship, human victims were burnt on an altar or sacrificed on the altar and the bodies then burned. Of King Ahaz it is recorded (**2 Chr. 28:3**)-

"Moreover he burnt incense in the Valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abomination of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel."

The same is recorded of King Manasseh (**2 Chr. 33:6**).

As a result of these practices by the apostate kings of Judah, we find in **2 Kings 23:10** that Josiah, the reformer-

*"Defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the children of Hinnom (**Gai Hinnom - Gehenna**), that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech."*

This defilement by Josiah was the beginning of its use as the repository of the filth of Jerusalem. Here, right up to New Testament times, fires were kept perpetually burning for the consumption of the refuse of the city. The bodies of criminals were often cast into this place, as a final indignity and degradation.

Topheth is mentioned many times in **Jeremiah 19**. The prophet is sent there to prophesy against Jerusalem, and Topheth, the place of refuse and burning, is used as a symbol of destruction and defilement and consuming judgment.

Isaiah uses the same symbol in foretelling the destruction of Assyria. He says (**Isa. 30:33**):

"Tophet is ordained of old; 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."

The use here is both literal and figurative, for while it was actually in this valley that the host of Sennacherib was destroyed, the prophecy obviously refers to the greater complete destruction of the latter day Assyrian power.

In the New Testament the same is true. The literal Gehenna, just outside of Jerusalem, will figure largely as a site of the destructive fiery judgments to which the term is figuratively applied.

Thus the terms Tophet, Hinnom, or Gehenna were used to indicate devouring judgments and the destruction of anything that was cast out as useless and offensive and utterly consumed by corruption and fire.

Christ accordingly used the term of the destiny of the wicked, whom we have seen will be consumed to smoke and ashes by God's fierce anger.

As in the literal all which was rejected, undesirable, and unclean was cast into Gehenna outside the city, so into the consuming lake of fire outside the spiritual new Jerusalem will be cast all who are found unfit for access into the city.

Not one of the 12 references to Gehenna give any hint of sustained torment, but always, in keeping with other references to Tophet and Hinnom, to **burning consumption and destruction.** There is not the slightest support for the popular doctrine in any of the uses of Gehenna.

UNQUENCHABLE FIRE

Unquenched or unquenchable fire neither means everlasting fire nor everlasting torment. Unquenchable fire, as scripturally used, means fire that completely consumes its object and fulfills its purpose of destruction.

Sodom and Gomorrah *"suffered the vengeance of eternal fire"* (Jude 7). It is not still burning.

God warned Israel (Jer. 17:27) that He would-

*"Kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and shall **not be quenched.**"*

The fire was kindled, Jerusalem was burnt, but the fire is not **still burning.** It was not quenched-it was not halted in its purpose.

Isaiah in the last verse of his prophecy, although he does not here mention Topheth or Gehenna, clearly refers to the same final judgment to which they are applied. He says-

*"And they shall go forth, and look upon the **carcases** 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."*

He does not, it is significant to note, speak of living persons in torment, but of **carcases** being consumed by worm and fire.

TARTAROS

The third word in the New Testament translated "hell" in the Common Version is **Tartaros**. This occurs only once, 2 Pet. 2:4-

*"God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to **tartaros**, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."*

To the Greeks, **tartaros** appears to have signified a subterranean prison of dense darkness, or the outer void confines of the earth. And Peter here uses it as synonymous with **hades**. The chains of darkness and the reservation to future judgment are harmonious with this.

This verse is no support for the popular idea, but very much the reverse, for it describes hell as a place of darkness and confinement WAITING FOR judgment - a perfect description of **sheol** or **hades** spiritually understood, but nothing like the orthodox hell.

TWO PLACES APPEAR TO TEACH TORMENT

For this hideous and blasphemous doctrine, there are only two places in all the Bible which could be considered to give it the slightest shadow of support, and both of these upon examination demonstrate the utter baselessness of the belief.

It is almost unbelievable that on the basis of such meager and twisted evidence, orthodox priestcraft should build such a repulsive and repugnant doctrine, in the face of the whole teaching and tenor of Scripture.

One would consider that men would be extremely reluctant to believe such things even on strong evidence, instead of eagerly snatching at isolated straws to support them in the very face of strong evidence. Unfortunately, the men who translated the Scriptures into our tongue were steeped in this error and have colored their translation with it, as we have seen.

No honest and careful study of all the appearances of the words **Sheol**, **Hades** and **Gehenna**, and of the teachings of Scripture on the nature of man and the destiny of the wicked, could possibly produce the lurid nightmare that is the orthodox conception of eternal torments amid the fiery demons of hell.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

First, we ask, is this parable to be taken literally and all the other plain teaching of Scripture rejected upon the strength of it? We must face this issue squarely and choose. The Scriptures say the dead are asleep in the dust of the earth, they know nothing, they will come forth to resurrection and judgment at the last day. We have seen that this is the consistent teaching of the Bible throughout.

Now we must either flatly reject ALL this testimony, or we must regard this story for what it truly and obviously is, a **parable** worded according to the false doctrines of the very class Jesus was addressing-the Pharisees.

As is apparent from the contemporary Jewish historian Josephus, this account of Abraham's bosom, the great gulf, the tormenting flame, was part of the pharisaical tradition by which they made void the Word of God (Mark 7:13), and Jesus was merely confounding them with their own errors and "answering a fool according to his folly" (Pro. 26:5) and "*taking the wise in their own craftiness*" (1 Cor. 3:19).

Compare his treatment of a similar Pharisaic fable (Matt. 12:27) and how he picked it up and turned it against his adversaries-

"If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges."

We are clearly told that Jesus deliberately spoke to them in parables **that they should not understand** (Matt. 13:10-13; Luke 8:10). This parable is in the middle of an obvious chain of other parables, and opens with the same introduction.

Taken literally, it is not in harmony with the orthodox conception of hell that it is claimed to prove. So-called immortal souls according to popular belief, do not possess fingers and eyes and tongues, neither is there visibility and conversation between heaven and hell. Taken literally, it is an absurdity from any point of view.

REV. 20:10 & 14:9-11

The other place used to support the theory of eternal torment is Rev. 20:10-

"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 for ever and ever."

Similarly in Rev. 14:9-11-

"If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, 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. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and

ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receive the mark of his name."

Here then is the whole case for eternal torment-a parable, and a case of obvious symbolism.

We submit that any attempt to take the admittedly symbolic book of Revelation literally to teach doctrines that are at complete variance with the whole tenor of plain Scripture is extremely unsound and unjustified interpretation.

It would not be suggested that the wine of the wrath of God, and the cup of His indignation, and the beast, and the mark on the forehead, and the great city Babylon, all mentioned in these very same verses, are to be taken literally. All these things must be understood in harmony with the first principles of Scripture.

In Rev. 20:14 we have death and hell cast into this same lake of fire. Can death be literally cast anywhere? Is hell cast into hell? To childishly take an isolated part of this symbolism to bolster unscriptural notions is not the course of honesty or wisdom.

The plain scriptural teaching on the state of the dead and the destiny of the wicked is too clear and repeated to give any excuse for false doctrines to be built on such passages as these.

And it could be mentioned in passing that the expression here translated "for ever and ever" does not in the Greek carry the same unlimited sense as the English, and must be understood in relation to the matter involved.

On the basis of all the foregoing, we conclude without doubt that HELL, as scripturally understood, is the grave, the silent, dark, unseen resting place of ALL the sleeping dead, the land of oblivion and forgetfulness- not the eternal, flaming torture - chamber of orthodox superstition.

-G.V.G.¹

¹ [Bereans - earlier than 1970](#). (n.d.).