**Is Hell a Real Place?**

According to the Bible, hell is a place that presently exists and will continue to exist in the future. The scriptures indicate it is a place of suffering and torment for the ‘lost,’ meaning those who denied the Lord God. They have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Their Names were not found in the Book of Life. (Revelation 20: 11-15 details the account of the White Throne Judgment, whereby the Lord Jesus Christ is judging the dead that are standing before His Throne, and the books were open that contain their actions, and they were judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is called the second death. It goes on to say “if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”)

The book of life contains the names of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. They will not be judged for their sins because by trusting in Jesus Christ, their sins were forgiven. (Romans 10:9-11 says “ that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (NIV).

The following is taken from Unger’s Bible Dictionary which I believe gives a good definition of the Hebrew and Greek terms for hell and also where it is alluded to.

HELL

HELL. A term that in common usage designates the place of future punishment for the wicked. Other meanings in many instances are expressed by this term, which must be recognized to prevent mistakes and confusion, In some cases it refers to the grave, in others to the place of disembodied spirits without any necessary implication as to their happiness or unhappiness. This fact, however, does not affect the correctness of the belief indicated by the common use of the term, a belief supported by many passages of Scripture.

Scripture Terms. The words of the original Scriptures rendered "hell" in English are three in number. With a solitary exception (2 Peter 2:4, tartaroo, to "incarcerate") they are the only words thus translated. These, however, are not the only terms, as we shall see, in which the idea of a place of future penal suffering for the wicked is clearly and strongly expressed. The three words are as follows:

**Sheol**.

Without entering into the discussion as to the derivation or root meaning of this term in the OT, it may be sufficient to say that it occurs several times in Scripture. The general idea is "the place of the dead"; and by this is meant, not the grave, but the place of those who have departed from this life. The term is thus used with reference to both the righteous and the wicked: of the righteous (Ps 16:10; 30:3; Isa 38:10; etc.), of the wicked (Num 16:33; Job 24:19; Ps 9:17; etc.). This is in accordance with the general character of the OT revelation, which presents much less clearly and strongly than the NT the doctrine of the future life with its distinct allotments of doom. But there are many hints, and more than hints, of the difference in the conditions of the departed. The psalmist prays: "Do not drag me away with the wicked and with those who work iniquity" (28:3; see also Isa 33:14; 66:24; Dan 12:2).

**Hades**. One of the NT terms rendered "hell." Like the OT "sheol," it is comprehensive and has a quite similar significance. It refers to the underworld, or region of the departed, the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. It occurs several times in the NT, namely: Matt 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14. The KJV renders this word "hell" in every case, with the exception of 1 Cor 15:55 in the KJV only, where it gives "grave" (the NASB and NIV at this point read "death," from thanatos, not hades.)

The NIV usually renders "depths," or "grave," for hades. The distinction thus recognized between "hades" and "hell" as a place of misery is a valid one. Nevertheless it is equally plain that our Lord, certain of His words, associated judgment and suffering with the condition of some of the inhabitants of "hades" (e.g., Matt 11:23-24; Luke 16:23-27).

**Gehenna.**  The valley of Hinnom. A place where the Jewish apostasy, the rites of Molech, were celebrated (1 Kings 11:7). It was converted by King Josiah into a place of abomination, where dead bodies were thrown and burned (2 Kings 23:13-14). Hence the place served as a symbol, and the name was appropriated to designate the abode of lost spirits. In this way the term was used by our Lord.

The word occurs in the NT, and in every case it is properly translated "hell," denoting the eternal state of the lost after resurrection. That is, the meaning of the English word is particularly the meaning of Gehenna (Matt 5:22,29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6).

The distinction between hades (the intermediate state) and Gehenna (eternal hell) is of importance, not only because it is necessary to the understanding of quite a large number of passages in the NT, but it may also prevent misconstruction and remove uncertainty as to Christ's teaching with regard to the future state of the wicked. It also has important bearing upon the doctrine of "Christ's descent into hell" (hades) and that of the intermediate state.

Scripture Synonyms. The Bible doctrine of hell is by no means confined to the terms above mentioned and to the passages in which they appear. There are many phrases in which the overshadowing idea is presented with great distinctness, such as "unquenchable fire," "black darkness," "furnace of fire," "fire and brimstone," "the smoke of their torment," "the lake of fire which burns with brimstone," "where their worm does not die," "the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." Van Oosterzee does well to remark: "There is no doubt that Holy Scripture requires us to believe in a properly so-called place of punishment, in whatever part of God's boundless creation it is to be sought. That the different images under which it is represented cannot possibly be taken literally will certainly need no demonstration; but it is perhaps not unnecessary to warn against the opinion that we have to do here with mere imagery. Who shall say that the reality will not infinitely surpass in awfulness the boldest pictures of it?"

BIBLIOGRAPHY: H. Buis, The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment (1957); J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (1978), pp. 473, 483 f.; W. G. T. Shedd, The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment (1980).

For theological treatment of the doctrine, see Punishment; Gehenna, as follows:

GEHENNA

The "Valley of Hinnom"). A deep, narrow glen to the S of Jerusalem where the Jews offered their children to Molech. The OT renders "valley of the son of Hinnom," or "Ben Hinnom" (2 Kings 23:10; Jer 7:31; 19:2-6). In later times it served as a receptacle of all sorts of putrefying matter and all that defiled the holy city, and so became the representative or image of the place of everlasting punishment, especially on account of its ever-burning fires; and to this fact the words of Christ refer when He mentions "the unquenchable fire." "The passages of the New Testament show plainly that the word 'gehenna' was a popular expression for 'hell' of which Jesus and his apostles made use, but it would be erroneous to infer that Jesus and his apostles merely accommodated themselves to the popular expression, without believing in the actual state of the lost." In the NT the word gehenna ("hell") falls many times from the lips of Christ in most awesome warning of the consequences of sin (Matt 5:22,29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5). He describes it as a place where their "worm" never dies and their "fire" is never to be quenched. Gehenna is identical in meaning with the "lake of fire" (Rev 19:20; 20:10,14-15). Moreover, the "second death" and "the lake of fire" are identical terms (20:14). These latter scriptural expressions describe the eternal state of the wicked as forever separated from God and consigned to the special abode of unrepentant angels and people in the eternal state. The term “second death,” is employed relating to the preceding physical death of the wicked in unbelief and rejection of God (John 8:21-24). That the "second death" ("lake of fire" or gehenna) is not annihilation is shown clearly by Rev 19:20 and 20:10. After 1,000 years in the lake of fire the Beast and false prophet still exist there undestroyed. The phrase "forever and ever" ("to the ages of the ages"), describing the destiny of the lost in Heb 1:8, also applies to the duration of the throne of God as eternal in the sense of being unending. Thus is represented the punishment of the wicked. Gehenna, moreover, is not to be confused with Hades or Sheol (which see), which describe the intermediate state of the wicked previous to the judgment and the eternal state. See Hades; Lake of Fire ; Hell; Hinnom.

(from The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright © 1988.)