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Do the Fires of Hell Come From God? (Part III)

Acts 3:23: (NASB) *And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.*

The world is messed up. If you believe in God, then you most likely believe in some sort of ultimate justice system. The question is, what does God's system of justice consist of - what kind of penalty? For generations, the majority of Christianity has believed in a hell of fire and torment as the answer to this question. However, there is a mountain of biblical evidence to the contrary. Today we will embark on Part III of our series that examines this evidence. We will look at some of the really difficult and seemingly contradictory Scriptures that talk about the condition of those who were evil in this life. Do they go to hell? Is there fire and torment in hell?

"Do the Fires of Hell Come From God (Part I)" on June 7, 2015 examined the biblical phrase *weeping (or wailing) and gnashing of teeth*, with the conclusion that its meaning was focusing on deep heartbreaking sorrow and anguish coupled with consternation, anger and pain at a GREAT loss. This reaction never applied to any eternal torment or torture - only to the loss of opportunity of God's favor at one time or another. "Do the Fires of Hell Come From God (Part II)" on July 26, 2015 examined the Greek word *Gehenna*, meaning the Valley of Hinnom, a word often translated as *hellfire*. We saw how this Valley was used as a garbage dump where fires constantly burned to utterly destroy all therein, and how it symbolized utter and disgraceful destruction. Because of the heinous sins previously committed there, God declared it a place of utter destruction, not torture. Bodies of criminals (dead, never live) were thrown in here, denied an honorable burial. Today, Part III will examine the word *Hades* and its Old Testament counterpart *Sheol*, often translated *hell*. What does it mean? How is it used? Jesus used the Old Testament as his foundation for the New Testament, so we will as well.

In the Old Testament, there is only one word translated *hell*:

Sheol: Strong's #7585 she'owl (sheh-ole') Hades or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat), including its accessories and inmates

When translated into English, this Hebrew word *Sheol* is translated: Grave - 31 times, Hell - 31 times and Pit - 3 times. When we think of "the grave," it brings to mind where we respectfully put a deceased body. When we hear the word *hell*, based on our Christian denomination, we could think of several different things. Some may think of it as a place of eternal torment.

So, our first problem is the Old Testament uses the exact same word, *Sheol*, but translates into English three different ways with three different English meanings.

Let's look at some of the "warnings" using this word: Deuteronomy 32:21-23: (KJV) ²¹*They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those, which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. (This text was quoted and fulfilled in Romans 10:19-21 relating to the Gentiles coming to favor thousands of years later.)* ²²*For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest **hell <7585>**, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. This is figurative language describing the "fire" of God's anger.*

Examples in the Old Testament where the Greek word *Sheol* is translated into English as *hell*: Psalms 9:17 Psalms 55:15 *Hell (Sheol) does sound bad for wicked people! But wait! There is more...Examples in the Old Testament where that same Greek word *Sheol* is translated into English as *grave*: 1 Samuel 2:6 Job 14:13: Job was a godly man who prayed to be hidden in Sheol - the same place for wicked people, right? In the Old Testament, both good and bad people go to the same place - *Sheol*. There is no thought or evidence of *Sheol* housing any fire or any torture - it is a pit - a place of the sleep of death - the grave! Job 14:13-14 Ecclesiastes 9:10*

You may be interested in reviewing the programs, "Where Does Your Soul Go When You Die?" (Part 1) March 15, 2015 and (Part II) April 12, 2015 for more scriptural foundations.

New Testament Greek word:

Hades: Strong's #86 haides (hah'-dace); properly, unseen, i.e. "Hades" or the place (state) of departed souls; KJV-- grave, hell.



Matthew 16:18: *The gates of hell (Hades)* - what was Jesus referring to? The gates of the grave, of death. Jesus was the resurrection and the life. Death does not have power over him.

But can we connect the Old Testament word, *Sheol*, and the New Testament word, *Hades*? **The next two examples are undeniable links between Sheol and Hades:** Psalms 16:10 and Acts 2:27. Isaiah 25:8, Hosea 13:14: *Sheol* is mentioned twice in the context of death. 1 Corinthians 15:54-55: (KJV) ⁵⁴*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (Quoting from Isaiah 25:8) ⁵⁵O death, where is thy sting? O grave <86>, where is thy victory?* There is no permanence in death because of Jesus' ransom. This speaks of the grave in its "biggest sense" - not just limited to "good" or "bad" people.

Can *Hades* mean the grave, just like *Sheol*? Yes! With this thought, consider these texts: **Jesus' being (his life) was not permitted to be forever lost in the grave:** Acts 2:27: (KJV) *Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell <86>, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

Hell - Hades - the grave - will be emptied out and the grave (death because of Adam's sin) will be destroyed! How do we know that? **We are specifically told:** Revelation 20:13-14: (KJV) ¹³*And the sea gave up the dead, which were in it; and death and hell <86> delivered up the dead, which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. ¹⁴And death and hell <86> were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*

Old Testament: SHEOL; New Testament: HADES; Both mean the same thing: GRAVE
Especially with a subject like this, we need a SCRIPTURAL foundation, not just a TRADITIONAL one.

What about the Rich Man being in "Hell" and being tormented in a flame?

Luke 16:23-24: How does this fit in with the clarity of definition we have just discussed? It is a parable. How do we know? Context! **Jesus is teaching several audiences all at once with a series of parables:** Luke 15:1-3

Luke 15:3-7: *The first Parable of the Lost Sheep* shows the recovery of mankind from their lost state of sin. Jesus gives the interpretation of his theme - joy in heaven. He tells them this lesson plainly, so they can follow his themes as they unfold into lessons of plain truth about the development of his Father's kingdom - and condemnation for being too proud and egotistical to comply with it. He is talking directly to the Pharisees.

Luke 15:8-10: *The second Parable of the Lost Coin* illustrates in its big picture the value of the redeemed race of man as a part of the symmetry of the ten coins being restored - the lost coin symbolizing the race of man and the woman symbolizing the work of reconciliation.

Luke 15:11-32: *The third Parable of the Prodigal Son* shows the two classes of Israel - the Pharisees represented in the older brother and the sinners and publicans represented in the younger one. (Incidentally, all of these classes of people were in front of Jesus while he was telling these parables!) This story reveals the attitudes of both classes and the grace of God in accepting repentance.

Luke 16:1-15: *The fourth Parable of the Unjust Steward* frontally attacked the selfish and compromising spirit the Pharisees displayed, showing their hypocrisy and godlessness. Jesus is dealing with a wide audience from publicans and sinners to tax collectors, scribes and Pharisees.

Now, *The fifth Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, a lesson in reversal: The story starts with the rich man being favored and the beggar out of favor. Luke 16:19-21:

- *Rich Man* - the Jewish nation, specifically the Pharisees
- *Clothed in purple (royalty) and fine linen* - the promise of the kingdom and righteousness
- *Fared sumptuously every day* - he enjoyed but did not appreciate his blessings
- *Lazarus* - represented the Gentiles - the "everybody else" outside of the Jewish favor
- *Laid at his gate/full of sores* - outside the gate of favor - outside of the atonement Israel received from their annual sacrifices



- *Desired crumbs/company with dogs* - the Gentiles at this time were spiritually hungry, unclean and detestable

This predicted reversal would soon happen shortly after Jesus’ crucifixion - see [Acts 10:9-16](#) and refer to our programs “[Why Cornelius? Why a Soldier?](#)” (Part I) [May 17, 2015](#) and (Part II) [June 14, 2015](#).

Luke 16:22-23: If this was NOT a parable and if they literally went someplace, then there are many questions one has to ask:

- Where would Abraham’s bosom be? Is this a metaphor for heaven?
- Do all faithful people go there?
- If so, how big a space are we talking about?
- Was Lazarus faithful or just poor?
- Was the Rich Man bad or just rich?
- If not a parable, who goes to the bosom? Who goes to this hell and where does everyone else go?

Consider these:

- *Beggar died* - sinners and Gentiles died to their situation of disfavor
- *Carried by angels* - the angels were the apostles and ministers of the Gospel
- *To Abraham* - became the children of God and heirs of the Abrahamic promise - [Galatians 3:29](#): (NIV) *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*
- *Rich man dies/is buried* - the Jews “died” to their favor and are buried in sin once again
- *Lifting his eyes in hell* - entombed as a nation in the death of disfavor

So, verse 22 is teaching us about a *state* of being dead and not being any particular *place*.

Luke 16:23: (KJV) *And in **hell <86>** he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

We know the *hell* in Luke 16:23 cannot be the lake of fire, Gehenna:

Revelation 20:14: (KJV) *And **death <2288>** and **hell <86>** were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*

- *Being in torments* - this Greek word here literally means “a touchstone.” He was being tested and his true colors revealed. As a touchstone, another way to say this might be: “You are revealed for what you are.” So when the Pharisees are being told that when they die to their position of favor, they will be revealed as counterfeit. Their hypocrisy would be made known. They would have recognized the touchstone as a symbol. We can imagine Jesus was looking directly at them while he was talking!

Torments: Strong’s #931 *basanos* (bas'-an-os); a touchstone

Greek English Lexicon: a touchstone, which is a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with metal by which one is forced to divulge the truth

The only other time this word is used: Matthew 4:24: Torments here meaning “hard testings.”

- *Seeing Abraham and Lazarus* - Lazarus as the spiritual seed of Abraham.
- *In his bosom* - no longer aliens, but children.

Romans 11:17-20: The Gentiles were the wild branches that did not belong on the olive tree (represented by Lazarus in the parable) grafted in so they could be of favor. The other natural branches were cut off! This story of the Rich Man and Lazarus shows us the change from the way things were.

Luke 16:24: (KJV) *And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am **tormented <3600>** in this **flame <5395>**.*

- *Father Abraham, have mercy* - essentially, this is the nation of Israel saying, “Don’t abandon me even though I abandoned you.”



- *Send Lazarus with a drop of water* - water is a symbol of truth - put us back on the right path
- *I am tormented* - the Rich Man was grieving a great loss, not being tortured with physical pain.

Tormented: Strongs #Tormented: 3600 odunao (od-oo-nah'-o); to grieve

Luke 2:48: Jesus' parents grieved when they thought they lost him as a child. Acts 20:38: The people, grieved, were sad, that the Apostle Paul had to leave them. So, *tormented* here has nothing to do with physical pain. It is all emotional!

- *In this flame* - (notice not *in the fire*) the revealing of past indiscretions and misuses of favor

Flame: Strongs #5395 phlox (flox); (to "flash" or "flame"); a blaze

In all cases EXCEPT FOR this parable, the word describes actual fire, stated as in *flame of fire*.

Some uses: Real fire: Acts 7:30: (KJV) *And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame <5395> of fire <4442> in a bush.* The flame describes the brightness of the fire. Symbolic fire: Hebrews 1:7: (KJV) *And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame <5395> of fire <4442>.* Again, the flame describes the brightness of the fire.

So in our parable, Jesus' lesson here is not one of torture, but of the *revealing* of past indiscretions and misuses of favor. (Unfortunately this very accurately described Israel at the time.) The flame is not destructive, but revealing and bright. Its purpose is to be the light that uncovers all things. We see this story had a specific purpose - the loss of opportunity and the giving of favor to someone else. Jesus knew the blessings would go to the Gentiles and the Jews would be out of favor because they were not obeying God. Remember, parables use picture language. The Parable of the Lost Sheep was not talking about real sheep!

Luke 16:25: With this understanding of *torment* being anguish and *flame* meaning light, let's review and paraphrase verse 24. Luke 16:24: Restated: *Father, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus (those whom I despised) that he may dip the tip of his finger in water (truth) and give me just a drop of it, for I am in deep anguish of heart in this light that has revealed my irresponsibility, my pride and my fall from favor...* This is all about lost opportunity but not about forever. Suddenly, we are not seeing hellfire and torment - we are seeing the anguish of heart from sin being revealed in the light of truth. This agony is not caused by physical pain, but by the realization that there is no place to hide. There is now nothing you can do but to accept the consequences that you so richly deserve. But if you take away hell, do you take away God's justice? NO. You take away a *perversion* of His justice. God's justice ALWAYS requires accountability. It ALWAYS has consequences commensurate with the sin. There is no sin a human being can commit that warrants being eternally tormented. Jesus was forcefully teaching that Israel- the Pharisees (the Rich Man), were about to lose favor with God (being close to Abraham) and the Gentiles (Lazarus the beggar) were about to gain that favor. Jesus was illustrating the suffering and anguish that they (Israel - the Pharisees) were going to experience. **For the interpretation of the rest of the parable, please see the Bonus Material.** By the way, what comes after this parable? Four parables followed before it, and after is the millstone and faith as a mustard seed - more picture language to teach the audience. Jesus used pictures to teach lessons but nothing to do with eternal torment.

What about Revelation and the smoke of their torment rising up forever?

There are two texts from Revelation that need explanation: Revelation 14:9-11 and Revelation 20:7-10. **Please see the Full Edition Rewind for the rest of the discussion!**

Evil and all those who represent it will be destroyed but that evil will never be forgotten. The experience of evil is indelibly stamped upon His creation. They can always look back and see life without God is miserable. From a standpoint of godliness, there is no greater punishment than not to be able to have life.

***So, do the fires of hell come from God?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***