

THE BIBLE TRUTH ABOUT "HELL"

Introduction Certain ideas about Hell have been instilled into our minds from childhood. If we were to ask a hundred people in our neighbourhood: "What is your idea of Hell?" we would probably find that most people gave answers something like this: "A vast fiery pit, where sinners are kept burning for ever and ever, while demons, armed with pitch-forks, gloat over the torments of the damned."

Does the Bible endorse this conventional picture of Hell? Let us open the Book and see.

Discussion 1.—WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN BY "HELL"?

Four different words from the original Bible languages are translated by the one English word "Hell":

- (a) **SHEOL** (Hebrew)—Has the general meaning of death, the state of death, the grave, the dominion of death and the grave. The sphere of death as opposed to the sphere of life. The after-world. The unseen or invisible realm to which all men go at death. In the Greek "Septuagint" version (the first translation from the Hebrew into Greek), the Hebrew SHEOL is commonly translated by the Greek word HADES. SHEOL does not carry with it intrinsically the idea of fire, or the conscious torment of the living, but simply death, the abode of the dead, both good and evil. The word occurs sixty-five times in the Old Testament. Example: Gen. 37 : 35.
- (b) **TARTAROS** (Greek)—Refers to the place of banishment of evil angels, and evidently means the regions of space surrounding this world, to which the rebellious angels were cast after their expulsion from Heaven. Does not concern the fate of ungodly men. Occurs only once in the New Testament: II Peter 2 : 4.
- (c) **HADES** (Greek)—Means literally that which is in darkness, hidden, invisible, obscure, and applies to the unseen world, or the abode of the dead. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew SHEOL, and therefore means the grave, or the dominion of death and the grave. HADES does not carry with it intrinsically the idea of fire, or the conscious torment of the living, but applies simply to the invisible world to which all men, good and evil alike, go at death. The word occurs eleven times in the New Testament. Example: Acts 2 : 27.
- (d) **GEHENNA** (Greek)—Applies literally to the Valley of Gehenna near Jerusalem, where in Christ's day all kinds of refuse were cast, including the carcasses of beasts, and the unburied bodies of criminals. Fires were kept constantly burning to consume this waste material. GEHENNA is the Greek mode of spelling the Hebrew words which means "the valley of Hinnom". However, the fires of GEHENNA were not for the torment of the living, but for the destruction of the dead. Jesus used the Valley of Gehenna as a symbol of the "second" or final death—the total, fiery destruction of the wicked at the end of the Millennium. The word occurs twelve times in the New Testament. Example: Matt. 5 : 22, 29, 30.

2.—WHY IS THE FIERY HELL OF THE BIBLE NECESSARY?

Because God is a clean God, and He wants to have a clean universe. His holy nature is the very opposite of evil, and therefore cannot tolerate wickedness in any form. The primary purpose of the fiery Hell is to disinfect the universe from everything that is evil and unclean.

I John 1 : 5: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

Habakkuk 1 : 13: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil."

Heb. 12 : 29: "Our God is a consuming fire."