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Hell

The Truth Shall Set You Free, 1943 ed., p. 90-91

“But just what does the Bible say about torment after death? If you have read earlier chapters of this book, you know that many common beliefs about the dead are false. You know, according to the Bible, that no soul or spirit separates from the body at death and continues conscious existence. Hence, there is no Scriptural foundation for the doctrine of eternal torment after death, for nothing survives that can be subjected to literal torment.”

Happiness - How to Find It, 1980 ed., p. 117

“The immediate future for a person after death is in the grave. The languages in which the Bible was written had words for the place of the dead, mankind’s common grave. In Hebrew it was termed *Sheol*. It was called *Hades* in Greek. These words have been translated in some Bibles by terms such as ‘grave,’ ‘pit’ or ‘hell.’ Regardless of how they are rendered, the meaning of the original-language terms is not a hot place of suffering but is the grave of the unconscious dead.”

(continued)

**You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth,
1982 ed., p. 81**

“Yes, good people go to the Bible hell. For example, the good man Job, who was suffering a great deal, prayed to God: ‘O that in Sheol [grave, *King James Version*; hell, *Douay Version*] you would conceal me, . . . that you would set a time limit for me and remember me!’ (Job 14:13) Now think: If Sheol means a place of fire and torment, would Job wish to go and spend his time there until God remembered him? Clearly, Job wanted to die and go to the grave that his sufferings might end.”

**Reasoning From the Scriptures, 1985 ed., p.
168-169**

“**Definition:** The word ‘hell’ is found in many Bible translations. In the same verses other translations read ‘the grave,’ ‘the world of the dead,’ and so forth. Other Bibles simply transliterate the original-language words that are sometimes rendered ‘hell’; that is, they express them with the letters of our alphabet but leave the words untranslated. What are those words? The Hebrew *she’ohl* and its Greek equivalent *hai’des*, which refer, not to an individual burial place, but to the common grave of dead mankind; also the Greek *ge’en-na*, which is used as a symbol of eternal destruction. However, both in Christendom and in many non-Christian religions it is taught that hell is a place inhabited by demons and where the wicked, after death, are punished (and some believe that this is with torment).”

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the doctrine of hellfire? Are not the horrible inquisitions and blood-spilling crusades of Christendom examples of this?

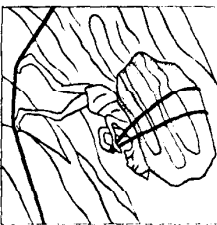
So it should come as no surprise that a growing number of people do not really believe in the existence of a hell of torment



Scenes from Buddhist pictures of hell

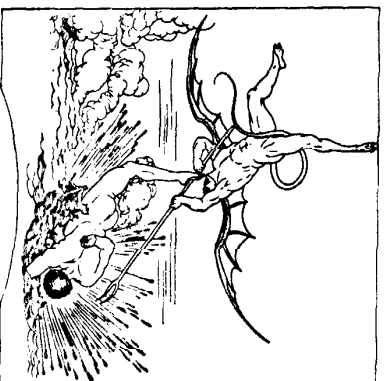
nor do they view its punishments as a deterrent to wrongdoing. Though not having actually disproved this teaching, they are simply not inclined to believe what does not appeal to them as reasonable and true. Still they may be members of a church that teaches this doctrine and, by supporting it, share responsibility for propagating the teaching of hellfire.

But just what does the Bible say about torment after death? If you have read earlier chapters of this book, you know that many common beliefs about the dead are false. You know, according to the Bible, that no soul or spirit separates from the body at death and continues conscious exist-



tence. Hence, there is no Scriptural foundation for the doctrine of eternal torment after death, for nothing survives that can be subjected to literal torment.

What, then, is the place that various Bible translations refer to as "hell"?



Scenes from the "Inferno" of Catholic Dante

"SHEOL" IDENTIFIED

In the Catholic *Douay Version*, the first mention of "hell" is found at Genesis 37:35, which quotes the patriarch Jacob as saying respecting Joseph, whom he believed to be dead: "I will

go down to my son into hell mourning." Clearly Jacob was not expressing the idea of joining his son in a place of torment. Even the footnote on this verse in the *Douay Version* (published by the Douay Bible House, New York, 1941) does not put such an interpretation on the text. It says:

"Into hell. That is, into limbo, the place where the souls of the just were received before the death of



¹⁴ As a soul, Adam, or any of us, could eat, get hungry and grow tired. In the original Hebrew, the Bible says that souls do all these things. (Deuteronomy 23:24; Proverbs 19:15; 25:25) In stating a prohibition that applied to the Israelites regarding work on a certain day, God made clear another important point about the soul, saying: "As for any soul that will do any sort of work on this very day, I must destroy that soul from among his people." (Leviticus 23:30) Hence, the Bible, here and in many other texts, shows that a soul can die.—Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Psalm 33:19.

¹⁵ Knowing such Bible truths can help us to evaluate recent stories about persons who supposedly died (there being no detectable heartbeat or brain activity), but who were revived and thereafter told about having floated outside their body. One possibility is that they may have had hallucinations caused by medication or the brain's oxygen-starved condition. Whether that is the full explanation or not, we know with certainty that no invisible soul left the body.

¹⁶ Also, if the dead are totally unconscious and no "soul" floats off from the body, then there can be no fiery hell awaiting the souls of the wicked, can there? Yet many churches teach that the wicked will be tormented after they die. On learning the truth about the dead, some persons have been justifiably disturbed, asking: "Why did not our religion tell us the truth about the dead?" What is your own reaction?—Compare Jeremiah 7:31.

Can a soul die, and what implications does this have? (14-16)

"It is noteworthy that in the New Testament we do not find hellfire to be a part of the primitive preaching. There are some indications in the New Testament that the ultimate fate of those who refuse God's offer of salvation may be annihilation rather than eternal punishment."—"A Dictionary of Christian Theology," edited by Alan Richardson.

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE DEAD?

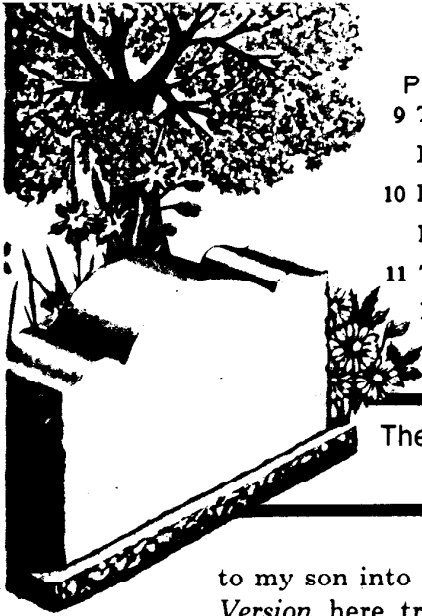
¹⁷ If the only future for persons now living were unconsciousness in death, then death would be an unbeatable enemy. But the Bible shows that it is not.

¹⁸ The immediate future for a person after death is in the grave. The languages in which the Bible was written had words for the place of the dead, mankind's common grave. In Hebrew it was termed *Sheol*. It was called *Hades* in Greek. These words have been translated in some Bibles by terms such as "grave," "pit" or "hell." Regardless of how they are rendered, the meaning of the original-language terms is not a hot place of suffering but is the grave of the unconscious dead. We read:

"All that your hand finds to do, do with your very power, for there is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol [hell, Douay Version; the grave, Authorized Version], the place to which you are going."—Ecclesiastes 9:10.

The apostle Peter assures us that upon death even Jesus went to the grave, to *Sheol*, *Hades* or hell.—Acts 2:31; compare Psalm 16:10.

What happens to a person after death? (17-20)



Psalm 16:10

9 Therefore my heart is glad,
and my glory rejoiceth;
My flesh also shall dwell in
safety.
10 For thou wilt not leave my soul
to She'ol;
Neither wilt thou suffer thy
holy one to see corruption.
11 Thou wilt show me the path of
life:
In thy presence is fulness of joy;

Acts 2:31

30 Being therefore a prophet, and
knowing that God had sworn with
an oath to him, that of the fruit of
his loins he would set *one* upon his
throne; 31 he foreseeing *this* spake
of the resurrection of the Christ,
that neither was he left unto
Hä'des, nor did his flesh see
corruption. 32 This Jê'sus did
God raise up, whereof we all are
witnesses. 33 Being therefore "by

American Standard Version

The Hebrew word "Sheol" and the Greek word "Hades"
mean the same thing

to my son into Sheol!" (Genesis 37:35) However, the *King James Version* here translates Sheol "grave," and the *Douay Version* translates it "hell." Now, stop for a moment and think. Did Jacob believe that his son Joseph went to a place of torment to spend eternity there, and did he want to go there and meet him? Or, rather, was it that Jacob merely thought that his beloved son was dead and in the grave and that Jacob himself wanted to die?

⁸ Yes, good people go to the Bible hell. For example, the good man Job, who was suffering a great deal, prayed to God: "O that in Sheol [grave, *King James Version*; hell, *Douay Version*] you would conceal me, . . . that you would set a time limit for me and remember me!" (Job 14:13). Now think: If Sheol means a place of fire and torment, would Job wish to go and spend his time there until God remembered him? Clearly, Job wanted to die and go to the grave that his sufferings might end.

⁹ In all the places where Sheol occurs in the Bible it is never associated with life, activity or torment. Rather, it is often linked with death and inactivity. For example, think about Ecclesiastes 9:10, which reads: "All that your hand finds to do, do with your very power, for there is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol [grave, *King James Version*; hell, *Douay Version*], the place to which you are going." So the answer becomes very clear. Sheol and Hades refer not to a place of torment but to the common grave of all mankind. (Psalm 139:8)

9. (a) What is the condition of those in Sheol? (b) So what are Sheol and Hades?

The "great crowd in heaven" referred to at Revelation 19:1, 6 is not the same as the "great crowd" of Revelation 7:9. The ones in heaven are not described as being "out of all nations" or as ascribing their salvation to the Lamb; they are angels. The expression "great crowd" is used in a variety of contexts in the Bible.—Mark 5:24; 6:34; 12:37.

What will those who go to heaven do there?

Rev. 20:6: "They will be priests of God and of the Christ, and will rule as kings with him for the thousand years." (Also Daniel 7:27)

1 Cor. 6:2: "Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world?"

Rev. 5:10: "You made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over ["on," *RS, KJ, Dy*; "over," *AT, Dg, Kz, CC*] the earth." (The same Greek word and grammatical structure is found at Revelation 11:6. There *RS, KJ, Dy*, etc., all render it "over.")

Who selects the ones who will go to heaven?

2 Thess. 2:13, 14: "We are obligated to thank God always for you, brothers loved by Jehovah, because God selected you from the beginning for salvation by sanctifying you with spirit and by your faith in the truth. To this very destiny he called you through the good news we declare, for the purpose of acquiring the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rom. 9:6, 16: "Not all who spring from Israel are really 'Israel.' . . . It depends, not upon the one wishing nor upon the one running, but upon God, who has mercy."

HELL

Definition: The word "hell" is found in many Bible translations. In the same verses other translations read "the grave," "the world of the dead," and so forth. Other Bibles simply translate the original language words that are sometimes rendered "hell"; that is they express them with the letters of our alpha-

bet but leave the words untranslated. What are those words? The Hebrew *the olam* and its Greek equivalent *hades* which refer not to an individual burial place, but to the common grave of dead mankind; also the Greek *ge en-nai* which is used as a symbol of eternal destruction. However, both in Christendom and in many non-Christian religions it is taught that hell is a place inhabited by demons and where the wicked, after death, are punished (and some believe that this is with torment).

Does the Bible indicate whether the dead experience pain?

Ecc. 9:5, 10: "The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all . . . All that your hand finds to do, do with your very power, for there is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol,* the place to which you are going." (If they are conscious of nothing, they obviously feel no pain.) (**"Sheol," *AS, RS, NE, JB*; "the grave," *KJ, Kz*; "hell," *Dy*; "the world of the dead," *TEV*.)

Ps. 146:4: "His spirit goes out, he goes back to his ground, in that day his thoughts* do perish." (**"thoughts," *KJ, 145:4 in Dy*; "schemes," *JB*; "plans," *RS, TEV*.)

Does the Bible indicate that the soul survives the death of the body?

Ezek. 18:4: "The soul* that is sinning—it itself will die." (**"Soul," *KJ, Dy, RS, NE, Kz*; "the man," *JB*; "the person," *TEV*.)

"The concept of 'soul,' meaning a purely spiritual, immaterial reality, separate from the 'body,' . . . does not exist in the Bible."—*La Parole de Dieu* (Paris, 1960), Georges Auzou, professor of Sacred Scripture, Rouen Seminary, France, p. 128.

"Although the Hebrew word *nefesh* [in the Hebrew Scriptures] is frequently translated as 'soul,' it would be inaccurate to read into it a Greek meaning. *Nefesh* . . . is never conceived of as operating separately from the body. In the New Testament the Greek word *psyche* is often translated as 'soul' but again should not be readily understood to have the meaning the word had for the Greek philosophers. It