

THE BIBLE ONLINE STUDY COURSE - LESSON 4

What Is "Hell"?

Even if you are a faithful, believing Christian, you may go to hell! Many of your loved ones are right now in hell! But don't be alarmed. You probably have never heard the TRUTH about what "hell" really is - and where most ideas on the subject came from. Just what does the Bible teach about "hell"? Millions are in confusion about "hell." What is it? Where is it? Who really goes there? And why?

Is "hell" a literal place - a geographical location? Is it somewhere deep within the earth, in the heart of the sun, or in remote space?

A Gallup survey in 2011 showed that 85% percent of Americans believe in heaven, but only 75% percent are persuaded of the reality of hell. Why the difference?

Probably because many of those who believe in a heaven simply cannot bring themselves to think that a merciful, loving God would consign anyone to a place of eternal torment!

Common Ideas of Hell

A survey in New Zealand indicated that 60 percent of New Zealanders believe hell is simply a state of mind. Only 26 percent believe hell is a literal place.

In San Francisco, random passers-by were asked: "How do you picture hell?" Some of the answers reveal the utter confusion surrounding the subject in the minds of the public.

First person: "Honestly, I have doubts there is such a place. I feel hell is a means of scaring people so they will lead a better life.....If there is such a place, I suppose it is craggy and filled with people feeding furnaces or breaking rocks."

Second person: "The idea of hell is one of the greatest means in the world for teaching children good. Personally, however, I think it is just a Biblical term."

Third person: "When I was young I had a clear picture of what hell is like - flames and a devil with horns and a pitchfork. But a person gets over this, just as he does with Santa Claus."

Fourth person: "I would rather not think about it."

Fifth person: "I have never thought of it except as I have seen it staged in operas or plays."

Sixth person: "I picture hell as a big, hot, uncomfortable desert. I think it does exist. Not down in the ground. But since someone put us here, then he could easily have a place for us afterward."

Seventh person: "Hell is a place of unhappy confinement, like a prison. Not necessarily with flames. More a torment of the spirit. I believe it is an actual area, although not necessarily down any more than heaven must be up."

These are just some of the many vague ideas about hell, but almost no real knowledge. Probably the clear majority are those who would just "rather not think about it"!

What the Clergy Thinks

Many theologians today do not believe in a literal "hell." Said one: "The essence of hell is separation from God - not really torture, but torment." Another described hell as "a condition of human existence."

One minister claimed hell is "the loss of communication, insensitivity to spiritual values, the realization of how far short of our capacities we have fallen, the memory of some of the things we have done." What abysmal confusion!

Isn't it time we learned the TRUTH of the Bible?

The "Fiery Inferno"

Most everyone assumes one of two extremes concerning "hell." One group totally denies that hell exists. Hell is passed off as an ancient superstition that has no bearing whatever on modern life.

The other group, including most so-called Bible fundamentalists, pictures hell as a terrible place of never-ending torment where the devil rules and his demons gleefully "roast" sinners like millions of wieners on a barbecue spit. There is bitter weeping and wailing, agonized cursing, shrieks and screams from those in eternal torment - according to this concept.

Here is the terse summation of this popular belief from the *Encyclopedia Americana*:

"As generally understood, hell is the abode of evil spirits; the infernal regions ... whither lost and condemned souls go after death to suffer indescribable torments and eternal punishment. Some have thought of it as the place created by the Deity, where He punishes, with inconceivable severity, and through all eternity, the souls of those who through unbelief or through the worship of false gods have angered Him. It is the place of divine revenge, untempered, NEVER ENDING. This has been the idea most generally held by Christians, Catholics, and Protestants alike. It is also the idea embodied in the Mohammedan's [Muslim's] conception ~~The~~ main feature[s] of hell as conceived by Hindu, Persian, Egyptian, Grecian, and Christian theologians are essentially the same" (from the article on "Hell," emphasis ours throughout lesson).

But why do people believe what they believe? From where or from whom have these popular ideas come?

From the Philosophers

A few prominent religious leaders of the Middle Ages left writings and teachings that were so universally believed that they became the accepted doctrine of the Christian-professing world. One of the most important of these influential writers was Augustine (345-430 A.D.).

Augustine reasoned that there should be a temporary cleansing of imperfect souls in purgatorial fire. He, like other influential men of the Christian-professing church, were influenced by "pre-Christian doctrine" - the doctrine of the ancient pagan philosophers and other early church fathers (see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., article "Purgatory").

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) wrote a tremendously popular poem, *La Commedia*, in three parts - Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Although Dante's purpose for writing his *Commedia* was to ridicule the religious concepts of hell which were prevalent during his day, his writing nevertheless tremendously influenced popular thought and teaching. "Of all poets of modern times," says a modern author, "Dante Alighieri was, perhaps, the greatest educator. He possibly had a greater influence on the course of civilization than any other man since his day he wrote, in incomprehensible verse, an imaginative and lurid account of a dismal hell - a long poem containing certain phrases which caught the attention of the world, such as "all hope abandon ... ye, who enter here!" His "Inferno" was based on Virgil and Plato" (*Dante and His Inferno*).

And so Dante wrote from the ideas and concepts of the philosophers Plato and Virgil and the prevalent "Christian" concepts of his day. But who were Plato and Virgil?

Says the *Encyclopedia Americana*: "Virgil, pagan poet, 70-19 B.C., belonged to the national school of pagan Roman thought, influenced by the Greek writers. Christians of the Middle Ages believed he had received some measure of divine inspiration."

Plato, born in Athens, Greece, 427 B.C., was a student of the renowned Socrates. Plato's famous literary work *Phaedo* taught the immortality of the soul - the foundation for other writings on the doctrine of an eternal hell where wicked "souls" are supposedly punished forever.

So the world's concept of "hell" is admittedly a product of human thinking - of pagan speculation - as men puzzled over the eventual fate of the wicked.

What About the Billions of Mankind?

Before we examine the Bible to see whether the common ideas about hell could be true, let us consider

where this concept of hell, if true, would lead us.

On this earth there are more than seven billion people. [2013 statistic.] The most populous lands are China, India, and others parts of Asia. But in spite of the efforts of Western missionaries, more than half of all the people on the earth have never so much as heard the only name by which men may be saved (Acts 4:12)- the name of "Jesus Christ"!

Literally billions of people on this earth have lived and died without having known anything about "salvation" - without ever having seen a Bible.

Now think what that means. If all the "unsaved" go immediately to a fiery hell at death, then more than half the people who have ever lived on this earth have been consigned to this terrible punishment without ever having had a chance to escape it!

Can you really believe that is the method an all-wise, all-merciful loving God is using to work out His purpose here below?

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

We face these alternatives: Either the Creator reveals the TRUTH on this subject in His inspired Word, or else we must throw up our hands and confess we just don't know. Either we believe what the Bible says, or we must- if we are rational and honest- admit ignorance.

What does God say about "hell" in the Bible? You may be surprised! So be sure to read all of the scripture references given in this lesson, and PROVE the truth from the Bible with your own eyes.

LESSON 4

Christ Spoke of "Hell Fire"

1. In His parable-like illustration, what punishment did Christ warn would ultimately befall those who refuse to quit sinning - refuse to stop using (obviously not literally "cut off") various of their members to commit sin? Mark 9:43.

COMMENT: "hell" is an English word. When Mark recorded Christ's words, he wrote them in the Greek language. The Greek word translated "hell," which Mark was inspired to write down, is *gehenna*. Since in this verse Christ says the sinner is "to go into hell, into the fire," it follows that those who go to *gehenna* will receive punishment by fire.

Keep in mind then that Christ associated the Greek word *gehenna* with fire.

2. What did Christ say in Mark 9:45 to emphasize what He said in verse 43?

COMMENT: Mark wrote down the same Greek word *gehenna* here in verse 45 that he used in verse 43. The translators of the Authorized or King James Version of the Bible of A.O. 1611 selected the English word "hell" to represent this Greek word *gehenna*. We will learn more about the real meaning of this word later.

3. How did Christ re-emphasize what He said about "hell fire"? Verse 47.

COMMENT: Again, the Greek word which Mark used in this verse is *gehenna*. *Gehenna* clearly refers to fire! But there are other words in the Bible also translated "hell."

English Word "Hell" Misapplied

Let's read what *A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by James Hastings, says about the use of the word "hell" in the Old and New Testaments. Keep in mind, as you read this, that the Old Testament was originally written in the Hebrew language, and that the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language.

Hastings says: "In our Authorized Version the word hell is unfortunately used as the rendering of three distinct words, with DIFFERENT IDEAS or meanings. It represents, *

1) the "sheol" of the Hebrew Old Testament, and the "hades" in the New Testament. ... It is now an entirely

misleading rendering, especially in the New Testament passages. The English revisers, therefore, have substituted "hades" [going back to the original Greek word] for "hell" in the New Testament. In the American revision the word "hell" is entirely discarded in this connection "The word 'hell' is used

2) as equivalent to the Greek word '*tartaros*' (2 Peter 2:4)..... and,

3) . . . as the equivalent of the Greek word '*gehenna*' ... "

So we see that the real meanings of three different Greek words - *hades* (equivalent to the Hebrew *sheol* of the Old Testament), *tartaros* and *gehenna* - have been confused with each other because translators have attempted to make the one English word "hell" cover the definitions of all three words! No wonder confusion has reigned in the minds of millions. What do these words really mean?

The original Old Testament Hebrew word *sheol* and the New Testament Greek word *hades* mean the same thing - simply the grave. These original words have been translated "grave" in many places in the Bible. "Hell" is an old English word, and over 350 years ago when the Authorized Version was translated, the people of England commonly talked of "putting their potatoes in hell for the winter" - a good way of preserving potatoes- for the word then meant merely A HOLE IN THE GROUND which was covered up - a dark and silent place- a grave! But pagan teachings gaining popular acceptance have caused people to misapply the old English word "hell" to the lurid imaginations of Dante.

The second Greek word, *tartaros*, which has also been translated into the English word "hell," occurs only once in the New Testament, (2 Pet. 2:4) and does not refer to humans, but to the restrained condition of fallen angels. Its meaning, translated into English, is "darkness of the material universe," or "dark abyss," or "prison."

But what about *gehenna*? This Greek word, as all authorities admit, is derived from the name of the narrow, rocky Valley of Hinnom which lay just outside Jerusalem. It was the place where refuse was constantly burned up. Trash, filth, and the dead bodies of animals and despised criminals were thrown into the fires of *gehenna*, or the Valley of Hinnom. Ordinarily, everything thrown into this valley was destroyed by fire- COMPLETELY BURNED UP. Therefore, Christ used *gehenna* to picture the terrible fate of unrepentant sinners!

Two Different "Hells"

In most of the passages of the New Testament where we see the word "hell," the original Greek word is not *gehenna*. Most often it is *hades* - which does not refer to fire at all, but to a grave- a hole in the ground. Yet the translators have confused and obliterated the two entirely separate meanings of these words by indiscriminately rendering them both by the same English word "hell." Let's study the proof.

1. What can we learn from Luke 12:5 about "hell"?

COMMENT: If you were to look up the original Greek word that is here translated into the English word "hell," you would find it is *gehenna*. *Gehenna*, then, is plainly a place where bodies are thrown and, as Christ indicated, DESTROYED BY FIRE!

2. But now notice the same English word "hell" in Acts 2:31?

COMMENT: The original Greek word which is translated by the English word "hell" in Acts 2:31 is *hades*. *Hades* means the "grave," as its usage in this verse clearly shows! We can plainly see that the English word "hell" can have different meanings! So when we come to the word "hell" in the New Testament, we must keep in mind these two vastly different meanings and carefully determine by the context whether it refers to destruction by fire, or the grave where the dead lie buried.

Whenever you're in doubt about the intended meaning of the word "hell" in the New Testament, look it up in an exhaustive concordance, such as *Strong's* or *Young's*, to see which Greek word it was translated from, and hence its true meaning.

Where to After Death?

In the preceding lesson we learned that when a person dies and is interred in his grave, he knows absolutely

nothing (Eccl. 9:5). He merely lies quietly and silently there as in a "sleep," totally oblivious to [or unaware of] everything. Let's briefly review this important truth.

1. What one thing befalls both men and beasts? Eccl. 3:19. Do they all go to one place- the same place- when they die? Verse 20 and Genesis 3:19.

COMMENT: Have you ever heard of beasts going to "hell" to be tortured?

2. What place does God say man goes to when he dies? Eccl. 9: 10. Did Job realize he would go to the grave after death? Job 17:13.

3. Was the One who became Jesus Christ "made flesh"? John 1:14. Did Christ take upon Himself the same mortal flesh of which we are composed? Heb. 2:14. And didn't He also have to go to the grave as other mortal men do? Turn to Acts 2:31 once again.

COMMENT: The original Greek word in Acts 2:31 is *hades* which, as you now know, means the "grave." Jesus' "soul" (body) did not see corruption (did not decompose in the grave) because He was resurrected after three days!

Some theologians, however, maintain the tradition that Christ was preaching to departed human "spirits in prison" (I Pet. 3:19) while He was in "hell." That idea is absolutely false. Verse 20 makes it plain that those to whom Christ preached (concerning their rebellious activities on earth) were demon spirits, and that He preached to them during the days of Noah! This verse is not talking about the three days and nights Jesus was dead in the grave at all!

Resurrected to "Judgment"

You may have heard ministers preach that sinners go directly to the fiery tortures of "hell" when they die. But this would mean they are condemned to "hell" before they are formally judged and sentenced! Let's notice when the wicked dead are judged by God.

1. When will the dead be judged? John 5:28, 29.

COMMENT: Christ said the judgment of the wicked dead, who are now in their graves, is yet in the future. "The hour is coming," said Jesus. Then how could they now be receiving punishment when they have not, as yet, even been judged? The two ideas clearly contradict each other!

When will the dead be judged? Obviously after they come up from their graves in a resurrection!

2. While they are in their graves - until the day of their resurrection - are those who have already proved themselves to be unjust "reserved" for a future time of formal sentencing and punishment? 2 Peter 2:9.

3. Does Revelation 20:13 also prove there is to be a future resurrection to judgment?

COMMENT: Notice that those who are in watery graves (the sea) are to be resurrected; and those who were killed by other means and left unburied ("death") are to be resurrected; and those who are in earthy graves ("hell" - the Greek word here is *hades* which means the grave) are also to be resurrected at this time.

So all the wicked dead on land or in the sea, wherever they may be, are to be resurrected to "JUDGMENT" in the future. That is when God will formally sentence them!

No one is, or ever has been, down in a fiery "hell" dancing around on hot coals, shrieking in terror and torment! God's time for judging and condemning the wicked has not yet arrived! How clear!

The whole question of "judgment" is thoroughly dealt with in supplementary reading material offered in conjunction with this Bible Study Course. Suffice it to say here that the Bible clearly shows that the time the wicked are condemned to their fate is IN THE FUTURE. The idea that wicked "souls" are right now suffering torments in a fiery hell is a pagan myth!

Death by Fire

What is the ultimate penalty - the "wages," or reward - of sin? Is it eternal life in torment? Or is it eternal oblivion? What is the ultimate FATE of the wicked? The Bible makes the truth very clear.

1. What is the "wages of sin"? Romans 6:23.

COMMENT: The "wages of sin is DEATH." "Death" is the opposite of "life"! The final wages the incorrigible wicked will receive, then, is simply the complete cessation of life!

2. What does Paul warn will be the judgment or sentence of those who, knowing God's commands and having tasted of [experienced] His way of life, willfully sin against Him? Heb. 10:26-27. Will such persons Live on in torment in fire- or will they be "devoured" by it? Verse 27. Notice that this judgment comes on people because they sin willfully.

3. Does Jesus compare false ministers who don't bring forth good works to trees that don't bring forth "good fruit"? Matt. 7:15-19. What did He say would happen to such people? Verse 19. Is wood put into a fire to be tormented or to be burned up? Did Christ clearly indicate that all people who do not bring forth good fruit will likewise be cast into fire? Matthew 7:17-19.

4. What did Christ say to the unrepentant scribes and Pharisees of His day? Matt. 23:33.

COMMENT: The original Greek word translated here as "hell" is *gehenna* - meaning the Valley of Hinnom. Christ used the fire that burned up refuse in the Valley of Hinnom as a type of the final fate- complete destruction - of the wicked by fire. Those rebellious and stubborn religious leaders could well understand Christ's analogy. They knew they were being threatened with complete destruction as just so much trash!

5. What did Christ warn would happen to those who will not repent of their sinful ways? Luke 13:3.

COMMENT: "Perish" means to cease existing. It does not mean to continue living. Life in eternal torment is not what God has decreed for incorrigible sinners!

The punishment revealed in the Bible is death - cessation of life forever. Eternal life is NOT something we were born with. It is a gift of God which He will bestow at the resurrection to those who obey Him. Eternal Life and death are contrasted all through your Bible!

6. Did Christ show by His parable of the tares that there is to be a future harvest? Matthew 13:30. Did He say the evil people- the "tares" - will afterward be BURNED? Same verse.

COMMENT: In this parable Christ likened the earth to a "field" (vs. 24), the obedient people to "wheat" (vv. 25, 29), and the disobedient to "tares" (vv. 25, 29, 30).

7. Does Psalm 37:20 also show the ultimate fate of the wicked will be destruction by fire? Is there coming a time that will be extremely hot - so hot that it will burn up - CONSUME - the wicked? Mal. 4:1. What will be left of the wicked? Mal. 4:3. Who will bum up the wicked - Satan and his demons, or the Eternal God? Same verse.

COMMENT: The "hell fire" that the Bible speaks of will be thousands of degrees HOTTER than the imaginary "hell fire" of most preachers - which is only hot enough to torment. The Biblical "hell fire" will totally consume the disobedient! Never will they exist again.

The Bible plainly shows that those who have known God's truth and still refuse to obey it, or willfully disobey, will reap the wages of sin - eternal death! (Rom. 6:23). This scripture means what it says. The attempts of many theologians to "explain away" death and to "interpret" it as mere "separation from God" cannot be reconciled with Scripture. Death clearly does NOT mean "eternal life" in the horrifying torments of an eternal "hell."

The author of this pagan deception is none other than the father of lies - Satan the devil! (John 8:44). If you have innocently believed his doctrine and have suffered mental torment because of it, thank God that He has opened your mind to understand the TRUTH!

What Is the "Lake of Fire"?

And now comes a most interesting revelation! Exactly what is the *gehennafire* that will consume the wicked? When and where will it occur?

Forget all the ideas you may previously have been led to believe. Read now in your own Bible what God reveals. For "hell fire" does not even exist yet!

1. Are all who stubbornly refuse to repent and persist in breaking God's commandments ultimately to find themselves in a lake of "fire and brimstone"? Rev. 21:8.

COMMENT: We've already seen that the fate of the wicked is *gehenna* fire. So *gehenna* and the lake of fire are the same. A very large fire would have the appearance of a fiery lake, hence its description.

2. Will it cause the death of the wicked? Notice Revelation 21:8 once again. Which death will it cause? Same verse.

COMMENT: Mortals naturally die once, because we just "wear out" (Heb. 9:27). But if anyone dies the second death, that individual will have been judged by God to be guilty of persistent disobedience and incorrigible rebellion. The second death will be for all eternity!

3. Does Revelation 20: 13-14 verify the fact that all who are incorrigible will be cast into this future lake of fire - not now, but after the coming judgment? Will all mortals whose names will not have been written in the book of (eternal) life be cast into the lake of fire? Verse 15.

4. When does the lake of fire actually begin - at Christ's second coming? Revelation 19:20. Will the two chief enemies of Christ be cast into it at that time? Same verse.

5. How long will this fire last? Matthew 25:41.

COMMENT: The word "everlasting" is *aionion* in the Greek. *Aionion* comes from the root *aion* which often means "age." In this case, the correct translation into the English language should be "AGE-LASTING fire." This "lake of fire" is going to be burning all during the Millennium - the "age" of Christ's rule.

During the millennial reign of Christ and His saints, the Valley of Hinnom will once more be kept perpetually burning - and the incorrigibly wicked ones who set their WILL to persist in rebellion against God's laws will be THROWN INTO this fire as a stern witness to all the rest of the world! (Isa. 66:24).

6. Much later - after the Millennium - will the flames of the "lake of fire" purify the earth's surface, burning in one vast worldwide holocaust? 2 Peter 3:10. Will all the things man has created be burned up, as well as the rest of those people who will not have received salvation and eternal life because of willful rebellion against God? Same verse and Revelation 20: 15 once again.

COMMENT: Here is God's - not man's - description of what the final "hell fire" will be like! It is yet in the future. It has not yet occurred. Nothing is said anywhere in the entire Bible about "souls" descending beneath the earth into "hell fire," or of torture for all eternity! Rather, the Bible shows that all incorrigible human beings and their works will suffer destruction once for all eternity. All other teachings to the contrary have come to us from paganism!

7. Are the wicked to be reduced to ashes by the fire which will consume the earth's surface? Turn to Malachi 4:3 once again. Can ashes be tormented forever and ever? Of course not! The death they will have suffered will be an eternal, everlasting punishment, **not an everlasting punishing** by torment. There is a big difference between punishment and punishing! The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), not eternal life in hell fire!

8. What is meant in Revelation 20: 14 by the words, "death and hell were cast into the lake of fire"?

COMMENT: The original Greek word here translated "hell" is *hades*. Only unrepentant sinners - those who refuse to obey God - will still be mortal at the time of this resurrection. There will be no one else who could die. Therefore, death and the grave will both cease to exist when the lake of fire engulfs the entire surface of the earth.

9. What will Satan's part be in this coming "hell fire"? Revelation 20:10.

COMMENT: Satan will be cast into the same conflagration that will destroy all incorrigible mortals. Notice that Satan himself will be in "hell fire." He will not play the role of torturing people as he is often

represented by the doctrines of this world.

10. Will the "beast" and "false prophet" still be in this fire? Rev. 20: 10.

COMMENT: Some Bibles use italics to show that the word "are" in this verse was supplied by the translators. It is not found in the Greek manuscripts. The phrase should read, "where the beast and the false prophet were" - the unwritten verb being understood to be in the same tense as the verb in the first half of the sentence. The Amplified Bible has it correct. These two mortal individuals will have been destroyed over 1,000 years before the time Satan is put into these flames.

Hell Fire "Never Quenched"?

1. Did John the Baptist ever speak of "unquenchable fire"? Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17.

2. Did Jesus say that hell fire will never be "quenched"? Mark 9:43-48. (Recall the Greek word for "hell" in verses 43, 45 and 47 is *gehenna*.)

COMMENT: Jesus repeated this statement five times for emphasis. From this, people have carelessly assumed [that] the "fire that never shall be quenched" (vs. 43) is a fire of torture which has been in existence for centuries, and will continue to exist for eternity.

We have proved that this idea is absolutely false! Notice God's own inspired explanation of unquenchable hell fire.

3. Did God (over 2,500 years ago) warn the inhabitants of Jerusalem that He would kindle a fire in Jerusalem's gates that would not be quenched? Jeremiah 17:27. But what would that fire do to the city's palaces? Same verse.

COMMENT: This fire occurred a few years later, and it destroyed all the houses of Jerusalem (Jer. 52: 13). Since God said this fire "shall not be quenched" and since it is not burning today, it obviously went out by itself after accomplishing its purpose- after devouring all combustible material!

4. What punishment befell the notorious cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? Genesis 19:24. Was it [a] literal fire that destroyed human beings? Luke 17:29. What do we read in Jude 7 about this event? Is there still a fire burning in those cities which God destroyed long ago? Of course not!

COMMENT: The expression "eternal fire" used in Jude 7 means a fire whose results are permanent or everlasting - obviously not a fire that burns forever! Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed centuries ago- they are not burning today.

The fires which burned these cities simply died out after consuming all combustible material. These scriptures prove [that] the "fire that shall not be quenched" will NOT torment people forever and ever!

Christ, as we have seen, often referred to the fires that burned in the Valley of Hinnom at the edge of Jerusalem to illustrate the final "hell fire" or *gehenna* which is to consume the wicked. But did those fires ever go out? The fact is, they were kept burning as long as there was refuse to burn. Then they burned themselves out!

They were never quenched or put out prematurely by anyone! The flames merely died out when they had nothing more to consume. Even so it will be with the FINAL *gehenna* fire. It will be unquenched - but it will finally burn itself out!

"Worm That Dieth Not"

A startling statement is found in Mark 9:44, 46 and 48. In these verses, Christ spoke of a worm that "dieth not." Are there really immortal worms?

Some people think Jesus referred to people as worms, and that He was trying to say that these "people" never die but live on forever in agonizing torment. However, those who believe this fail to notice that what Jesus spoke of was "their worm." So the wicked themselves are not the "worm."

What is this mysterious "worm" that does not die? Notice what Jesus really meant.

Jesus clearly had reference, as the marginal notes of many Bibles show, to Isaiah 66:24, where a similar statement is made about "their worm" - the worm of dead "carcasses." (Be sure to read this verse in your Bible.)

Now, what is the "worm" of a dead, decaying carcass? If you have ever seen a putrefying carcass, the answer should be obvious. To put the matter beyond all doubt, we find that the lexicons define grub or maggot [of] both the Greek and the Hebrew words translated *as* "worm" in Mark 9:44 and Isaiah 66:24.

When a dead body occasionally lodged on one of the rocky ledges above the garbage fires of the Valley of Hinnom, it was soon infested by many worms or maggots - which hatched out of eggs laid by flies. It was simply these worms to which Christ referred when He said, "their worm dieth not."

But Jesus didn't mean that each individual worm continued to live forever! Actually, the larvae - maggots - would hatch from eggs, eat the flesh, continue in the larval form only a few days, then go through pupation or metamorphosis and finally emerge as flies! The worms didn't die - they became flies! Later, the flies died.

These are facts known by any student of biology! And Christ was not ignorant of them.

By contrast, the misunderstanding of Christ's simple statement by some people should be an object lesson to always be careful to use wisdom and common sense in studying God's Word. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7). The Bible is one book that makes good sense! Let's always study these perplexing scriptures carefully and not jump to hasty, erroneous, weird conclusions.

The Story of "Lazarus and the Rich Man"

Jesus' story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) is perhaps one of the most outstanding texts used by those who attempt to prove there is an eternal hell fire.

What lesson did Jesus intend to illustrate by this strange story? Let's carefully study this story word by word, comparing it with other crystal-clear scriptures.

1. Did Lazarus - a poor but righteous beggar - die? Luke 16:22. Was he later carried by angels to "Abraham's bosom"? Same verse.

COMMENT: If we are Christ's, God considers us Abraham's "seed" - descendants or children - and we become heirs with Abraham to receive the promises God made to him (Gal. 3:29). Through faith we may all become "children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). This is an intimate relationship - a close or bosom relationship, spiritually speaking - with Abraham. We are to be in close contact with him in sharing the promises. This is the sense in which righteous Lazarus was taken to "Abraham's bosom."

When, then, will Abraham and the Lazarus of our story actually receive the fulfillment of the promises? The answer of the Bible is that Abraham and the saints - his "seed" - will inherit the promises at the resurrection of the just when Jesus Christ returns to earth to establish the Kingdom of God! (We will study more about the subject of the Christian's inheritance in the next lesson.)

2. And what about the sinful rich man of Jesus' parable? Did he also die? Luke 16:22. And do we next see him lifting up his eyes, indicating his having been resurrected, and calling to Abraham for a few drops of water to cool his tongue, being in mental torment? Luke 16:23-24.

COMMENT: The word "hell" used here is translated from the original Greek word *hades*, which we know means the "grave." It is not from the Greek word *gehenna*, which represents the future lake of fire that will DESTROY the wicked forever. The rich man is pictured at the very moment of his coming up out of his GRAVE in a resurrection!

Abraham and Lazarus will have already inherited eternal life in God's Kingdom (Matt. 25:34). They will have been immortal for over 1,000 years BEFORE the wicked rich man is resurrected to be burned in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:4-5, 15). Until then, the rich man will have been dead in his grave, having no consciousness of the passing time (Eccl. 9:5).

At his resurrection, the rich man will see the flames of the lake of fire beginning to surround him. He knows

these flames will destroy him forever. Being in great mental agony, he asks for just a little water to cool his tongue, which has become dry from his mental anguish. He does not ask for buckets or oceans of water to put the fire out. He knows such a request would be denied.

3. What did Abraham then answer the rich man? Luke 16:25-26.

COMMENT: The great "gulf" between the two will be the difference between mortality and immortality. Those who will have been made immortal shall never die because they will have been born of God (Rev. 20:6). Abraham and the beggar will be on the immortal side of this gulf- the mortal rich man on the other side, facing imminent eternal death by fire!

Many of the condemned, like the rich man, will want their relatives warned (Luke 16:27-28), not realizing how much time has passed since they died and that all other people will already have had their chance to receive salvation.

The story or parable of "Lazarus and the rich man" does not prove eternal punishing by God in hell fire. Rather, Christ used this short illustration to picture to His listeners the REALITY of the resurrection from the dead of both the righteous and the wicked. He was picturing the resurrection to ETERNAL LIFE as contrasted with the ultimate fate of the wicked- the resurrection to ETERNAL DEATH!

God Is Love - and Justice!

Why do so many people have a false concept of "hell"? Because they fail to understand God's overall purpose in putting man on this earth.

God's purpose for man is to develop holy, righteous character which will [enable him to rule in God's Kingdom as a member of God's Family] after having received the precious gift of eternal life. But God created man of the dust of the ground, subject to death, so that if he refused to develop right character he could be released from his misery by death.

God has no desire to torment or to torture anyone. God is love (1 John 4:8). He created us mortal for our own good. He will condemn no one because of ignorance, and will see to it that every single one will ultimately learn the truth and have a real chance for salvation. But if God granted eternal life to those who persistently rebel and [refuse] to develop righteous character, they would simply bring misery on themselves as well as others for all eternity!

Certainly the kindest thing God can do, for all involved, is not to allow such a rebel to continue living. So God will simply put the incorrigibly rebellious to DEATH - not mercilessly torture them forever!

God is also a God of justice. The obedient will be given the free gift of eternal life. But the disobedient must also be paid the wages they have earned. The final or second death - eternal death in the lake of fire - will be the penalty [their] own sins have incurred.

This truth should inspire no unreasoning terror such as the pagan, satanic doctrine of eternal hell fire has caused to so many innocent people. On the other hand, the lake of fire should stand as a FEARFUL WARNING to all who know God's truth and still stubbornly refuse to obey it!

Only those who obey God - those who become and remain Christians in the true sense of the word - will inherit eternal life (John 3:16). All others who willfully live in disobedience to God will die the second death.

Those are the two alternatives God places before each of us - eternal life on the one hand, and everlasting death on the other.

The idea of an ever-burning "hell" is clearly a pagan myth and superstition. It is merely a fable that has crept into professing Christianity. But the Biblical hell fire - the one Christ spoke of - will be VERY REAL! It will consume the incorrigible wicked, reducing them to mere ashes.

Let's strive to remain faithful overcomers and receive eternal life so we will not have to pay the penalty of eternal death - extinction in the lake of fire.

MINIQUIZ - TEST YOUR MEMORY

This quiz is designed to help you remember the important facts you learned in this lesson. You simply circle, or underline each correct answer. After you've finished, check your choices with the correct answers at the end of this test, and then rate yourself.

1. "Hell" is a subject: A. nowhere mentioned in the Bible. B. not well understood by most people today. C. that was well understood by the ancient pagans. D. that was first introduced by Dante Alighieri.
2. Dante got his ideas about hell from: A. Polycarp. B. the Bible. C. Plato and Virgil. D. attested personal experiences of some who had been there.
3. Which of the following do NOT believe that there is a place of never-ending divine torment and vengeance called "hell"? A. Catholics. B. Protestants. C. Mohammedans [Muslims] and Hindus. D. Christians who accept the literal interpretation of the Bible.
4. Most of this world's people: A. are headed for an ever-burning hell. B. have never had a chance to receive salvation. C. believe in Jesus Christ. D. will never go to "hell" - Greek *hades*.
5. Jesus Christ spoke of: A. a hell of eternal torment and torture. B. Jewish myths of a *gehenna* in order to refute them. C. a place of fire that will never be quenched. D. the grave as a place of fire.
6. The English word "hell" originally meant: A. simply a grave or a hole in the ground. B. a garbage dump. C. the eternal home of wicked immortal souls. D. a condition of restraint for evil spirits.
7. Which of these words is NOT translated "hell" in the Authorized Version of the Bible? A. *Gehenna*. B. *Hades*. C. *Sheol*. D. *Abussos*.
8. Those who have died are now: A. simply in their graves. B. in torments. C. disembodied spirits free to roam the universe at will. D. immortal worms.
9. How can you always know the meaning of the word "hell" when you read it in your Bible? A. By remembering it always means fire. B. By deducing it from the context. C. You can't ever be sure. D. By checking it in an exhaustive concordance of the Bible such as *Strong's* or *Young's*.
10. Hell fire is to be: A. everlasting fire in the cavernous depths of the earth. B. the lake of fire on the earth's surface. C. on the surface of the sun. D. on the moon.

TRUE OR FALSE

11. Jesus preached to wicked spirits in prison while He was in "hell" (*hades* - the grave). T F
12. Satan and his demons will be destroyed in the lake of fire along with the incorrigible wicked of humanity. T F
13. The fires that burned and destroyed the ancient city of Jerusalem were never "quenched." T F
14. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man proves there is - right now- an eternal punishing of the wicked going on. T F
15. The kindest thing God could do is to destroy forever anyone who refuses to live the way of life that is conducive to peace and happiness. T F

**Draw a line from each numbered phrase to
the correctly related lettered phrase.**

16. The wicked

A. Being tormented

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| | B. Now in hell fire |
| 17. "Wages of sin" | C. Death |
| | D. Quenched |
| 18. Lake of fire | E. To become ashes |
| | F. Cannot bum up. |
| 19. Satan | G. Symbolic only |
| | H. Ea1th burning |
| 20. Flies | I "Immortal worms" |
| | J Eternal life |

ANSWERS TO QUIZ Rate Yourself

1- B, 5-C, 9-D, 13-T, 17-C, 19-20 correct - - - excellent

2- C, 6-A, 10-B, 14-F, 18-H, 16-18 correct - - - good

3- D, 7-D, 11-F, 15,-T 19,-F 13,-15 correct - - - fair

4- B, 8-A, 12-F, 16-E. 20-I

WHAT IS "HELL"?

1. "Hell" is a subject
 - A. not understood by most people today.
 - B. not understood by professing Christian ministers.
 - C. not easily understood by just reading the Authorized Version (King James) of the Bible.
 - D. All of the above.
2. Where did the world's traditional concept of "hell" originate?
 - A. Certainly not from human reasoning.
 - B. Definitely not from pre-Christian pagan speculation.
 - C. It is admittedly a product of pagan speculation as men puzzled over the eventual fate of the wicked.
 - D. It came from Jesus Christ Himself.
3. The word "hell" in the Authorized Version of the Bible is
 - A. the English translation of one original Hebrew word and three original Greek words.
 - B. the English translation of one Hebrew word and one Greek word.
 - C. an original Hebrew word.
 - D. an original Greek word.
4. Hell
 - A. is an English word that has been correctly used by translators of the King James Version of the Bible.
 - B. is an old English word which simply means a hole in the ground - a grave.

- C. is only used in translating the Hebrew word *sheol*.
 - D. always refers to fire in the Bible.
5. The original Old Testament Hebrew word *sheol* and the New Testament Greek word *hades*
- A. refer to "hell fire."
 - B. have opposite meanings.
 - C. mean the same thing - the grave.
 - D. are always translated "hell" in English translations.
6. The English word "hell" was used to translate the
- A. Hebrew *sheol* and the Greek *hades*.
 - B. Greek *gehenna*.
 - C. Greek *tartaros*.
 - D. All of the above.
7. Which one of the following statements is false?
- A. *Hades* refers to fire.
 - B. *Hades* refers to the grave.
 - C. *Gehenna* refers to fire.
 - D. *Tartaros* refers to a condition of restraint - a prison - for fallen angels.
8. Which one of the following statements regarding *gehenna* is NOT true?
- A. The Greek word *gehenna* is derived from the Hebrew name of the rocky Valley of Hinnom just outside of Jerusalem.
 - B. *Gehenna* was a garbage dump in the Valley of Hinnom where trash was continually burned up.
 - C. The dead bodies of animals and despised criminals were thrown into the fires of *gehenna* to be destroyed - consumed by the flames.
 - D. Christ referred to the fires of *gehenna* to picture the eternal torment of unrepentant sinners.
9. When in doubt about the real meaning of the word "hell" anywhere in the New Testament you can be absolutely sure by
- A. deducing its meaning from the context.
 - B. checking it in an exhaustive concordance of the Bible, such as *Strong's* or *Young's*, to see which Greek word it was translated from, and hence its true meaning.
 - C. remembering it always means the grave.
 - D. remembering it always means fire.
10. After Jesus Christ died
- A. His "soul" went to preach to wicked spirits while His body was in the grave.
 - B. His "soul" went to heaven.
 - C. He was put into "hell" - the grave (Greek *hades*) - where He remained stone-dead for three days and nights.
 - D. He remained in the grave and decomposed.
11. The "unsaved" dead
- A. are to be resurrected to judgment in the future.
 - B. have already been judged and condemned to "hell fire".
 - C. are now in the traditional hell believed in by most churches.
 - D. are dancing around on red-hot coals, shrieking in torment and terror in "hell fire".
12. According to the Bible, the "wages of sin" is
- A. eternal separation from God.
 - B. death - cessation of life forever.

- C. eternal torment in hell fire.
 - D. condemnation to purgatory.
13. Christ said that unrepentant sinners would
- A. be tormented in eternal hell fire.
 - B. live forever in mental anguish.
 - C. "perish" - cease to exist.
 - D. go to heaven.
14. The "hell fire" of the Bible will
- A. be just hot enough to torment the unrepentant.
 - B. utterly consume incorrigible sinners so they will never be remembered.
 - C. temporarily punish sinners.
 - D. purge the wicked of their sinfulness.
15. Hell (*gehenna*) fire is to be
- A. everlasting fire in the cavernous depths of the earth.
 - B. on the surface of the sun.
 - C. the "lake of fire" on the earth's surface.
 - D. on the moon.
16. The lake of fire will
- A. actually begin at Christ's return.
 - B. burn all during the Millennium.
 - C. engulf the entire earth when God's plan of salvation for man is finished, thus purifying the earth's surface.
 - D. All of the above.
17. Those judged as incorrigible sinners will
- A. be destroyed forever in the lake of fire, becoming nothing but ashes.
 - B. be tormented forever in the lake of fire.
 - C. remain dead in their graves.
 - D. go to purgatory.
18. Satan and his demons will
- A. never be cast into hell fire.
 - B. also be cast into the lake of fire.
 - C. cease to exist when cast into hell fire.
 - D. be purified by fiery torment.
19. Who will actually be tormented forever?
- A. Incorrigible human sinners.
 - B. The beast.
 - C. The false prophet.
 - D. Satan and his demons who are incorrigible, eternally living spirits.
20. How will Satan be eternally tormented?
- A. Through mental anguish resulting from seeing all he has striven toward, worked, and plotted for, burned up as the earth is purified by fire.
 - B. By everlasting fire.
 - C. By the lake of fire.
 - D. By hell fire.
21. Satan, who is a spirit and therefore cannot die,

- A. is the father of lies.
 - B. wants humans to suffer mental torment over the supposed suffering of their "unsaved" loved ones in hell fire.
 - C. has deceived all mankind.
 - D. All of the above.
22. The "unquenchable fire" Jesus and John the Baptist spoke of
- A. has been burning for centuries.
 - B. will never burn itself out.
 - C. is fire that is not put out prematurely - it burns until all combustible material is burned up.
 - D. is not the final fate of the unrepentant.
23. "Eternal fire" (Jude 7)
- A. is fire that burns forever.
 - B. is fire whose results are permanent.
 - C. is still burning in Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - D. will not be the "fate" of incorrigible sinners.
24. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man proves
- A. the existence of an eternal hell fire.
 - B. only that there is to be a resurrection of the dead.
 - C. the resurrection of the righteous to eternal life, and of incorrigible sinners to eternal death in the lake of fire.
 - D. that eternal punishing awaits the wicked.
25. Which one of the following statements have we proven not to be true?
- A. The idea of an ever-burning "hell" is clearly a pagan myth and superstition.
 - B. The fable of eternal punishing in hell fire has crept into professing Christianity.
 - C. The Biblical "hell fire" will consume the incorrigible sinners, snuffing out their lives forever.
 - D. The world's traditional concepts of "hell" clearly come from the Bible.

ANSWERS TO LESSON 4 TEST

1-D, 2-C, 3-A, 4-B, 5-C
 6-D, 7-A, 8-D, 9-B, 10-C
 11-A, 12-B, 13-C, 14-B, 15-C
 16-D, 17-A, 18-B, 19-D, 20-A
 21-D, 22-C, 23-B, 24-C, 25-D

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