

Benefits of going to Hell

Contributed by absolutebailbonds
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When we talk about our living to see the time when there will be no "hell," we are led to ask: Will this be of benefit to us living on the earth then? Could "hell's" disappearance release upon this earth a swarm of persons of the worst type to make our moral and social conditions still worse than they are today? Such a suggestion is shocking, frightening. What good could there come from this for anybody, for God or for man, especially for us who are already plagued with troubles and troublemakers? These seem to be hard questions. There are, however, reliable answers to all such questions. Doubtless everybody will be interested to hear them. Then we shall understand what is really coming.

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{bot_wrgoogle}"Hell" has always had a religious connection. So the oldest religious Book, the Bible, should give the right answers. And it does this very thing. The English word "hell" has been used in speech for centuries. For instance, when the persecuted Bible translator, William Tyndale, made his translation of the Greek part of the original Bible, he said, in Matthew 11:23, according to his spelling in the year 1525: "And thou Capernaum, which art lyft up unto heaven, shalt be brought doune to hell." When Dr. Martin Luther translated those Christian Greek Scriptures into German in 1522, he used the similarly sounding German word "Hoelle." But when the Roman Catholic Saint Jerome translated the same scriptures from common Greek into Latin, in 383 C.E., he used the word "infernus." So the Italian poet of the fourteenth century, Dante Alighieri, wrote his famous poem entitled Divine Comedy and called the first part of it "Inferno." He pictured the "Inferno" as a deep pit with gradually contracting circles on which the condemned human souls suffered after the death of the body. Was Dante correct?

The religious clergymen of Christendom have created an image of what they understand to be "hell" or "inferno" in the minds of their church people. It is a terrible image. Their long-taught idea of "hell" or "inferno" depends upon the doctrine that they teach about the human soul. They imagine that the human soul is something separate and distinct from the human body. Also, that, whereas the human body is mortal and corruptible, the human soul is immortal and incorruptible, it being spiritual and hence invisible, something that we cannot feel with our sense of touch.

So, as the clergy say, when the human body dies, the human soul does not die but survives, although we cannot see it with our natural eyes. Since it must now leave the body in which it has been dwelling, it must go somewhere in the invisible, spirit world. But where? Simply stated, the good souls go to heaven, but the bad souls go to hell. Heaven is thus set as opposite from hell, and as heaven is a place of everlasting happiness and blessing, so hell must be the place of everlasting suffering, eternal torment. The clergymen locate fire and brimstone there in hell.

For many centuries the clergymen of Christendom have taught such an idea of “hell.” Since they claim that their teaching is what the Holy Bible says about “hell,” we are obliged to go directly to the Bible itself to find out exactly what it does say on this subject. O yes, the word “hell” or “inferno” does occur in various Bible translations scores of times, and according to those translations the Bible does teach that there is a “hell.” But the point is, What did the writers of the Bible say and show that this “hell” is? We must go according to what they show it to be, and not according to what others say that those Bible writers said it was. We can deceive ourselves by twisting what those Bible writers say.

HOW FAR BACK “HELL” EXISTED

We know that this “hell” existed as far back at least as the year 1750 before our Common Era, which means more than 3,720 years ago. That was the year when the envious half brothers of Joseph the son of Jacob sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Later those half brothers lied to their father Jacob about what had happened to his beloved son Joseph. They gave him the impression that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. In grief, what did the patriarch Jacob say? Where did he say his son Joseph now was? Jacob was a Hebrew, and the Jerusalem Roman Catholic Bible translation shows the Hebrew word that Jacob used, in Genesis 37:35. There we read: “All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I will go down in mourning to Sheol, beside my son.’” Years later, when the half brothers of Joseph asked for permission to take Joseph’s full brother Benjamin down to Egypt, Jacob again used the Hebrew word and said: “If any harm came to him on the journey you are to undertake, you would send me down to Sheol with my white head bowed in grief.”—Gen. 42:38; see also 44:29, 31.

Roman Catholics should not overlook the fact that their Saint Jerome’s Latin translation of Jacob’s words here does not use the Hebrew word Sheol. It uses the Latin word “infernus” and its related word “inferi.” But the Roman Catholic Douay translation in English uses the word “hell” in all four places. This means, then, that the Hebrew patriarch Jacob believed that his dear son Joseph was in Sheol, in the infernus, in “hell.” Also, Jacob expected to go there to join his son.

Does this not make us wonder? Did Jacob really expect to go to a “hell” such as the clergymen of Christendom have described to the church people for centuries? Did Jacob expect to go to a place of fiery torment of his soul, from which he never could get out; and did he believe that his precious son Joseph was in such a place? So are Jacob and his son Joseph in such a place of eternal fiery torment today after more than 3,600 years since their death? This ought to be hard for us to believe inasmuch as in the very last book of the inspired Hebrew Scriptures the Lord God says through his prophet Malachi: “I loved Jacob, and [his twin brother] Esau I have hated.”—Mal. 1:2, 3.

At any rate, when did the patriarch Jacob as a man loved by God go to Sheol, to the infernus, to “hell”? This was after he died in the year 1711 B.C.E., and the still living Joseph and his brothers took the embalmed body and buried it in the cave of Machpelah. This is at the city of Hebron, which today is in the land of Israel. In that same cave Jacob’s father Isaac lay buried, also his grandfather Abraham. Thus Jacob joined Abraham and Isaac in Sheol, in the infernus, in “hell.”—Genesis 49:33 through 50:13.

There is no Bible reason for believing that all three of those Hebrew patriarchs are today suffering in a “hell” of eternal fiery torment. We are helped out of this difficulty of understanding by means of other Bible translators. For example, the former Roman Catholic priest, Martin Luther, translates the word Sheol as “the pit” (die Grube). And then in the century after Luther, the English Bible that was authorized by King James I of England, in 1611 C.E., translated Sheol as “the grave.” The Hebrews, the Jews themselves, ought to know what their own word Sheol means; and so the English Bible translation by the Jewish Publication Society of America translates the word as “the grave.” (1917 C.E.) And so too does the English translation by the Jewish rabbi, Isaac Leeser. (1853 C.E.) Note, however, that Sheol does not mean “a grave.” It means “the grave,” that is, the common grave of all dead mankind. Once we understand this fact about the “hell” as taught in the Holy Bible, it helps us to understand the situation as to dead mankind.

So, beginning with Jacob’s use of the Hebrew word, “Sheol” occurs sixty-five (65) times throughout the thirty-nine (39) books of the inspired Hebrew Scriptures. The word was used by the prophet Moses, by Job, by Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah (in Kings), Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah and Habakkuk.

Bible translators have not been uniform in rendering that word Sheol into their languages. For instance, the English Bible authorized by King James I translates Sheol thirty-one times as hell, thirty-one times as “the grave,” and three times as “the pit.” Any reasonable person will therefore have to admit that in the inspired Hebrew Scriptures the words “hell,” “the grave,” and “the pit” mean one and the same thing. And there is no connection of it at all with fire, brimstone and eternal torment. If we turn in the English Douay Version Bible to Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10, we read: “The living know that they shall die, but the dead know nothing more. . . . Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly: for neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, nor knowledge, shall be in hell [Latin, inferi], whither thou art hastening.”

No wonder, then, that the patriarch Job, in his terrible sufferings, could say: “Who will grant me this, that thou mayst protect me in hell [Latin, infernus], and hide me till thy wrath pass, and appoint me a time when thou wilt remember me?” (Job 14:13, Douay Version) The patriarch Job knew that God remembers those in Sheol, in “hell,” in the infernus. Job believed that God would remember him for good because of his faithful integrity toward the true God. The prophet Jonah also appreciated that fact, for, when he was inside the big fish in the Mediterranean Sea he said: “I cried out of my affliction to the Lord, and he heard me: I cried out of the belly of hell [Latin, inferi], and thou hast heard my voice.” (Jonas 2:3, Douay) And then there is the psalmist David, who wrote: “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (Latin, infernus); nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption.”—Ps. 15:10, Douay.

WHEN “HELL” DID NOT EXIST

Here, now, is a good time for us to ask, with our corrected understanding of matters from the Bible itself, when was it that “hell,” the infernus, or Sheol, did not exist? This was the time when the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were in the Paradise garden of Eden, almost six thousand years ago. Of that happy time, we read: “And the Lord God had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning: wherein he placed man whom he had formed.” Later God put the first woman there, alongside Adam.—Gen. 2:8-23; 1:26-28, Douay.

“Hell” or Sheol did not exist then on earth. There was no cemetery that had been dug by either God or man. The common grave of man such as exists today had not then got started. There was then no need for such a thing, for the Lord God had not created mankind to go eventually either to “hell” (Sheol) or to heaven. He lovingly desired mankind to live forever on earth amid paradise conditions. That was why he said to Adam, even before his wife Eve was created: “Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.”—Gen. 2:17, Douay.

Lest we should pass over this important point, the Lord God, let us note, did not say to Adam that, in whatever day he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would go to a “hell” to suffer consciously forever in fiery torments. He warned Adam that he would die the death for disobedience. Even after Adam followed his wife’s example and ate the forbidden fruit, God said to Adam in the sentence of death: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.” (Gen. 3:19, Douay) This was in harmony with the description of man’s creation, which reads: “And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” (Gen. 2:7, Douay) Man became a living human soul at creation. So at death he would cease to be a living soul, and so there was no soul that survived and that could be consciously tormented in fire and brimstone forever.

Living a condemned life outside the paradise of pleasure for about nine hundred and thirty years, Adam lived more than eight hundred years after the death of his second son Abel. Righteous, God-fearing Abel was murdered by his jealous older brother Cain. No deaths of any of Adam and Eve’s children being reported before that, “hell” (the infernus, Sheol) came into existence with the death and burial of Abel. The Lord God said to the murderous Cain: “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground. And now you are cursed in banishment from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood at your hand.”—Gen. 4:1-11; 5:1-5.

Abel was a man of faith in God. In Hebrews 11:4 we read: "By faith Abel offered God a sacrifice of greater worth than Cain, through which faith he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness respecting his gifts; and through it he, although he died, yet speaks." (See also 1 John 3:12.) Jesus Christ also spoke of Abel as being righteous. (Matt. 23:35) For that reason the Lord God remembers Abel in his death, and for this reason it was to Sheol, to "hell" or the infernus that Abel went at death and burial. He still lies in the common grave of dead mankind. His death was unlike that of the sentenced sinners, Adam and Eve. We can be sure that God will remember Abel just as he will remember the patriarch Job at the divinely appointed time.—Job 14:13.

"HELL" IN THE CHRISTIAN GREEK SCRIPTURES

Since we have just mentioned Jesus Christ, it is timely to ask, Did not Jesus Christ himself teach that there is literal fire in "hell"? Look at what he said in his parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus. Jesus said: "And the rich man also died: and he was buried in hell [Latin, infernus]. And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom: And he cried, and said: . . . I am tormented in this flame." (Luke 16:22-24, Douay) This parable was recorded by the Christian disciple Luke in the Greek language, and so he did not use the Hebrew word Sheol. The Roman Catholic Jerusalem translation of the Bible shows the Greek word used by Luke, for it reads: "The rich man also died and was buried. In his torment in Hades he looked up." Ah, yes, the Greek word Ha´des is here used. And is there fire in Ha´des for tormenting the dead, as The Jerusalem Bible would make it appear?

Before answering that question, we ask: Why does the Greek word Ha´des that is here translated as hell (infernus) have the same meaning as the Hebrew word Sheol? Why does it not have the idea of Ha´des that is taught in the pagan Grecian mythologies? It was because, after the time of the Greek poet Homer (or before 700 B.C.E.) the proper noun Ha´des came to mean not just the "place of departed spirits" but also "the grave" and "death." (See Greek-English Lexicon, by Liddell and Scott, first published in 1843, Volume I, page 21, column 2, under Ha´des, section II.)

22 Hence, when certain Alexandrian Jews, who spoke Greek down in Egypt, began to translate the inspired Hebrew Scriptures into the common Greek, about 280 B.C.E., and started what is now called the Greek Septuagint Version, they used the word Ha´des to translate the Hebrew word Sheol. So, when translating the words of the patriarch Jacob in Genesis 37:34; 42:38; 44:29, 31, they put the word Ha´des in Jacob's mouth, to mean "the grave," and not Homer's false idea of Ha´des. So, when Ha´des is put into the mouth of Jesus Christ, it means no place of fiery torment forever.

"GEHENNA"

The place with which Jesus Christ associated fire was, not Ha´des, but Gehenna. The name really means "Valley of Hinnom." This, in its literal sense, means the valley of Hinnom to the south and southwest of Jerusalem. In Jesus' day this was used as a city dump or depository for refuse, and fire mingled with brimstone or sulfur was used to dispose of the refuse, even dead bodies of criminals who were thought to be too vile to be buried in Ha´des, the common grave of mankind. In a symbolic sense, the way in which Jesus used it, Gehenna was a symbol of total everlasting destruction, a blotting of one out of existence forever. Annihilation! The name Gehenna occurs just twelve times in the inspired Christian Greek Scriptures. Jesus is first reported as using the word in Matthew 5:22, 29, 30. There we read (Rotherham's):

"Every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment,—and whosoever shall say to his brother, Worthless one! shall be liable to the high council; and whosoever shall say, Rebel! shall be liable unto the fiery gehenna. And if thy right eye is causing thee to stumble pluck it out, and cast it from thee,—for it profiteth thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into gehenna. And if thy right hand is causing thee to stumble cut it off, and cast it from thee,—for it profiteth thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body into gehenna depart."—Mark 9:43-47.

To illustrate that Gehenna pictures total everlasting destruction, Jesus said to his twelve apostles: "And be not in fear by reason of them that are killing the body,—and the soul are not able to kill. But fear rather him who is able both soul and body to destroy in gehenna!" (Matt. 10:28, Rotherham's) If, now, what is called the "soul" is destroyed, how could it be tormented consciously in fire and brimstone forever? In the Dark Ages it did not take religious persecutors forever to burn the body of a so-called "heretic" at the stake. Fire does not preserve one.

For other occurrences of Gehenna, see Matthew 18:9; 23:15, 33; Luke 12:5, and James 3:6. In all these cases Jerome's Latin Vulgate uses the word gehenna, and not infernus. Those whom God assigns to everlasting destruction as pictured by Gehenna are those who, like Satan the Devil and his demon angels, are beyond correction, beyond recovery to righteousness. That is why Jesus, in his parable on the sheep and the goats, says to those like goats: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels."—Matt. 25:41, Douay.

NOT WIPED OUT FOREVER IN "HELL"

Does this mean that those who go to "hell," that is to say, to "Ha´des" or "Sheol," are not wiped out forever there, do not remain there for all time to come? This must be the case if the Holy Bible shows that someone got out of "hell" (infernus, Ha´des, Sheol), to stay out forever. Let us remember what the psalmist David wrote: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Latin, infernus]; nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption." (Ps. 15:10, Douay; 16:10, Authorized Version) Was David here speaking about himself? The Christian apostle Peter says No. On the day of Pentecost of the year 33 C.E., Peter quoted this psalm of David and applied it to the right one. Peter said:

"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Latin, infernus], nor suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life: thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Ye men, brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David; that he died, and was buried; and his sepulchre is with us to this present day. Whereas therefore he was a prophet, and knew that God hath sworn to him with an oath, that of the fruit of his loins one should sit upon his throne. Foreseeing this, he spoke of the resurrection of Christ. For neither was he left in hell [Latin, infernus], neither did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised again, whereof all we are witnesses."—Acts 2:27-32, Douay.

Many persons who have been church members will remember reciting unitedly what is called "The Apostles' Creed," in which they said: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who . . . was crucified, dead, and buried: he descended into hell [Latin, inferna]; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Thus the reciters of this Creed have expressed the belief that Jesus Christ "descended into hell." Did they mean by those words that he descended into fire and brimstone under the earth in order to be tormented there forever in place of mankind? They could not have meant that, for in the very next words they said: "the third day he rose from the dead." Thus they themselves, as well as the apostle Peter, confess that, in the case of Jesus Christ, "hell" (infernus) is not a place from which dead humans, once entering into it, cannot ever get out. Jesus felt no torment there.

Jesus Christ was in "hell" (Ha´des or Sheol) for parts of three days (Nisan 14-16, 33 C.E.). As Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10 tells us, while he was there he was conscious of nothing. He found no work, reason, wisdom or knowledge there. Though really dead, he was as if he were asleep, inactive, unaware of everything. That is why the Christian apostle Paul writes concerning Christ's resurrection from the dead: "But now Christ is risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep." (1 Cor. 15:20, Douay) Truly, then, the resurrection benefited Jesus Christ, who was dead in "hell" (Ha´des or Sheol). And for that reason the resurrection is purposed by God the Almighty to benefit all the rest of the dead in that "hell." Jesus Christ was merely "the firstfruits" of those sleeping there in death. The full crop of the human dead will be awakened and be brought forth in God's appointed time. This is the key idea in the inspired words of the apostle Paul:

"For by a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive."—1 Cor. 15:21, 22, Douay.

That “hell” (Ha´des or Sheol) is the place out of which all the dead are to be released by a resurrection is made sure for us by the words of the resurrected Jesus Christ. About the year 96 C.E., or thirty-two years after the burning of Rome by Emperor Nero, the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to the apostle John in a vision. This vision is set out in the last book of the Bible, called Apocalypse or Revelation, and in it he says to the apostle John: “I am the first and the last, and alive, and was dead, and behold I am living for ever and ever, and have the keys of death and of hell [Latin, infernus].”—Apoc. 1:17, 18, Douay.

In having the “keys of death and of hell,” is it the purpose of the resurrected Jesus Christ to keep those in death and in hell locked up forever? Or does he have to have money paid to him first by relatives or friends of the dead ones before he will use the keys and let those in death and hell out? How selfish and commercialistic that would be for him to take such an advantage of his having the “keys of death and of hell”!

In total rejection of such an idea, Jesus said to his apostles: “The Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a redemption for many.” (Matt. 20:28, Douay) When on earth as a man, Jesus Christ never charged a single silver denarius coin for raising from the dead any of the dead persons whom he brought back to life. Not to keep the dead locked up forever, but to release them lovingly and freely, is the purpose of the resurrected Jesus Christ respecting the use of the “keys of death and of hell.” God himself, who resurrected his Son Jesus Christ from “hell,” entrusted those “keys” to him for that very purpose.

Looking forward to that joyful time for him, Jesus Christ said to the Jews: “As the Father hath life in himself, so he hath given to the Son also to have life in himself. And he hath given him power to do judgment, because he is the Son of man. Wonder not at this; for the hour cometh, wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things, shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:26-29, Douay) Plainly that resurrection of all those dead in “hell” is for their benefit. It is only after any who have been resurrected from “hell” return to evildoing willfully that their having been resurrected will end up in a judgment of condemnation to everlasting destruction. So the purpose of the resurrection is beneficial, with the eternal benefit of the dead in view. It opens up to them the opportunity to enjoy eternal life in God’s new order.

In that same Revelation or Apocalypse to the apostle John, the resurrected Jesus Christ gave a picture of the time when “hell” will be no more. This is after this old worldly system of things has been destroyed, and God creates new heavens and a new earth, that is, a new heavenly government and a new earthly human society. Describing the wonderful scene, John writes:

“And I saw a great white throne, and one sitting upon it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away, and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which was the book of life; and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hell [Latin, infernus] gave up their dead.”—Apoc. 20:11-13, Douay.

38 Ah, yes, when “hell” (Ha´des or Sheol) has given up the last dead one in it, by the resurrection of all the dead for whom Jesus Christ gave his human life as a redemption, then there will be no hell anymore. All the earth around, the inhabitants will not see a single cemetery nor a grave marker. The common grave of mankind will have been destroyed forever. That is why Apocalypse 20:14, 15, Douay, goes on to say: “And hell [Latin, infernus] and death were cast into the pool of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the pool of fire.” What a glorious judgment day that will be! “Hell” will be given the deathblow. The death that all mankind has inherited from the sinful Adam and Eve will be put to death, cease to exist because of the bringing of all obedient mankind to the perfection of human life in a paradise of pleasure restored. Evildoing will be stopped by the destroying of all who turn willfully wicked and who must suffer the penalty of second death.