



SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (Part 2)

Reading: Acts 2

What happens after death?

There are many different ideas about what happens after death. Here are a few examples:

- some believe in reincarnation (that people live on as another person, or even as an animal);
- some believe that good people go to heaven, while the wicked suffer for ever in hell;
- some believe that death is the end and there is no hope of any kind after death;
- others believe that there will be a day of resurrection of the dead, followed by a judgement, and immortal life on earth for the faithful.

What does the Bible say?

Death is the punishment for sin. It is the end of life and consciousness. A dead person cannot feel anything and cannot think. At death, a person no longer exists. No part of a dead person continues to live:

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and for ever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6).

Notice that this passage says:

- the dead know nothing
- they have no more reward
- the memory of them is forgotten
- their love, hatred and envy have perished
- they do not take any further part in human activities.

The Bible is clear that death is the end of life. But does this mean that there is no hope beyond the grave?

The promise of resurrection and immortal life

There is hope, but only through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said,

“... for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

Through the sinless life and death of Jesus, we can have the hope of life after death:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16,17).

We die because we sin. But our sins can be forgiven through Jesus, who was described as *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). And if our sins are completely forgiven, then like Jesus we will not stay dead but will be raised from the dead and given immortal life just as he was.

Read John 6:39-44. Three times in these verses Jesus speaks of raising the dead *“at the last day”* (that is, when he returns to the earth). Notice especially verse 40:

“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Righteous people will be given immortal life in God’s kingdom on earth. To them, Christ Jesus will say,





“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

The Christian hope is resurrection from the dead and immortal life in God’s kingdom on this earth when Christ returns.

What is hell?

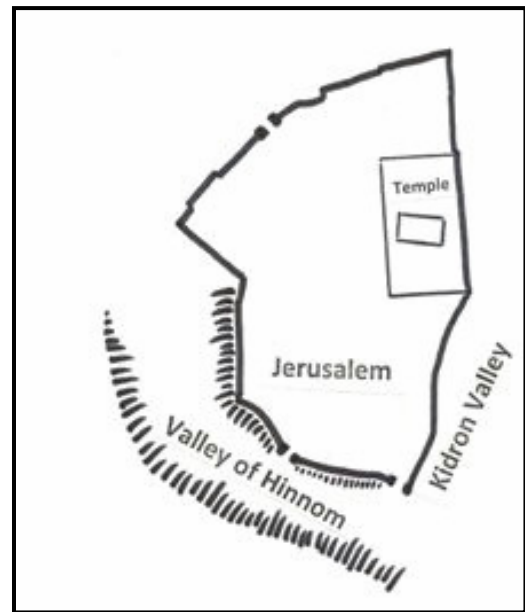
We know that life completely ceases when people die. Dead people cannot think or feel anything, so they cannot be punished by suffering in hell for ever. So what does the Bible mean by the word ‘hell’?

There are two Greek words in the New Testament which are translated ‘hell’. These are ‘Gehenna’ and ‘hades’. They have different meanings, but neither of them refers to a place where wicked people are tormented after death.

1. Gehenna

‘Gehenna’ is used as a symbol for complete destruction of the wicked. It is not a place of torment for wicked people. People rejected at Christ’s judgement will not suffer for ever.

The word ‘Gehenna’ should not appear in the Bible as ‘hell’. It is the name of a place outside Jerusalem and means ‘Valley of (the son of) Hinnom’ (Joshua 15:8). This valley was well known to the Jews. It was a place of wickedness, where some of the kings of Judah had burned their children as sacrifices to idols (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 32:35). It was also a place associated with God’s punishment of the people of Judah (Jeremiah 7:30-34). In the time of Jesus, the Valley of Hinnom was the place where the rubbish from Jerusalem was burnt, including the bodies of dead animals and criminals. Jesus brought these ideas together and used the word ‘Gehenna’ as a symbol to show that the wicked will be completely destroyed.



Mark 9:43-48 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

The word ‘hell’ in Mark 9:43-48 is the word ‘Gehenna’. The language used here has led people to wrongly believe that when the wicked die, they are punished by being burnt for ever. We know that this cannot be true because the dead do not know anything and cannot feel pain – they no longer exist.

The fires in the Valley of Hinnom were probably kept burning continually because there was so much rubbish. But a piece of paper put on a fire does not burn for ever. Within minutes it has stopped burning because it is completely destroyed. However, the fire continues to burn as more rubbish is added – it is “*unquenchable*”. In this way, Gehenna is a symbol of complete destruction of the wicked. Jesus is not saying that the wicked would burn for ever.

This passage in Mark 9 cannot be taken literally because Jesus would not expect a person to pull out an eye, even if it could cause a person to sin. Jesus is using picture language. But what did he mean?

A person who is tempted to steal is not literally expected to cut off his hand, but he should be prepared to take drastic action in his life to avoid the temptation to steal. If he



continues to steal, he will not be in God’s kingdom. At the judgement when the Lord Jesus returns, the man will be rejected and die for ever. He will never live again – his destruction will be complete.

Similarly, a man who looks with lust (desire for sex) on someone else’s wife does not have to remove an eye, but he has to do something to remove the temptation from his life. This could mean that he has to live or work somewhere else so that he does not see the woman again. It may be as hard to do this as to remove his eye, but this is better than being rejected at the judgement. If rejected, he will be completely destroyed – as completely as the rubbish that was burnt in the Valley of Hinnom. Jesus used picture language to show how important it is to cut temptation out of our lives.

“Though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction for ever” (Psalm 92:7).

2. Hades

This Greek word refers to the grave, the place where the dead are buried. Older English versions of the Bible translate ‘hades’ as ‘hell’, which is an old English word meaning ‘a hidden or covered place’. So the word ‘hell’ (hades) is used in the Bible for the grave, which is where dead people are hidden and covered.

This is shown by comparing Acts 2:27 in three different Bible versions:

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION	AUTHORISED VERSION	NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
<i>For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.</i>	<i>Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.</i>	<i>Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.</i>

Sometimes the translators have chosen to leave the original Greek word ‘hades’ in the text, others have translated it as ‘hell’, while others have used ‘the grave’.

hades (a Greek word) = hell = the grave

Notice also that ‘my soul’ is translated above as ‘me’ in the New International Version, since ‘soul’ refers to a person, as we learnt in Lesson 22.

Sheol – hell in the Old Testament

In some versions of the Bible, the word ‘hell’ also occurs in the Old Testament. The original Hebrew word is ‘sheol’, which means ‘the grave’ or ‘pit’.

Acts 2:27, used above to explain ‘hades’, is a quotation from Psalm 16:10 in the Old Testament. The English Standard Version of Psalm 16:10 contains the Hebrew word ‘sheol’:

*“For you will not abandon my soul to **Sheol**, or let your holy one see corruption”.*

sheol (a Hebrew word) = hades (a Greek word) = hell = the grave

In Psalm 49:15 the Psalmist shows his confidence that God will raise him from the dead:

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION	AUTHORISED VERSION
<i>But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol ...</i>	<i>But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave ...</i>

Comparing these two Bible versions again shows that the Hebrew word ‘sheol’ can be translated as ‘the grave’. Nowhere in the Old Testament is it associated with punishment in fire.





A closer look at Acts 2:27

“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.”

What does this verse mean? It was spoken by the apostle Peter after the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven. Peter is using the words of King David from Psalm 16. Peter explains that David was prophesying that Jesus would rise from the dead:

“... he (David) foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31).

David was inspired to write that Christ’s soul (that is, Jesus himself) would not be left in hades (hell – the grave). He would be raised from the dead and God would not allow his body to decay. Christ was in the grave for three days. How can hades (hell) be a place where sinners are punished, when we read that Christ went there after he died? We know that his body was placed in the tomb, so this again shows that the word ‘hades’ (hell) in this verse means ‘the grave’.

In Revelation 20:13 there is a picture of resurrection and judgement. It says:

“And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.”

We see that ‘hades’ contains the dead. Sometimes ‘hades’ is thought of as a shadowy place where the spirits of the dead exist. We know that this cannot be true, because the Bible tells us that *“the dead know nothing”* (Ecclesiastes 9:5). They have no conscious existence. ‘Hades’, as we have seen, is simply the Greek word for the grave.

HELL		
‘Sheol’ Old Testament word refers to the grave	‘Hades’ New Testament word means ‘the grave’	‘Gehenna’ New Testament word means ‘Valley of Hinnom’ – a place outside Jerusalem, used as a symbol for total destruction of the wicked

Summary

1. The Bible teaches that death is the end of life and consciousness.
2. At Christ’s return, there will be a resurrection from the dead and immortal life on earth for true believers.
3. ‘Hell’ (from ‘sheol’ or ‘hades’) refers to the grave – the place where the dead are buried.
4. ‘Gehenna’ should not appear in the Bible as ‘hell’. It is the name of a valley outside Jerusalem. It was a place associated with wickedness and God’s punishment of Judah. In the time of Jesus it was the place where the city’s rubbish was burnt, including the bodies of dead animals and criminals.
5. Gehenna is used in the Bible as a symbol for complete destruction of the wicked.

Verses to learn: 1 Corinthians 15:22,23

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Verses to read: 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 5:10

