

The Traveling Pulpit

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Words Associated With The Concept of Hell **(Part I)**

***I am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (Rev. 1:18)**

Introduction

I graduated from high school with a friend who grew up in a local church and was active therein until graduation. We both went to different colleges and after completing only the first semester, he told me that he learned in his religion class that there was no such place as heaven or hell; they were both only figments of one's imagination. I lost touch with him shortly after that, but I found out years later that he had died from AIDS while living on the West Coast of the United States. When I heard of his death, I thought of what he told me concerning his view of heaven and hell and that if he had NOT gotten "saved" (Acts 16:31), then he discovered the horrible reality of hell.

Many years ago, I preached in view of a pastoral call for a church that later told me that I was voted down because in my sermon, I mentioned Hell and they did not want a pastor who preached on Hell. In all my years of trying to witness to the lost and share the saving message of Jesus Christ, I'll never forget one man. He was in the hospital at

Chapel Hill, NC, dying with Leukemia, and he told me of how he was a member of a Baptist church. But, the shocking thing that he told me was that he wanted to go to Hell when he died, because he knew that his son was in Hell and he wanted to go to Hell to be with his son. More recently, after 40 years of ministry and retiring from the pastorate, my wife and I visited a church one Sunday morning only to discover that the pastor was preaching about Hell. In his sermon, the pastor was very lighthearted in talking about Hell, even stating that belief in the immortality of the soul was not biblical and that the “second death” (Rev. 21:8) was mere annihilation. How sad it is to see the apostasy that has crept into many institutionalized churches of our day.

To believe that the original manuscripts of Holy Scripture were verbally inspired (the very words were selected by God), inerrant (without mistake), infallible (incapable of error), plenary (fully inspired with no mixture of human error) is to believe that God not only wrote His Word through human hands, but that “God breathed” (II Tim. 3:16) the words that were to be penned through human personality. This means that the human writers did not use sources of study nor did they merely write a concept or thought, but their words have a depth of meaning that conveys God’s Truth. For that reason, we are going to look at some biblical words from Hebrew and Greek that are associated with the concept of Hell.

From our opening text (Rev. 1:18), we are reminded that “death” is the separation of the body from the soul and spirit. When Christ died on the cross, He did not swoon or pass out, He literally died and His body was placed in the tomb. Christ proved that He was God by the way He conquered death, hell, and the grave. On the third day, Christ arose victoriously giving us hope as believers that we too shall someday arise (Matt. 28:6-7). Today, He holds the “keys” to the doors of death and the grave. Having possession of the “keys” means that He has the authority and power to open and shut. Christ proved His power over “death” and that He, as God, has complete control over the realm of the dead. There is only ONE eternity, but there are TWO destinies. Heaven is for those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Hell is for those who die lost in their sins without ever repenting and confessing faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me say before beginning this study that nobody on this side of eternity knows all there is to know concerning Heaven and Hell. What we know about the present location of Heaven is a little glimpse of what Paul describes as the “third heaven” (II Cor. 12:2). If there is a “third heaven” that means that there must be a first and second heaven. In my feeble concept, I picture the first heaven as being the sphere in which man can function and the second as the headquarters of Satan after he was cast out of God’s presence due to his rebellion (Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:12-19, Lk. 10:18). That is no doubt why he is called the “prince of the powers of the air” (Eph. 2:2). The devil and his demons currently have access to those of us on earth to tempt, try, and trouble us as we live under the curse of sin. Some things that are often taught concerning the present location of Hell are not clearly revealed in the Word of God; therefore, it amounts to mostly speculation. We DO have reason to believe that there is an intermediate state of Heaven and Hell for the soulish condition of man and then a permanent state following the resurrection at which time the soul and resurrected body

will be re-united. This intermediate state is NOT soul sleep which is a doctrine of heresy. Scripture does not teach any such thing as soul sleep nor a place of purgatory. Keep in mind that in the resurrection, both believers and unbelievers will be resurrected. The saved will be raised to eternal bliss; whereas, the lost will be raised to everlasting torment (I Thess. 4, Rev. 20).

With this in mind, let's look at several words from Holy Scripture that will help us with our understanding of the concept of Hell. I remind you that the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and for that reason we'll begin with the word Sheol. Most of the New Testament was written in Greek, which was a most precise language, and from the New Testament we'll study the words, Hades, Gehenna, Abyss, and Tartarus.

Sheol

The Only Hebrew word from the Old Testament that is translated Hell in our English Bibles is the word Sheol. The root word from which Sheol comes, means TO MAKE HOLLOW; therefore, it points us to the vast hollow subterranean resting place for the dead, or in other words, the "grave." This word, Sheol, mostly referred to the realm of the dead and is best translated to speak of the "grave" as being a receptacle for both the righteous and wicked dead (Gen. 37:35, 42:38, Job 10:21-22, 11:8, 14:13, 17:16, Prov. 9:18, Isa. 38:10). However, there are several passages where the word Sheol seems to imply a place of darkness, gloom, punishment, and separation from God (Job 11:8, Ps. 9:17, 139:8, Prov. 5:5, 23:14, Amos 9:2).

Two views are held in the ranks of Christendom concerning the location of Sheol as a place of torment. Some believe that Sheol had two compartments in the bowels of the earth, being located side by side with a connection between the two that they call the "gulf" (Lk. 16:26). Others who hold the two-compartment theory picture it with an upper and lower level. Those who hold to the two-compartment concept, believe that Christ delivered the Old Testament saints from the upper level or from the paradise side at the time of His resurrection (Eph. 4:9-10). The second school of thought is that we do not know the exact location of Hell as a place of punishment and torment. Some like to argue the fact as to whether Christ went into Hell following His death on the cross. I do not believe that Christ descended into Hell for believers, but I do believe that He suffered my Hell on the Cross as my Substitute for sin's penalty.

The Apostles' Creed affirms the descent of Jesus into hell. But, the correct understanding of that statement is to believe that Jesus endured God's wrath for us on the cross. It is my belief that the Ephesian passage is referring to the way Christ descended from Heaven's glory, took upon Himself the form of a Servant, to capture those of us who are enslaved to sin and held "captive" to sin, and then after His glorious resurrection, He "ascended up far above the heavens" (Eph. 4:8-10). We must be very careful to take the Bible in context and from Ephesians 4, we see that the text is teaching us about the Oneness of the body of Christ. Christ made us one with Him by His coming into the world and upon His departure, He did not leave us "comfortless" (Jh. 14:18), but neither did He leave believers without means of edification. Therefore,

He bestowed various “gifts” upon the church that the Holy Spirit would use for the edification of the saints. Although, Christ did not empty a paradise compartment of Old Testament saints, Scripture is clear that after He died, He did appear to the demons to testify of His glorious victory (I Pet. 3:18-19 is a passage we’ll examine later).

Holy Scripture is very clear as to there being a place of eternal torment and separation from God forever and forever. No Bible believing Christian should ever debate that fact; although, there may be a difference as to where we believe the present state of Hell is located. The center of the earth concept comes from Greek mythology, but was also held by Judaism and taught in Roman Catholicism. The great “gulf” (Lk. 16:23,26), as it is called in the parable of the “rich man” and “Lazarus,” simply refers to there being a great distance between paradise and torments. We must remember that “paradise” is where God is and when the Old Testament believer died, his soul entered “paradise” waiting the time of the resurrection just like all believers of today who die in the Lord. When Christ died on Calvary, He told the repentant thief on the cross that “to day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43). His final words were, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk. 23:46).

Ministry Update

In this two-part study on words associated with the concept of Hell, we’ve only taken a brief look at the subject of Sheol as it is found in the Old Testament. In our next edition for the Summer, we’ll look at four more words all of which are in the New Testament. I’m afraid that most of the time in today’s society, the word hell is heard mostly in profanity. It is a real place that every lost soul will discover upon death. For that reason, we need to be busy proclaiming God’s truth to a lost and unregenerate world. There is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun. Christ alone is the answer to man’s sin problem. By faith alone in Christ alone can a sinner find deliverance from the bondage of sin and escape from the eternal torments of Hell.

Preachers of today need to preach on Hell just as much as our forefathers did years ago. It has not disappeared or gone away. It never will. The consequences of sin will never change. If there were no Hell, then there would be no need of salvation. Christ came to call out a people unto Himself. We refer to those as His “bride” (Rev. 21) whom He will someday usher into that glorious eternal state of Heaven to be with Him forever and forever. For the Christian, this world is the only hell that we’ll ever know, but for the unregenerate sinner, this world is the only heaven they will ever know and that’s certainly not saying much for a heavenly expectation. May God use this study to open the eyes of those who remain spiritually blind in need of Christ.

In closing, let me express appreciation to all those who support COGM both prayerfully and financially. I never dreamed when this little ministry was started that God would use it to the extent that He is today. It has grown beyond my wildest dream. All I can say is “to God be the Glory.” Thank you for taking the time to read “The Traveling Pulpit” and for all your encouragement along the way.

Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM