

The Traveling Pulpit

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Words Associated With The Concept of Hell (Part II)

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

In our previous quarterly Bible Study, we began a two-part series on words that are associated with the concept of Hell. In the Spring Edition, we looked at the Old Testament Hebrew word, Sheol. In this edition, we'll study four Greek words from the New Testament, Hades, Gehenna, Abyss, and Tartarus.

Hades

One of the New Testament Greek words that parallels the Hebrew word, Sheol, is the word Hades. This word is generally used to define the intermediate state between death and the future resurrection in the sense that it speaks of the "grave" where the dead body is buried. Numerous times in the New Testament this word, Hades, is translated to be "hell," but is speaking of either "death" or the "grave" (Matt. 11:23, 16:18, Lk. 10:15, Lk. 16:23, Acts 2:27, 31, Rev. 1:18, 6:8, 20:13). In the KJV, the only time that the word Hades is translated "grave" is in the Book of First Corinthians (I Cor. 15:55). Many of the newer versions have translated the word "hell," as it's found in the KJV, with the word "Hades" (NKJV) or "death" (ESV). When the word

“Hades” was used in the New Testament, it could sometimes refer to the wicked dead before their final judgment. However, the words “death” and “Hades” are basically synonymous in Scripture, with “death” referring to the condition and “Hades” referring to the place of the dead.

As we consider the use of the word “Hades” as it relates to either “death” or the “grave,” there are two passages in particular that I want to call to your attention. In the parable of the “rich man” and “Lazarus,” the word “hell” (KJV) in that passage is a reference to “death” or the “grave,” but we are also told that the “rich man” was in a place of “torments” (Lk. 16:23). Secondly, in the famous passage of Jesus speaking to “Peter” telling him that “the gates of hell shall not prevail” (KJV) against the “church,” this word “hell” is “Hades” referring to “death” or the “grave” and not to a place of torments (Matt. 16:18). The word “Hades” in the NKJV (Matt. 16:18) reminds us that the doorway to the “grave” is “death” and that not even “death” (Heb. 2:14-15) can stop the “church” of Jesus Christ. It is true, that the devil and all the demons of Hell cannot prevail against the “church” of the living God. But, to be true to the interpretation of this passage, we must see that it is talking about “death” or the “grave” and how putting Christ to death and putting Him in the “grave” did not stop the intended purpose of the “church.” The killing of Christians will not stop the church of the living God because the church is the body of Christ and she is indestructible. History has shown that the blood of Christian martyrs has increased the growth of the church.

Pagan Greek mythology, as well as Roman mythology, believed in a Hades that was a dwelling place for the dead below the surface of the earth. The Greeks believed that it was ruled by Pluto along with his wife Persephone (per-sef-o-nee). They even associated various characters and places with Hades, such as the river Styx (sticks) as the river crossed by the souls of the dead. They believed that three judges were the ones who decided the fate of the souls who entered Hades. I’m sure that you are aware of how pagan practices have tried to creep into the institutionalized church.

I’ve said that to simply suggest that perhaps this has influenced the thinking of many in arriving at the conclusion of how Hades is a region of the dead with two compartments prior to the death of Christ. There are several scriptures that refer or implies to “hell” being down and “heaven” being up (Deut. 32:22, Job 11:8, Ps. 55:15, 86:13, 139:8, Prov. 7:27, 9:18, 15:24, Isa. 14:9, 15, Ezek. 31;16-17, 32:27, Hab. 2:5). However, let’s remember that when we think of being buried in a “grave,” our thoughts turn to the earth from which “man” was “formed” (Gen. 2:7). Because of the curse of sin, man must return to the “ground” from which he was “taken,” from “dust” we came and “unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19). When we think of God’s heavenly domain, our thoughts turn above where the heavenly “tabernacle” of God exist (Rev. 15:5-8). The Old Testament tabernacle was patterned after God’s heavenly tabernacle. No doubt, this heavenly “tabernacle” must be the place where Paul was taken to the “third heaven.” The appearance of “Moses” and “Elijah” on the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk. 9:30) indicates that they were not confined in a holding cell in the center of the earth. This one thing we do know, when a believer dies today, his soul enters immediately into the presence of God at death (II Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:23). Scripture uses the word “Hades” in the New Testament to speak of the wicked dead, to death, and to the “grave” where the dead “body” is placed after the departure of “soul” and “spirit” (I Thess. 5:23). We must remember that we cannot build Bible doctrine merely on metaphors, analogies, and assumptions. The truth of the matter is that on this side of

the “grave,” we know little about the condition of the dead and we’ll know nothing of certainty until the final curtain is drawn upon our own mortality.

Gehenna

The New Testament does use a Greek word that refers to the place of eternal punishment and it is the word Gehenna. Gehenna was originally the Valley of Hinnom, just south of Jerusalem, where the filth of the city, along with the bodies of unclaimed criminals, and dead animals were cast out and burned. It was literally the garbage dump for the City of Jerusalem and a fitting symbol of the future destruction of the wicked. In order to consume all the debris and to keep down the stench, fires would burn night and day and worms constantly ate away devouring the filth. During the days of Ahaz and Manasseh (II Kings 16:3, 21:6, 23:10) the Valley of Hinnom was the place where human sacrifices were offered to the pagan god Moloch by idolatrous Jews (II Chron. 28:3, 33:6, Jer. 7:31, 19:2-6).

Various New Testament passages use the word Gehenna to speak of a literal eternal place of torments (Mk. 9:43-48, Matt. 5:22, 29-30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 33, Lk. 12:5, James 3:6). Scripture teaches that there is a real literal place of eternal torment and everlasting separation from God which is the worst thing about Hell. It’s not merely on the face of the earth, nor is it fictitious, or a state of mind, or merely imaginary. There may be figurative descriptions of what Hell is like, but one thing is for sure and that is the fact that Hell is not symbolic, but literal. Hell is for “the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41) and all who are deceived by his lies (Rev. 20:15). The description of Hell given in God’s Word, pictures it as an undesirable place where nobody should ever want to go. It is said to be a place of “unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12). It’s a place of “damnation” (Matt. 23:33). It’s filled with “blackness and darkness” (Jude 13). It’s described as a “lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8).

Abyss

A word that comes to us out of Judaism is the word Abyss, referring to a place of terror. It is used in speaking of a place that is a refuge for demons and a place of terror. The word Abyss (being a noun) is not found in most Bible translations. However, it’s adjective form, ABUSSOS (ab-us-sos), is used to speak of a “bottomless pit” (Rev. 9:1-2). The Septuagint, which is the first Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, uses the word Abyss about 25 times. The word was used in talking about the ocean (Gen. 1:2) and deep waters (Ps. 42:7), but also the realm of the dead (Ps. 71:20). However, mostly it was associated with the prison house for certain demons (Lk. 8:31, Rev. 9:1-11).

The passage from the book of Jude could very well be referring to such an Abyss (Jude 6). This passage seems to be speaking of the sinful influence that the demons had upon the society of Noah’s day (Gen. 6:1-4). The result was sexual sin and to substantiate belief that this passage is referring to Noah’s day we notice that it says in Jude 7, “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha ... in like manner.” These sinning “angels” (demons that possessed mankind) of Noah’s day were chained, or bound, in a place that we can call the Abyss or Tartarus. God’s judgment upon the fallen “angels” reminds us of the seriousness of sin and apostasy. If God will judge and punish spiritual beings, then He will most certainly judge and punish mankind. “Judgment of the great day” refers to the final judgment when Satan and all his demons will be forever consigned to

the “lake of fire” (THE ETERNAL STATE OF HELL), along with all the ungodly (Rev. 20:10, 15).

Tartarus

The word Tartarus comes from the Greek meaning the deepest abyss of Hell. It was a term used by the Greeks in referring to the abode of the wicked dead. The Greeks believed in a place called Tartarus (tar-tar-o-o in the Greek) which they considered to be located below Hades with punishment that was comparable to that found in Gehenna. Tartarus is a Greek word that literally means dark underground caverns in the unseen world. Such a place as Tartarus could have been where the fallen “angels” (demons who indwelt the bodies of mortal men) were imprisoned after they cohabited with the women of Noah’s day (II Pet. 2:4).

We must remember that God must judge the wicked because His holiness demands it (II Thess. 1:7-9). That judgment, as we have seen from the book of Jude, includes demons as well as the unregenerate souls of mankind. “The angels that sinned” speaks of the demonic immorality that they caused during Noah's day. The result of their sin caused God to “cast them down to hell ... into chains of darkness ... reserved unto judgment.” The Greek word that we find in this text is “Tartarus” and is translated in our Bibles as “hell.” This is believed to be the place where Christ went after His death on the cross and before His resurrection to show the demons that He had triumphed over them (I Pet. 3:19). All down through history, beginning with the killing of “Abel” by “Cain” and the birth of “Seth” (Gen. 4), Satan has tried to thwart the coming of Christ. By making a personal appearance to these “spirits in prison,” He demonstrated to them that He had won the victory.

Closing

Scripture is very clear in its teachings concerning the immortality of the soul (I Cor. 15). Even the Old Testament states belief in immortality (Gen. 25:8,17). Man’s “soul” (Gen. 2:7) is housed inside the body until death and every “soul” will spend eternity in one of two places. Scripture likens the “body” to a “tabernacle” or tent in which the soul and spirit resides (II Cor. 5:1, II Pet. 1:13-14). At God’s appointed time in the resurrection, the body, soul, and spirit will be re-united (I Cor. 15:35-57, I Thess. 4:13-17).

It’s recorded that John Wesley once dreamed that he went to hell. Upon his arrival, he asked if there were any Methodist, Baptist, or Catholics there and the answer was YES. Then he dreamed that he went to heaven and asked the same question, but the answer was NO. Looking around, he wanted to know who the happy multitude was and he was told that the only people in heaven were those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb!

A Ministry Update

Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no hope beyond the grave, but only the dismal destiny of eternal torment. But, for the Christian, we can sing along with the song-writer that “our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.” It’s a blessing indeed for all God’s children to look forward to the day when we see Jesus face to face and serve Him throughout all eternity. Until then, and as long as God sees fit, may He use this little ministry to evangelize the lost and edify the body of Christ. Thank you for your prayer and financial support. The latest news is that my new book, *Prayer-Communicating With God*, is now available just for the asking as are all my books. God’s grace is free as are my books. This new book will soon be downloaded to our website. All books and Bible Studies can be found under the “publications” tab at our website. Check it out!

Because of His Sovereign Grace.....Burley W. Moore