

# COMING BACK FROM HELL SOON

ONE QUESTION that presses on the hearts of man is, “Where are our loved-ones who have died? Will we see them again?” Many theories circulate about the condition of the dead, but for the Christian the only authoritative answer should come from the Bible. Man-made creeds of the Dark Ages place good people in heaven and the wicked in hell-an eternity of fiery torment from which none shall escape. This concept is more or less accepted in mainline Christian churches, but is it supported by the Scriptures? The Bible makes many references to “hell” and the condition of the dead. One such citation is Ecclesiastes 9:5 where we are told, “The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything. “Let us examine what the Bible really has to say about hell.

In the Old Testament the word “hell” is a translation of the Hebrew word “sheol.” This Hebrew word appears in the Old Testament sixty-five times. Thirty-one times it is translated hell, thirty-one times it is translated grave, and three times it is translated pit. The good patriarch Jacob is the first one to use the word sheol and he uses it to describe death. He had just been informed that his son Joseph had been slain by wild beasts, and he said, “I will go down into0 the grave [sheol] unto my son mourning.” (Gen. 37:35) Here the word grave could just as properly be translated hell, and the text indicates that in Jacob’s understanding his beloved, righteous son, Joseph, had

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gone to sheol, or to hell, in death.

Jacob also used the word sheol when referring to the possibility that his beloved son Benjamin might lose his life. He did not know that Joseph had been sold into slavery in Egypt instead of being killed, and was now a ruler in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. When famine sent the family, with the exception of the father and Benjamin, to Egypt for food, Joseph recognized them, though they did not know him, and demanded that the next time they come they bring Benjamin with them. When told this Jacob replied, “My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave” [sheol-the Bible hell].-Gen. 42:38

And here we are reminded of another difference between the teachings of the Bible on the subject of hell and the teachings of the Dark Ages. According to the Bible both the righteous and the wicked go to hell when they die, whereas according to the theory of the Dark Ages only the wicked go to hell. This important truth, as well as other information concerning sheol, is found in Job 14:13-15.

Great calamity had come upon Job. His flocks and his herds were destroyed; his family was destroyed; he lost his health-breaking out with boils from head to foot-and his good wife turned against him, saying, “Curse God, and die.” Poor Job wished he could, and in an agony of heart, mind, and body he asked God to let him die. Job prayed, “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that

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thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.”

According to the teachings of the Dark Ages, sheol, or hell, was a place where God visited his wrath upon his enemies. But here we find Job, a righteous servant of God, asking God to let him go to sheol-the Bible hell-in order to escape his wrath! Job asked to be hidden in sheol until God’s wrath was past.

No one who believed the teachings of the Dark Ages on the subject of hell expected that God would ever remember them favorably once they died and were consigned to the alleged “regions of the damned.” But Job did not have that viewpoint. Job, one of God’s prophets, asked to be hidden in hell only until God’s wrath was past, and then he prayed, “That thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me.” Job realized that in this prayer he had asked God to let him die, and then he asked the question, “If a man die [if I die], shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time [in death] will I wait, till my change [from death to life] come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.”

Job, having asked whether or not a man who dies shall live again, answers his own question and assures us that this is to be the experience of humankind; that those

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who die-and all die-shall live again, and that they shall be called forth from death in the resurrection; that the Creator, having created them to inhabit the earth, will exercise his power to restore them to life, that they might, in harmony with his glorious arrangement, be given an opportunity to live on the earth forever. Here, then, is one of the Old Testament's definite assurances that those who go into the Bible hell shall return; that they do not go to hell to be tortured forever, but to rest in death until the Lord's time comes to carry out this final great feature of his plan of human redemption and salvation.

Job's experience of suffering continued for a long time, and before he reached the point of asking God to let him die that he might be free from his suffering, he expressed the thought that it would have been better for him had he died when he was a baby. This thought is expressed in chapter 3, verses 11 to 22. We quote verses 11 to 13, "Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest."

This is most revealing, indeed, in view of the creeds of the Dark Ages. In most instances it is believed that babies go instantly to heaven when they die, but this was not Job's expectation. He declares that, had he died when he was a baby, he would have "lain still and been quiet." Also, "I should have slept." And concluding this description of what would have resulted from having died as a baby, he says, "Then had I been at as a baby he

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would have been still and quiet, that he would have slept and been at rest. This does not seem like the description of a happy infant in heaven, or of a tortured one in a creedal hell.

However Job does not leave the thought there, but describes what it would have meant to die as a baby. In verse 14 he adds that in the same condition as babies who have died there are also “kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves.” The kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves, could well be a reference to the custom of Job’s day to prepare one’s own tomb in advance and to fill it with treasures which it was hoped could be used by the dead king or counsellor. In any case, it is here made plain that kings and counsellors of the earth in death are in exactly the same condition as those who die as babies. They are quiet, they sleep and are at rest.

In verse 15 Job adds to the category of those who would be quiet and sleep and be at rest, namely, the princes of earth that had gold and who filled their houses with silver. If it is a sin to be rich, then these rich men referred to by Job did not go to a place of torment when they died, but to a condition of quietness and rest.

In verse 16 he adds another category, “Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light.” Here, Job seems to be agreeing with those who claim that an unborn child is still a human and deserves to live. He implies by this statement that they are in the same condition as he would have been had he died when

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he was a baby, or as kings and counsellors and princes that had gold. As we have already seen from Job's own testimony, he expected for these, and for himself, an awakening from the sleep of death—a resurrection—and so, too, we may expect that for those who experience an untimely birth.

In verse 17 of this narrative we find a most surprising statement—surprising, that is, to those who believe in the Dark Age creeds. Job says that “there the wicked cease from troubling.” This indicates beyond a doubt that, in Job's estimation, even the wicked are asleep and are at rest in death. And to this Job adds, “And there the weary be at rest.·· Yes, death is a state of unconsciousness, a state which you could liken to rest, where babies and kings and counsellors and princes and the wicked all rest in death. In verses 18 and 19 Job continues, “There the prisoners rest together; ... and the servant is free from his master.” There is no exception in death. All are in the same state or condition. They are all resting, waiting, although unconsciously, for the resurrection.

Then Job sums up his soliloquy by adding, “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?” The creeds of the Dark Ages insist that life and misery and bitterness of soul are the heritage of those who go into death, into the Bible hell. But this is not true, as we have already noted. Job prayed to go to the Bible hell in order that he might escape suffering.

## HELL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament the word hell translates two Greek words which apply to the death condition of humans. One of these is the word “Gehenna.” One reference to this should be sufficient to prove that hell as translated from this word does not mean a place of torture. It is found in Matthew 10:28: “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Here we are distinctly informed that hell is a place in which humans are destroyed, not tormented.

The other Greek word translated hell in the New Testament is Hades. Hades has exactly the same meaning as sheol in the Old Testament. We know this because the Apostle Peter, in his Pentecostal sermon, quotes a text from the Old Testament in which the word sheol appears, and in his quotation he uses the word Hades as a translation of sheol. The text he quotes is Psalm 16: 10, which reads, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” This is a prophetic utterance by David concerning Jesus declaring his faith in the promises of God to restore him to life in the resurrection. Commenting on it Peter said, “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the

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flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.” -Acts 2:29-32

Here we have direct assurance not only that the hell of the Bible is not a place of torment, but also that those who go into this Bible hell, which is the condition of death, do not necessarily remain there. Of Jesus we are told in the Bible that he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Yet when he died he went into the Bible hell. Isaiah stated that “he poured out his soul unto death.” The reason for this was that he took the sinner’s place in death. As a result of the original sin of our first parents the whole world was plunged into condemnation to death, and Jesus took that condemnation upon himself and took the world’s place in death. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”-! Car. 15:22

Here, then, is one instance in which one who was in hell returned. Jesus was held captive in death from the time of his crucifixion until he was awakened on the third day. And according to the Apostle Paul, Jesus would not be the only one involved in the fulfillment of this prophecy. Paul wrote concerning Jesus that “when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” (Eph.4:8) According to the marginal translation of this, instead of the expression “captivity captive” we are informed that a better translation of the Greek is “a multitude of captives.” This would harmonize with Paul’s



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explanation concerning the resurrection that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” -I Cor. 15:22

We find, then, that what actually took place in connection with the resurrection of Jesus was not only that he was restored from the Bible hell, but that through him the whole multitude of the dead world of mankind will be awakened from death, or will come back from hell. This is emphasized in Revelation 1: 18 where Jesus declared, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.”

Keys are here used as symbolic of the authority to open what Jesus himself referred to before his death as “the gates of hell.” When the Apostle Peter testified to Jesus that he believed him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus replied, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” -Matt. 16: 17, 18

The thought is not that members of Christ’s church ever will storm the gates of hell to gain admittance. The reverse of this is the true thought. All of earth’s inhabitants are held prisoner in the Bible hell, in Hades. The only chance they have of escaping is that the symbolic gates which enclose this place of incarceration will be opened and the prisoners set free. What Jesus is saying is that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church in their

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divine mission to accomplish that great boon on behalf of all mankind.

But how do we know this to be the future work of the church? God promised Father Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. The Apostle Paul, commenting in Galatians 3: 16, tells us that Jesus is this promised Seed. Paul also tells us in verses 27-29 of this same chapter that the true followers of Jesus are also a part of this promised seed, destined in the plan of God for the saving of the world from death-to be joint-heirs with Jesus in the future great privilege of restoring mankind to life.

When God made the promise to Abraham that he would bless all the families of the earth through his seed, many of those families were already dead. All the families of the earth who have lived since that time have died, and continue to die. How then can they be blessed? Only by being restored to life. And Jesus assured Peter, and he assures us, that when God's time comes for the church, the true seed of Abraham, to extend God's promised blessings to all mankind, not even death, not even the Bible hell (Hades) will be able to prevent this. Even the gates of hell shall not prevail to interfere in the carrying out of God's great and glorious design. Yes, the dead are to be restored from death-from hell.

## THE HOPE OF THE KINGDOM

In the 20th chapter of Revelation we are presented with a very comprehensive view of the work of the Lord's kingdom in the earth when that kingdom is established. The opening verses tell of the binding of Satan, and in verse 4 the Apostle John tells of seeing those who were "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God." And he states that they "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." In verse 6 of the chapter this same group of faithful followers of the Master-those who are to live and reign with him in his kingdom-shall be, he says, "priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

It is toward the end of this wonderful kingdom chapter that we are given assurance of the resurrection of the dead. We quote verses 13 and 14: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

It is hard to understand, in view of this plain statement of the Bible, how the view ever found acceptance that hell would retain its dead forever; because the plain assertion is that hell-that is, Hades-will give up its dead. And it is interesting to note in passing that those who are in hell are said to be dead. They are not alive and in torture, but dead. The declaration that hell gives up its dead is simply one of the Bible's ways of assuring us that there shall be a resurrection of the dead.

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It is also interesting to note at this point that here we have one of the last uses of the word hell in the Bible. This means, obviously, that here we have what we might call the Bible's last word on the subject of hell, and that word is that hell gives up its dead. Yes, there is one more appearance of the word hell, which is in the next verse, and here we are told that "death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." The expression "lake of fire" is simply a symbol of death. There is nothing more deadly or destructive than fire. Certainly we do not throw that which we wish to preserve into a burning fire. Fire does not preserve; fire destroys, and is used here to denote the fact that one of the things it will destroy, in God's due time, is hell.

Testament where the Lord, through his prophet, declares, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." (Hosea 13:14) Here it is plainly stated that the Bible hell will be destroyed, and it is this that is depicted for us in Revelation by the statement that hell is cast into a lake of fire.

Another interesting point appears in this wonderful Old Testament promise. The Lord says, "O death, I will be thy plagues." When the time came for the Lord to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, the Pharaoh who was then ruling refused to release them. Because of this the Lord sent a series of plagues upon Egypt until the king would agree to let God's people go. This thought

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is introduced into the promise concerning those who are held captive in death. God says that in order to obtain the release of these he will plague death. What a wonderful assurance that is!

One of the illustrations used a number of times in the Old Testament concerning the resurrection of the dead is that it is a release from their captivity. They are prisoners in death. They are prisoners shut up behind the gates of hell (Hades), but these gates will be thrown wide open in God's due time, and its prisoners shall be set free. First there will be the release of those who have proved faithful as followers of Jesus. These will be exalted to glory, honor, and immortality, to live and reign with Christ. But all the dead, as prisoners of death, will be released. The Apostle John says, in the kingdom chapter already mentioned, verse 12, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

We are not to understand this thought of standing before God in too literal a sense. The reference is that in being brought forth from hell they have a standing before God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and upon the basis of this standing they are judged. They were not judged worthy of eternal death when they died; but as this wonderful explanation shows, when they are restored from death, the books of knowledge concerning God will be opened and their worthiness of everlasting life will be determined upon the basis of their obedience to the will

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of God as expressed in the open books.

To this the Apostle John adds that another book was opened, which is the book of life. The thought here is, as clearly indicated, that when those restored from the Bible hell prove faithful to God by obedience to the things written in the open books, their names will then be entered in the book of life. The purpose of hell giving up its dead is that all, during that time when Satan is bound and no longer able to deceive them, may respond favorably to the revelation of God's will to them and thereby obtain worthiness of everlasting life.

This will be the world's judgment day, when Christ, and associated with him his faithful church, will judge the world in righteousness. Those who obey the righteous laws of the kingdom during that judgment period will be restored to the original perfection enjoyed in the Garden of Eden and will thereafter live upon this perfected earth forever as humans. What a glorious hope the Bible holds out to us in God's Word!

## AND SOON

The glorious hope of life beyond the grave which the Bible presents to us is an encouragement under any circumstances, but is especially so now in view of the disturbed and chaotic conditions in the world around us; for the prophecies of the Bible reveal the fact that these very conditions through which we are living are themselves a clear indication that the fulfillment of God's

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kingdom promises is indeed near at hand; that the dead are soon to come back from hell.

One of these prophecies is found in the 12th chapter of Daniel, particularly verses 1 to 4. In the first verse of this chapter we are told of “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” This time of trouble is said to arise from the fact that one called Michael “shall stand up” who, as described by the text, is a “prince which standeth for the children of Thy people.” It would be hard to deny that we are now living in a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation. It is trouble unlike any other because of its severity and of its worldwide characteristics. It is a trouble unlike any other which has ever visited mankind in that its causes are so many and varied. Jesus described it as a time of distress of nations with perplexity, and this word “perplexity” which Jesus used is a translation of a Greek word which means “no way out.” And how true it is that today the world is unable to find a way out of the trouble. - Luke 21 :25

Jesus again refers to this prophecy found in the Book of Daniel. (Matt. 24:21,22) He partially quotes, in fact, from the prophecy, saying, “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” This statement by Jesus is part of his answer to the disciples as to what would be the sign of his second presence and the end of the age. Here he indicates clearly that he is the Michael referred to in the prophecy, and that this time of great

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tribulation, or trouble, would be one of the signs of the end of the age and of his presence.

And here again the accuracies of the prophecies are revealed. At no time in the history of mankind has the destruction of the whole human race been threatened until now. How wonderful that Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, should be able to forecast this and to identify the meaning of the time in which it occurs, the time when Michael would stand up and there would be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation!

In verse 4 of the prophecy of Daniel 12, he identifies this period as the time of the end, and he declares that in this time of the end there would be much running to and fro on the earth and a great increase of knowledge. It surely is not difficult to identify the accuracy of this prophecy. If one hundred years ago anyone would have said that the time would come when you could pick up a gadget on your desk and talk to your friends or business associates across the ocean and in distant continents, someone would have said, "I admire that man's enthusiasm, but there is a place for people like that."

But this great increase of knowledge is upon us, as is the running to and fro, that is, much and rapid travel. Based upon this prophecy, Sir Isaac Newton predicted that the time would come when people would be able to travel at the rate of fifty miles per hour. How far short of reality was the prediction! And yet rapid travel, and much of it, is the common experience of civilized man.



## WHY NOT THE RESURRECTION?

One reason we are calling special attention to these two particular prophecies is the fact that in them there is not only a prediction of a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation and the prediction of much and rapid travel which we have noted, but that midway between the two illuminating prophecies respecting the time in which we are living is the assurance that at that same time the people of God shall be delivered- from death. It says, "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."

The prophecy continues to give some of the details of the resurrection, but what we want to note here particularly is that it is at the time in the world's history when there shall be worldwide tribulation, when there shall be much and rapid travel throughout the earth, then those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. In other words, this is not only a time for great tribulation and much and rapid travel, but before its culmination it will be the time also for the people to come back from hell. We are witnessing two-thirds of this prophecy being fulfilled. Shall we say that its declaration concerning the resurrection shall not also be fulfilled? It is abundantly evident that we are indeed living in the time when it can be truthfully said that the dead will soon be returning from hell.

This prophecy refers to the dead being asleep in the dust

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of the earth. This is beautiful pictorial language, and it takes us back to the time of creation and the transgression of our first parents. When Adam was sentenced to death the Lord said, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;” so the use of this similar statement in Daniel’s prophecy clearly gives us assurance that all who lost life through Adam will have life restored through the redeeming power of Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all.

Do any of your friends or relatives fear the supposed torments of hell? Tell them to fear not; that hell is not a place of torment, but the state of the dead, and that we are rapidly approaching the hour when God’s due time will have arrived to begin the restoration of the dead to life. They will not all be restored in one day, for it will take most of the entire kingdom age. But the brightness of this hope lies in the fact that the beginning of this glad time of restitution, as the Bible calls it, or resurrection, is nigh at hand. Let this be our hope and our strength in this time when man’s world is falling down around him. God has his own world, a new world, a world to come “wherein dwelleth righteousness.” And in that world we will meet our loved ones who have died and will forever rejoice in God’s loving kindness in sending his Son to be our Redeemer and Savior. □

*“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. “-Revelation 14:6*