Jonah - Commentaries by Paul Wilson

God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility: Arminianism, Calvinism, and a Review of A.W. Pink's "The Sovereignty of God", Questions Raised About Previous Comments

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Question: What is meant by your statement on page 24 which says, “There are none in hell yet, for the first two men who will go there will be the Roman beast and the false prophet in Jerusalem” ? Did not the rich man in Luke 16 go to hell? This is the substance of several inquiries.

Answer: In order to answer the above questions, it will be necessary to look at what is meant by the word “hell” in various places in the Word of God. There are four different words in the original Hebrew and Greek texts that are translated “hell” in the King James Version in English. Let us look at them one at a time:

The Hebrew word sheol is frequently translated “hell” in the Old Testament, but sometimes it is translated “grave,” and three times it is given as “pit.” See Numbers 16:33, where Korah and his company “went down alive into the pit,” and Jacob said, “I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning” (Gen. 37:35), and Jonah said, “Out of the belly of hell cried I” (Jonah 2:2). These are samples of the word sheol’s being translated into three different English words.

Another instance of the use of the word sheol is found in Psalm 16:10, where the Lord Jesus prophetically says, “Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell” — sheol. Here it seems to refer to the soul’s being apart from the body, for next the Lord says, “Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption,” which refers to the body. When we come to the New Testament, this same verse is quoted thus: “Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption,” and “he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:27,31). In both instances in Acts 2, the Greek word here translated “hell” is hades. Thus we see that in the sense of the soul’s being separated from the body, sheol and hades mean the same thing — the one being Hebrew and the other Greek.

To answer our reader’s second question first, we would call attention to the fact that in Luke 16 the Greek word is hades for the place where the rich man went after his death. His body was buried, but his soul went to a place of departed spirits. We also learn from Luke 16 that in the unseen world of souls separated from their bodies there is a great gulf fixed between the saved and the lost, and that there is conscious bliss for the one and conscious woe for the other. For the believer today, when his body dies, his soul and spirit are spoken of as departing from this life and being present with Christ (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8). This then is the portion of the believer, while the rich man’s case shows the present condition of the soul and spirit apart from the body for all who die in their sins. It is not a sleep of the soul, but the believer’s soul and spirit are in paradise with Christ (Luke 23:43) while the unbeliever is in conscious torment, with his memory still active in remorse.

Another word in the Greek which is translated “hell” is Gehenna, which is the Greek equivalent for two Hebrew words signifying “valley of Hinnom.” It was a place near Jerusalem where the Israelites, in their pagan rites, made their children pass through the fire to heathen gods. Refuse was deposited there, and there was a continual fire burning, which the Spirit of God has used as a symbol of eternal punishment. The word “Tophet” in the Old Testament has reference also to this place and its emblematic use for the lake of fire.

The Lord Jesus, in Revelation 1:18, speaks as the mighty victor over death, who now possesses the keys of hades and of death — the former referring to the confines of the soul, and the latter to the dissolution of the body. At the Lord’s coming for His saints, their bodies will be raised in glory, in incorruptibility, and their souls and spirits will be united in these spiritual bodies, entirely fitted for the coming scene of glory. At the resurrection of the wicked dead, the confines of both hades and the grave will be emptied out into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13). Then the wicked — body, soul and spirit — will be banished from God for all eternity. This is variously spoken of as “the lake of fire,” “the second death,” “outer darkness,” “the blackness of darkness forever” and “everlasting fire” (Rev. 20:15; 21:8; Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30,41; Jude 13).

This place of eternal punishment was “prepared for the devil and his angels,” but, sad to say, unrepentant man will share it with them. But no man is in that place yet. The first ones who will go there are found in Revelation 19:20: “And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.” They will be taken in open-handed rebellion against Christ when He comes in judgment, and they will be summarily cast into that place of eternal torment without a trial. We read of them 1000 years later as still being there. See Revelation 20:10, which tells of the devil’s being cast into it at least 1000 years after those two wicked men were, and they are spoken of as being there then. No, there is no such thing as annihilation.

We take it that others will be sent into the lake of fire from Christ’s throne of glory on earth, according to Matthew 25:41,46, while the wicked dead will be raised at the end to stand before the great white throne and be sent from there into eternal punishment. It is called the “second death” because it will be the whole man separated from God for all eternity.

There is one more word in the Greek text of the New Testament which is translated “hell” in English: That is Tartarus, but it is only found in 2 Peter 2:4. It is a word that was used by heathen writers to designate the “deepest abyss of the infernal regions,” a place of extreme darkness. The Spirit of God has chosen to employ it as descriptive of the present place of confinement of certain angels that sinned. We cannot say more about it.