

HELL IN THE BIBLE

Preached May 22, 1960, by Pastor Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church, Topeka, Kansas

There is a word used sixty-five times in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, which our English translators in thirty-one instances render: *Hell*; in thirty-one they render it: *Grave*; and in three instances: *The Pit*. That word is *Sheol*, uniformly rendered *Hades* in the Greek of the Old Testament Septuagint, and wherever the New Testament quotes the passages in which it occurs. By common consent, the Greek word *Hades* is the exact equivalent of the Hebrew *Sheol*. It occurs eleven times in the New Testament, and always in the same sense as the Old Testament *Sheol*. To all intents and purposes therefore, *Sheol* and *Hades* denote one and the same thing, but *Sheol* and *Hades*, my friends, is never used to denote the hell of final punishment. Neither is it used to denote the mere receptacle of the body after death: the grave. Nor yet is it ever used to denote the mere state of being dead as to the body. And still less to denote *The Pit* or *Abyss*. A careful inventory of all the passages conclusively proves the *Sheol* or *Hades* is the name of a place in the unseen world, altogether distinct from the hell of final punishment, or the heaven of final glory. Its true and only meaning is the place of departed spirits, the receptacle of souls which have left the body. To this place all departed spirits, good and bad, up to the time of the resurrection of Christ, went. In it there was a department for the good called paradise by the Savior on the cross, and another department for the bad. Thus, both the rich man and Lazarus went to *Hades* when they died. For the word is: ***“In Hades, he lifted up his eyes, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” (Luke 16:23)***. Lazarus was then in Hades too, as well as Abraham, and the only difference between them and Dives was that the good were separated from the bad by an impassible gulf. They could converse with each other, and none of them were in their final mercy or misery. Even at the best, it was

not a place to be coveted. With all the relief which it brought to pious sufferers, and the good promise it bespoke of something better for them at the resurrection, the scriptures everywhere describe it as a somber world: a place of detention and waiting, even for the best. There is nothing ever said about going up to it, or of full compensation there for works of piety. Now, by virtue of having died, Christ thus became an inmate of *Hades*, just as all other good men which died before him, whilst the descent into *Hades* was part of his active redemption and the beginning of his exaltation as the successful redeemer, which wrought a great change in *Hades* itself, and in the whole condition of the pious dead, from that time on. His dead body, having been requickenened and glorified by His divine power, recalling His departed soul to it, even before he reappeared on earth, He went to *Hades*, not as the subject of death, but as the conqueror of death, heralding his victory to the spirits therein detained (*1 Peter 3:18*), and actually bringing out with him all faithful souls, even resurrecting many of them. It is with special reference to this that he announced himself to John in the first vision in the book of the Revelation, as having the keys of death and of *Hades*. Paradise now is no longer in *Hades*, but above in the heavens, where its inmates enjoy a far more blessed portion than was ever enjoyed in *Hades*. Christ led captivity captive when he made his triumphant descent into *Hades*, and no true believer now ever goes to *Hades*. Christ said of His church that the gates of *Hades* should never prevail against it. That is: It should never close on any true members of His church. *Hades* now is therefore the receptacle of only such departed spirits as have no share in Christ's redemption. It's a mere prison of bad and unbelieving souls who there pine over their crimes, awaiting the day of judgement, when all in *Hades* and *Hades* itself shall be cast into the hell of final punishment, that is the lake of fire. *Sheol* and *Hades* then is not hell, in the sense of being the lake of fire. The Old Testament speaks of another place in the underworld, called in Hebrew

Abaddon, which we read in our English bible: Destruction. Thus, “***Sheol is naked before him, and Abaddon hath no covering.***” (***Job 26:6***). And, “***Abaddon and death say, we have heard the fame thereof.***” (***Job 28:22***). And, “***Sheol and Abaddon are never full.***” (***Proverbs 27:20***). *Abaddon* thus connects with *Sheol* or *Hades*, but is a deeper, darker, and a more retched place. *The Pit of the Abyss*, or the *bottomless pit*, referred to in ***Revelation 9:1-3***, and from which came the plague of spirit locusts, you remember, seems to identify with this Hebrew *Abaddon*. For the angel of this pit, and the king over these locusts has a name, which in the Hebrew tongue is *Abaddon*, but in the Greek tongue hath his name *Apollyon*. That’s ***Revelation 9:1-3***. Nine times do we read of this *Pit of the Abyss*, or *bottomless pit*, in the New Testament. The demons whom Christ cast out of the wretched man of Gadara besought the Savior not to command them again into *The Pit*, or *The Abyss*. That’s ***Luke 8:26***. And, also the great beast, the Anti-Christ, cometh up out of *The Pit*, or *The Abyss*. ***Revelation 11:7***. *Abaddon* and the *Abyss* were therefore seen to be the abode of demons, a sort of deeper pit beneath *Hades*, where the wickeder and baser spirits of dead men, and other foul spirits of the lower orders, are for the most part held as melancholy prisoners until the day of final judgement. It does not appear that fallen angels now have their place in *Hades* then. The Lucifer of whom ***Isaiah 14*** speaks as having been brought down to *Hades*, is explained in verse 4 to be the King of Babylon, and so a bad man and not an angel. Fallen angels are never said to be in *Hades*. The place of their present detention is described by quite another name in the Bible. Thus, Peter tells us that God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to *Tartarus*, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgement. That’s ***2 Peter 2:4***. Our translators also call *Tartarus* hell, however, as if *Tatarus*, *Hades*, *The Pit*, and the final lake of fire were all one and the same thing. The truth is that they are each distinct and separate, though they are all departments of the

underworld. The burning lake is the only true and final hell of punishment. It's perdition, destruction, the second death, or the final hell. It too has its own proper name. It is called *Tophet* in the Old Testament. ***Isaiah 30*** and ***Jeremiah 7***. In the New Testament, it is twelve times called *Gehenna*, which in the Greek is the same as *Tophet* in Hebrew. From denoting a place of horrible burning on earth, it came to be used to denote the place of final punishment. And our translators in the King James' version have uniformly translated the word *Gehenna* by the word hell. But *Gehenna* is altogether a different hell from *Sheol*, *Hades*, *The Abyss of the Pit*, or *Tartarus*. Thus the Savior says that whosoever indulges malignant and devilish spite towards his brother shall be in danger of *Gehenna* fire. ***Matthew 5***. He also says that it is better to sacrifice a right eye or a right hand in this world than that the whole body should be cast into *Gehenna*. He also says that we are not to fear them which kill the body, but rather to fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in *Gehenna*, and so forth. This *Tophet* or *Gehenna*, as will be seen at once, is something different from *Hades*, *Tartarus*, or *The Pit*. It is manifestly the same which John calls the lake of fire which burneth with brimstone, and into which The Beast, The False Prophet, Satan, death, *Hades*, and whosoever is not found written in the book of life are finally cast and swallowed up forever. That is, it is the ultimate hell of final punishment. My friends, it is important to know that into this final hell no one has yet ever entered. It is a prepared place for the devil and his angels, or emissaries; but none of them are there now. The first persons that ever go into this place are The Beast and The False Prophet, at the time of the battle of Armageddon. That's in ***Revelation 19:20***. The next to get into it is Satan himself, more than a thousand years afterwards. ***Revelation 20:10***. The Beast and The False Prophet are represented at that time as still alive and suffering. And then follows the casting of all the wicked, along with death and *Hades*. That's in ***Revelation 20:14***. The Word has it "***And whosoever was not***

found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.” When The Beast and The False Prophet were taken, they were cast alive into the lake of fire which burneth with brimstone. A thousand years afterward, when Satan proves himself the same deceiver he always has been, he also is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. And into that same lake of fire, all the condemned souls of mankind, at the white throne of judgement, are hurled. What that lake of fire is, I cannot tell, I do not know, and I humbly trust God that I may never find out. I trust it is a place that everything said about it proves. People in corporeal life must needs have locality. That it is a place of woe, pain, and dreadful torment is specifically stated, and is the chief idea in every image of the description. What God judges a just punishment for the wickedness of the great head of all evil, for having ruined many of the sublime creatures in heaven, and for the mischiefs, impieties, and desolations wrought in our world by more than six thousand years of unremitted exertions against the peace of mankind, and the gracious purposes of God, certainly must involve a length, and depth, and breadth, and height of misery at which the universe may well stand aghast. And He who understands it best calls it a lake of fire and brimstone, and I do not know what mortal man can tell us better. Confirmed depravity cannot be cured where there is no grace, and neither can those cease to sin whose whole nature has been turned to sin. And if there can be no end to the sinning, how then can there be an end to the suffering? Remorse cannot die out of a spirit ever conscious of its self-imposed damnation. Thus behold the state of those in the final hell of punishment. Therefore we read ***“Their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:44)***. And now friends, in the presence of these awful verities, what shall I say to those who know it all, yet go deliberately on in ways which can have no outcome but the second death or the lake of fire? I look at them and think, and the terribleness of

their hallucination paralyzes my utterance. I would feign arouse them to their better senses, but when I speak, my words seem but ashes in my mouth in comparison with the alarum for which their situation calls. I would say *“Ho! Ye unbelieving men, ye dishonest men, ye profane men, ye lewd men and women, ye slaves of lust and appetite, ye scoffers at the truth of God, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”*

This is Fred Phelps, Pastor of Westboro Baptist Church. Next week, the LORD willing, at this same time, more of the same. And now, peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the father and the LORD Jesus Christ, and grace be with all them that love our LORD Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Amen.