

# ***The Truth About Hell***

## **The Wages of Sin**

***“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” —Romans 6:23***

Recent comments by Pope Francis regarding the subject of Hell have brought this topic to mind afresh. Is it a literal place where sinners are tormented forever? Or is it the condition of death itself, which the Bible refers to as a “sleep”?

The Bible clearly teaches that by divine decree there is an adequate yet just punishment for sin. What is the nature of this punishment? Our text declares that the “wages” of sin is death, and one might think that such a statement of fact would settle the question in the minds of all; but there are differing views as to what the Bible means by “death.”

We all realize, of course, that the Bible was not written in the English language, and that the versions we use are translations from the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and the Greek of the New Testament. There was a time when this presented a real barrier to critical Bible study on the part of any except those conversant with the Hebrew and Greek languages. But now Hebrew and Greek concordances of the Bible are available, in print and electronic versions, in which can be found the true meaning of the original words used in any text on which there may be a variance of opinion. This is a great help.

It is also important to realize that the Lord often speaks to his people in pictorial, or symbolic language. Many of God’s most precious promises are presented in picture form, as for example, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”—Ps. 23:1,2

Likewise, when the Scriptures describe the “wages of sin,” pictorial language is sometimes employed. If we fail to take this into consideration we cannot hope to find and appreciate the harmonious testimony of the Word on this important topic.

The word “hell” is used many times in both the Old and New Testaments, and on occasions the expression, “hellfire.” The Bible also speaks of a “lake of fire,” and of “everlasting fire.” This language is related to the punishment for sin, and regardless of our individual views on the subject, must be taken into consideration if we are to attain an accurate understanding of what the Bible means when it tells us that “the wages of sin is death.”

The first human sin recorded in the Bible was the one which caused the death penalty to be imposed upon Adam and Eve. They had been forewarned as to the result of disobedience—“Thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) After they disobeyed, the penalty fell upon them: “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) No explanation is given as to what it would mean for them to die; no hint, that is, that some part of them would not die, but would continue to live and suffer after the body died.

While there are many symbolic expressions used in the Bible, death, the punishment for sin, does not seem to be one of them. Death and life are presented as opposites. “The wages of sin is

death,” but the “gift of God,” Paul wrote, is “eternal life.” To us it seems essential that in our search for the truth we should be guided by this basic and clearly stated fact. We should recognize, in other words, that whatever symbols the Lord may use to illustrate the idea of death, they must be interpreted in harmony with this fundamental truth of God’s Word.

There are other non-symbolic expressions used in the Bible to describe the divine punishment for sin. They are synonymous with the word death. One of these is “perish.” John wrote, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

The word “destroy” is also used to describe death. Jesus said, “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28) We all know what is meant by the destruction of the body, and here Jesus tells us that not only the body, but the soul, as well, is destroyed in “hell.”

Taking these plain statements of the Bible into consideration, the pattern of truth which appears is that through sin the human race lost the opportunity of continuing to live, hence has been going into death; that God in his love sent Jesus to redeem the race, and that in the resurrection all will be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to live forever. We believe that the Bible’s testimony on the subject of hell will be found to be in harmony with these plainly stated truths concerning the “wages of sin” and “gift of God.”

## “Hell” in the Old Testament

Our English word “hell” appears in the Old Testament Scriptures thirty-one times. It is of Old English usage but like many other English words, through the years it has taken on a radical change of meaning. Originally it simply meant to conceal, to hide, to cover; hence it was properly descriptive of any concealed, hidden, or covered place. In Old English literature may be found references to the helling of potatoes—that is, putting them into pits—and of the helling of a house, meaning to cover it with a thatched roof.

The word hell was therefore properly used by the translators as synonymous with the words “grave” and “pit” to translate the Hebrew word *sheol*—the only word in the Old Testament that is translated hell in any English Version of the Bible. It is interesting to observe in comparing these various translations of the same Hebrew word—as they appear in the King James Version of the Bible—that as a rule the word hell is given when the text applies to wicked people, while the words grave or pit are used if righteous persons are involved. Thus the reader is led to an entirely wrong conclusion concerning the death state of the two classes.

The translators of the Revised Version Bible did a little better in that they left *sheol* untranslated, giving the reader an opportunity to draw his own conclusion as to the meaning of the text. This was being only partially helpful, for had they given a correct and consistent translation in every instance, the truth concerning hell would have been discerned—readers would have known that it was not a place of torment.

The Hebrew word *sheol* appears in the Old Testament in all sixty-five times, and in order that no doubts be left in the mind of anyone as to the meaning the Lord intended to convey by its use, we will examine all sixty-five passages in which it is found. This is a serious subject. The torment theory has been believed by millions. If it is true it should be widely preached. Certainly it behoves all of us to determine beyond any possible question just what the Bible does say on the subject.

The word *sheol* was first used in the Old Testament by the good patriarch, Jacob. Through the treachery of his sons who, because of their jealousy, sold their young brother, Joseph, into slavery in Egypt and induced their father to believe that he had been slain by wild beasts, he became broken-hearted, and in his anguish said, "I will go down into the grave [*sheol*] unto my son mourning." (Gen. 37:35) No student of the Bible has ever supposed that Jacob expected to go to a place of torment when he died, yet from his own words he did expect to go to *sheol*.

Later Jacob expressed a similar thought in connection with the possible loss of his son Benjamin, explaining that if he were taken to Egypt and did not return, it would bring down his "gray hairs with sorrow to the grave [*sheol*]." (Gen. 43:38) The fear that he would lose Benjamin, and thus be caused to mourn the rest of his life, is repeated twice by Jacob's son Judah in Genesis 44:29 and 31. In both these instances the translators have also given us the word "grave." Apparently they did not like to send Jacob to hell, for in view of the meaning which has been given to the word hell, it would have raised too many questions in the minds of Bible students.

The next time the word *sheol* appears in the Old Testament, the translators felt justified in translating it hell for it is used in association with the wrath of God. Here the Lord speaks through Moses, and says, "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell [*sheol*]." (Deut. 32:22) This is a highly symbolic phrase, descriptive of the punishment that was to come upon the nation of Israel, denoting the utter ruin of the nation, when, as Paul expresses it in the New Testament, "wrath to the uttermost" would come upon the nation. Leeser, a noted translator of the Old Testament, translates the expression the "lowest deep," and the British revisors made it read "lowest pit."

The prophetess, Hannah, next uses the word *sheol*, and in a very revealing statement of fact. Extolling the works of God, she said, "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave [*sheol*], and bringeth up." (I Sam. 2:6) One point in this statement precluded the possibility of using the word hell, with its distorted meaning, to translate *sheol*; namely, that the Lord will bring up from *sheol* those who go there. This would completely upset the theology concerning hell which insists that it is a place from which there can be no return, and where the victims suffer forever.

But how beautiful is the thought when understood in the light of God's great plan of salvation! "The Lord killeth," the text states. This began in the Garden of Eden when our first parents were sentenced to death because of their sin—"The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23) But Jesus died to redeem the human race from death, and because of this, the people are to be restored, that is, brought back from *sheol*. Moses, in his prayer, expresses the same thought in slightly different language, saying of the Creator, "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men." (Psa. 90:3) Paul confirms this viewpoint and shows that the promised restoration will be through Christ, saying, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:22

In I Kings 2:6,9 the word *sheol* appears twice, and both times is translated "grave." The passage is part of a charge of King David to his son, and successor, Solomon. It concerns the attitude Solomon should take toward a certain one who had dealt unjustly with David, and reads, "Let not his hoar head go down to the grave [*sheol*] in peace. . . . His hoar head bring thou down to the grave [*sheol*] with blood." By no stretch of the imagination is it possible to read the idea of torment into this passage. *Sheol* is here used, as always, to denote the death condition.

## “Sheol” in the Book of Job

In the Book of Job the word *sheol* appears eight times. Twice it is translated “hell,” five times “grave,” and once, “pit.” In view of such inconsistency, is it any wonder that the truth concerning hell has been kept from the public?

Job 7:9 reads, “As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away; so he that goeth down to the grave [*sheol*] shall come up no more.” Here the translators must have been tempted to use the word hell, for, on the surface at least, it would tend to support the theory that those who go to hell never return. They were obliged to use the word grave, however, because Job was speaking of himself, and they feared to give the impression that one of whom it was written that he was “perfect and upright,” who “feared God, and eschewed evil,” had gone to a place of eternal torture.—Job 1:1

Nor can this text be used to prove that there will be no resurrection of the dead. In the passage Job is merely comparing his restless nights of suffering, followed as they were by equally unhappy days of distress, with the time when he would be resting in *sheol*, a rest that would be unbroken by the pains of a diseased and dying body.

Job 11:8 reads, “It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell [*sheol*]; what canst thou know?” These are the words of Zophar, one of Job’s “comforters.” He is referring to the wisdom of God and using the best illustrations he could think of to convey the thought of its being unlimited. Both the heavens and *sheol* are used pictorially in this passage, and certainly no suggestion is given that *sheol* is a place of torment.

The next use of the word *sheol* in this book is a most interesting one. Job’s suffering became unbearable, and while he did not deny God, he did pray to the Lord to let him die; and his use of language in the prayer is most revealing. We quote: “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave [*sheol*], that thou wouldest keep me in secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!”—Job 14:13

According to the view originating in the Dark Ages, *sheol*, the Bible hell, was supposed to be a place where God visits his wrath upon sinners; but here we have Job, a righteous servant of God, praying to go to hell to escape God’s wrath. How different is the Word of God from the teachings of the creeds! The wrath of God from which Job asked to escape by going to *sheol* is the manifestation of his disfavor toward the human race because of sin. It began in Eden in the pronouncement of the death sentence upon our first parents, and all the pain and sorrow in the world since have been incident thereto.

But Job, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, looked forward to a time when God’s wrath would be past, when, according to the Book of Revelation, there would be no more “curse.” (Rev. 22:3) With this hope in mind, he simply asked God to allow him to fall asleep in death—to go into *sheol*—until it was the due time for divine love to be manifested in the restoration of the dying race. Then, as Job expressed it, he would hear the Lord call him forth from death.—Job 14:15

“If I wait,” declares Job in a later statement of his outlook as a sick and dying man, “the grave [*sheol*] is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.” (Job 17:13) There is certainly no support for the torment theory in this text.

In the last verse of chapter seventeen, Job declares, “They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust.” The “they” referred to here, and with which Job declares he would rest together in the dust, are “corruption” and the “worm.” These, he says, were his father and his mother. In the use of this language, Job is simply emphasizing that with the coming of

death, the disease that was preying upon him would also cease. There is no thought here of eternal torture in a hell of fire and brimstone.

Speaking of the experience of many of the wicked, Job says, “They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave [*sheol*].” (Job 12:13) In the preceding verses, Job is telling of the boast of the wicked—and what is, as a matter of fact, often their experience—that they fare well and enjoy the good things in life. In the verse quoted, he points out that often the wicked continue to enjoy the supposedly good things of life right to the end, and then suddenly, without suffering, fall asleep in death go down to *sheol*.

This viewpoint, of course, is true only during the reign of sin—during this time when God is permitting evil for a wise purpose, the time referred to by the Prophet Malachi when we “call the proud happy,” and when those who “work wickedness are set up,” and they that “tempt God are even delivered.” (Mal. 3:15) It will be different when the kingdom of Christ is in full control of the affairs of men, for then the righteous will flourish. (Psa. 72:7) But the main point is that this use of the word *sheol* by Job does not in any way indicate that it is a place of torture.

“Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave [*sheol*] those which have sinned.” (Job 24:19) What happens to water under the heat of the sun is certainly not a very good illustration of eternal torture, but it does, even as Job here indicates, serve well to illustrate the outworking of the penalty of death upon sinners.

The translators have given us the word hell in translating Job’s last use of the term *sheol*. We quote: “Hell [*sheol*] is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.” (Job 26:6) There is no support here for the torment theory; rather, the reverse, for *sheol* is shown to be synonymous with destruction. In this statement, Job is describing, symbolically, the unlimited wisdom and power of the Creator.

## “Sheol” in the Book of Psalms

The Hebrew word *sheol* appears in the Book of Psalms fifteen times. It is translated hell seven times, and grave eight times. There is no valid reason at all why it should not have been translated the same in every instance. Had this been done, much would have been accomplished in freeing the minds of the public from the Dark Age blasphemy against the glorious name of our loving God. These uses of the word *sheol* in the Book of Psalms are as follows:

“For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave [*sheol*] who shall give thee thanks?” (Psalm 6:5) What a clear and positive statement we here have to prove that those in *sheol* are unconscious! The reference is to the righteous who, being always glad to praise God while they are alive, would be glad to give thanks to him after they die were it possible to do so; but it is not, for they remain asleep in death until the resurrection.

“The wicked shall be [re] turned into hell [*sheol*], and all the nations that forget God.” (Psalm 9:17) The word “turned” is here a translation of the Hebrew word *shuwb*, which is properly translated returned. The message of this psalm applies to the period of Christ’s reign, during which the Lord will “judge the world in righteousness.” (Verse 8) It will be then that the Lord will be a “refuge for the oppressed.” (Verse 9) “The Lord will then be known by the judgment which he executeth.”—Verse 16

Revelation 20:7-9 informs us that the people of the nations who fail to obey the laws of Christ’s kingdom are to be destroyed by the direct judgments of God; and it is evidently to this that Psalm 9:17 refers. Hence we can see the appropriateness of the use of the Hebrew word *shuwb*, meaning

returned. These wicked nations, having been awakened from the sleep of death and given a full opportunity to obey the laws of the kingdom and live, will be “returned” into *sheol*, the Bible hell—not a place of torment, but the condition of death, oblivion, for ultimately “all the wicked will God destroy.”—Psalm 145:20

“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*sheol*]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” (Psalm 16:10) The Apostle Peter quoted this text during the course of his Pentecostal Sermon and explained that it applies to Jesus—that it was Jesus’ soul that was not left in *sheol*. (Acts 2:27-32) Thus we have an irrefutable proof that *sheol* is not a place of hell-fire and torment, for surely no one could think of Jesus going to such a place when he died.

The translators must have known that the “Holy One” of this text was Jesus, yet they used the word hell to describe his condition in death, despite the fact that in most other instances where the righteous were concerned they have translated *sheol* by the word grave or pit. The reason for this is obvious, for they were caught in a dilemma by the fact that it is Jesus’ soul that is said to be in *sheol*. Had they used the word grave, they would have been admitting that Jesus’ soul was in the grave, in oblivion; so, knowing that in the minds of the average reader hell was at least a place of life, they used it, hoping perhaps no one would inquire too diligently as to why Jesus was in hell, or just what his experience there might have been.

To admit, through a translation, that Jesus’ soul was in the grave, the state of death, would have disproved another of the Dark Age dogmas; namely, the erroneous theory of the immortality of the soul. Actually, Jesus’ soul did go into death, into *sheol*. The Prophet Isaiah writes concerning him that “he hath poured out his soul unto death”; his soul was made “an offering for sin.” (Isa. 53:12,10) It was essential that Jesus thus give his life, his soul, in order for the human race to be redeemed from death. It was because Jesus took the sinner’s place in *sheol*, in death, that an will be awakened from death and given an opportunity to live forever—“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:22

“The sorrows of hell [*sheol*] compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.” (Psalm 18:5) Here, although the text applies to David, a servant of God, the translators tried hard to make it appear that there are sorrows in *sheol*. However, the Hebrew word which they have translated “sorrows” simply means a twisted rope, or a noose. The marginal reference makes it “cords.” Leeser renders the expression; “The bonds of death [*sheol*] encompassed me.” It is a highly figurative expression of deep anguish and fear of death. By no stretch of the imagination can it be made to mean that there is torment in *sheol*.

“O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave [*sheol*]; thou has kept me alive.” (Psalm 30:3) This is a prayer of thanksgiving for recovery from a severe illness which threatened death. *Sheol* is here employed by the psalmist as a synonym for death.

“Let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave [*sheol*]. Let the lying lips be put to silence.” (Psalm 31:17,18) Here is an instance where the translators have given us the word grave to translate *sheol* when the reference is to the wicked. Doubtless, as in so many other places, they would like to have used the word hell instead of grave, but to do so would have revealed that the wicked are silent in the Bible hell, and this would have been quite contrary to credal theology, which pictures them as almost constantly shrieking with pain and cursing God.

“Like sheep they are laid in the grave [*sheol*]; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their strength [margin] shall consume, the grave [*sheol*] being an habitation to every one of them [margin]. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave [*sheol*].” (Psalm 49:14,15) In view of the erroneous meaning attached to the

word hell, the translators found it impossible to employ it in this text as a translation of *sheol* because it states that human beings are laid therein “like sheep.” They realized that even an unenlightened public would know that sheep do not go to a place of torment when they die.

In passing it is well to note a fact, borne out by this text, that *sheol* is not literally a burial place in the ground, for sheep are not ordinarily thus buried. The Hebrew word *geber* is the one denoting literally the grave, while *sheol* is a condition, the condition of death, oblivion. Sheep do go into this condition when they die, and remain there, but human beings are to be restored to life in the resurrection.

The text under consideration also implies strongly, what is elsewhere in the Scriptures definitely promised; namely, resurrection for all mankind, for David says that the “upright shall have dominion over them in the morning”—that is, the morning of the millennial age. In Romans 14 :9 the Apostle Paul explains that because Jesus died for the people, and was raised from the dead, he now is the Lord, or Ruler, over both the dead and the living. The church will share this dominion with him, and in the exercise of their power and authority during the Millennium, will restore all the willing and obedient to life everlasting. They will have dominion over them to bless, not to torment.

“Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell [*sheol*]: for wickedness is in their dwellings.” (Psalm 55:15) Some, in the reading this text, and supposing that the “hell” mentioned was a place of torment, have wondered how David, a man after God’s own heart, could be so cruel as to pray for his enemies to go to such a place. But when we realize that *sheol*—the word here translated hell—is simply oblivion, the absence of life, then all is clear, for David’s prayer is thus seen to be in harmony with the law of God which states that the “wages of sin is death.”—Rom. 6:23

“Great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell [*sheol*].” (Psalm 86:13) Here the translators were confronted with the choice of putting the psalmist’s soul in the grave—had he not been delivered from death—or let the reader wonder why the soul of a servant of God should go to “hell” in the event of death. They chose the latter, for otherwise they would have proved by their translation that human souls are not immortal. The text actually does prove this fact, for *sheol* is the state of death, oblivion. The expression “lowest hell” (*sheol*) is poetic in nature, signifying an eternity of death except for the mercy and grace of God.

“My soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave [*sheol*].” (Psalm 88:3) Here the Psalmist clearly indicates that he expected to go into the Bible hell when he died, but the import of his statement is kept from the reader by the use of the word grave as a translation of *sheol*.

“What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand [power] of the grave [*sheol*]?” (Psalm 89:48) Here it is as clear as language can state it that *sheol* is the state of death. And the translators had no alternative but to use the word grave even though the text emphasizes a known fact, that no member of the fallen race can keep from dying, that all souls go down into death. They could not use the word hell in this instance, for the claim is that by living righteous lives people can indeed keep their souls from going to “hell.” How plain it is from this text that *sheol*, the Bible hell, is not a place of torment!

“The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell [*sheol*] gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.” (Psalm 116:3) *Sheol* in this text, as elsewhere, simply signifies the condition of death, and the psalmist is speaking of the suffering and pain associated with the dying process as the “pains of *sheol*,” that is, the pains which lead to death. It is a poetic expression, the meaning of which is clearly discernible.

“Whither shall I go from Thy spirit [power]? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell [*sheol*] behold, Thou art there.” (Psalm 139:7,8) According to the teachings of the Dark Ages respecting hell, this text would indicate that God is a resident of that awful torture chamber. But how reasonable is the text when we view it in the light of the real meaning of *sheol*, the Bible hell. The psalmist is merely reminding us that there is no place, or no situation in the whole universe, that is beyond the reach of divine power, that even those who have gone down into death, into *sheol*, oblivion, are not beyond his reach. This coincides perfectly with the many promises of the Scriptures which assure us that divine power will be used to restore the dead to life.

“Our bones are scattered at the grave’s [*sheol*] mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.” (Psalm 141:7) Here again, *sheol* denoting the death condition, is used in a poetic sense; and while the full meaning of the text is somewhat obscure, it certainly has nothing in it to indicate that *sheol* is a place of torment.

Thus we find that throughout the Book of Psalms the use of the word *sheol* consistently denotes the death state, or condition, and never a place of torment.

### **“Sheol” in the Book of Solomon**

Now let us go on to examine the use of the word in the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. Solomon was noted for his great wisdom; and, besides, he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. How did he use the word *sheol*?

“Let us swallow them up alive as the grave [*sheol*].” (Prov. 1:12) These are suggested as the enticing words of criminals addressed to one whom they desire to join them in their murderous assault upon victims they wish to rob. It is a description of the sudden death usually inflicted under such circumstances. No thought of torment can be read into the passage.

“Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell [*sheol*].” (Prov. 5:5) This text describes the ways of an evil woman, and to what they lead. Because an evil person is so manifestly involved, the translators have given us the word hell; whereas in the text considered foregoing (Prov. 1:12), because it is the victims of evil persons that go to *sheol* and not the evil persons themselves, grave is given as the translation. No wonder the public has been misled into believing that the wicked go to a different place when they die than do the righteous.

“Her house is the way to hell [*sheol*], going down to the chambers of death.” (Prov. 7:27) In view of the distorted meaning which became attached to the word hell, it would seem very logical to believe that the house of an evil woman is the way to hell, and the average reader might not notice the explanatory phrase telling us what *sheol*, or hell, really is; namely, that it is the “chambers of death.”

“Her guests are in the depths of hell [*sheol*].” (Prov. 9:18) Here the translators, in their zeal to associate a harlot and her friends with a place of torment, have overstepped themselves in the use of the word hell to translate *sheol*, for they put the harlot’s guests in hell before they die. But there is no inconsistency in the text when we realize that *sheol* means the state of death, for the Scriptures represent all sinners as being dead in trespasses and sins.

“Hell [*sheol*] and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?” (Prov. 15:11) There is no thought of torment in this use of the word *sheol*, even though the translators have given us the word hell, for it is here associated with destruction. *Sheol* and destruction are in reality synonymous.



“The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell [*sheol*] beneath.” (Prov. 15:24) The translators very nearly made this text support the idea that the righteous go up to heaven when they die, and sinners go down to hell. But, of course, their effort fall short of doing this once we realize that it is the word *sheol* which they have translated hell. The revised Version translates the passage thus: “To the wise the way of life goeth upward that he may depart from *sheol* [margin, the grave] beneath.”

The thought of the text is that the path of life for the wise is an upward one toward righteousness; and for such there is a promise of deliverance from the power of *sheol*, a deliverance through the power of the resurrection. This hope of deliverance for those who walk uprightly goes beyond the mere awakening from the sleep of death which will come to all. For the righteous of ancient times it will mean a “better resurrection,” and for the followers of the Master now, the “first resurrection.” Over such “the second death” will have “no power.” The “unjust” who are awakened from sleep of death will have to walk up the “highway” to holiness and thus prove worthy of everlasting deliverance from *sheol*, death.—Heb. 11:35,39,40; Rev. 20:6; Acts 24:15; Isa. 35:8-10

“Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell [*sheol*].” (Prov. 23:14) Keeping in mind the true significance of the word *sheol*, that it signifies the death condition, the meaning of this text is clear. It teaches that by properly training a child to obey the laws of God and to respect the rights of those with whom he is associated, his life, his soul, will be prolonged, or kept from going into premature death, here described by the word *sheol*.

“Hell [*sheol*] and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.” (Prov. 27:20) Here, again, *sheol* is associated with destruction. Instead of this text emphasizing that “hell” is so large that there is no end to its capacity, thus implying a threat to sinners, it simply denotes that there is no limit to the capacity of death, as it is a condition, not a place.

“There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: The grave [*sheol*]; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.” (Prov. 30:15,16) The meaning of this text with relation to *sheol* is the same as that of the preceding one; namely, that death, as a condition, can never be filled: It does not, even in the remotest sense, lend color to the idea of torment after death.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [*sheol*], whither thou goest.” (Eccles. 9:10) This is a most positive statement respecting *sheol*, the Bible hell, and the language used describes beyond any question of doubt a condition of unconsciousness.

“Jealousy is cruel as the grave [*sheol*].” (Song of Sol. 8:6) Here the death state, oblivion, is represented as the very personification of relentlessness. It swallows up the entire human family, making no exception, either of character or condition.

## “Sheol” in Isaiah’s Prophecy

Isaiah was one of the outstanding prophets of the Old Testament, and the word *sheol* appears nine times in the book which bears his name. These are as follows:

“Therefore hell [*sheol*] hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure.” (Isa. 5:14) The prophet here uses the word *sheol* to describe the loss of prestige, the ignominy, the dishonor which had come upon Israel. They had become as though dead, they had passed into

oblivion in large numbers. The passage has no reference to a literal grave, and certainly has no reference to a hell of fire.

“Hell [*sheol*] from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming.” (Isa. 14:9) This is highly symbolic language. The context indicates that it applies to “Babylon,” and particularly to “the king of Babylon.” (Verse 4) It could hardly be fulfilled through the overthrow of literal Babylon; so the real application is to mystic Babylon of which there is so much said in the Book of Revelation. Symbolic Babylon is, briefly stated, a great counterfeit system of Christianity, the antichrist. This system is to be destroyed; that is, it will go into oblivion; and the great king of Babylon, Satan, will also finally be destroyed.

“Thy pomp is brought down to the grave [*sheol*].” (Isa. 14:11) This is a continuation of the same symbolic picture as seen in the preceding text. It has no reference whatever to a place of torment.

“Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell [*sheol*], to the sides of the pit.” (Isa. 14:15) This is a reference to “Lucifer,” who, although depicted in this prophecy as the king of Babylon, is quite generally believed to be Satan, the devil. The Scriptures clearly teach that he is to be destroyed.

“Ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell [*sheol*] are we at agreement.” (Isa. 28:15) The reference here is to a class who exercised authority over the professed people of God—“this people which is in Jerusalem.” (Verse 14) The language is, of course, symbolic, but apparently it has reference to dogmas concerning death and hell (*sheol*) which have been laid down by religious rulers. In this same verse and the 17th verse, these “agreements” are referred to as a “refuge of lies.”

Putting the thoughts together, it would seem that the text is calling our attention to the misrepresentations of death and *sheol* which have been foisted upon the people by those who have agreed that death is not really death, that actually “there is no death”; and that *sheol*—the Bible hell—instead of being a condition of sleep in death, is a place of eternal torture.

“Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell [*sheol*] shall not stand.” (Isa. 28:18) Thank God, the time is coming when the truth about hell will become known to the people and they will realize that the true God of heaven is a God of love and mercy, not a cruel demon who planned to torture untold millions of his creatures in a hell of fire and brimstone!

“I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave [*sheol*]: I am deprived of the residue of my years.” (Isa. 38:10) These are the words of the good king of Judah, Hezekiah. By a miracle his life had been unexpectedly prolonged, and in this text he is describing his thoughts during the time of his sickness, when he expected that he would shortly die. The translators were careful not to use the word hell here as a translation of *sheol*, for to do so would have aroused questions in the minds of many readers as to why one so good as Hezekiah should be expecting to go to a place of torment when he died.

“The grave [*sheol*] cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee.” (Isa. 38:18) These are also the words of Hezekiah. He continues to speak of his severe illness, and expresses appreciation that he is still alive. He speaks of death as being synonymous with *sheol*, and says that while the living can praise the Lord, death and *sheol* cannot; meaning, obviously, that those who die and are in *sheol* cannot praise the Lord. Had the translators rendered *sheol* by the word hell in this text, many would have been led to wonder what kind of a place hell might be.

“Thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst debase thyself even unto hell [*sheol*].” (Isa. 57:9) Because the one referred to in this text is said to be debased, the translators used the word

hell, but this does not change the meaning of the word *sheol* which the prophet uses. Actually the text does not refer to death in a literal sense at all. It is a reference to the nation of Israel which is here represented as a woman negligent of her husband, the Lord, and seeking alliance with the kings of the earth. Such actions ultimately led to the death of the nation, and to oblivion so far as recognition by the Lord was concerned.

### **“Sheol” in Other Prophecies**

The Prophet Ezekiel, another of the major prophets of the Old Testament, used the word *sheol* five times; in no instance to describe a place of torment, but always, either literally or symbolically, a condition of oblivion. We note these five uses as follows:

“In the day when he went down to the grave [*sheol*] I caused a mourning. ... I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell [*sheol*]. ... They also went down into hell [*sheol*] with him unto them that be slain with the sword.” (Ezek. 31:15-17) The context here indicates that this text refers to the overthrow of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who, in all probability, is used in this instance as a prototype of Great Babylon of Revelation, which also is to go into oblivion. (Verse 2) The word *sheolis* used in the passage three times. Once it is translated grave, and twice by the English word hell. The fact that the translators used the word grave once in the passage to translate *sheol* would indicate that they must have known it does not refer to a place of torment.

“The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell [*sheol*] with them that help him.” (Ezek. 32:21) The reference here is to the death condition of Egypt as a nation; and various nations which perished prior to Egypt’s fall are represented as speaking from oblivion concerning Egypt. The thought is much the same as when we say that the lessons of history speak to us. Paul speaks of the righteous blood of Abel crying out. (Heb. 11:4) The passage gives no support at all to the torment theory.

“They shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell [*sheol*] with their weapons of war.” (Ezek. 32:27) Here the destruction of other nations is referred to, and these likewise are said to go down to *sheol*, the Old Testament hell. The interesting thing about this text is that weapons of war are also said to go down to *sheol*, here translated hell. We know that weapons of war do not go to a place of torment, but we thank God that they can go into oblivion, and that they will go there as a result of the thousand-year reign of Christ. God promised that this shall be so, that he shall make “wars to cease unto the end of the earth.”—Psalm 46:9

The Prophet Hosea uses the word *sheol* twice, and both times in the same passage, which reads, “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: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”—Hosea 13:14

There is no mistaking the meaning of this text of Scripture. It uses the only word of the Old Testament which is translated hell, and tells us definitely that it shall be destroyed. First, the Lord tells that he proposed to ransom the people from the power of *sheol*, and that he would destroy *sheol* altogether. This is a prophecy of the redemptive work of Christ, showing that through the merit of his shed blood all mankind were to be redeemed from death.

With this redemption accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus, he returns at this second advent to awaken those who sleep in death and to give them an opportunity to live forever. Thus the people are ransomed from the power of *sheol*. While there will undoubtedly be

some at that time who will refuse to accept the gift of life on the terms of belief in Jesus and obedience to the laws of the kingdom, and as a result go into the second death, yet death and oblivion which resulted from the sin of our first parents will be destroyed. This glorious hope is described by the Revelator in the statement, “There shall be no more death.”—Rev. 21:4

“Though they dig into hell [*sheol*], thence shall mine hand [power] take them.” (Amos. 9:2) Here the Lord declares his infinite power, his ability to reach down even into the death condition in order to carry out his purposes toward mankind, and particularly the nation of Israel. God had pronounced certain judgments upon Israel, and the nation could not escape. These, however, were not judgments of eternal torture, for later in the same chapter he declares his purpose to restore the nation to his favor.—Amos. 9:11-15

“Out of the belly of hell [*sheol*] cried I, and thou heardest my voice.” (Jonah 2:2) Jonah here refers to his experience in the stomach of the great fish, and describes his condition there as that of *sheol*. Had he not been delivered, it certainly would have been oblivion for him. Had the ancients understood *sheol* to be a place of torture in fire and brimstone, certainly Jonah would not have used the word with respect to his experience in the belly of the great fish. There would have been no comparison.

“Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell [*sheol*], and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.” (Hab. 2:5) An ambitious and aggressive nation is here referred to, a nation so determined to extend its rule over other nations that it is never satisfied. This unholy grasping for power is compared to the unlimited capacity of death and *sheol*. The thought of torment is in no way suggested in the passage.

This is the last text in the Old Testament in which the word *sheol* appears; and as *sheol* is the only word therein translated hell, it should be clear to every reader that the people of God during ancient times were not taught the doctrine of torture as a penalty for sin.

## “Hades” in the New Testament

“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*hades*], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” (Acts 2:27) We start our examination of what the New Testament says concerning hell with this text because it is a quotation from the Old Testament in which the Greek word *hades* is used by the Apostle Peter to translate the Hebrew word *sheol*. We believe that this inspired translation of *sheol* is definite proof that *hades* of the New Testament has the same meaning as *sheol* of the Old Testament; and that meaning, as we have found, is oblivion, the state of death.

This quotation is from Psalm 16:10, and is a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter quotes it in his Pentecostal sermon and explains that Jesus’ soul, his being, was restored to life—brought back from *sheol*, the Bible hell, at the time of his resurrection. As we have already learned, Jesus went into the Bible hell, the death condition, to redeem those who were in death, and it is this that constitutes our basis of hope in a resurrection of the dead a returning from hell, or the death condition, of all mankind.

Jesus implies this very strongly in Revelation 1:18, where we find him saying, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [*hades*] and of death.” These, of course, are not literal keys, but merely symbols of Jesus’ authority and power to unlock *hades* and set death’s captives free. This right, or authority, is his because of

having died the Just for the unjust, pouring out his soul unto death as the Redeemer of Adam, and through Adam, of the entire human race.

And in keeping with this symbolism of the keys of hell, Jesus speaks of the gates of hell. To Peter he said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [*hades*] shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18) This statement is a reply to Peter’s confession that Jesus was the “Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16) It is this great truth concerning Christ that the Master referred to as the rock upon which his church would be built, not on Peter himself.

The church of Christ is the body of Christ, and the Apostle Paul tells us that Christ, and all those who are baptized into his body as members of his true church, constitute the promised seed of Abraham through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed. (Gal. 3:27-29) The importance of Jesus’ statement, therefore, that the gates of *hades* would not prevail against the church, is seen in its assurance that nothing will prevent the outworking of God’s purpose through the seed of Abraham to bless all the families of the earth.

The families of the earth, all of them from creation to the present time, to whom God’s promises of blessing apply, are in *sheol*, *hades*, the Bible hell. Even the body members of the Christ all down through the Gospel age succumbed to death and went into *hades*. But this does not, and cannot, defeat the divine purposes to bless all the families of the earth through Christ and his church, for Jesus will use the keys of death to unlock the great prison-house and set its captives free. Thus it will be true that the gates of hell will not prevail against God’s purpose through the church. Death’s prisoners will be set free!

It is quite in keeping with this thought that the word *hades* is again used in Revelation 20:13, which reads, “Death and hell [*hades*] delivered up the dead which were in them.” Strange, isn’t it, that anyone should get the thought that those who go to the Bible hell will never return, for here it is definitely stated that hell will deliver up its dead. It will have to, because divine power is to be used to restore the dead to life. In passing it is well to note also that those in hell (*hades*) are said to be dead—hell delivered up the “dead.” Those in hell are not alive and suffering, but are dead; and, as Solomon declares, while “the living know that they shall die,” “the dead know not anything.”—Eccles. 9:5; Job 14:21

In Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15, the wicked Jewish city of Capernaum has a prophecy of destruction uttered against it, and this is described as being brought down to hell (*hades*). While the people of Capernaum were affected by the destruction of the city, the prophecy is against the city itself, and no one has ever claimed that cities go to a place of torment. But Capernaum did go into oblivion, hence into *hades*, the Bible hell.

Another very interesting use of *hades* is found in Revelation 6:8. Here hell (*hades*) is represented as riding on horseback together with death. It would be difficult to imagine the great abyss of torture such as hell was supposed to be, thus riding on a horse’s back. But in the symbology of this passage, no difficulty is encountered when we realize that *hades* and death are practically synonymous, and thus shown together in this graphic picture of destruction stalking through the earth.

## **The Rich Man in Hell**

In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, it is stated of the rich man that “in hell [*hades*]” he lifted up his eyes, “being in torments.” (Luke 16:23) This is the only passage in the Bible in which is suggested the possibility that there is thought, or feeling, in *hades*, or *sheol*. We cannot suppose,

however, that this text is contradictory to the definition of *sheol* given us by the prophet when he declared that there is no knowledge, wisdom, nor device, but only oblivion, in *sheol*. Nor can we suppose that Job made a mistake when he prayed to go to *sheol* in order to escape suffering.

Besides, when we examine the details of the parable of which this statement is a part, we find that it could not possibly be a literal statement of fact. Seizing upon this parable as their best means of proving the torture theory, many have erroneously presented it as proof that the righteous go to heaven when they die, and that the wicked go to a place of eternal torment. Actually, however, the parable says nothing about either the wicked or the righteous, nor does it say anything about heaven.

There is a poor man and a rich man, but there is nothing said about their virtues nor about their sins. They both die. The poor man is carried by the angels to “Abraham’s bosom,” not heaven. Even if this were a literal statement of fact, it would not put the poor man in heaven, because Abraham is not in heaven. We know this because Jesus said, “No man hath ascended up to heaven.”—John 3:13

In death the rich man is said to see the poor man in Abraham’s bosom, and he begs him to send a drop of water to cool his tongue. Abraham’s literal bosom had turned to dust long centuries before this parable was given, hence the expression must be symbolic; and if that is symbolic, the remainder of the account must also be a word-picture of something more than the experience of two men after they died.

We think the most reasonable view as to the meaning of the parable is that these two men represented two groups, or we might say, nations. The rich man, with the various details related concerning him, seems clearly to be a symbol of the Jewish nation, while the poor man is a true representation of the Gentiles and the position they were in at the time the parable was given.

The nation fared sumptuously every day, as the parable states. That is, the promises of God belonged to them, and upon these they were privileged to feast. Their table was laden with these good things from the Word of God. The purple robe of the rich man represented the royal hopes of the nation, and his fine white linen represented the standing of righteousness the nation enjoyed as a result of the typical sacrifices which were made year by year for them. While this righteousness was merely typical of the righteousness enjoyed by spiritual Israel through the blood of Christ, nevertheless, it gave them a standing before God which other nations did not enjoy.

Israel died as a nation, and lost all these special favors of the Lord, but the individuals comprising the nation continued to live, and each successive generation of these throughout the centuries has suffered. They have suffered because of being members of a nation that was dead. See the prophecy of this as recorded in Deuteronomy 32:22.

The poor man—representing the Gentiles—also died to that condition of alienation from God which was theirs prior to the first advent of Christ. Believing Gentiles were carried into Abraham’s bosom; that is, they became the children of Abraham through faith, and inherited the promises of God which were made to and through him. The whole Gentile world—particularly where the Gospel has been at least nominally accepted—has benefited from this great change. Representatives of the dead nation of Israel, from time to time in the past, appealed to the favored Gentile nations for mercy and assistance, but little help was given.

The key that identifies the rich man of the parable is in the statement concerning his five brothers—“They have Moses and the prophets.” This was true only of the Jewish nation. The nation was divided into twelve tribes. Following the Babylonian captivity, it was mostly the

members of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin that returned to Judea, although some of all the tribes returned. It was largely, therefore, the two tribes to whom Jesus ministered, and who would be represented by this rich man of the parable. If this one man represented two tribes, the other ten tribes could be well represented by his five brethren, and the parable shows that they shared the same fate because they had failed to hear Moses and the prophets.

But the parable does not teach that the Jewish nation was to suffer forever. Indeed, there are many prophecies to show that the death of Israel as a nation was to be only temporary, and now these prophecies are being fulfilled. Today, as the restored nation of Israel continues to work out its new destiny in the Promised Land, the flames of persecution are abating. Eventually their eyes of understanding will be opened to recognize Jesus as their Messiah; and by bringing themselves into accord with his righteous kingdom soon to be manifested for the blessing of all nations, they will be completely reinstated into the favor of God and will have the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of peace and everlasting life which will then be made available to all the peoples of the earth.

## Victory Over Hades

In the masterful treatise by the Apostle Paul on the resurrection of the dead, recorded in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, we find the assertion, “O death where is thy sting? O grave [*hades*], where is thy victory?” (Verse 55) The “sting of death is sin,” writes Paul. (Verse 56) Sin fastened itself upon father Adam, and through him the human race was stung to death. But as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so Jesus, the great Sin-bearer for the world will be lifted up so that all can see and know of his saving power. Those who look to him for help will live forever. (John 3:14,15) Then the temporary victory of *hades*, the death condition, will be taken away; for all who are in hell are to be awakened from the sleep of death, and given an opportunity to look unto Jesus and live.

Then *hades*, or hell, is to be destroyed. We are assured of this in the passage where the world hell appears in the Bible for the last time; namely, Revelation 20:14. When we examined the use of the *sheol* in the Old Testament, which has the same meaning as *hades* of the New Testament, we found that according to Hosea 13:14, it was God’s purpose to destroy the death condition which it describes. And now, in this very last use of the word *hades* in the Bible, we discover that the Lord is again assuring us of this same blessed fact.

Here, however, the destruction of the Bible hell is made even more definite, for the Lord illustrates the fact by using the symbol of fire. We read, “And death and hell [*hades*] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” Adam and his race have died the first death; but from this death they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. The Scriptures speak of the “second death,” and it is here symbolized by a lake of fire. All incorrigible sinners will be destroyed in the second death, as will also the devil himself. And in this text we are assured that even hell, or the death condition, will be destroyed. It is because of this fact, in Revelation 21:4, we read, “there shall be no more death.”

## Gehenna and Unquenchable Fire

There is another Greek word in the New Testament that is translated “hell,” and with which the word fire is sometimes associated—that word is *Gehenna*. It is this word that Jesus uses in

Matthew 10:28, which reads, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [*Gehenna*].”

In examining the meaning of this word *Gehenna* the point to which we wish to call attention in the passage just quoted is that it is presented by Jesus as a place, or condition of destruction, not of torment. That which the Lord consigns to *Gehenna* is destroyed, not preserved or tortured. And this is fully in keeping with the significance of the word as it was understood by the Jews of Jesus’ day.

*Gehenna*, literally, was a deep valley, or ravine, just outside the ancient city of Jerusalem which was used as a place for the disposal of the offal of the city. In the Hebrew language it was known as the “Valley of Hinnom.” Fires were kept constantly burning in this valley in order to assure the destruction of everything that was cast into it. Not only, therefore, was *Gehenna* a place of destruction, but that which was destroyed therein was worthless.

In Jesus’ day the people were well acquainted with the purpose for which *Gehenna* was used, and when he employed it as a symbol of the utter destruction of those unworthy of life everlasting, they would be quick to get the force of the illustration. Nor would the idea of torture ever enter into their minds when they heard Jesus use this illustration.

Thus seen, while both *hades* and *Gehenna* represent the death condition, Jesus seems to have used the *Gehenna* symbolism more particularly with respect to those who will prove to be incorrigible, hence unworthy of everlasting life; while the Bible indicates that those who are in *hades* are to be awakened from death, either as members of the church who will come forth in the “first resurrection,” or else as those who come forth to participate in the trial, or judgment, of the millennial age.

Jesus used the word *Gehenna* in his Sermon on the Mount, saying, “Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell [*Gehenna*] fire.” (Matt. 5:22) The literal Valley of Hinnom, or *Gehenna*, was not far distant from where Jesus uttered these words, and those who heard them would not think for a moment that he was teaching that all who do not accept him before they die were to be tortured forever. And no one reading his words today would ever think of such an absurd interpretation were it not for the background of distorted and god-dishonoring teachings which have come to us from the Dark Ages.

While the literal *Gehenna* of Jesus’ day was used for the destruction of the city’s garbage, it is said that the carcasses of dead animals were also often destroyed therein. It is also said that the dead bodies of human beings—criminals—whom the Jews judged as unworthy of a resurrection, were also destroyed in *Gehenna*. In view of this, those to whom Jesus ministered would be quick to catch the thought of eternal destruction when he used *Gehenna* as a symbol of the punishment of the wicked.

Twice more Jesus used the Word *Gehenna* in his Sermon on the Mount. We quote: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell [*Gehenna*]. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell [*Gehenna*].”—Matt. 5:29,30

So far as we are aware, no one has ever claimed that the human body of a sinner is cast into a place of torment. Certainly we all know that the body returns to the dust, yet some try to use this passage to support their torment theory. These words of the Master should readily be recognized



as highly symbolic. No one supposes that he had any intention of teaching that in order to escape eternal torture it would be necessary for one literally to pluck out an eye, or cut off a hand. Rather, he is using these as symbols of those things which might seem very precious to us as Christians; but, if they should stand in the way of our gaining eternal life in the kingdom, it would be better to give them up as mere temporal advantages in order to make sure of the eternal glories.

In the illustration, Jesus uses *Gehenna* as a symbol of the utter loss that would be experienced by those who, after tasting of “the good word of God,” and being “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” and of “the powers of the world to come,” should through unfaithfulness, do despite to the grace of God. (Heb. 6:4,5) But no suggestion of torment is in any way implied by the lesson.

In Matthew 18:8,9, Jesus presents a lesson identical in meaning with the one he gave in his Sermon on the Mount. Once in this passage he speaks of “*Gehenna* fire,” and refers to the same thing as “everlasting fire.” Since fire is a symbol of destruction, and quite properly so because of its destructive qualities, the expression “everlasting fire” would simply denote everlasting destruction. Again, no torment is suggested.

In Matthew 23:15 we find the word *Gehenna* used again by the Master. Here he is upbraiding the scribes and Pharisees for their wrong, hypocritical attitude, and tells them that despite their zeal to make converts to the Jewish religion, anyone who was influenced by their teaching was made “twofold more the child of hell [*Gehenna*]” than they were themselves. This is simply the Master’s way of saying to the Pharisees that they were far out of line with the true God of Israel and with his plans, and that those whom they taught would likewise be far afield from the divine arrangements—so far that they would be in danger of not gaining everlasting life at all, unless they changed their position. But even so, there is no threat here of eternal torture, but rather a warning as to the danger of losing the privilege of living everlastingly, that glorious opportunity that was to be provided through the blood of Christ.

In Matthew 23:33, Jesus addresses the scribes and Pharisees again, calling them a “generation of vipers,” and adding, “How can ye escape the damnation [judgment] of hell [*Gehenna*]?” The translators took the opportunity to use the word “damnation” in this text, thinking no doubt, to make the threat of the statement sound more sinister. And if we think of hell erroneously as meaning torture, and couple with it the word damnation, we do have a blistering text.

But the plain facts of the case are quite simple. The Greek word here translated damnation simply means judgment, and hence the condemnation of *Gehenna* would simply be that of eternal oblivion—that which is described in the Book of Revelation as the “second death”—a death from which the Scriptures nowhere promise a resurrection. The Revised Version uses the proper word “judgment” instead of “damnation.”

In Mark 9:43-47 we have a repetition of the lesson which speaks of the advisability of parting with one’s eyes, and feet, and hands, rather than be cast into *Gehenna* fire. In Jesus gave in his Sermon on the Mount, and in which he this passage, however, Jesus intensifies the illustration by speaking of the worms which do not die, and the fires which are not quenched—unquenchable fire.

As we have seen, fires were kept continually burning in *Gehenna*, which at all times assured the destruction of whatever was thrown into the valley. Anything reaching those fires was sure to be destroyed, hence from this standpoint, they were unquenchable. But there was always the possibility that carcasses thrown into the fires of *Gehenna* might lodge on the jagged sides of the ravine and not reach the fires below. These would be destroyed by the ever-present worms which

infest dead bodies thus exposed to the elements. It was to this that Jesus referred as the undying, or ever-present worms.

How absurd, as some have tried to teach, that Jesus is here describing the alleged immortal souls of human beings as worms! In this passage, as in many others of the Bible, it is only because people have erroneous notions in their minds that they see a meaning which was never intended by the Lord. Let us try to comprehend the hideousness of the torment theory, and realize that a God of love would not make such a plan for the punishment even of his enemies. Through Jesus our Heavenly Father teaches us to love our enemies, and certainly he does not want us to believe that he tortures his.

The last use we find of the word *Gehenna* in the Gospels is that of Luke 12:5. Here Jesus tells us that we are to fear him who is able to cast one into hell (*Gehenna*). The construction of the text is very revealing. A man may kill another, but the eternal existence of his victim would not be jeopardized. But those whom the Heavenly Father considers incorrigible, and not worthy of life, are cast into *Gehenna*. This, of course, is not a literal casting into that valley which was located outside of the city of Jerusalem. The thought is, rather, that *Gehenna* is a fitting symbol of the destruction of that which is not worthy of life.

The last, and one of the most interesting uses of the word *Gehenna* in the New Testament is that recorded in James 3:6. Here James tells us that the tongue is set on fire of *Gehenna*. It would be difficult to explain the meaning of this text should we have in mind the traditional misconception of hell. But when we think of *Gehenna* as being a symbol of destruction, it is readily seen that what James means is that the tongue, moved by selfishness and hate, is set on fire or caused to speak, by influences which, if not checked, are sure to lead to death, either of the one whose tongue is thus incited to speak evil, or of those concerning whom he speaks.

And now we have examined every text in the Bible in which the words **sheol**, **hades**, and **gehenna** appear, and we have found that not even once is there justification for supposing that these Hebrew and Greek words which are sometimes translated hell are descriptive of a torture chamber into which God purposes to consign all unbelievers at death.\* Let us then dismiss from our minds this blasphemy against the good name of our loving God, and endeavor to learn more concerning his loving plan to bless all nations during the thousand years of Christ's kingdom.

\* NOTE—The word hell appears one other time in the New Testament; namely, in II Peter 2:4. Here it is a translation of the Greek word *tartaroo*. The text, however, is not discussing the penalty for sin which comes upon human beings, so is not important to our present discussion.

We have found the Scriptures clearly to teach that man was created to live on the earth forever as a human being, that he forfeited this privilege by transgressing God's Law. The Scriptures, nevertheless, teach that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, and that in order to make restoration of the race possible, he died as man's Redeemer.

During this present age, the work of the Lord has been, not to convert all mankind to be followers of the Master, but to call out from the world a people to be associated with him in his kingdom. At the end of the age these are brought forth from *hades* in the "first resurrection," exalted to glory, honor, and immortality to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—Rev. 20:6; Rom. 2:7

In Matthew 25:31-46 is an account of a parable which Jesus gave to his disciples to illustrate the work of the next age—the judgment work, when the Lord will be dealing with all mankind and proving their worthiness or unworthiness of everlasting life. It begins with the time when the "Son of man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him." In the Greek text the term angels

means messengers, and the reference here is to the church—all who have suffered and died following in the Master’s footsteps. Together with him, these will be the judges of the world of mankind—“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” asks Paul.—I Cor. 6:2

There are two other important points in this parable to which we wish to call attention. The first is the reward that is given to those who are represented by the sheep, that is, those who qualify for life under the terms of that judgment-day period. To these the invitation is given, “Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Verse 34) This is the kingdom, or dominion, that was given to our first parents, but which they lost on account of sin. Here we are told that it will be restored at the close of the thousand-year judgment day.

But let us notice also the final disposition of those represented by the goats of the parable; that is, those who prove themselves to be incorrigible sinners. These, it is stated, go away into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Some have seized upon this statement in an effort to prove the torment theory, but no such thought is attached to the text. Fire here, as always in the Bible, is a symbol of destruction, not torment. Everlasting fire would simply be everlasting destruction.

In the last verse (46) of the chapter the same thought is referred to as “everlasting punishment.” Death is the punishment for sin, and eternal death would be everlasting punishment. The thought is made more definite when we examine the Greek word here used, translated “punishment.” It is a word which denotes a “cutting off.” The willfully wicked will be cut off from life, but as the text declares, the righteous of that time will enter into “life eternal.” And to these the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world will be restored. The parable reminds us that the devil and his angels will also then be destroyed.

In Revelation 20:10 Satan is represented as being destroyed in the “lake of fire.” As we have already noted, the lake of fire is a powerful symbol of destruction. Death and the Bible hell are represented as being destroyed therein. The “beast” and the “false prophet” of Revelation are said to be destroyed in the lake of fire. (Rev. 19:20) It is conceded that the “beast” and the “false prophet” are symbolic of corrupt politico-religious systems dominated by Satan. These are to be destroyed preparatory to the full manifestation of the kingdom of Christ.

Revelation 20:10 speaks of the torment of Satan in the “lake of fire,” but as other scriptures declare definitely that he is to be destroyed, this expression must be understood symbolically, even as the lake of fire is itself symbolic. Satan’s torment following his destruction is evidently the everlasting derision that will be heaped upon him in the minds of the people. Even now we speak of not letting people rest after they die; but the thought is not that their rest is actually disturbed, but rather that the living remember and deride them. So it will be with Satan. His course of willful opposition to God and its terrible results, will serve as an everlasting object lesson to all the restored of mankind.

Thus we have found that the entire Bible is in agreement with Paul’s declaration that the “wages of sin is death,” not torment. And how glad we are that an opportunity to escape eternal death has been provided by our loving God through the gift of his Son to be our Redeemer and Savior! Believers during the present age receive life through faith; and while temporarily they fall asleep in death, they will be raised to glory, honor, and immortality in the “first resurrection,” to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—Rev. 20:6

During the thousand years of Christ’s reign all mankind will be given the opportunity to accept God’s loving provision of life through Christ, and those who do accept and obey the laws of the

divine kingdom then in force will be restored to perfection of human life. Instead of sickness and death, there will be health and life, for the promise is that God will “swallow up death in victory” and wipe away tears from all faces.—Isa. 25:8,9

Truly we should rejoice that our God, the God of the Bible, the Creator of heaven and earth, is a God of love. May the length and breadth and height and depth of his love inspire us with a greater desire than ever to serve him, and to make known to all the glories of his character.

For further information on this important topic please see our publication, [Where are the Dead?](#) available at [http://www.bibletoday.com/booklets/ward\\_text.htm](http://www.bibletoday.com/booklets/ward_text.htm)