

IS THERE A HELL?

By R. H. Judd

"THE FOUNDATION OF SOUND FAITH IS SOUND KNOWLEDGE"

ANXIOUS inquirers frequently and properly ask the question "Is there a Hell?" The present writer was born more than eighty three years ago into a foreign missionary society that pledged and still pledges, its members to belief in eternal conscious suffering for all persons out of Christ, and its official organ proclaims the fact that all such will burn forever in flames of fire.

As a lad, I was brought up to believe that the Bible is from God, and knowing my own sinfulness and failures, and believing that the missionaries who taught this awful doctrine were sincere in doing so, I was for many years seriously terrified by this teaching. I was utterly unable to reconcile such a fate with the Bible declaration that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son".

Years later I entered MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE of Chicago with the purpose of taking up missionary service in the Far East. While there, during the period that the famous R. A. Torrey was its dean, and himself a propagandist of that awful theme, I overheard a private discussion on the subject which gave me hope. Prospects of missionary work, however, prompted me to stifle my doubts, and at the urgent request of my father I proceeded to the mission field. Hope of future relationships also had a bearing on my inward conflict; but through having overheard that discussion, seed had taken root which God in His mercy kept alive. The conflict between truth and expediency was a thorny and difficult path, and by no means short. Eventually I determined to find out from God's Word the truth regarding this matter until sure foundations should be mine on which to rest, that my life might become a blessing to myself and to others.

The best way to study the subject is to search out the basic facts regarding it, for only misconception can result where conclusions are reached through secondary phases. To base the vitally important things concerning this life, and that which is to come on parabolic or figurative, or even symbolic language, is to disregard the fundamentals of reason and to give to allegory a higher value than original fact. That the Scriptures of the Common Version do speak of a literal hell, there is no room for questionings. The consequent logical query then is: What is the hell of which the Scriptures speak?

As our Scriptures are translations of Hebrew in the Old Testament, and of Greek in the New Testament, common sense demands that we seek the original intent of the words from which "hell" is translated. In the Old Testament the only word rendered "hell" is the Hebrew word sheol. It occurs sixty-five times. It is rendered "hell" thirty one times; and "grave" also thirty-one times; which fact is, in itself, very good evidence that the one is the equivalent of the other.

The remaining three times it is rendered "pit".

If we ascertain what objects are said, in Scripture, to go to sheol, we have ample indication of its reality, purpose, and location. In Genesis 42:38; 44:31; and 1 Kings 2:9, it is a place for gray hairs. In, 1 Samuel 2:9; Psalm 31:17; 94:17 it is a place of silence. (See also, Psalm 115:17, and note that in these last two references the word "silence" is rendered by "Hades" in the Septuagint Versions thus not only proving that "Hades" is the Greek equivalent of "Sheol" but also proving that "Hades" is a place of silence). In 1 Kings 2:9 it is a place, not only of gray hairs, as noted above, but also of blood.

In Psalm 141:7, it is a place for bones. In Isaiah 14:11, it is a place for worms and maggots. In Ezekiel 31:17; 32:27; swords and weapons of war are found in sheol. In Psalm 49:14, sheep are laid there. In Numbers 16:32, we read that tents, household goods, and living persons with them, went down to sheol and the earth covered them. Many similar passages can be quoted, all of which go to prove that sheol (hell) is indeed very material and very real, and a common experience with the sons of men. The well-known commentator Albert Barnes says: "He that is in the grave is in sheol, but he that is in sheol may not be in a (properly prepared) grave, but in any pit or in the sea. In short, it is the region of the dead, which is sometimes figuratively considered as a city, or large habitation, with gates and bars, in which there are many chambers...." Numerous well-known names can be cited in support of this definition.

Usher, referring to several passages where the Hebrew word is sheol, the Greek Hades, and the English "hell" says, "The place of dead bodies is to be understood!" The reader is advised to turn to Genesis 37:35, in the English Revised Version and to note the comment in the margin where sheol and hades are identified as equivalents, so that what is true of one is true of the other. This is well illustrated in, Acts 2:27, and following verses when compared with Psalm 16:10, for in the first the Greek is hades and in the second sheol.

Gehenna is also translated "hell" twelve times in the New Testament. See Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28 and others. It is the Greek form of what the Hebrews formerly called Ge-Hinnom, "the valley of Hinnom".

Its location is shown in, Joshua 5:8, and 2 Kings 23:10. It lies on the west and south of Jerusalem, and to this day is called by the Arabs -- Wady Jehennon. Webster defines it as a place where some of the Israelites sacrificed their children in fires to the god Molech, and which, on this account was afterwards regarded as a place of abomination and used for the refuse of the city, and where perpetual fires were kept to prevent pestilence; hence the expression "hell-fire" Here worms continually consumed that which was left by fires, and from this fact came the free expression that the worms die not. The Hebrew word rendered "carcasses" in, Isaiah 66:24, is translated "dead bodies" in 2 Chronicles 20:24, 25. In some parts of England, it is still common to "hell potatoes" and to "hell a roof" What is meant by the phrase is, not to burn them, but to cover them. In hot climates like India and China, men use "hel-mets" to cover the head.

An "unquenchable fire" is simply a fire so intense that it cannot be extinguished, but when all the material on which it feeds is consumed, it ceases to be. Many persons are puzzled over the expression "the smoke of their torment!" There could not be a more apt illustration of utter and completed destruction than that of smoke, for smoke is the proof, the guarantee, that what has been put into the fire has been completely consumed. There could be no smoke without that result. In Matthew 23:15 "the child" (or son) of hell (Gehenna) has for its meaning one "worthy of death!" See, 1 Samuel 26:16, and 2 Samuel 12:5 (Revised Version margins).

The fate of the wicked is described in Scripture in the plainest of language that cannot be misunderstood. For example, see Psalm 37:10, 20 and countless others. Hence Scripture says, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Death is the only punishment that can be everlasting; all others end in death. In, Matthew 25:46 "everlasting punishment" and "everlasting life" are put in contrast, the one with the other.

Jesus Christ said, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish!" Scripture language is final. Speaking of the dead it tells us that there are some whom God remembers and there are others whom God "remembers no more." There is no room in such language for universal salvation. Luke 16: is so often quoted in defence of the hell-fire-torment doctrine that a brief comment may be helpful. The passage in this chapter most often quoted is Verse 23 - "In hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments".

It cannot be disputed logically by anyone that the man mentioned in this verse is the same man that "was clothed in purple and fine linen" (V. 19), and it is the same man who "died and was buried" V. 32.

It seems strange indeed that it should be necessary to ask "How many eyes has any man got?" for two only is the common heritage of men, rich or poor. Moreover, who is there that would deny that custom demands that men's eyes are buried with him? Obviously the story is parable. Any person who reads the narrative honestly and critically will see that reason, logic and fact proclaim it to be parable.

LIFE, LIFE ETERNAL LIFE!

By R. H. J.

"And I heard a voice out of the throne saying death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more " Revelation 21:3-4. R.V.

I could never believe in Heaven
As a place of joy and peace,
While thousands on thousands suffered
In a Hell that will never cease.

For my God is a God of mercy,
He is a God of justice too;
But the frightful stain of unending SIN
I could NEVER believe it true.

My Father in Heaven forgive them,
Those who teach such crime as true;
And wilt Thou in kindness remember
That "they know not what they do".

For eternal LIFE is the gift of God.
To be shared with CHRIST who died;
That eternal SIN might never be
A stain on eternity's tide.

"FOR THE LOVE OF GOD IS GREATER THAN THE MEASURE OF MAN'S MIND....."

Copies may be had from the author R. H. Judd, Fulton Cottage, R. R. #3. Colborne, Ontario. Single copies 5¢. Special price on quantities.

ALSO: Author of "One God: The God of the Ages" 17 chapters,
with Introduction by Pastor G. E. Marsh. Price \$1.00

From the author or National Bible Institution, Oregon, Ill.