

ALL ABOUT HELL

The Bible reader is at an extreme disadvantage to understand the biblical word hell. To add to his confusion the reader cannot tell from his English text that the word “hell” is the translation of not one, nor two, but three different Greek words! These three Greek words are not very close to each other in meanings. They are not synonyms in any way nor do they deserve the treatment given them by many translators. In spite of all those hindrances a little helpful coaching and the fog will clear and good sense and understanding will be gained.

Of the three Greek words translated **hell**, only “*hades*” has its roots in the Old Testament. The Hebrew equivalent word is *sheol* which appears 65 times where it is translated “hell” 31 times, “the grave” 31 times and “pit” 3 times. The verse whereby this link is made with the New Testament Greek is Psalm 16:10 which reads as the psalmist speaks to God, “**Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (*hades*), neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption...**”

Peter quoted this Psalm two times in Acts 2 and applied it to Christ, Who indeed was put into the new tomb, or grave, of Joseph of Arimathaea. Thus He saw no corruption of His body by contacting the decayed remains of previous corpses. Also He was raised from the dead early the third day such that His own body did not experience decay or corruption. Peter applied the verse to the Lord Jesus Christ and explained how it could not be applied to King David, the writer of Psalm 16, for David did see corruption and his tomb remained with the Jews at that time and is still open for visitation today! (I have been there!)

The Hebrew word “*sheol*” in Psalm 16 is translated *hades* in the Greek translation called the Septuagint and indicated by the Roman numerals LXX, that is 50 + 10 + 10 = 70, for there were seventy scholars translating the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek about 300 years before Christ.

The word *hades* is best translated as “the grave,” that is, the realm of the dead. The Hebrew word for an individual grave in a cemetery is not *sheol*. It is “*keber*.” This connection of the English word hell with *hades* disappears if we translate all 65 times in the OT “the grave,” and do the same for all the ten of “*hades*” appearances in the NT. This is explained more fully later.

Our Appendix lists every appearance of *hades* in the NT and includes the wider context of each so the reader can better appreciate each setting. We need to notice that the Greek *hades* was used twice in Matthew and twice in Luke quoting the Lord Jesus. Luke used it twice in Acts 2 quoting Peter. It was not used at all by Paul if we change the Greek word in 1 Cor. 15:55 from *hades* to *thanatos*, meaning death. That done, we discover that the Apostle Paul did not use *hades*, nor *gehenna*, nor *tartarus* at all in his fourteen letters. The remaining four uses of *hades* are by John in the Revelation where it is coupled with death all four times. Each of those four verses would better read, “death and the grave...”

Next let us consider *gehenna*. It is translated hell and fire is coupled with it four of its twelve times. It is my suggestion that fire should be put with it all twelve time for that is the sense. This word is the combination of “*ge*” which means land with “*henna*” which is taken from the name of the Jewish owner of this parcel named Hinom (from which we get *henna*). It was located at the edge of the city of Jerusalem. Centuries before the time of Christ this parcel had many disreputable uses similar to a city dump. In such a place one could easily understand that fires would be burning much of the time (if not all the time).

Isaiah 66:24 describes this place in detail and reads, “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases (dead bodies) of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.” This association is clear from the three uses of gehenna in Mark 9:43,45,47, which includes the words of Isaiah 66, “their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.”

A clue as to how we should think of gehenna, whether as being a literal geographical place or symbolical is indicated in James 3:6 where he described the human tongue as “set on fire of hell (gehenna).” Surely it is to be understood in a figurative sense here and we likewise recommend it for all its other eleven appearances.

We take special notice that other than in James the word gehenna appears only in Matthew, Mark and Luke and is used only by the Lord Jesus Christ. A study of each context will bring us to the awareness that the Lord was exhorting the twelve apostles. His message in every place suggests that there will be a distinct and solemn dishonor awarded those disciples who served Him poorly.

The situation that best captures the meaning of gehenna is that of shame and disgrace heaped upon a person who served dishonorably. It suggests that a funeral wherein a eulogy of praise and honor will be denied, and the dead one’s body discarded into the city dump — GEHENNA! The shame and disgrace of such a person would be such that his family could never outlive the shame. This is the dishonor pictured for poor, offensive, shameful service done by disobedient disciples. This depicts the Lord’s meaning in His usage of gehenna. Try to see how well the suggested meaning fits each context wherein gehenna was used.

Notice how that most scary passage in Mark 9:41-47 ends with the Lord Jesus saying, “have peace with one another.” Peace among the twelve apostles would be the result if each one served the Lord and one another without the offensive behavior which the Lord had cautioned against. I recommend that all twelve uses of gehenna be transliterated. Make it an English word, gehenna. Many other Greek words have been transliterated into English, such as baptism, deacon, etc. I suggest we do the same with gehenna thus “hell” would disappear from all these verses.

TARTARUS

It appears but once, 2 Peter 2:4, and has to do with disobedient angels. We need not connect it to the other two words hades and gehenna. The end it describes is unpleasant in the extreme. Perhaps we could leave that one translated HELL.

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APPENDIX: The word and its associated context is provided for all the Bible verses wherein we find “hell,” grouped by the Greek word from which they were translated.

HADES (Used 11 times in the New Testament. Only 10 with the text correction of 1 Cor 15:57.)

Listed below are all of the Bible verses which have the Greek word *hades*. For this paper we are using the text of the King James Version. The reader is urged to read an even larger passage to better grasp the larger context of each.

Matt 11:20-24 Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: 21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. 23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: (the contrast is “exalted unto heaven”) for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Matt 16:13-21 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.

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. *(In this context, **hell** would have prevailed against... not the church but the rock, “Christ,” had **the grave** prevailed to keep Him its prisoner.)*

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. 21 From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Luke 10:13-16 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14 But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. 15 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. 16 He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. (Manifestly the same setting as Matthew 11 above.)

Luke 16:22-26 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. 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. *(This parable is not intended to be taken literally for the Lord Jesus was reciting the damnable teaching of the Jewish rabbis back in their teeth.)*

Acts 2:25-33 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: 26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”

29 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. 30 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; 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. 32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33 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.

1 Cor 15:54-57 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. 55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? 56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Better Greek Texts use the Greek *thanatos* here instead of *hades* in this one verse. Hence, “O death, where is thy victory?”)

Rev 1:17-19 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 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. 19 Write the things which thou hast seen,

Rev 6:7-8 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. 8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Rev 20:11-15 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

(Note: In all four verses in Revelation hell is coupled with death. Translated better they would all read “death and the grave.”)

GEHENNA Appears 12 times translated hell and often “hell fire” or “fire of hell.”

Matt 5:22-30 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**.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. 29 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**. 30 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**. (Mark 9 will expand the ideas expressed here in Matthew.)

Matt 10:25-33 It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? 26 Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. 27 What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. 28 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**. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. 32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. 33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. (These verses speak of service, not of salvation.)

Matt 18:1-11 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 But **whoso shall offend** one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world **because of offences!** for it must needs be that **offences come**; but woe to that man by whom the **offence cometh!** 8 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**. (This term will be seen to be equivalent to hell fire.) 9 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**. 10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Matt 23:14-16 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. 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. 16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

Matt 23:29-33 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Mark 9:37-50 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me. 38 And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. 39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. 40 For he that is not against us is on our part. 41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. 42 And **whosoever shall offend** one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

43 And if thy **hand offend** thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

45 And if thy **foot offend** thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

47 And if thine **eye offend** thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 49 For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. 50 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and **have peace one with another.** *(Is not the reader surprised to see this ending to the Lord's words to His disciples?)*

Luke 12:1-9 In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. 3 Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. 4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 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. 6 Are not

five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? 7 But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. 8 Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: 9 But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.

James 3:1-11 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation 2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. 3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. 5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 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**. 7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: 8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

TARTARUS

Appears but one time, translated hell and pertains to the doom of disobedient angels.

2 Peter 2:4-6 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to **hell**, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemn-ed them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.

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