

HELL, DEATH AND THE SOUL

Death is man's greatest enemy! Man has a natural fear of the unknown thus the uncertainty of what awaits us beyond the grave is of great concern to everyone. Those who have lost loved ones in death often wonder what has become of them; where are they; are they happy; are they suffering?

The Bible, alone, is the only source of information concerning the condition of the dead, and the hope of a resurrection. The Bible tells us what death is. It tells us who goes there, and why. It tells us the condition of those who have gone into death.

WHAT IS DEATH?

The Bible tells us that *"the wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23) Thus we realize that death is a punishment for sin.* It was the punishment for the original sin of Adam. Adam violated God's law of obedience. Therefore, having sinned against God's law, he was sentenced to death. His children and all his posterity were born under this death sentence. *"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* (Romans 5:12)

Some have taught, and others have believed, that there is no death; that man only appears to die, while in reality he has merely passed into a different kind of life in some other place and in some other form. The origin of this concept is in the Bible, too, and is found in Genesis 3:4, *"Ye shall not surely die."* But these are the words of the serpent, the spokesman for Satan.

God had placed Adam and Eve under a covenant of obedience. They were forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was in the midst of the Garden of Eden. The law which God gave them was *"of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die."* (Genesis 2:17) But Satan tempted Eve into dis-obeying this law by telling her a lie. He told her that she would not die. And many people still believe Satan's lie.

The testimony of the entire Bible supports God's original law, that man disobeyed and died. The theories and teachings of men have often supported Satan's lie, telling us that we do not really die, but are merely transferred to another place — either heaven, hell, or some other type of existence.

The Bible clearly tells us that the death

condition is the ending of all conscious existence. *"The living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything."* (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

In Genesis 2:7 we are told that *"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* But, after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the Lord said *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."* (Genesis 3:19) And in Psalm 146:4 David made it very clear to us regarding the condition of those who return to the dust. *"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish."* Obviously, if his thoughts perish, he cannot possibly be aware of anything. This would be a sad condition for one who had been transferred to heaven. No, the dead are not transferred to any other place. They go into the grave, there to await the time of the resurrection* which is so clearly taught in the Scriptures.

WHAT IS THE SOUL?

Many things have been taught concerning the soul. The Bible is the only source of information from which we can find the true meaning of the soul.

"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7) This clearly teaches that the soul is a combination of the body with the breath of life. Note that this Scripture does not say that God breathed a soul into Adam. It says He breathed into him the breath of life — then the soul came into existence as a result of the union of the breath of life with the body.

First, according to the Scriptures, the body of Adam was formed out of *"the dust of the ground."* This is fully in harmony with the facts as we know them today. The body of man is composed entirely of the chemical elements found in the earth. Then, into this body was breathed the breath of life. And what happened? Simply this . . . he

became alive — he became a living soul.

The soul is a result of the combination of the body with the breath of life. Thus, when the breath of life leaves the body, the soul ceases to exist — the person dies. Where, then, do some men get the idea of an immortal* soul? Surely this concept does not come from the Bible. The term "immortal soul" is nowhere to be found in the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible clearly teaches that the soul dies, or ceases to exist when the breath of life leaves the body.

The idea that the soul continues to live on after the body dies is an attempt by Satan to perpetuate his original lie. He told Eve that death was not real, thus when men died, Satan had to cause men to believe that what appeared to be death really was not — that the soul continued to live separate from the body. Thus the telling of one lie always necessitates the telling of many more, in order to make the original one appear to be true. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul becomes necessary to support Satan's original lie.

What does the Bible say concerning the soul? Adam was told that if he sinned against God's law he would die. Thus we find the words of God in Ezekiel 18:4 *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* If the soul can die, then surely it is not immortal.

As already noted, the expression "immortal soul" is not to be found in the Bible at all. The word "immortal" is used only once in the entire Bible, and in that one instance it is applied to the Lord, and not to men. *"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever."* (1 Timothy 1:17)

The word "immortality" is used several times in the Bible, and is always used as a reward for faithfulness. *"To them (Christians) who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life."* (Romans 2:7) Obviously, if man already has an immortal soul it would not be necessary to "seek" for it. The Christian seeks for it "through

*See Word List on page 3.

patient continuance in well doing.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:53 we read: *“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”* Here we are clearly taught that man is mortal (a creature capable of dying) and that if immortality is ever to be obtained it must be something that is added at some future time. And the Scripture goes on to explain when this shall be. *“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”* Thus immortality is something to be obtained after the resurrection from the death condition, and only given to those who have faithfully followed in the footsteps of Jesus . . . a life of sacrifice. *“Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.”* (Revelation 2:10)

WHAT IS HELL?

A doctrine of Christian belief which has been much distorted and misunderstood is that which pertains to the punishment of those who disobey divine law. We have seen the clear teachings of the Bible to be that *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23) and *“the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* (Ezekiel 18:4) Thus we have found that the death penalty applies to the soul, the complete being, and not limited merely to the disintegration of the body. In view of these plain statements of the Bible, the question naturally arises, what about punishment for the wicked?

Some teach that the dead are unconscious, that they will remain unconscious till the resurrection. Others teach, and many have believed, that the wicked go to a place of eternal torment when their body dies — a place where eternal fires torture its victims for ever and ever. The Bible alone is the only reliable source of information concerning the fate of the wicked. Nowhere in its pages do we find that God plans to torture any of his creatures throughout all eternity. What do the Scriptures really say about the condition of the wicked who die?

The Bible has much to say about hell, and even uses the term *“hell fire.”* What do these terms mean?

Hell in the Old Testament is a translation of the Hebrew word *“sheol.”** This word sheol literally means a place of darkness, hidden, the grave, the condition of death, or a pit. The Hebrew word carries no thought of fire, punishment, or torment of any kind.

If hell were a place of fire and torment

forever, then surely no one would ask to go there, regardless of how difficult or painful the present life may be. Yet Job prayed to God to go there. Job was in deep grief of heart, mind and body, and he desired to die. But he knew that death would be a condition where no consciousness would exist — and he would wait for the time of resurrection. He prayed *“O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave (sheol), that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me.”* (Job 14:13) Note that Job wanted to go to sheol to escape from God's wrath. If sheol (hell) were a place where God's wrath is poured out upon its victims, then Job certainly would not escape the wrath of God by going there. What, then, did Job mean when he asked to go to sheol? He merely asked that he be hidden in the death condition until the evil conditions in this world are removed, at which time he desired to live again.

The fact that Job did not expect to remain in sheol is evident by the way he concluded his prayer. He asked the question, *“If a man dies, shall he live again?”* and then answers his own question by affirming his hope in the resurrection, thus, *“Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.”* (Job 14:15)

A careful examination of all the Scriptures in the Old Testament in which the word sheol is used will reveal that it is a condition into which both good and bad go at death, and that it is a condition from which one can return. The prophetess Hannah used the word sheol in a very revealing statement. She said, *“The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave (sheol), and bringeth up.”* (1 Samuel 2:6) Obviously, if the Lord brings up those who are in sheol, it cannot be a place where its victims suffer forever.

But how beautiful is the meaning of Hannah's words when understood in the light of God's great plan of salvation! *“The Lord killeth,”* she stated. This began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were sentenced to death because they disobeyed God's law. 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.

In the New Testament we find the word *“hell”* translated from the Greek word *“hades,”* which has exactly the same meaning as *“sheol.”* Hades is merely the Greek translation of sheol. And when we find this word in the New Testament it is most interesting to note that Jesus went there. Yes, Jesus went to hell. Now if, as some teach, hell is a place of fiery torment

in which the wicked suffer forever and ever, then why would Jesus go there? The Bible plainly states that he was *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.”* (Hebrews 7:26)

The Apostle Peter, in Acts 2:27, quotes a portion of a Psalm which is prophetic of Jesus, saying, *“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”* This has reference to the fact that Jesus did not remain in *“hades”* (the death condition), but was raised by the Father.

When we remember that the Bible hell is the state or condition of death, we can see why it was necessary for Jesus to go there. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus, in his redemptive work for the human race, took the sinner's place in death. By so doing he became a ransom* for the sin of Adam, thereby releasing Adam from the death sentence. And he not only released Adam from the sentence of death, but we are told that he *“tasted death for every man,”* thereby releasing all mankind from the death sentence. This means that all mankind will be brought back from sheol, or hades.

But, one may ask, if hell is not a place of fiery torment for the wicked, why do the Scriptures speak of hell fire? What does this term mean? The term *“hell fire”* is not translated from the Greek word hades; it is from the word *“Gehenna.”** Gehenna, in the Greek, is a place called the Valley of Hinnom. It was a valley outside the city of Jerusalem which was used as a garbage dump. Fires were kept burning there continually, in an attempt to destroy the refuse which had been thrown into it. Brimstone (sulphur) was also used, probably as a disinfectant and also to increase the efficiency of the fires.

Jesus used the term Gehenna (hell fire) as a very fitting illustration of the *“second death”* — a condition from which there is no return, no resurrection; a condition of eternal destruction. Live bodies were never thrown into Gehenna. Dead carcasses of animals were often thrown there, and sometimes the dead bodies of criminals who were not considered worthy of burial. Thus when Jesus used the term Gehenna as an illustration, he had no reference to a place where fire torments people. He merely had reference to a place where fire completely destroys that which has no life.

The *“second death”* to which Jesus referred is described in Revelation 20:13-15: *“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them . . . and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This*

is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Obviously the lake of fire is not hell, for it is impossible that hell could be cast into hell. The lake of fire is pictorial language, used to describe a condition of complete and everlasting destruction. The text says the lake of fire is the second death. Hell (the death condition) will forever be cast into it, thus the condition of death because of Adam's sin will forever cease.

THE RESURRECTION FROM HELL

The Apostle Paul, in Acts 24:15, told us "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." This indicates that there will be two classes of people who

will be resurrected. Those who would be considered "just" would be Christians who have faithfully followed in the footsteps of Jesus and have transformed their minds and characters into his likeness. These receive a resurrection to heavenly life. Peter spoke of this as "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." (1 Peter 1:4) Very few of mankind will receive this heavenly resurrection.

The majority of earth's billions will receive a resurrection to earthly life. The Apostle John described this by saying "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things have

passed away." (Revelation 21:4) The Prophet Isaiah spoke of this time when the life giving effects of the ransom would bring all mankind back from the death condition. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:10)

Then Isaiah gave us a beautiful word picture of the conditions on earth after the resurrection. "The work of righteousness shall be peace: and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." (Isaiah 32:17, 18)

WORD LIST

GEHENNA. (Greek word) The place where garbage was destroyed with fire. Hence, everlasting death. Matt. 10:28; Rev. 20:14.

HADES. (Greek word) The grave, or the condition of death. Acts 2:31. (Same as "sheol.")

IMMORTAL. Not able to die.

MORTAL. Dying, or able to die. Job 4:17.

RANSOM. An exact corresponding price. Jesus' sacrifice as a substitute for Adam, which will release mankind from death. 1 Tim. 2:5-6.

REDEEM. To buy back. Especially Jesus buying back the human race. 1 Pet. 1:18-19.

REDEMPTION. See "Redeem."

RESURRECTION. Coming back from death. Acts 24:15. Made possible by Jesus' sacrifice. (See "Ransom.")

SECOND DEATH. Everlasting death. Rev. 20:6. (Not possible before one is released from the first death, the Adamic death.)

SHEOL. (Hebrew word) The grave, or the condition of death. Psalms 16:10; Proverbs 27:20. (Usually translated "grave" or "hell.")

SIN. To miss the mark. Hence, to go against the law of God. Rom. 5:12; Heb. 4:15.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the human soul? Is it mortal or immortal? (page 1)
2. What did God say about death? What was Satan's lie? (page 1)
3. Are people conscious after death?
4. What is the Bible hell? Will it last forever? (page 2, 3)
5. Why did Job pray to go to hell? Why did Jesus go there? (page 2, 3)
6. Could there be a resurrection of the dead if no one were really dead?
7. Where will people be in the resurrection?