



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## *The Herald of His Grace*

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XII  
Issue 295

## *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Hell?*

*A Response to H.A. Ironside*

by – A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

**T**he *Sunday School Times*<sup>1</sup> contained an article with the above heading, which is reproduced herewith. It was written by the pastor of the *Moody Memorial Church*, Chicago, H.A. Ironside.

Apart from the subject itself, it is instructive and helpful to see how such a man, with a lifelong acquaintance with the Bible, and a sincere desire to know and teach the Word of God, is subconsciously controlled by the traditions which he has inherited. It should lead each one of us to test himself by the one touchstone – the exactitude of the Word of God.

It is the value of this exposition as a background for the truth which tempts me to make use of it. We must reach people where they are and lead them on from that point. Doubtless many who have read the article sincerely hold that it is God's truth.

With such a caption and such an expositor, we have a right to expect that all of the statements will be in exact accord with the Scriptures. As we are taken past the English to the original, we are entitled to look for perfect accord with the documents of inspiration.

The article is reprinted [in indents] to distinguish it from our comments. The following are the first two paragraphs:

Our English word hell, meaning literally "the hidden place" in the expressive language of our Anglo-Saxon forbears, is used in the *Authorized Version* of the New Testament to translate three Greek words, *Hadēs*, *Gehenna* and *Tartaros*.

Hades is the equivalent of the Hebrew *Sh'ōl*, and refers to the abode of disembodied spirits between death and resurrection only. It is never used after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in connection with those who



are saved, but only to describe the place of punishment of the lost. In the Old Testament *Sh'ōl* is used in a very broad sense as covering the state and condition of all the dead, and is sometimes wrongly rendered "grave," but a careful examination of every passage where it is so translated will show that the reference is not to the tomb, but to the place where the spirits of the departed, whether saved or lost, await their final bliss or woe. There is a sense in which both the words *Sh'ōl* and *Hadēs* set forth not only a place, but the state of a spirit without the body. When the resurrection takes place, the spirit is reunited to the body and the Hades condition is over.

The first statement which challenges investigation is the definition of *hadēs*. It is said by Dr. Ironside to be "the abode of disembodied spirits." The Scriptures distinctly teach that the spirit "returns to God" Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Shall we combine these statements logically and teach the startling doctrine that "hell" is where God is? If the spirit returns to God and this is "hell," how can we avoid such a conclusion?

Is there a single passage in God's Word that teaches that, at death, the disembodied *spirit* goes to "hell?" If so, where is it? Let us test this definition in some of the occurrences of the word *hadēs*. Did our Lord predict that Capernaum (Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15) should subside into the abode of spirits? In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, was Abraham disembodied? He had a *bosom*. Lazarus had a *finger*. The rich man had a *tongue*. The flame gave him *pain*. He could not cross the gulf between them. If these are disembodied, then words are useless for the purpose of revelation.

Our Lord actually went to "hell" and has left us a record of it. In the last dread hour of His sufferings did He say, *Hell*, into thy hands I commend My *spirit*? Such would have been His cry if the "disembodied spirit" goes to "hell" at death. Instead, He said, "**Father, into Thy hands I am committing My *spirit*.**"

(see *BIBLE-HELL*, page 2711)

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- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
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- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
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PO Box 265, Windber, PA 15963

Office: (800) 784-6010

Local: (814) 701-0063

bsn@studysshelf.com

www.BibleStudentsNotebook.com

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr. – Editor

(clyde@studysshelf.com)

André Sneider – Managing Editor

Rick Lemons – Associate Editor

### Department Managers

Clyde L. Pilkington, III – Office

Nathan H. Pilkington – Shipping

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BIBLE-HELL (continued from front page)

His spirit DID NOT go to Hell. His soul went to *hadēs*. He said, “Thou wilt not abandon My **soul** in the unseen” (Acts 2:27). His body was not allowed to decay. His soul was not left in “hell.” His spirit returned to God, His Father.

Is there a single passage in the Word of God which connects the human spirit with “hell?” *Hadēs* is always associated with the soul. This is basic. How can we know what the Bible really teaches on this subject if we confuse the soul and the spirit, and send the spirit to “hell,” when it *really* returns to God Who gave it?

Is there any place in divine revelation where we read of the time “between death and resurrection?” Death, in the Scriptures, is a state which continues until resurrection. The act of dying is not spoken of as death, but is referred to by a special term, *apothnēskō*, literally “FROM-DIE,” die off. Men are dead until resurrection, rousing or vivification restores them to life. It is the *dead* who are raised, as such, not those who died at some time in the past and who are not dead at the moment of resurrection. God raises the *dead* and *makes them alive!*

The implication that the disembodied spirit is conscious during death is absolutely unwarranted. The Spirit **returns** to God. God gave it. Was it conscious when it was with Him, before He imparted it to us? If it was not, neither is it conscious when it returns to Him. Consciousness is never associated with the human spirit in God’s Word. It is always associated with the soul, during life, not in death. In the death state between the act of dying and the resurrection, human spirits **return** to God, the soul **returns** to “hell,” whence it came, and the body **returns** to the soil, of which it was formed.

The statement that *hadēs* is never used of those who are saved after our Lord’s resurrection, but only to describe the punishment of the lost, does not seem to accord with the facts. Our Lord, speaking to the beloved disciple on Patmos, said, “I have the keys of death and of ‘hell.’” Anyone who will read the context will see how incongruous any idea of punishment is here. The fact that Christ has the keys of “hell” indicates that He would rouse John from the dead, not thrust him into torments. Nowhere, in God’s Word is *hadēs* or *shē’ōl* limited to the unsaved. It applies to *all who die*, saint and sinner alike. All go to the unseen at death and emerge when they are roused.

We are told by Dr. Ironside that “a careful examination of every passage where it is so translated ‘grave’ will show that the reference is ... to the place, where the spirits of the departed, whether saved or lost, await their final bliss or woe ... *Shē’ōl* and *Hadēs* set forth ... the state of a spirit without a body.” The word *shē’ōl* occurs less than seventy times. It is translated “grave” only thirty-one times (Genesis 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; I Samuel 2:6; I Kings 2:6, 9; Job 7:9; 14:13; 17:13; 21:13; 24:19; Psalm 6:5-6; 30:3-4; 31:17-18; 49:14-16; 88:3-4; 89:48-49; 141:7; Proverbs 1:12; 30:16; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Song of Solomon 8:6; Isaiah 14:11; 38:10, 18; Ezekiel 31:15; Hosea 13:14). Let anyone read these passages and see if a *spirit* is **ever** associated with the *grave* or *shē’ōl*. Even a careless reading will show that it is *not*.

What the Bible *really* teaches is seen in the following, which we take from the *Authorized Version* to avoid giving offense:

*Thou wilt not leave my **soul** in **hell*** (Psalm 16:10).

*Brought up my **soul** from the **grave*** (Psalm 30: 3, 4).

*Redeem my **soul** from the power of the **grave*** (Psalm 49:15-16).

*Deliver my **soul** from the lowest **hell*** (Psalm 86:13).

*His **soul** from the hand of the **grave***” (Psalm 89:48-49).

*Deliver his **soul** from **hell***” (Proverbs 23:14).

Normally, only the soul goes to *shē’ōl*. It is only in a figurative sense that gray hairs (Genesis 42:38) and pomp (Isaiah 14:11) go there. [I]t is an abnormal event, when live men, with their bodies, descend to the unseen (Numbers 16:30). Does not the Bible *really teach* that the *soul*, not the disembodied *spirit*, goes to *shē’ōl*?

In contrast to this the spirit is spoken of as follows, showing that it goes to God, not to “hell.” I quote from the *Authorized Version*:

*If he set his heart upon man, If he gather **unto himself** his **spirit** and his breath; **all flesh** shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust* (Job 34:14).

***Thou** takest away their breath [**spirit**], they die, and return to their dust* (Psalm 104:29).

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and **the spirit** shall return to **God** Who gave it* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

*Into Thy hands I commend My **spirit*** (Luke 23:46).

The *spirits of all flesh*, as well as those of God’s saints and that of our Savior, go to God at death. Can any passage be found to the contrary?

At death the Scriptures return the body to the soil [and] the spirit to God. The soul is the sensation resulting from the combination of these two (Genesis 2:7). How, then, can there be any sensation, any perception, in *hadēs*? There is not, for God calls it the *imperceptible*, where perception is impossible. Without the organs of the body or the life of the spirit there is no sight, no hearing, no smelling, no feeling of any kind. This gives “hell” its *real* name - the **un-perceived**.

The second word translated hell is *Gehenna*, which was the name of a valley just outside Jerusalem where the offal and refuse of the city were burned. In ancient times, the abominable rites of Moloch worship involving human sacrifice had been celebrated there, so it was looked upon as a place accursed. Perpetual fires were kept burning in



this valley, and into the flames were thrown the carcasses of beasts and sometimes even human criminals; upon these rotting, burning bodies the worms were continually feeding, until the flames destroyed them. Our Lord uses this awful picture as a figure of the place and state of the lost after the day of judgment. Other figures are used to describe the same dreadful condition, as for instance, “outer darkness,” “the blackness of darkness forever” and “a lake of fire and brimstone.”

The first part of this paragraph is good; but when did our Lord use *Gehenna* as a figure of “the place and state of the lost after the day of judgment?” The dozen passages where this word occurs (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6) seem to contain no hint of such a thing. Can it be that the writer has *added* to God’s Word on this solemn theme? The “outer darkness” also is dated during the kingdom, *before* the judgment (Matthew 8:12). The “blackness of darkness” is for a single eon (Jude 13). These refer to dealings with *special* classes previous to the Great White Throne, not to all humanity after it.

The third term, *Tartaros*, literally the abyss, is found only once in the Scriptures, and that in II Peter 2:4, where we read of the fallen angels who have been cast down to hell. From this we would gather that it refers to a special punishment reserved for the angels who sinned, though elsewhere we are told that the lost are to depart “into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41), so that the punishment is evidently of the same character.

*Tartarus* should not be confounded with *abussos*, abyss. It is a place where sinning messengers are *kept* for chastening judgment (II Peter 2:4). It is a place of detention, *before* the lake of fire, not a place of punishment.

## WHAT CHRIST TAUGHT ABOUT HELL

It is noteworthy that the greater part of the New Testament teaching on the subject of hell and the future punishment of the impenitent comes to us from the lips of our blessed Lord Himself. He it was who related the solemn story of the rich man and Lazarus. It was He Who warned of the dangers of being cast into the *Gehenna* of fire; it was He Who contrasted eternal life with everlasting punishment and who solemnly averred, “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24), and, “Whither I go ye cannot come” (John 8:22). We hear much sentimental talk in our day about refusing the stern teaching of the apostles in view of the teaching of the gentle Nazarene. But men forget that it was the Lord Jesus who gave us the heart-rending picture of the intermediate and the final condition of men in eternity who die in their sins. He negatives all thought of any second chance or eternal hope for such. His words as recorded in John 3:36 are conclusive. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” It is impossible logically to couple the thought of universal

salvation or of final annihilation of the wicked with these words. “*Shall not see life*” – there will then be no second chance in another world for men who have rejected the Gospel in this one. “*The wrath of God abideth on him*” – you cannot have abiding wrath and annihilation.

The preceding fail to clearly distinguish *hadēs*, the imperceptible, the unseen, which receives the souls of all in death, from *Gehenna*, which operates only during the day of the Lord and is located outside of Jerusalem, and from *Tartarus*, which keeps messengers for judgment, and from the lake of fire, for unbelievers after resurrection and judgment. This paragraph is equally confusing in regard to *time*. *Eonian* life is contrasted with eonian chastening only in regard to the nations who do not succor the Jews in the end time. It has no reference whatever to other sinners. What bearing has John 8:24 on this subject?

Does John 8:21-22 prove that the Jews will never go to Him? A really careful examination of the Greek will show that our Lord carefully chose verb forms which do *not* allow and will not uphold that inference. He did not put it in the indefinite, “I go” and “you come,” but “*I am going*” and “*you be coming*.” He avoided the very forms which might give us ground for thinking that this was more than a temporary arrangement; but we need not ask our readers to examine this in the original. Could our Lord say these words to His Own apostles? Were *they* also eternally shut out from His presence? If this interpretation is true, *they were!* Listen to His word: “*Little children, I am still with you for a little time. You shall be seeking Me, and, according as I said to the Jews, that ‘Where I am going, you cannot be coming,’ at present I am saying it to you also.*” The tense is temporary. The disciples go to Him later, and also the Jews (John 13:33).

Where did our Lord give us a picture of the final condition of men in eternity? Is it wise to make “pictures” out of His plain statements unless they are warranted by the text in so solemn a subject?

Is John 3:36 finally conclusive? Then Luke 17:22 is also, for the word and the tense are the same. “*Yet He said to His disciples, ‘The days will be coming when you will be yearning to perceive one of the days of the Son of Mankind, and you shall not see it.’*” Did He mean that they would *never* see it? By no means! He goes on to explain that it is only a temporary delay. So, in John 3:36, the “*shall not see life*” is not final. This is absolutely certain in the case of the word “*abide*.” He could have said, “the wrath of God **remains** [emeine]” (Matthew 11:23), but He chose a term referring only to a present process, “*is remaining* [menei].” None of these passages refers to final things.

The implication that universal salvation (I Timothy 2:4; 4:10) involves a “second chance” is purely gratuitous. If *man* is the active agent in salvation, no number of *chances* will be sufficient, but if *God* is our Savior He does not need even one “chance.” He has distinctly said that *He* will justify all (Romans 5:18) and vivify all (I Corinthians 15:22) and reconcile all (Colossians 1:20). There is no *chance* that He has lied or overestimated His

abilities, or His riches in Christ.

It is very evident, then, that the Bible plainly teaches the eternal punishment of those who, because of their sins, shall be shut away from the light and glory of Heaven in the sorrow and darkness of hell. For them all hope must forever be abandoned. In spite of all that advocates of other theories have written, I have never been able to find in my Bible one ray of hope for men who die spurning the grace of God in Christ. For them, *"it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hebrews 10:31).

Where is the evidence, the plain teaching, on which these statements are based? It seems to be based on that unscriptural idea of "only two destinies – heaven and hell." What about the myriads of Israel's saints who go to neither, but are blessed on earth? "Eternal [everlasting] punishment" in God's Word is not applied to sinners in general, for their sins. It is said only of a very small class at the beginning of the kingdom. Their sins are not the basis of this judgment. It turns entirely on their treatment of Israel (Matthew 25:46). It is very painful, indeed, to find honored servants of God habitually misplacing this passage. Their consciousness seems to be thoroughly inured to this serious perversion. Let us pray that God will lay this fault on their hearts.

Hebrews 10:31 deals with those in the covenant nation who outrage the spirit of grace. Why apply this to all? [W]hy not bring up a definite passage showing that there is no hope? No such Scripture exists. There are definite statements in God's Word which can easily be found, but which demand *faith*, which is evidently lacking here. *God* says that *death*, the last enemy, *shall be abolished* (I Corinthians 15:26). *God* says that He will *justify all mankind* (Romans 5:18). *God* says that He will *make all alive* (I Corinthians 15:22). *God* says that He will *reconcile all to Himself* (Colossians 1:20). [E]ach of these statements definitely speaks of the ultimate consummation. The statements used in this article do not refer to the end, but to the process. They are dislocated in time.

But, having seen this, there is another side of the truth which it is well for us to keep in mind. Nowhere in Scripture is hell presented as a vast pandemonium where lost men and demons are indiscriminately huddled together harassing one another while they vilify God and curse His blessed Son throughout an eternity of hideous torture. All such conceptions come from paganism and belong to medieval theology, not to the teaching of Bible-instructed Christians. In other words, we are not to think of eternal torment as though it involved the eternal torture of the lost either by the Devil or his agents, or by one another, and certainly not by God Who is love. But torment of a mental and spiritual character will be inescapable. "I am tormented in this flame," cried Dives (Luke 16:24). We need to remember that it was a disembodied spirit who was speaking, so that the flame of very necessity could not be any more literal than the physical terms which he uses when he speaks of finger and tongue. In I John 4:18, we read, "Fear hath torment." It is the same word, and refers

of course to what is mental and spiritual. How could it be otherwise with men who remember throughout eternity opportunities neglected, grace despised, and abide beneath the awful sense of being under divine indignation because of their rejection of Christ? This indeed will be torment.

How can we "remember" that the torment of the rich man was of a "mental and spiritual character" when there is no indication of this in previous Scripture and the whole setting of the scene is contrary to it? This is *hadēs*. We have shown that the spirits of Abraham and Lazarus and the rich man are with *God*, not in *hadēs* if this is to be taken literally. If not, then the *men* are there, especially their *bodies* and their *souls*, for the scene is based on their actual presence and sensations. Take the whole as a parable of Israel's sufferings while they are *lo ammi*, and the comfort of those who believe, which is figured by Abraham's bosom, and it is filled with prophetic light. Make it a mixed literal-figurative phantasmagoria, and all is confusion. Are we to understand from this that no punishment is physical? Why, then, resurrect the bodies of the dead for judgment?

But even the lost in hell are included in the universal subjugation of Philippians 2:9-11, where we read, *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* The word *"things"* in each instance is italicized in the text, and does not appear in the original. The word *"those"* might just as well be inserted, for it is clearly of intelligent beings that the apostle is speaking. He is declaring that in the coming day of our Savior's exaltation, all in Heaven and on earth and in the infernal regions shall bow the knee in subjection to Him, and every tongue shall confess His Lordship. In *Gehenna* there will be *"wailing and gnashing of teeth,"* but no actual insubordination will be permitted.

There is nothing about "hell" in Philippians 2:9-11. The term *katachthonion* is simply subterranean. To change it to "infernal regions" savors of medieval priestcraft. The whole passage deals with the exaltation of Christ under the name *Jesus*, which is His title as *Savior*, not Judge. No knee can bow in the name of our Savior and not be saved. No one *can* say that Jesus is Lord except by holy spirit (I Corinthians 12:3). It is to be for the glory of God as *Father*. How much "hell" exalts our Lord's Saviorhood and God's Fatherhood we must leave to each one to decide in His presence. *Gehenna* has its place in the kingdom in the eon preceding the one in which our Lord becomes Head of all. The connection is most incongruous.

We are to think of hell, therefore, as God's well-ordered prison house, where men who never behaved before will have to behave at last; where absolute justice will be meted out to all, but where mercy never shall come and hope shall be forgotten.

Where in God's Word is "hell" His "prison house?" God keeps the messengers who sinned in *Tartarus*, not in "hell." Satan will be locked up in the *abyss*, not in "hell." Who ever heard of justice being meted out in "hell?" Are we not drifting away from God's Word altogether? *Hadēs* is the Greek *imperceptible*. *Sh'ôl* is the Hebrew *questionable*, from the verb *shâ'al*, to *ask*. They denote a state where there is no perception with any of our senses, no sight, no hearing, no feeling of any sort. Literally, there is no soul when the spirit leaves the body. Figuratively, the same sense is given by saying that the soul goes to *hadēs* or *sh'ôl*.

According to the crude thoughts of many, hell will be Satan's kingdom and realm of despair, where he will reign despotically throughout eternity, taking fiendish delight in torturing his unhappy subjects. Needless to say, this conception is not found in the Word of God. According to Scripture, hell is the Devil's prison where he and his demon hosts will be shut up and unable longer to injure men or to defy or insult a holy God.

Yet the "Devil," or Slanderer, has never been in "hell" and never will be! There is not a word of Scripture for the assertion. His place is in heaven until he will be cast down (Revelation 12:9). Then he is shut up in the *abyss* (Revelation 20:3), from which he is loosed on earth (Revelation 20:7) and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). How can my dear brother preface "according to Scripture" to statements which have absolutely *no* basis in God's Word?

### WHERE DEATH WORKS NO CHANGE

In the very nature of things, men who die impenitent, possessing only an evil nature, a carnal mind, which "*is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,*" could not be happy in Heaven with God and His redeemed. Constitutionally opposed to His holy will, they will not be changed, by passing through death, into gracious, obedient saints. Death in itself has no purifying or saving power. After death men will be judged for the deeds done in the body. When souls have passed out of the body, it is too late for repentance and restoration. Therefore the tremendous importance of closing with the divine offer of mercy while it is called today, and while the Holy Spirit speaks in power to the soul. Scripture everywhere intimates that it is a fearful thing to die out of harmony with God. "*If,*" to use Joseph Cook's trenchant phrasing, "*men die hating what God loves and loving what God hates,*" the Bible suggests no post-mortem means of changing their character. It rather declares the very opposite; for, portraying the eternal state in the last chapter of the Book of Revelation, the Spirit declares: "*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still*" (22:11).

In other words, character tends to permanency. Through the infinite mercy of God, no matter how low and vile one has become while in this life, there is still hope through Christ's atonement. But if unregenerated before passing

into another world, one can but meet God according to the character already formed. "*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Observe: not "after this another chance, or second probation," but stern, relentless judgment.

Men do not possess an "evil nature." The statement that the Circumcision were "*by nature*" children of Indignation, even as the rest, has been misinterpreted so as to directly deny the teaching of Romans that *man's nature is not evil*. Sin is *beside nature* (Romans 1:26). The gentiles may be doing *by nature* what the law demands (Romans 2:14). It is allied with conscience. Paul says that the Uncircumcision, who *by nature* are discharging the law's demands, will judge the Circumcision (Romans 2:27). As the idea that human nature is evil is one of the foundations of "evangelical" theology, it is taken for granted, and its basis in the Scriptures is not examined. The "*carnal mind*" (disposition of the flesh, Romans 8:7) is present in the believer today. Hence the argument of this paragraph applies to believers quite as well as to unbelievers. Are they also hopelessly lost?

In Revelation 22:8 John returns to Patmos. Read the passage down to verse eleven. The standpoint is not the final eon, where John has been in vision, but the days in which he wrote the scroll. It is *before* the Lord's coming, which is promised in the next verse. How can it refer to the "eternal state?" That is utterly out of line with its context. Have we a right to take a statement which refers to the past and shift it to eternity? What will become of God's revelation if this course is pursued?

In Hebrews 9:27 the argument absolutely repudiates the popular interpretation here given. What parallel is there between the death of a man and his judgment and the offering of Christ? It was the death of the high priest in Israel which led to the "*judgment*" of the man slayer (Numbers 35:22-29). The statement has no reference to men in General. The "*judgment*" here is *restoration*. It cannot be applied to suffering for sin on the part of the unbeliever at the Great White Throne. How often have great saints wrested this passage from its context so as to bolster up their theology! Where this is necessary, does it not indicate a defect in their teaching?

It is true that death works no change for the better in either saint or sinner. It has no purifying or saving power. What is it, then, that will change the saints from fleshly minded failures, quite unfit for heaven, into incorruptible, immortal beings with bodies like His glorious body? Resurrection, or rousing, will not do it, for men have been brought back to life without such a change, and even the unbeliever will be resurrected for judgment. *Vivification* is the solution. Ours will be a resurrection of *life*. What ails us now all comes from lack of *vitality*. Abundant *life* will transform us into His image.

The question remains, Will the *unbeliever* ever be *vivified*? He will be raised and roused at the Great White Throne, but after being judged he will be cast into the lake of fire, the second death. Is there any escape from it? *There is*. Death, as the *last*



enemy (which can refer only to the second death), will be abolished, not by resurrection (*anastasis*) or rousing (*egersis*), but by *vivification*, or *making alive* (*zōopoieō thēsontai*) (I Corinthians 15:22). If this changes saints it will also change sinners. All men sin because they are dying. They will cease from sinning when beyond the operation of death.

The order of events would seem to be as follows: When God says to the wicked man, “*Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee*” (Luke 12:20), that soul, which cannot be killed when the body dies, passes immediately into *Hadēs*. This is the clear teaching of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. “*The rich man also died, and was buried; and in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments*” (Luke 16:22, 23). It is evident our Lord meant us to understand there was an instantaneous transition from the life of luxury to a state of wretchedness and woe. And it should be noted, in connection with what has already been said, that there is no hint of this lost soul being in a condition where demons or demon-controlled men are torturing him by inflicting upon him any suffering other than that which results from the fact that he carries within himself the means of his torment and grief. “Son, remember!” (Luke 16:25). What a world of anguish is involved for the lost soul in these words. Eternal memory! This in itself must needs involve eternal torment unless one has been washed from his sins by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The idea that the soul cannot die certainly never had its origin in the Word of God. The notion that man dies in sections is based on some figurative passages in which a part is emphasized. Herod “*Sought the young child’s soul*” (Matthew 2:20). God is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna (Matthew 10:28). “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die,*” though a figure, shows clearly that the soul is included with the body and spirit in the return called death. The soul is often spoken of as dying. Here are a few passages from the Psalms: “*Let my soul live*” (Psalm 119:175); “*Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave*” (Psalm 30:3); “*Thou hast delivered my soul from death*” (Psalm 56:13); “*He spared not their soul from death*” (Psalm 78:50); “*None can keep alive his own soul*” (Psalm 22:29). In the Unveiling we read that every living soul died (Revelation 16:3). The determined effort of evangelicals to make death some form of life has led them to invent the non-scriptural phrase “the resurrection of the body,” because they really do not believe God’s Word that the *man* is dead, including his soul and his spirit. To them the *rousing* (of the soul) and the *vivification* (of the spirit) are unknown.

Abraham says, “Son, remember.” Hence he is the torturer of hell! But we have no hint that this actually did torture the rich man. The record says “I am tormented *in this flame*.” Why try to deny this? Flame is painful. Who started this flame? Who keeps it burning? We are agreed that it is not the Slanderer or his messengers. If God does not do it, who does? Abraham seems to be especially favored, for he has an unobstructed view of the torment of the damned, and he need not be unduly concerned about them for he cannot

help them anyway. He must be very happy, indeed! Would any of my readers care to reserve a seat where they can enjoy the torturing of the damned for eternity?

This intermediate state continues unchanged (on the wrong side of the great gulf which is irrevocably fixed so that none can pass from one side to the other) until the end of time, when the day of the last great assize shall dawn. Then we learn from Revelation 20 that he who once hung on Calvary’s cross will sit on the great white throne, and before him all the wicked dead will be gathered. They will come forth in the resurrection of judgment. We are not told anything as to the nature and condition of the resurrection bodies of the lost. That they will be raised is perfectly plain. “Death and Hades” will give up the dead that are in them. That is, death, the grave, will give up the bodies; Hades will give up the souls; and so the unsaved will rise and stand before the throne. There the books of record will be opened and men will be judged out of the things written in the books. Every secret sin will be exposed; every evil thing brought to light. The Word of God, too, will be opened, for our Lord declared to the Jews that Moses in whom they trusted would be a witness against them in that day. Then, too, “the book of life” will be unfolded, for many in that vast throng once thought their names were written there, having made profession of faith in Christ, but they will search in vain to find themselves enrolled among the possessors of life eternal. And so we read, “*Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of life*” (Revelation 20:15). Thus death and Hades will come to an end. There will be no more place for the grave, for all will then be resurrected. There will be no more use for Hades, for every lost soul will be called forth for judgment. Therefore death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire.

This “intermediate state” of torment will continue only one or more thousand years before the sinner will be brought before the Judge to be tried! Can anyone imagine a greater travesty on justice than this? Human courts cannot help being unjust, but how many of them inflict the severest penalty long before the prisoner’s sentence has been passed? I preached in a jail for many years. They would not let us even see those inmates who had not been tried and condemned, lest it should be to their disadvantage. Yet we are asked to believe that God uses the unbeliever as a sort of spectacle for his saints for thousands of years before the sinner is brought to trial! God is just! He is not an abandoned fiend!

Death, in the Scriptures, is figured by sleep. Let us not make this literal, as our Lord’s disciples did, when He spoke of Lazarus, for then death would be a restorative. There are many things about sleep which are not true of death. There is a measure of subconscious activity in sleep, but not in death. There are dreams in sleep, but not in death. The point of likeness is *oblivion*. God, at death, makes the sinner entirely oblivious of everything until the moment of his resurrection, so that, to the sinner’s consciousness, he is brought into judgment *immediately*, the moment after his demise. *This* is just. *This* is Godlike. *This* is scriptural.

## THE FIRE OF HELL

The lake of fire is expressly called the second death. It is clearly the same as Gehenna; that hell-fire concerning which our Savior spoke so seriously. This is hell in all its awfulness. It is not annihilation, for the wicked are to "have their part in" it.

Much time has been wasted debating whether this fire is material or symbolical. But the awful fact is that it depicts a punishment that is endless, and a suffering that is beyond anything ever known in this world.

*"Our God is a consuming fire,"* and to be exposed to His wrath will burn the soul like the fiercest flame throughout eternal ages, in which each individual will suffer only for his own sins. Thus for some it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment than for others, for *"God shall render to every man according to his works."*

The lake of fire is not the second life, as is here intimated. *The sinner is judged for his sins before the Great White Throne*, not in death, either the first or the second. This lake of fire is nowhere associated with the vale of Hinnom, below Jerusalem. Worms cannot exist in a lake of sulphurous fire. It is not annihilation, but *it is death* for those who appear before the Great White Throne, and have died before. They suffer for their sins during their second life. That is why they are raised. They cannot have eonian life. That is for the saints only. Hence once more they enter oblivion until the abolition of death, the last enemy. Then they are vivified, made alive, that God may be All in *all*.

How can God render to every man according to his works when, according to this unjust arrangement, the mildest sinner, even infants, must suffer in fire for eternity? In *time* there can be no distinction, for infinity admits of none. In severity, what choice is there between various flames? The babe and the murderer, the Christ rejector and the ignorant heathen who never heard of our Savior, all partakers of a doom infinite in duration and beyond imagination in severity! [W]ho would suffer most? The god that would plan and permit such a fiendish "hell." His glory would be eclipsed, as it is now being dimmed by those who think Him capable of such hatefulness.

The Scriptures have told us about hell in order that we may never go there. The Word of God makes plain the way of life and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who bore in our stead on Calvary's cross the bitter anguish that lost men must endure eternally if they refuse His grace. Thrice happy the man who, turning in repentance to the risen Christ, finds in Him an all-sufficient Savior and so can exclaim with assurance in the language of Paul Gerhardt, the German singer:

There is no condemnation  
There is no hell for me,  
The torment and the fire  
My eyes shall never see.

How foolish for men to reason and argue about the possibility of an end to hell when they may find here on

earth One Who will save them forever from entering upon its woe. The apostle links together in one passage (II Corinthians 5:11, 14) two motives for sending this Gospel out into the world. He says, *"Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ... for the love of Christ constraineth us."*

Quite the contrary is true. Unless our Lord comes, the souls of all believers will return to *hadēs*, as their spirits return to God, and the bodies return to the soil. Death is still a return. Our bodies came from the soil and may return thither. Our spirits came from God and must return to Him. Our souls came from *hadēs* and they cannot possibly *return* elsewhere! The Circumcision are warned against *Gehenna* and the lake of fire, but these are not in operation now.

Where in the Scriptures do we learn that Christ bore "in our stead" the bitter anguish that lost men must endure eternally? Is an infant capable of bearing such anguish? Is any man equipped for agony such as He endured? Are our Savior's sufferings so insignificant that they will be duplicated for unnumbered infinities by each and every sinner of the race? I much prefer the theory that His sufferings were so much greater than that of others that He endured an amount equal to that of all the doomed. However lacking, it at least glorifies His sacrifice. But never before have I heard that the slightest suffering of the sinner will equal that of Emmanuel when forsaken by His God.

After having said "death and hades will come to an end," why call it foolishness for others to even consider the possibility of the same thing? When death is abolished there will be no *hadēs*. There is no *Gehenna* on the new earth. Even the lake of fire is no longer the second death when there is no death. Yet this does not do away with the fearful judgments of God. He will visit indignation and fury, affliction and distress on every human soul which is effecting evil (Romans 2:9). The sinner must suffer for his sins unless he is sheltered by the blood of Christ.

There have been times when even a slight offense called for the extreme penalty. Men were hanged for stealing food to keep from starving; but such laws are no deterrent to crime. Their very unreasonableness makes them a dead letter. It is useless to threaten sinners with eternal torment. It is so contrary to every sense of justice that they distrust the evangel which must be propped by such an alternative. Let us preach the sane and wholesome truth that God is *just*, that He will vindicate Himself to the sinner, and win his approval even of His severe judgments. After all, it is God Who is most affected by the sinner's judgment.

Many phases of this question are not touched in this brief reply, for they are expounded elsewhere. The fact that the future is always spoken of in terms of limited eons (not endlessness) is the key to the problem. In this article the writer has consistently appealed to passages which deal with the process to God's goal, but he has absolutely ignored those passages which actually deal with the consummation itself. Our Lord and His twelve apostles did not reveal the final things. That was given to the apostle Paul, who completed the Word of God. Why, in this treatise on what the Bible really teaches, was his testimony – the only real revelation of the consummation – completely repudiated? ■