

THE STORY OF MAN'S DESTINY #12
STUDY OF HELL CONTINUED

We now begin our third lesson on the subject of hell. There will still be another one after this lesson. For this lesson we will study all of the other verses using the word hell in the N.T., with the exception of Lk. 16:23, and the verses in Revelation. Lk. 16:23, is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and we will need an entire lesson for that. The verses in Revelation are addressed in a separate study of the Book of Revelation in a separate section of this web site.

In the previous lesson, we only considered verses in Mk. 9, containing the word hell as translated from "valley of Hinnom", or gehenna. As noted earlier, there are a total of 12 verses where hell is translated from this. Even though the remaining verses from gehenna have the same basic conclusion as those in Mk. 9, we still need to address each of them. To do that, we will site each of the verses with a short commentary for each one.

Mt. 5:22. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. This verse describes a series of sins against a brother with increasing consequences for each. The third or worst act against a brother carried a consequence of "hell fire". Hell, in this verse, is translated from "valley of Hinnom". Compare this verse with V21, and you will see that Christ is teaching a higher standard of responsibility than was required under the law. The point, I believe, is that the standard for the kingdom of heaven was much higher than the law, and to violate this higher standard subjected these Jews to whom he was speaking to the "unquenchable fire and undying worm", symbolized by the valley of Hinnom. In other words, it has the same significance as those in Mk. 9.

Mt. 5:29-30. 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. 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. These verses are duplications of those we have already commented on from Mk. 9, and have the same interpretation. Please refer to those comments for these verses also.

Mt. 10:28 and Lk. 12:5. And 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. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him. These are interesting verses. Jesus teaches his disciples and those following him not to be afraid of those who kill the body, but can't kill the soul. But fear him who is able to destroy soul and body in hell (the valley of Hinnom). The eternal torture theology interprets this verse thus: Don't be afraid of some man who can kill your body ---- but fear God who can destroy soul and body in gehenna. That isn't what the verses say. It says fear him -- with no mention of God. Speaking to a Jewish audience, I believe Jesus was saying: To be killed naturally by someone is not the worst that can happen to you. It would be much worse to reject the Lord and lose both natural and spiritual life with those who are cast in the "valley of Hinnom" in the judgments upon Israel. The traditional interpretation of these verses has serious inconsistencies in it. Tradition says that, upon the death of a sinner, their "soul" goes straight to a place of torture. The body does not go then but must wait until a "general" resurrection. So tradition teaches that the body goes back to dust and the soul to hell. But Mt. 10:28 tells us that soul and body would be destroyed in hell (valley of Hinnom). There is no way to equate the word destroy with the idea of living forever in a literal fire.

Mt. 18:8-9. Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. These verses are the same as those we covered in the previous lesson. For their explanation, review that lesson for more detailed information.

However, an additional comment is in order here. What about the “everlasting fire” mentioned in verse 8? I could dwell on the meaning of everlasting as “age lasting” and not lasting for eternity as long as God does. But I will simply call attention again to Jude V7, that tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of eternal fire. They are not burning now, but the vengeance inflicted upon them had an eternal consequence and cannot be changed. On this same kind of thought, I call attention to Mt. 25:46, which tells of those who will go away into everlasting punishment. First, notice that it is everlasting punishment and not everlasting punishing. There is a difference. One denotes the infliction of something that is an act that ends by its nature while the other denotes a continuation of the act. The everlasting punishment referred to is death. It is a final act upon those who are ungodly.

Mt. 23:15. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. The 23rd chapter of Mt., records a scathing rebuke of the Pharisees for their religious hypocrisy and evil. In this verse he derides them for seeking feverishly to persuade people to their religion. Since their religion was in vain and since they would reap the coming judgments on Jerusalem and unbelievers such as themselves, all who they converted to their thinking was “doubly” destined for the “valley of Hinnom”, and its judgment of unquenchable fire.

Mt. 23:33. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell? This verse simply confirms the destruction awaiting them in the valley of Hinnom.

Jas. 3:6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. The tongue is a fire? Is it really? Whose tongue is a (literal, eternal) fire? How is it that the tongue is set on fire of hell? This fire caused by the tongue, is it not an allegory? Is it not telling us that this unruly member of our body is capable of destruction as total and certain as the fire of the “valley of Hinnom”? How else could you say that the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity? The expression, “world of iniquity”, is synonymous with fire. The tongue is a destructive force, a fact we have all known all of our lives.

This concludes the N.T. verses using the word hell as translated from the “valley of Hinnom”. Now we turn to the N.T. scriptures where the word hell is translated from the word “hades”. There are 10 verses where the word hell is used as the translation from “hades”. We will address only 5 of them in this lesson. We will hold the times it is used in Lk. 16:23 and also 4 times in the book of Revelation for later lessons.

Strong's concordance advises us that the word hades (hahdace) means the place of departed souls; the grave.

Erdmans Bible Dictionary informs us that hades is “the abode of the dead”.

The International Bible Encyclopedia tells us that our English word “hell” is of Teutonic origin meaning to hide or cover.

Beginning with Mt. 11:23, let us employ this information along with the specific scriptural text and context, as we seek to understand “hell” from hades. *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.* Thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven ----. This exaltation to “heaven” cannot possibly refer to a geographic elevation into the skies, where there is supposed to be mansions and streets of gold. Instead, it has to refer to an exalted attitude, feeling or position, through pride and selfishness, resulting, not to a lifting up to some “glory world”, but to sin and wickedness. Facts and the context will not allow any other conclusion. Because of this prideful exaltation and thereby their disregard for God, the Lord says that they would be cast down to hell ---- “hades”; the place of the dead. Capernaum as a city was not physically cast down anywhere. Because of their sinful exaltation they were cast down in public

humiliation and dissolution. Unless you choose to believe that an actual city was dug up by its foundation and all of its buildings, etc., were transported to that far away region that torture advocates describe as hell, then your only choice is to interpret this verse of scripture as meaning the fall of Capernaum from among the society of people to a place of public debasement and destruction and dissolution. As a matter of history there is no city of Capernaum today. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia tells us: "The woe spoken of by the Master against this great city has been fulfilled to the uttermost. So completely has it perished that the very site is a matter of dispute today.

Lk. 10:15. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. This is Luke's version of exactly the same thing. The previous comments on Mt. 11:23, apply to this passage in every detail.

Mt. 16:18. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of the Lord Jesus. Let's cut straight to the point with our comments on this. The grave cannot prevail against the Church. Why? Because it will be resurrected from the grave (hades, hell). What other theology can be deduced from this famous declaration of our Lord. If you interpret it to mean that some eternal torture is to be understood by "hell" in this verse, then you totally nullify the resurrection. The resurrection is the only power, event and condition that can bring the church ultimate victory. The "place of the dead", hades, the grave, cannot (and did not prevail) against the church. For overwhelming proof of this point, turn now to Acts 2:22 & 35.

Acts 2:22-35. Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens; but he saith himself, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. These scriptures are part of the message that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost was poured out on the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem. Our specific emphasis will be on verses 27 and 31. I would urge anyone to pay very special attention to these scriptures, especially if you believe that "hell" refers to a place of literal torment in a literal fire for all eternity. If these scriptures cannot be construed to teach such doctrine (and I am sure that they cannot be) then it surely must cast enormous doubts upon other passages that are also presumed to teach it.

Peter with the other 11 apostles standing beside him, is proclaiming the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in explanation of this awesome and memorable occasion: the baptism of the Holy Ghost. On this day and by this event, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, was instituted among men.

Peter first assured the gathering multitude that they were not drunk as some supposed. Then he explained that this is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel, of which prophecy all of the multitude would have been aware. Following this, he elaborated on the life of Christ, and how they

(unbelieving Jews) with wicked hands had crucified him. In a voice of triumph, he then declared: “whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible he should be holden of it.

At this point in his message, Peter reverts back to the prophecy of David, specifically from Ps. 16:8-10. He quotes this prophecy as proof and explanation of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. In Acts 2:25-27, he quotes David as saying: “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption”. Continuing on, Peter says (V29), brethren let me freely speak to you about David: he is dead and buried and his grave is still with us unto this day. In V30, he declares, that, being a prophet, and knowing that God would raise up the Christ to sit on the throne of David, that he was speaking of the resurrection of Christ that “his” soul was not left in hell, neither “his” flesh did see corruption. Then, V32, this Jesus hath God raised whereof we all are witnesses. Finally, in V34, as if to rule out any mistaken assumption that David was talking about himself and not about Christ, he emphatically declares: for David is not ascended into heaven ----. (He is dead and buried, and his sepulchre is still with us, and he has not gone to heaven).

What can we learn about hell from this marvelous passage of scripture? The first point is that we can’t ignore what we find here and go on by to other passages we think better support the torture theory. We aren’t exploring verses like Mk. 9; or Lk. 16; or the 20th chapter of Revelation. We are looking at Acts 2, and the truth they convey to us about hell. Therefore let us consider some thoughts that leap out at us from the “hell” we find in this place.

- a. Jesus went to hell. Not some wicked sinner, but our Lord and savior; the Holy One.
- b. It was not some invisible entity that went to hell, but the whole man Christ Jesus.
- c. He was resurrected from hell. Is there any credible theology anywhere to suggest that he was resurrected from any place other than the tomb where he was buried?
- d. Ps. 16:8-10, David’s use of the word hell comes from the Hebrew “sheol”; while Peter’s use of this word comes from “hades”. In both instances they manifestly are referring to the resurrection of Jesus ---- from the grave.
- e. There is no fire, torment, torture or unbearable agony associated at all with hell in this text.
- f. Peter’s entire point is to prove that this Jesus God hath raised up from the dead and he has vacated the sepulchre.
- g. To further certify that David was referring to Jesus and not to himself, he concludes with this complete denial of the theology of “going to heaven when you die”, when he states that: David is not ascended unto heaven. If the sweet psalmist of Israel; the man after God’s own heart, whose kingly throne is established in Christ forever, did not go to heaven when he died, what chance do you think that you and your grandmother, etc., have of going their when you die. In order for Jesus to ascend to heaven it was imperative for him to first be resurrected from the grave. That is our only hope also.

All of this from Acts 2, begs one final question. What price did Jesus pay for our sins? The only answer to the question is: “death”. If the penalty for sin is eternal torture in a literal fire, who is paying that price? Jesus didn’t! For the wages of sin is death.

With these verses in Acts 2, we have completed all of the N.T. verses containing the word hell, with the exception of: Lk. 16:23; II Pet. 2:4; and Rev. 1:18, 6:8, 20:13-14. As previously stated, we will review these in later lessons. To conclude this lesson, there are some interesting observations about the overall use of hell in the N.T. that I would like to call your attention to. An observation that I believe makes a significant impact on the overall conclusion to the question: what is hell?

First, the scriptures about hell used almost exclusively to demonstrate that there is a place of eternal torture of the wicked in a literal fire, are confined to Mt., Mk., Lk., and revelation. To be sure, everything written in these books is absolutely the inspired word of God. The point I would make with this reference is: (1) the gospels in so many instances provide us with messages applicable to the Jewish nation. We have found this from verses already studied from these locations. (2) For those verses in Revelation on hell, it is absolutely imperative to recognize the symbolic nature of the material being conveyed, or face a complete inability to fully understand and apply the message

given.

Another part of this observation is the writings of the apostle Paul. He is credited with writing over half of the N.T. He said (Acts 20) that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God and that he had kept back nothing that was profitable. Yet this foremost writer of more revealed truth than any other N.T. author never mentioned the word or the subject of hell. Not once! Did he miss something, or fail to declare a truth that so much of the religious world holds as a cardinal faith of N.T. salvation? Why did Paul overlook or ignore it. Why did he never refer to such a message as the rich man and Lazarus? This apostle who told us that the wages of sin is death, believed that ----- completely.

Add to the writings of Paul, those of the apostle John, who never mentioned it either, save in the symbolic visions of Revelation. And don't forget the writings of Peter, who used the word one time (II Pet. 2:4) and never gave a message about torturing the wicked forever. The apostle James, apparently the overseer of the Jerusalem church, made one reference to hell and that one time was an allegory about the tongue being set on fire of hell.

The observation I am making is that the foremost apostles of the church: Peter, John, James, and Paul, have not left us one single viable message about the theology of an eternal fire to literally torture the wicked for as long as God lives. Add to this complexity the concept (as we are told) that the invisible, immortal soul goes there at death, and then at some future time the soul is put back in a body and both returned to burn forever.

Next we will study the cornerstone of the eternal torture theory, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.