

## 4. THE UNSEEN, THE IMPERCEPTIBLE

One irrefutable fact presented in Scripture and experienced by Adam's entire race is that *death has passed through into all mankind and all die, on which all sinned* (Romans 5.12 *cv*). Death is the last enemy of mankind (1 Corinthians 15.26). It is likened to sleep, and the only way to be awakened is through resurrection. The dead know nothing whatsoever.

Praise God; there is hope for mankind because God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has conquered sin and death.

For I delivered to you in the first place what I also received, that Christ **died for our sins**, according to the Scriptures, and that He **was buried**, and that He **was raised the third day**, according to the Scriptures.... (1 Corinthians 15.3-4 LITV)

Ultimately, all on earth and those in the heavens will be reconciled to God, for God is love (1 John 4.8, 16) and, in His love, He has reconciled *all* to Him, making peace through the blood of His cross.

And **He is the Head of the body, the ecclesia**, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first, for in Him the entire complement delights to dwell, and through Him to **reconcile all to Him** (making peace through the blood of His cross), through Him, whether those on the earth or those in the heavens. (Colossians 1.18-21 *cv*)

This is truly good news for all mankind, without exception, but especially for believers of our present eon. Unfortunately, one of the greatest hindrances today to seeing the glory of God's purpose in the reconciliation of all mankind can be summed up in one word and what it represents to most people; it is the word *hell*.

### ***Man's hell.***

So that there is no misunderstanding over what follows, let it be noted that the concept of *hell* is an invention of man created under the influence of the world forces of darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness. It is man's hell that is based on a god created in man's own image, which is grounded in pagan theology.

Today, the word *hell* is commonly used by unbeliever and believer alike. Without doubt, this one little word is used countless times in common every day speech. In fact, it is most commonly used in slang expressions to express anger or to even curse others (e.g., "Go to hell!" or "I hope you rot in hell!"). Among some groups, it is used to preach to the lost and scare them into believing (e.g., "Where will you go when you die; to heaven or to hell?").

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It is safe to state that most often when the word *hell* is invoked in our day, it conjures up all sorts of thoughts associated with evil, fire, torment, the devil, demons, worms and other vile things, but it seldom, if ever, is associated with the silent sleep of death. Most commonly, it is portrayed as a place of fire and torment for the departed (dead) lost and a place in which Satan and his angels rule. Satan is often depicted as standing at the entrance of hell with pitchfork in hand greeting the lost when they die.

To many, hell is a great torture chamber with a fire that never goes out. The people who are sent there are not consumed by this inferno, but rather remain alive in a never-ending state of torment, with no chance of restitution. The justice system of the nations is more compassionate than the justice that is ascribed to our loving heavenly Father. And yet, from some of the pulpits of Christendom, we are told that this heinous place called *hell* is the invention of the One Scripture says is love, who loves the world and is full of mercy, and that He alone sends people into this place with no chance of ever coming out. Even the terrorists of our day seem to pale in their diabolical deeds in comparison to the hell that is attributed to our loving God. <sup>1</sup>

Literature is filled with references to *hell* in its most grotesque misuse of the word. One such well-known work is *The Divine Comedy* by Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). This work is an allegory divided into three canticas, *Inferno* (Hell), *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) and *Paradiso* (Paradise). *Inferno* is about how, in the year 1300, a young man descended down into the depths of hell, represented by circles. Each circle went deeper into the earth and represented further and further evil. Each circle contained the lost who committed greater degrees of sin. In the very depths of hell was Satan, waist deep in ice. The gates of hell had inscribed on them: “*Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.*”

Of course, this is all the imagination of one man who wrote a long time ago. His work was ignored for many centuries; however, in the nineteenth century, some of the major literary writers of that period “rediscovered” this writing and began to draw on this work for their inspiration.

Some, whom many consider the greatest preachers who lived during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, preached sermons that reveal the influence of pagan theology. In trying to reach the lost, these men, who loved the Lord, worked up fear in people with horrid sermons on the “damned” suffering endlessly in *hell* and the saved, even with some demented glee, watching their loved ones being tortured. They made God into something worse than the adversary himself, and there are preachers doing likewise in our day.

Consider these words from a very famous preacher from this era.

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<sup>1</sup> Some people counter this by stating that *hell* is man’s own doing, that God did not create it, but that man created it himself because of his rejection of God. If so, then how do we answer Scripture that declares: *Seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen!* (Romans 11.36 cv)?

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“The smoke of their torment shall ascend in the sight of the blessed forever and serve as a most clear glass always before their eyes to give them a constant, bright and most affecting view.... This display of the divine character and glory will be in favor of the redeemed, and most entertaining, and give the highest pleasure to those who love God, and raise their happiness to ineffable heights.... Should this eternal punishment and this fire be extinguished, it would in a great measure obscure the light of heaven, and put an end to a great part of the happiness and glory of the blessed.”

Will you be happy in heaven watching your fellow humans being toasted and tormented in a never-ending furnace? Will the smoke of their torment cause you to worship God? Will this give you the highest pleasure of the love of God? Will it make God, who created man *to be* in His own image, happy? It is beyond human comprehension how any sound believer who loves God and knows His love for mankind could embrace such rhetoric. It should make us wonder how much of such ignorance has penetrated the minds of believers through the so-called “enlightenment” of man.

Unfortunately, such pagan thought has penetrated the thinking of many believers and is seen, heard and read in all the forms of media available to us today. Recently on television, a preacher proclaimed that many are “going to hell” and his listening congregation responded with loud claps and big smiles on their faces. The message of hell was being proclaimed with glee because, somehow, they (the messenger and the hearers) “had made a decision for Christ,” while all the unbelievers had not. It was painful to watch. If this is the true destiny of the so-called lost, then where are the hearts that are crying over the ones who have not made a “decision.”

There are many so-called Christian videos that have been produced in an attempt to reach the lost. Rather than portraying the love of God, most of these videos play off the fear of man. They present a hideous picture of a place they call *hell* in which people are burning and living at the same time. Using all the modern techniques of a Hollywood production, they portray people with flames all around them and even engulfing their bodies as they scream out in anguish and pain, and yet, they never, *never* die.

The same thing applies to books. There is a book that has been recently released in which the person claims that he spent twenty-three minutes in hell. His description of hell matches that of Dante’s *Inferno*. Where in Scripture do we discover such an image? You will search in vain to find such an *inferno*.

I even read of some who claim that Jesus took them to hell and they saw people hanging on walls with worms coming out of their heads. They cannot die nor escape from this hellhole, for they are to be tormented forever. As the so-called account goes, Jesus showed no compassion on these lost souls in hell, but He said that they deserved it. What foolishness! Where is the absolute victory of the cross? If you ask me, according to this story, Jesus and His death on the cross failed, for

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He could not save billions upon billions of ones He created and loves. Instead they must be hung in hell with worms and fire, living in utter torture while Jesus looks on and says that it is too bad; there is nothing He can do to save them. Does this not sadden your heart? I cannot speak directly to how the Lord Jesus views this, but I believe that it both saddens and angers His heart! <sup>2</sup>

I do not cite these examples to belittle any true brethren in Christ. Some truly love the Lord and their intentions are noble, for they have a desire to see many saved. However, noble intentions that do not match the word of God can be dangerous, particularly when the intentions fail to properly present that God is love and He wills that all mankind be saved. Our only safeguard from error is not in the traditions of men but in the word of God that transcends tradition.

Only an adversary could have come up with such a horror and convinced people that this is God's plan for most of mankind. Satan himself would not desire to have such a diabolical place, even if he were the suzerain <sup>3</sup> over it. Why? Because he desires to be worshipped and no worship will ever come from people who are living forever in a horrific furnace of fire with no chance of pardon. We see his desire for worship in his failed attempt to tempt Jesus.

And the Devil said to him, 'To thee I will give all this authority, and their glory, because to me it hath been delivered, and to whomsoever I will, I do give it; thou, then, if thou mayest bow before me—all shall be thine.' And Jesus answering him said, 'Get thee behind me, adversary, for it hath been written, Thou shalt bow before the Lord thy God, and Him only thou shalt serve.' (Luke 4.6-8 YLT)

The Devil has nothing against a beautiful world and all its glory. Most likely, he would leave the world as it is (i.e., beautiful and yet sinful) if all mankind would bow the knee in worship of him. Notice the half-truth of his temptation. The authority over this world was not delivered to him as if he deserved it or as if mankind willingly handed it over to him; rather, he took the dominion of this world through deception (1 Timothy 2.14).

Satan is the father of hate and lies, not the father of love and truth, and he seeks to destroy mankind knowing that God is love. His strategy is to convince men, women and children that God does not love them and that He is out to destroy them. In some ways, Satan has fertile ground upon which to plant his seed of

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<sup>2</sup> Let us all face the fact that we all have sinned and all have come short of the glory of God; we miss the mark (Romans 3.23). Lest any of us should become proud and boastful, thinking that we did something to deserve our place in the family of God, we need to be reminded that God locks up all together, that He should be merciful to all (Romans 11.32 CV). If this becomes engraved on our hearts, then we will see how odious the concept of the modern-day hell is to God is love. How can we see the glory of God in the cross of Christ if Christ is not able to save all mankind? If He has not saved all mankind, then Adam's one transgression is far more effective in bringing death to mankind than Christ's one righteous act is effective in bringing life to mankind.

<sup>3</sup> A *suzerain* is a ruler, one in a position of power, especially a feudal lord, one who has control over land held in a feud or quarrel. Surely, there has been a quarrel over the earth.

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destruction. All of us, in some measure, know that we are sinners that deserve punishment for our sins. The laws and customs of all the nations and tribes of the world alone convict people of doing wrong or harm to others. With one simple twist of deception, Satan takes these convictions and convinces people that God <sup>4</sup> is angry with them and that He does not love them. In fact, Satan goes even further by convincing many that God is so angry with them that He will never forgive them; their sins are too great. Once this lie is accepted, it is merely one simple step to believe that God has created a hell to torment those He hates and will not forgive. It is safe to state that at the core of most destructive behavior throughout mankind is the absence of love, especially the love of a father for his child. This is why so many, even among God's people, have a difficult time knowing and accepting the love of the Father, a love which is destroyed by the heaven and hell preaching of our day.

I have no doubt that when people, including believers, do not know the love of God in their heart, they will be consumed by hate, rejection and guilt, which will also lead to all sorts of sicknesses, diseases and even premature death. Because of this, man places a demand on himself that he must be punished and therefore deserves to end up in some diabolical hell with no way out. So what results? A hell is created based on the worst and most vile, wicked and diabolical characteristics of fallen man. To make matters worse, the guilt is so severe that man cannot accept responsibility for such a horror, so he places the responsibility for it on a god of his own making.

The institutions of the world, such as governments and Christendom itself, perpetrate this lie because it helps to keep people in line. The result is that people live in fear in varying degrees. Some might protest that this is not so in Christendom, but I have heard it with my own ears. I recall sharing with a local pastor about the love of God and how He will bring all His people through in the end. This brother stopped me and said: "If we teach this, how will we keep people in line?" What he meant was; if we don't keep them in fear, then they will sin. He was fearful himself of releasing his people into the loving care of the Lord and trusting the spirit of God to lead them. Further, it seems that some people who hear and accept the heaven-hell message out of fear are never sure of their salvation and are in fear of losing it. I have heard an example of this from the pulpit as well. A man, who sat under heaven and hell preaching for many years, began to question his own salvation. He went to his pastor for help and shortly thereafter he died suddenly and without warning. Perhaps fear came over this man, and it led to his premature death. Fear will not lead us into the kingdom of God; love and the grace of God will! <sup>5</sup>

Let us never lose sight of *God is love*.

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<sup>4</sup> Obviously, many in the world do not believe in the one true God but believe in many gods. However, many of these co-called gods are angry, vengeful gods.

<sup>5</sup> Fear of God is an entirely different matter. We are to have reverential fear of God; that is, we are to hallow His name, to reverence Him, which means to honor and respect Him as the Almighty. He is not man; He is God.

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Before looking at the specific Scriptures used by many to support their view of hell, there are six additional points that need to be made.

### ***Satan is in heaven, not hell.***

First, Satan is not in a place called *hell*, nor does he rule over a kingdom called *hell*. He is the ruler over the kingdoms of this world, for they all lie in the power of the evil one (1 John 5.19). He roams the earth seeking ones to devour; thus, we must resist him (1 Peter 5.8-9). He is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2.2), and we are to *put on the panoply of God, to enable you to stand up to the stratagems of the Adversary, for it is not ours to wrestle with blood and flesh, but with the sovereignties, with the authorities, with the world-mights of this darkness, with the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials* (Ephesians 6.12 cv). Satan continues to move about in heaven itself (Job 2.1-2); however, Scripture reveals his fate as Michael seizes the dragon, the old serpent, and casts him down to the earth until, finally, he is seized and bound in the abyss (submerged chaos) for a thousand years (see Revelation 12.3-9; 20.1-3).

### ***The dead know nothing whatsoever.***

Second, the dead know nothing; therefore, they cannot be alive in a place called *hell*. However, those who believe in a literal hell, a place of fire and torment, also must believe that there really is no such thing as death for the believer and the unbeliever alike, or for the righteous and the unrighteous alike. They hold that the believers go to *heaven* and eternal bliss immediately upon their death, and the lost go to *hell*, a place of fire and torment, immediately upon their death.

To believe this, one has to redefine death as something other than death; the dead really do not die but merely change form and residence. But this is not what Scripture has to say on the matter. Death is *not* another state of consciousness or life in some place, whether it is in heaven or hell. Death is death; it is not life. Today, the Lord Jesus Christ *alone has immortality* (1 Timothy 6.16); He alone is absolutely beyond death. Solomon, David's son who was granted the wisdom of God, declared: *The living are conscious that death will come to them, but **the dead are not conscious of anything**, and they no longer have a reward, because there is no memory of them* (Ecclesiastes 9.5 BBE).

### ***The wages of sin is death, not torture or extermination.***

Third, Paul declared that *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6.23). We never read anywhere in Scripture that the wages of sin is endless torture or complete extermination (destruction, annihilation), meaning that the person ceases to exist forever. You are challenged to search the Bible looking for any reference to either of these concepts being the wage for sin. Sin leads to death. Isn't death enough of a punishment for sin? Why do we need to make up something worse than death? Death came into mankind through one man's transgression, and on account of this

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one act, all sin (read Romans 5-6). Again, we must redefine death in order to make it into another form of life in a fiery place with worms and endless torment.

Besides, God gave His law to mankind through Moses, and no where in the law is there punishment by torture or punishment forever. The law is for restitution and correction, not punishment. The most severe penalty for breaking the law was death, physical death. No one was ever commanded to be burned alive at the stake or to be tortured endlessly. If we accept this as the truth, which there is no reason not to accept it, then why do so many believe that God changed His divine law along the way to include torture in hell forever and ever? Think about it!

Further, the notion held by some that the wages of sin is extermination or total annihilation of the person is based on improper translation of Scripture, such as Matthew 3.12; 10.28; 13.40-42, 57-50; 2 Thessalonians 1.9; 2 Peter 2.12; and Jude 7. Words such as *destroy*, *destruction*, *perish* and *burned* are held to mean that the person will be utterly destroyed, never to exist again. Of course, others take some of these verses to mean the person will be tormented forever in hell. Both interpretations must be rejected.

There are forty-five Hebrew words and ten Greek words that are most often translated with the word *destroy*, and there are thirty-one Hebrew words and four Greek words often translated with the word *destruction*. However, a study of all these references will reveal that there are several meanings to these words. According to Young's Analytical Concordance, the word *destroy* can mean "to gather," "to kill," "to catch or drag," "to oppress," "to break," "to finish or consume," "to beat down," "to cast down," "to cut off," "to spoil," "to mar," "to make of none effect," "to loose," or "to lay waste," to name a few. The word *destruction* can refer to "ruin," "waste," "trouble," "downfall," "cutting off," "breaking," "treading down," or "loss," to name a few.

One example will further our understanding of this matter. Before He sent out the twelve disciples, Jesus instructed them: *'And be not afraid of those killing the body, and are not able to kill the soul, but fear rather Him who is able both soul and body to destroy in gehenna'* (Matthew 10.28<sup>YLT</sup>). In the same discourse, Jesus also instructed them: *To save your life is to lose it, and to lose [destroy] your life for my sake is to save it* (Matthew 10.39<sup>WNT</sup>). The words *destroy* and *lose* come from the same Greek word. If *to lose* meant "utter destruction" or "annihilation," then how could one find life?

Consequently, every place that we read the word *destroy* or *destruction*, we must not read into it that the affected party will cease to exist, that is, never be brought out of the state of death to live again. Simply, we must allow Scripture to determine the meaning of the word in light of other Scripture on the matter.

Again, the wages of sin is death. There is no other wage to be paid for the sin of the world. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29) that was imputed to all by Adam's one sin. Jesus has paid the wages of sin in full.

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On the cross, Jesus cried out: “*Telelestai!*,” which means, “*It is accomplished.*” Not knowing sin, He paid the penalty for Adam’s sin, being made a sin offering for our sakes that we may be becoming God’s righteousness in Him (2 Corinthians 5.21 cv). If the wages of sin were either eternal torment or eternal annihilation or destruction, then Jesus could never have been the Savior of the world because He would be in eternal torment even unto this day, or He would have been completely destroyed. Think about it! If these are the wages of sin that so many seem to teach, then Christ and His death on the cross is of no avail to mankind. Some might argue that Jesus did pay for the wages of sin by His death, but those who reject Him must suffer the consequences; they must pay the penalty by either being cast into hell to be tormented forever or to be totally destroyed. In other words, either death must continue forever, which according to Scripture it will not, or death must be defined as something other than death. If either case were true, which they are not, then the wages of sin is something other than death, and mankind must pay the wages of sin, which Jesus paid for on the cross. It cannot be both ways. Either Jesus is the full, total, absolute Savior, or He is not. The only way that death will be abolished is if it is replaced with life, the life of the Son, and this is exactly what Scripture teaches.

People of God, let us not be fooled by the doctrines of men; Jesus died for our transgressions. He *was given up because of our offenses, and was roused because of our justifying* (Romans 4.25 cv). He went into the tomb as a dead man and came out three days later alive forevermore as the Savior of all mankind, especially of believers.

**I died; but I am now alive until the Ages of the Ages, and I have the keys of the gates of Death and of Hades!** (Revelation 1.18 WNT)

***The judgment of God is for restoration.***

*Fourth*, do not read into anything that has been stated so far that God will not judge, for most assuredly He must judge; He does today and He eventually will judge all mankind. However, judgment is ultimately for restoration and not for endless punishment. Judgment is of works or acts. Our God is a consuming fire, and He will judge according to His fire, which is the judgment of His divine law.

However, there is one verse that seems to answer the question of judgment of the unjust, and it is discovered in Peter’s second epistle in reference to the Lord rescuing Lot from the unrighteousness of his day.

The Lord is acquainted with the rescue of the devout out of trial, yet is keeping the unjust for **chastening** in the day of judging, yet especially those going after the flesh in defiling lust and despising lordship. (2 Peter 2.9-10 cv)

The Greek word for **chastening** is ***kolasis***, which comes from *kolazō*, which means **to chasten with a view to amendment**, in contrast to punishment which is penal. In other words, the day of judging of the unjust is not for

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punishment but for correction. The concept of eternal punishment with no chance of restitution or full payment for one's action is not to be found in the Greek word *kolasis*. God is love means that God's heart is to correct and restore all mankind, not to punish or destroy wayward mankind forever. He must judge according to the fire of His law, but He will never torture anyone.

***Hell means to cover, to conceal, to hide.***

*Fifth*, the original meaning of the word *hell* has no semblance to its modern-day meaning. Those who compile dictionaries refer to the origin of words. Simply, they seek out the origin of a word, which may have come from another language, and based on this information they derive a definition.

However, word definitions are also set by current usage, and the word *hell* has taken on a meaning very foreign to its original meaning.

In tracing the origin of the word *hell*, we discover that it is of Saxon origin and comes from the verb *helan*, which also has been spelled *hele*, *helle*, *hell* and *heile*. Looking up this word in any English dictionary will reveal that it originally meant "to cover, conceal, and hide." In some European countries, particularly in England, this word has been used to mean "to concealed," "to cover" or "the grave." For example, "to *hele* over a matter" means "to cover it." Another Saxon derivation is the word *holl*, which refers to a cavern or to the unseen place of the dead. In the past, this word was used in a variety of similar ways to mean a place that is covered or where others could not see. I read of one interesting usage that referred to a lover taking his love into a "hell" (hidden place) to kiss her. I would like to see the heaven-hell preachers fit this into their sermons.

Most would agree that these words have a rather benign meaning and, most definitely, do not conjure up a picture of a fiery furnace with people being tormented without ceasing.

Given its origin, if the word *hell* is to be used in the translation of the sacred Scriptures into the English language, then it should be used in the sense of a covered or unseen place, which by extension should be used for the grave or even the state of death. If the English translators of Scripture hundreds of years ago were true to the language, then when they used the word *hell* they could have/should have used it in the benign sense of grave. The fact of the matter is that some commentators state that the word *hell* refers to "hole," which means grave. If everyone held to this thought, then the word *hell* would be appropriate. Unfortunately, so many people see hell as something other than the grave, that the use of the word distorts the intent of the original languages of Scripture and produces a doctrine that is more in line with pagan theology.

It is very unfortunate that the word *hell* has been so distorted and perverted from its original meaning. It is safe to state that practically everyone who reads the English translations of Scripture and sees the word *hell* immediately pictures a

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fiery furnace or, at the least, something grotesque. This picture is also supported in the everyday language of modern man. Today, the word *hell* as used by the unbeliever has the same meaning. It is a word that is used in countless slang expressions and curses. It is never used in a benign way as something concealed. On the contrary, it is used to expose the heart of man in all its wickedness.

### ***The King James and hell.***

*Sixth*, in some translations, the word *hell* is translated from at least four different Hebrew or Greek words: *sheol*, *hades*, *tartarus* and *gehenna*. *Sheol* (Hebrew) and *hades* (Greek) have the same meaning and are associated with the unseen and death. *Tartarus* is associated with imperceptible or unseen caverns of gloom. *Gehenna* is associated with fire and death.

The King James Version, one of the most widely used and influential Bibles in the world, is the greatest culprit in using the word *hell*. It is used 54 times. The New King James Version is a little better, with only 32 uses. To confuse matters, the King James also translates *sheol* and *hades* into *grave* and *pit*, as well as *hell*.

Other popular and not so popular translations use the word *hell* from 12 to 14 times (e.g., American Standard, New American Standard, Revised Standard, New Revised Standard, New Living Translation, Amplified, New International, Darby New Translation, New Century). However, there are several versions that attempt to remain closer to the original languages and do not use the word *hell*. These include the *Concordant Literal New Testament* (1926, 1983), *Young's Literal Translation* (1898), *Rotherham's Emphasized Bible* (1902, 1944) and *Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech* (1903).

Since the King James Version uses the word *hell* more than any other, it would be helpful to cite the places where it is used in place of the Hebrew or Greek words *sheol*, *hades*, *tartarus* and *gehenna*.

*SHEOL* occurs 65 times and is translated by the KJV:

*HELL* 31 times: Deuteronomy 32.22; 2 Samuel 22.6; Job 11.8; 26.6; Psalm 9.17; 16.10; 18.5; 55.15; 86.13; 116.3; 139.8; Proverbs 5.5; 7.27; 9.18; 15.11, 24; 23.14; 27.20; Isaiah 5.14; 14.9, 15; 28.15, 18; 57.9; Ezekiel 31.16, 17; 32.21, 27; Amos 9.2; Jonah 2.2; Habakkuk 2.5.

*GRAVE* 31 times: Genesis 37.35; 42.38; 44.29, 31; 1 Samuel 2.6; 1 Kings 2.6, 9; Job 7.9; 14.13; 17.13; 21.13; 24.19; Psalm 6.5; 30.3; 31.17; 49.14, 14, 15; 88.3; 89.48; 141.7; Proverbs 1.12; 30.16; Ecclesiastes 9.10; Song 8.6; Isaiah 14.11; 38.10, 18; Ezekiel 31.15; Hosea 13.14, 14.

*THE PIT* 3 times: Numbers 16.30, 33; Job 17.16.

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*HADES* occurs 11 times and is translated by the KJV:

*HELL* 10 times: Matthew 11.23; 16.18; Luke 10.15; 16.23; Acts 2.27, 31; Revelation 1.18; 6.8; 20.13, 14.

*GRAVE* 1 time: 1 Corinthians 15.55 (not in all manuscripts).

*TARTARUS* occurs 1 time and is translated by the KJV:

*HELL* 1 time: 2 Peter 2.4.

*GEHENNA* occurs 12 times and is translated by the KJV:

*HELL* 12 times: Matthew 5.22, 29, 30; 10.28; 18.9; 23.15, 33; Mark 9.43, 45, 47; Luke 12.5; James 3.6.

If we truly want to understand the purpose of the eons, it is vital that we put aside the words *grave*, *hell* and *pit*, and examine the uses of the original language words of *sheol*, *hades*, *tartarus* and *gehenna*. This is the safest way to overcome the distorted and convoluted uses that have been attached to the word *hell*.

Since *sheol*, *hades* and *tartarus* pertain to the unseen or the imperceptible, it is best to look at these first. Since *gehenna* is associated with fire and, as such, is more closely aligned with the *lake of fire*, it is taken up in a separate chapter dealing with our God is a consuming fire.

### ***Sheol and hades.***

Now, *sheol* is found in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and *hades* is found in the Greek Scriptures (New Testament), and both have the same meaning. In fact, the Hebrew word sets the meaning for the Greek word. This is a very important point, for there is a mighty difference between the Hebrew and Greek languages. We could say that the Hebrew language originated with God, for it began with the Hebrews and was the primary language for capturing God's word given through the prophets. Initially, there was no use for Hebrew in literature beyond the sacred Scriptures. Consequently, there was no other literature in use that could corrupt the language. It was used for God's word; thus, the meaning of what was written could be and still can be determined by Hebrew Scripture alone.

However, the Greek language is a far different matter. Before the Greek Scriptures were written, there were countless pieces of Greek literature in use that determined the meaning of words. For example, the Greeks believed in mythology and many gods and, as such, held many beliefs associated with the spirit world. To the Greek, *hades* was viewed in the light of their pagan mythology. Consequently, a Greek reading the word *hades* in the Greek Scriptures might relate the word to the world of darkness, the spirit world or some intermediate state after death. The

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pagans believed in an afterlife, and *hades* would have been associated with such a life.

Thankfully, the spirit of God has given us the meaning of *hades* in Scripture; compare Acts 2.27, 31 with Psalm 16.10.

Thou wilt not leave my soul to **hades**, nor wilt Thou give Thy Kind One to see corruption. .... having foreseen, he did speak concerning the rising again of the Christ, that his soul was not left to **hades**, nor did his flesh see corruption. (Acts 2.27, 31 YLT)

For Thou dost not leave my soul to **Sheol**, nor givest thy saintly one to see corruption. (Psalm 16.10 YLT)

The verses in Acts 2 are a direct quote of the verses in Psalm 16, which refer to the Lord Jesus and His death; thus, *sheol* and *hades* have the same meaning. Given this understanding, all we must do is understand what *sheol* means in order to understand what *hades* means.

The Complete Jewish Bible (1998) by David H. Stern acknowledges the sameness of these two words by using the word *sheol* (*Sh'ol*) in place of *hades* throughout the New Testament.

### ***Ask, unseen.***

In Hebrew, the primary word from which *sheol* is derived signifies “ask.” *Ask* refers to something that is *unseen*. We ask: Where has it gone? And the answer comes: To the unseen! In other words, *sheol* refers to *the unseen* (*imperceptible*.) Study every place that *sheol* appears and you will discover the unseen in relation to the state of death where the life of the person ceases and is no more. <sup>6</sup>

There is another test that can be applied. If we take the word *hades* and look at the Greek words from which it is derived, we will discover that it too means “un-perceive” or “not to perceive,” which is the same as “unseen.” Thus, approaching *sheol* and *hades* from two angles yields the same result. They simply mean “the unseen.” Obviously, this is a far cry from the modern-day view of the word *hell*.

### ***The soul.***

In a related matter, in death, the soul returns to *the unseen* (see Psalm 16.10; 30.3; 49.15; 86.13; 89.48; Proverbs 23.14; Acts 2.27, 31). Thus, the spirit and the body are not associated with *sheol* and *hades*.

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<sup>6</sup> Some believe that *sheol* and *hades* simply refer to the grave. This is far closer to the truth than making them refer to a modern-day *hell*.

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The body, which is the man, came from the soil and at dissolution returns to the soil. The spirit, which is the breath that is blown into the body and which is described as the imperceptible power of life, action and intelligence, came from God and at dissolution returns to God. The soul or sensation (feelings, experiences), which came from the union of the breath and body, came from the unseen and at dissolution returns to the unseen. As our body entirely decomposes at death, so do the sensations that comprise our soul end in death. There is simply no way for the experiences and sensations of the soul to continue on in death. They did not exist before birth, and they do not exist in death.

In the New Testament, we discover that the *unseen* is used in relation to the Lord's soul not being forsaken in the unseen (Acts 2.27); Capernaum subsiding in the unseen (Matthew 11.23); the rich man residing in the unseen (Luke 16.22-23); the Lord Jesus having the keys of the unseen (Revelation 1.18); death being followed by the unseen (Revelation 6.8); death and the unseen giving up the dead (Revelation 20.13); and finally death and the unseen being cast into the lake of fire, the second death (Revelation 20.14). Of particular note is the personification of death and the unseen, as if they are a specific authority or power.

Thus, the soul returns to the unseen from whence it came and not to any place in which life continues (whether hell, heaven, paradise, purgatory or any intermediate place between life and death). Because of the current meaning of the word *hell*, which should mean "covered" (hidden or unseen), it is most unfortunate that translators use the word *hell* in the place of the words *sheol* and *hades*. A further step toward the truth and to regain a proper understanding of this matter would be to follow the concordant method and replace *sheol* and *hades* with the word *unseen*.

If we desire to hold to what Scripture teaches, then we must hold that *sheol* and *hades* refer to the *unseen*, which speaks of death, a state of unconsciousness, *not* a living hell of endless torment and torture.

### ***Tartarus—chastening judging.***

Next, we need to consider the word *tartarus*, which is most often translated as *hell*. Peter was the only inspired writer of Scripture to use the word *tartarus*, which is translated by the King James Version as *hell*. However, Jude made a similar statement about the messengers, which commentators seem to agree are one and the same messengers as Peter mentioned.

For if God spares not sinning messengers, but thrusting them into the gloomy caverns of Tartarus, gives them up to be kept for chastening judging.... (2 Peter 2.4 cv)

Besides, messengers who keep not their own sovereignty, but leave their own habitation, He has kept in imperceptible bonds under gloom for the judging of the great day. (Jude 6 cv)

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These verses can be summed up very simply: There are messengers that have sinned and God puts them through chastening judging, just like He does all mankind. However, there are other points that are worth mentioning.

First, these verses do not state that these messengers are in an eternal *hell* of torment. The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible states that *tartaroo* means "to incarcerate in the eternal torment." However, there is nothing in these verses that implies an eternal torment for the sinning messengers. Further, some translations use the word *hades* instead of *hell*; however, the Greek text does not use this word, and there is no reason for the translators to use it, other than to heap more confusion on the word *hades*.

Second, the word *Tartarus* comes from the Greek pagans who named the unseen world *Tartaros*. The word is found in Greek literature of that day, and it referred to the murky abyss, the lowest region of the world, as far below as earth is from heaven in which immortals (i.e., their pagan gods) were punished. It is described as a dark, gloomy pit, surrounded by a wall of bronze, and beyond that, a three-fold layer of night. It was the primary prison for their defeated gods. Even Roman mythology saw *Tartarus* as the place where sinners are sent, which has a flaming river, a hydra with fifty black, gaping jaws, lashing whips and a deep pit.

It is difficult to imagine that Peter used the word in the exact same way that the pagan's did. More likely, he used it as a common term of his day, which had some similarity to the pagan word, but did not have exactly the same meaning given to it by the pagans. In other words, he adapted the word for his own use. Again, neither Peter nor Jude indicated a burning inferno inspired by images of the modern-day *hell*.

Third, the word used in the Greek is the verb *tartaroo*, which means "casting or thrusting them into." Since it is a verb, there is no reason to capitalize it and make it into the proper noun *Tartarus*. This only adds to the impression that it is a very special place and opens one up to accept pagan mythology. The Darby New Translation seems to have avoided this pitfall, although it has these messengers being cast down when the thought is being thrust into.

For if God spared not the angels who had sinned, but having cast them down to the deepest pit of gloom has delivered them to chains of darkness to be kept for judgment.... (2 Peter 2.4 DNT)

Fourth, the Concordant Greek Text English Sublinear states "to-caverns of-gloom tartarus<sup>ing</sup>," indicating action rather than a specific place. The place is indicated by the caverns of gloom, which is how Darby translated it.

Fifth, 2 Peter 2.4 and Jude 6 seem to have referred to the same messengers. Jude stated that they are kept in *imperceptible* bonds under gloom. Most translations state that they are in everlasting or eternal bonds, which incorrectly adds to the confusion, for it places these messengers in an eternal dungeon.

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The English Sublinear states “un-perceived,” which translates to the word *imperceptible*. According to Webster’s Dictionary, *imperceptible* means “not plain or distinct to the senses or the mind; especially, so slight, gradual, subtle, etc. as not to be easily perceived.” In other words, these bonds are not to be perceived, or better yet, we cannot perceive them. All that we know is that God is keeping or preserving these messengers for a future day and purpose. Some would say that they are in an eternal dungeon in the earth; but how can this be so when, according to Peter, the earth itself does not have an eternal future? The current heavens and earth will be cleansed by fire following the next eon as God’s day and new heavens and a new earth come into view (2 Peter 3.12-13; Revelation 21.1).

Sixth, in these verses, Peter and Jude referred to sinning messengers that are being kept for chastening judgment and the judging of the great day. Chastening is not an eternal punishment, for the word speaks of discipline, such as training or correction with a view to full restoration. This is not eternal but rather eonian in nature. It is very similar to the discipline of Hebrews 12.7-11.

Seventh, the question arises as to the nature of these sinning messengers. Do they refer to mankind or celestial beings?

### ***Sinning messengers—celestial beings?***

If we carefully consider the text, it seems that these messengers are already under chastening judgment, for they are bound. If they are literally bound, then this would indicate they are celestial beings, since there is no prison for departed (dead) humans.

Where these celestial beings are bound is a question without a clear answer. By their very nature, the realm of the celestial beings is celestial or heavenly. Since they are in caverns of gloom or places of darkness, perhaps they are on the back side of the moon or in a black hole in the universe. These are just as likely places for messengers to be jailed, since they are celestial beings. In any case, they are not allowed to roam freely, which leads to the next point.

Who are the recipients of the chastening judgment? Are they the sinning messengers, or are they others, such as humans, who will be judged in the great day? In other words, who gets trained by discipline? Could it be that these messengers, who are kept in bonds, are being held for some other purpose?

The Weymouth New Testament states that God is keeping these angels in *readiness for judgment*, which implies that they have been preserved for a purpose related to judgment. Similarly, the Concordant Version states that they are being kept for *the judging of the great day*.

One commentator suggests that these messengers are the same ones who are released with the sound of the sixth trumpet of the second woe (see Revelation 9.12-21). Four messengers that are bound at the great river Euphrates are *made*

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*ready for the hour, and day, and month, and year, that they should be killing a third of mankind. Then we are told that troops of cavalry numbering two hundred millions go forth and kill a third of mankind by the fire and the fumes and the sulphur. Truly, this is a great day of judging on the earth as God executes this judgment through these messengers.*

The messengers are bound at the Euphrates, which means that they are held or restricted to a certain area on earth. The command to the sixth messenger to release these prisoners comes forth from the horns of the golden altar, which is before God. These four messengers are prepared for one thing, and that is to bring about death for multitudes, and they will do this by instigating and leading a 200 million cavalry. Could it be that their gloomy caverns are not in the earth, but associated with a region of the earth around this great river?

As a caution, we must keep in mind that *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, which God gave to John, was (is) to *signify* the things that must take place. *Signify* refers to *symbols*, and as such, much of the language of *The Revelation* must be seen as symbolic language that must be discerned **spiritual to spiritual**.

Now, take special note that the judgment is not for eternal torment. The judgment is death upon a third of mankind. In other words, the multitudes that are killed do not enter some other form of life in a living hell of torment. No; they are killed! They are dead!

The fact that mankind dies is supported by the context of Peter's epistle. The great deluge of Noah's day resulted in the death of all mankind except Noah and his family. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah resulted in the death of all the inhabitants of these cities, except Lot and his family.

The point is that God knows how to rescue the devout (just or righteous) out of trial, and the unjust will be judged by death, not life. Consider the full text.

For if God **s pares not sinning messengers**, but thrusting them into the gloomy caverns of Tartarus, gives them up to be kept for chastening judging; and spares not the ancient world, **but guards Noah, an eighth, a herald of righteousness, bringing a deluge on the world of the irreverent; and condemns the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, reducing them to cinders by an overthrow**, having placed them as an example for those about to be irreverent: and rescues the just man, Lot, harried by the behavior of the dissolute in their wantonness (for the just man dwelling among them, in observing and hearing from day to day, tormented his just soul by their lawless acts), **the Lord is acquainted with the rescue of the devout out of trial**, yet is **keeping the unjust for chastening in the day of judging**, yet specially those going after the flesh in defiling lust and despising lordship. Audacious, given to self-gratification, they are not trembling when calumniating glories, where messengers, being greater in strength and

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power, are not bringing against them a calumniating judging before the Lord.  
(2 Peter 2.4-11 cv)

According to Peter, God guards Noah, a herald of righteousness, and rescues the just man, Lot. Consequently, the Lord is acquainted with the rescue of the devout out of trial. By contrast, God spares not sinning messengers, brings a deluge on the world of the irreverent, and condemns the cities by reducing them to cinders, as an example for the irreverent. Thus, God rescues the reverent and brings death upon the irreverent as a chastening judgment with a view toward full restoration.

### ***Sinning messengers—mankind?***

The Greek word *aggelos* simply means “messenger” and refers to an occupation and not a nature, and by itself makes no distinction as to whether it refers to a man or a celestial being. To be an *aggelos*, all one needs to possess is a message. According to Scripture, men that were *aggelos* included John the baptist (Matthew 11.10; Mark 1.2; Luke 7.27), John the baptist’s disciples (Luke 7.24), Jesus’ disciples (Luke 9.52), and the spies at Jericho (James 2.25).

This leads us to the second part of our inquiry; whether the sinning messengers could refer to mankind. To pursue this question, let us first concentrate on Jude’s epistle. One commentator has suggested that Jude 5-7 refers to three situations found in the Hebrew Scriptures in relation to Israel.

Now I am intending to remind you, you who once are aware of all, that the Lord, when saving the people out of the land of Egypt, secondly destroys those who believe not. (Jude 5 cv)

It is not difficult to see that this refers to Numbers 13.1-33; 14.22-23, 36-38, which recounts the Israelites reaching the land of Canaan and sending in the spies. Unfortunately, the majority believed the spies with an evil report and tempted the Lord ten times, resulting in them being barred from Canaan and the first generation dying in the wilderness. The men that gave the evil report died by a plague. They were not able to enter because of unbelief (Hebrews 3.19 NASB).

Besides, messengers who keep not their own sovereignty, but leave their own habitation, He has kept in imperceptible bonds under gloom for the judging of the great day. (Jude 6 cv)

This might relate to the story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram recorded in Numbers 16.1-40. As the story goes, these princes of the congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron, leaving their own habitation or their designated places of leadership, which was having assigned sovereignty over the people. They wanted to take the place of Moses and Aaron, which was going directly against God’s chosen vessels. They formed a mob with two hundred and fifty princes from the congregation and went against Moses and Aaron. In response to their defiance, God opened the earth, and these rebellious men went down alive into an open pit, the

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earth closed back up, and they perished. Then fire came down upon the two hundred and fifty other rebels. Could this be judgment on the sinning messengers? They are not alive in some pit but dead, waiting for the day of judgment of the unjust. *They are kept in imperceptible bonds* could be a reference to being in the un-perceived, which is the unseen.

As Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner to these committing ultra-prostitution, and coming away after other flesh, are lying before us, a specimen, experiencing **the justice of fire eonian**. (Jude 7 cv)

The account of Sodom and Gomorrah is recorded in Genesis 19.24-25. We need not spend any time on these two cities other than to note that the fire of God rained down on them, and they became a heap of cinders.

Thus, looking at all three stories as connected to the Hebrew Scriptures, we could conclude that the messengers are humans and not celestial beings.

But what about the verses in Peter's epistle; could these sinning messengers be humans as well? It seems that Peter followed the same pattern as Jude. He started with sinning messengers, proceeded to Noah and then ended with Sodom and Gomorrah. Since Noah's day and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah are real-life events, perhaps the sinning messengers being thrust into gloomy caverns refers to a real-life human event preceding Noah entering the ark. Could these sinning messengers be false preachers in the day of Noah? As Noah stood for righteousness in an evil day, perhaps these sinning messengers were the antithesis to Noah. With the great deluge, such men were covered with miles of water that surely was a gloomy cavern (a figure of speech). They are dead and awaiting the judgment of the unjust.

Perhaps, this is the better interpretation, because it seems strange to introduce angels into the context of Peter's epistle. The fact that the pagans of that day believed in a place called Tartarus should raise some suspicions that this had anything to do with angels. Why would Peter inject a concept held by pagans? Most likely he did not inject such pagan thought; therefore, we must interpret his words in light of all Scripture on the matter.

In conclusion, the traditions of men are like cement once it has cured; they are extremely difficult to break up. The only thing that will break up tradition is when the eyes of our heart are opened to see the truth, the truth that will not only set us free but set all mankind free. The modern-day concept of *hell* keeps mankind under bondage and fear. The Scriptural truth of the unseen and the imperceptible sets us free to see the glory of a future resurrection and immortality, which are all *in Christ*, and are reserved for the day that will consummate our present wicked eon, and usher the conquerors of Christ into the eons of the eons; all in accord with the purpose of the eons.