

APPENDIX

The Underworld

Introduction

The mention of the word “Hell” (Greek, “Hades”) in Matthew 16:18 suggests a most important study of the Scriptures which will unfold the truth concerning this place—“the underworld.”

There are two words; the Hebrew word, “Sheol,” in the Old Testament, and the Greek word, “Hades” used in the New Testament, which are identical in meaning and exactly equivalent. Both of these words mean **the underworld** or the place of departed spirits. They are never used to denote the Hell of final punishment, neither to denote the grave, the receptacle of the body, which is designated by a different Hebrew word, “queber.” These words are not used to denote the mere state of being dead as to the body.

What is the underworld?

The true and only meaning is “a place of departed spirits, souls which have left the body, whether in bliss or torment.” The testimony of Scripture, the Apocrypha, of the early Church Fathers, and even of heathen authors affirms this.

The difficulties in understanding the subject

Much confusion and even heresy would have been avoided were it not for the fact that the KJV inconsistently uses several words as translations of these two expressions, Sheol and Hades. They are translated “hell” (usually connected in the minds of Bible readers with the place of final judgment); “grave,” which is an entirely different word; and “pit,” which is really an appropriate translation of the Hebrew word “Abaddon” and the Greek word “abussos” or abyss. As examples of passages where these two words are found, see Isaiah 14:9 (Sheol) and Luke 16:23 (Hades).

Where is the underworld? Who will occupy it? (Old Testament times)

Hades or Sheol is described in Scripture as a “somber world and place of detention and waiting, even for the best” (Seiss). In the OT, the death of a patriarch is spoken of as being “gathered to his people” or “gathered to their fathers,” (Gen. 25:8; 35:29; Num. 27:13). This is the import of the words in Luke 16, where the beggar is spoken of as being “carried into Abraham’s bosom.” In the OT, the passing of a soul is designated as a **descent**, a going down (Isa, 5:14; Gen. 37:35; 42:38; Num. 16:33). These Scriptures clearly answer the question, “Where is Hades, or Sheol—the underworld located?” Somewhere beneath the surface of the earth (see also Ezek. 31:16, 18; 32:18). Samuel, when recalled by divine interposition and providence, on the occasion of Saul’s visit to the witch of Endor came **up** “out of the earth,” I Sam. 28:13—15.

The Relation of Christ to Hades

Into the “paradise” side of Hades, Christ and the penitent thief went, Luke 23:43. This descent into Hades, “the lower parts of the earth” (Eph. 4:9), was part of His redemptive work. By His descent into this region He wrought a great change therein and the whole condition of the pious dead from that time on. He announced His victory to the spirits imprisoned there (1 Pet. 3:18, 19), brought out with Himself all faithful souls, and resurrected many of them, Matt. 27:52, 53; Eph. 4:8, Psa. 16:10, Acts 2:27, 31.

The Present Condition of Hades

The “paradise” side of Hades is now empty. The “gates of Hades” do not prevail against or shut in, even temporarily, any of His saints. Christ is now in paradise above, and the righteous dead go to be with Him, at least in a relative sense, until they receive their resurrection bodies at the full consummation of redemption, see 2 Cor. 12:4. Read also Rev. 1:18.

The Abyss and Ghenna

There are several other terms used, two in the OT and two, their counterpart, in the NT, a clear understanding of which will add interest to the study of the underworld and give to the Bible student a more lucid understanding of many passages of Scripture.

(a) Abaddon and Abussos (the abyss)

In the OT, we find the Hebrew word “Abaddon,” usually translated “destruction.” The word, however, refers to a locality as well as to the dire state of those who go there, not to something abstract.

- ✓ Job 26:6
- ✓ Job 28:22
- ✓ Psalm 88:11
- ✓ Proverbs 27:20

This OT expression, “Abaddon,” is identical with the NT “pit” or “abyss” (Luke 8:26—31) and the “bottomless pit,” literally the “well-pit of the abyss,” Rev. 9:21; 11:7; 20:1. This region of Abaddon or the abyss of the underworld seems to be what would correspond to the dungeon of a prison, where the “baser spirits of dead men, demon spirits and other foul spirits of the lower order are for the most part held as prisoners until the final day of their judgment” (Seiss). The demon spirits in the record of Luke 8:31 besought the Lord that He would not send them to the “deep” (Greek abyss-abussos). From this dungeon hold there will be let loose upon the earth during the Tribulation period, Rev. 9:1—6.

It would seem that this well-pit or dungeon keep of the abyss is coterminous with the “great gulf,” which our Lord stated separated the righteous from the wicked in Hades. In other words, at the bottom of the great, yawning gulf is this “pit” or “abyss,” into which Satan will be cast, when he is bound by the angel at the beginning of the millennium

(Rev. 20:1) and where demons have their abode and are now confined, some of them, while others are dismissed by the Lord, when cast out at His command.

(b) Tophet (the Valley of the son of Hinnom) and Gehenna

In Isa. 30:33 and Jer. 7:31, 32, there is reference to “Tophet” in the Valley of the son of Hinnom. This Tophet is identical with the NT “hell fire” (literally “Gehenna of fire”) found in Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 23:14, 15, 33. Gehenna is the Grecian mode of spelling the Hebrew words that are translated “the Valley of Hinnom.” This valley was the place where were cast all kinds of filth, with the carcasses of beast and the unburied bodies of criminals who had been executed. Continual fires were kept burning there to consume this trash. Here also wicked kings in sacrifice to the heathen god Moloch burned children.

This Valley of Hinnom, then, or Tophet with its continual fires, is used as a symbol by Christ of the final “hell fire,” the place of punishment of the wicked, the “lake of fire,” which is the second death. Note the vividness of the words the prophet Isaiah uses in describing this Tophet, which is ordained for “the king,” (possibly the Antichrist and Satan).

Look up the following passages where the word “sheol” is used in the original Hebrew (it is usually wrongly translated “hell” and “grave”): Isa. 14:4—20; Exek. 32:21; Ps. 16:10; 86:13. Then, look up the following passages where “queber” is used: Ex. 14:11; 2 Sam. 3:32; 2 Chron. 16:14; 1 Kings 13:30; 2 Sam. 21:14; Gen. 50:5.

Now, remember that “sheol” and “queber” are as different as night and day. “Sheol” refers to the realm of the soul after it has left the body and “queber” refers to the realm of physical death. “Sheol” is never used in the plural; the body never goes there; it is not located on the earth; man does not go there; he does not dig it or make. The exact opposite is true of “queber”.

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