

HELL - DOES THE BIBLE SAY YOU GO THERE WHEN YOU DIE?

Article by Brian H. Butler B.A., D.O., F.A.S.K.

Class of '64 Graduate & former Faculty Member of Ambassador College, England.

These notes, composed from 2013 on, are based on taped lectures given between 1977 and 1997 by Dr. Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., formerly the Head of Theology for the Worldwide Church of God; he resigned in January 1974 because of his unresolved doctrinal issues with the administration. Sadly Dr. Martin died in January 2002, a great loss to the world and to those who seek Biblical truth.

Most translations of the Bible contain indications that the wicked go to hell and are tormented and punished with unremitting pain for ever, but is this true? No there is no substantiation for this teaching in the original texts.

Hell is an English word which means 'hole', or 'dark place' or 'under' or 'out of sight'. Years ago before refrigeration, vegetables were stored in pits, a 'hell' and covered with soil. When people died, a grave was dug, a hell, and the body was put 'under' the ground, in a 'dark place' and 'out of sight'. Holland and Netherland are the names of a country that was mostly below sea level, low lands.

In the Bible there are several words which the original translators interpreted as 'hell', and to that English word was then attached a false doctrine or teaching of punishment when you die.

One word is Hades which means 'an unseen place' or cemetery. How did 'fire' and 'outer darkness' get mingled together? These are figurative statements. One trap for the unwary in attempting to make sense of the Bible is to confuse and interchange the figurative statements, parables and stories with literal statements of events, and vice versa.

Another word in the New Testament also translated 'hell' is the Greek word 'Gehenna' which refers to the valley of Hinnom, named after a man, which was Southwest of Jerusalem where all the rubbish of the city was burned. The fire never went out as more waste was added daily. The prevailing wind was West or North West which took the pungent smoke away from the city. So the 'evil' waste matter burned continuously (eternally) in a fire. In the Old Testament 'burning' is used as a figure of speech, concerning ridding a person of sin.

A third word translated 'hell' is 'tartaroo' – a place of punishment for evil fallen angels mentioned in second Peter.

2 Peter 2:4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (tartaroo – a watery type of an area – the Dead Sea), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

The Dead Sea to the East of Jerusalem erupted with fire and smoke from time to time, and still does, and one day will become the 'lake of fire' referred to in the Bible. Ancient maps of the Dead Sea used to show smoke over its centre. So over time, fire and punishment began to be associated with the word 'hell'. But is that what happens to bad people when they die?

There certainly seem to be indications in the Bible of everlasting or eternal punishment, but the words in the passages concerned are 'olam' or 'aeon' neither of which mean 'everlasting' or 'forever' at all, but relate to a long period of time which has a beginning and an end. To translate these words as 'everlasting' or 'eternal' is completely incorrect, and gives a totally wrong view. They mean an age, or an epoch of time, which always has a beginning and an end.

Jude 7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrhah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal (Greek 'aonian' or age lasting) fire.

Obviously the fire which came down from heaven and consumed these cities was not eternal, for they went out when the cities burned out, and the job God wanted done was complete. So the fire that destroyed the city and the people in it was not 'eternal' at all.

Scholars of the Hebrew and Greek languages know the actual definitions of 'hades', 'sheol', tartaroo, and gehenna, perfectly well, and know that they do not mean 'hell', or a fiery place of torture. Sadly these mistranslations have persisted into even the most modern of translations of the original scriptures. Why is this when the scholars know that the language does support this notion?

This is because the 'scholars' minds have been infected with false pagan beliefs that have been perpetuated for centuries, and incorporated into the doctrines of Christianity. The main one being that humans have an immortal soul. The Bible says very clearly, that the soul that sins shall die.

Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

This idea of the immortal soul was popularized by Plato, Socrates, and other of the Hellenistic Greek philosophers who lived in the 4th to 3rd Century B.C. most of whom were perverts and homosexuals, who worshipped pagan deities, and whose ideas of life were distorted by being skilled at false reasoning and specious argument.

Another example of how false pagan ideas are perpetuated for even thousands of years is the symbol of healing, a snake or snakes entwined around a rod that we see today in hospitals and doctors offices, called the Caduceus. Sophocles in 420 B. C. welcomed and set up an altar at his house for the image of Asclepius, a pagan god symbolised by a snake entwined around a stick, when the 'deity' was introduced to Athens. This image of a snake and stick has a Biblical origin.

Numbers 21:8 And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

God told Moses to make the image, and it saved the lives of many people, but later when the snakes were gone, instead of just looking at the image to be delivered from snake bite, they worshipped it, so it became an 'other god' which broke the first and second commandments.

Yet what do we see everywhere we go in the medical world, in hospitals and so on? We see the sign of the Ascelapius, the Caduceus wherever we look. Of course it would be ridiculous to suggest that doctors worship the image, but nevertheless, if you want to be a Christian, you need to get rid of it! It is a remnant of paganism.

The English word 'philosopher' has a dignified ring to it, until the word is examined for its original root. Philo is Greek for 'lover of', and Sophos was the Greek word for deceitful argument. This gives rise to our English word 'sophistry' which the dictionary defines as 'deception, ambiguity, fallacy, inconsistency, trickery.

Yet the same dictionary gives the meaning of 'sophistication', another word with a dignified ring to it, which again is based on 'sophist' as 'worldly wisdom', 'refined', 'cosmopolitan, 'cultured'!! Oh! Observe the chicanery and devious twists of the meanings of words over time.

But where did all this chicanery and devious reasoning start? Why, the very first mention of the doctrine of the 'Immortality of the Soul' starts right at the very beginning of human existence in the Garden of Eden, and who originated the idea? Satan the Devil.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

The serpent says to Eve in effect, "God is a liar, you will not die, but your mind will be opened to know amazing things He does not want you to know." Satan was selling information, false information, intriguing, exciting knowledge, and here is how you get it, just eat of the tree. Don't worry you won't die, you have an immortal soul, that is one of the things God doesn't want you to know about. So Eve ate of the tree, and sin entered the world.

God had said, Genesis 2:16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for **in the day** that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

And neither Eve nor Adam died that twenty-four hour day, so just what did God mean when He said you will die "in that day". Jesus Christ who wrote the Bible inspired Peter to insert an interesting piece of information.

2 Peter 3:8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Genesis 5:5 And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.

Adam lived for 930 years and he died, so he did die within 'that day', the thousand year day that God told him he would.

The doctrine of the 'Immortality of the Soul' was absorbed into Christianity in the 3rd and 4th century A.D. under the influence of Constantine the Great and other of the notables in that religion, and that doctrine of course is very

much alive and well, and is embraced by virtually every Christian denomination to this day.

The soul of a dead person is not alive! When you die, you lose consciousness, and have no thoughts or awareness of anything. It is like when anyone has an operation and goes under an anesthetic, they are not aware of anything at all until they wake up from their sleep.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

These inspired words from Ecclesiastes are Jesus Christ talking to us today and are therefore the truth. Remember, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and the scriptures cannot be broken, they are perfect in themselves as they are, even including the 'errors'! God can override the 'errors' by having the Holy Spirit guide us into the truth that Jesus wants us to know at any given time, and recognize where human hands have muddied the waters. These words from the Psalm are also truth.

Psalm 146:4 His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Psalm 115:17 The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence.

Now this is very comforting teaching. We can be very thankful that it is true that when we die, we know nothing, and we are in a sense 'asleep' awaiting the resurrection. Because, however long it is that we are 'asleep' until resurrected, whether it is a month, a year, a thousand years; the very next moment we have consciousness as we are resurrected to immortality, we shall be changed, we shall have a new body, and we shall be with Christ, and we shall consist of Spirit, and we shall have life eternal. We will be eternal, not age-lasting, not eons of time, but eternal forever and ever.

What a fantastic joy the true knowledge of our future is, compared with the lying teachings of so many preachers when they teach God is going to punish the wicked for eternity with horrible torture in fire.

The Catholic Church has invented several types of 'hell' and 'limbo' types of punishment to cover various states of man.

Hitler, Ghenghis Khan, Stalin, Pol Pot and other people who committed crimes beyond belief are dead, they are not alive. They will at some time in the future be resurrected to face their Maker concerning their conduct. So are they to be given a second chance? No! They never had a first chance when they were alive, as they were so far from any understanding of Christ, and a merciful God is going to make sure that every human being has a chance to repent.

Is this an example of 'reincarnation'? No reincarnation is a pagan belief tied into the idea of the immortality of the soul. Reincarnation is not Biblical, and when we really understand the Plan of God, the notion is completely incompatible with the truth of our future. When we are dead, we are dead! Not sitting around somewhere deciding whether to come back to earth in another form, or to live another life.

So what are the consequences of sin?

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death.

Not conscious life, death. No thoughts, no knowledge, nothing.

Christ sets the standard of all doctrines, His life is the standard of Christianity. He died on the tree of crucifixion. Why did He die? He took the sins of this world on His shoulders, which of course is what Christianity is all about. When Christ died, did He go to an 'eternal hell'? Of course not.

After His death on the tree of crucifixion Christ was sealed in the grave for three days and three nights. He was then raised from the dead, and went to His Father that day to be judged and restored to His position at the right hand of the Father. Christ then returned to earth to provide proof that He was indeed resurrected and alive to His disciples and many others. Christ did not repent of sin, of course not, as He had not sinned. He died because He took our sins on His back, he died for us. He was not consigned to hell fire or eternal punishment. He paid the full penalty for all mankind's sin, and in three days time he was restored to Eternal Life! At no time was he exposed to heat and flames, and torment or any other form of punishment.

It is time to get back to the real meaning of the Biblical scriptures.

What about the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man? It is a figurative parable. It is not called a parable, but clearly it is one. One main fundamental error that people fall into with regard to the Bible is to take the

figurative language and say it is literal, and plain language literal descriptions of things they make figurative. Confusion results.

Matthew 13: 2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;...

Christ only spoke to the general public in parables.

Matthew 13: 10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? 11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. 12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. 17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Christ then went on to explain the deeper meaning of the parable of the sower to His disciples. We have the record of the interpretation, and we are privileged to have that understanding. Yet even today many who read the Bible and though they may call themselves Christian, do not appreciate the deeper meaning of the parables Christ gave, and how important it is that they apply the principles they teach in their lives.

There are many 'shallow' people whose interest in Christ burns out; many who allow the 'cares of this world' to choke out the riches of the privilege of knowing about Christ and His Gospel of the Kingdom. Others go on to grow in grace and knowledge, and to their credit, bear a lot of fruit in their lives.

It is important for us to understand the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, as it is unique in its figurative language.

Luke 16:19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

If this is literal, then Lazarus is in the 'bosom of Abraham' along with millions of other who have died. Clearly this is figurative language. Also clearly, Abraham and Lazarus are 'afar off' but in close enough proximity to the Rich Man who is in torment to be seen by him.

If Abraham and the beggar are 'in heaven' they will not enjoy their time there being able to observe others in torment. But of course Abraham and the beggar are not in heaven, and the rich man is not across the road in Hell! They are all dead, this is just a story to illustrate the Rich man's callous disregard of the beggar's plight.

Christ also said in Matthew 19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

This is not literal either! This man had a problem with his riches being more important to him than following Christ. The Rich man who ignored the beggar had another problem in his lack of compassion for others. These are parables and stories, figurative language to illustrate a point as in Paul's statement about heaping coals of fire on our enemies heads!

Romans 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Literally? Of course not!! An enemies conscience would burn with remorse, and a burning desire to make it right with you. Only a fool takes figurative language literally.

Proverbs 26:7-9 7 The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. 8 As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool. 9 As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouths of fools.

Only a fool would be so ignorant that they would take the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man and suggest that it was literal and not figurative.

Luke 16:25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. 27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

In this parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, Christ is making the very important point that a great gulf exists between those who hear His Word and act on it, and those who do not. This is also the theme of the parable of the sower.

As Christ says at the end of the Lazarus story, concerning those who misinterpret and fail to 'hear' the teachings of the Law and the Prophets, and who have a wrong perception of God in their hearts, though one rose from the dead, as Christ did, even that would not cause them to change their minds or their hearts. And that fact was true in Christ's time, actually from the beginning of time, and is also true regarding the majority of people today.

The historic proofs that Christ was the Son of God, and that He rose from the dead are undeniable, but people still pooh-poo the idea.

The whole Bible, God's Word, is extremely powerful evidence and testament that God is speaking to humans then and now through His inspired Word, yet most are not persuaded to change their ways and follow Christ's teachings.

