

## ***SUPPLEMENT TO PERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY***

### • **The Place and Meaning of Sheol**

The place and meaning of *Sheol* was touched upon in the paper in response to soul sleep. The main issue appears to be whether *Sheol* is a physical location or whether it speaks of the "afterlife" in a generic way. The answer to this issue is "it appears to be both." If taken as a physical location, *Sheol* could mean either (1) "grave" or (2) "the shadowy nether world beneath the earth where the dead are kept." So, consequently, there are three ways it can be understood:

1. the grave (which itself could be used metaphorically for "afterlife")
2. the nether world place of the dead
3. the afterlife

Some examples:

- *Sheol* is equated with the word "death" or the act of dying (Ps. 6:5, Ps. 49:14).
- *Sheol* occasionally appears to be a place (other than the grave) and not vague as in "afterlife" concepts (Dt. 32:22). Here the idea is probably the nether world or holding place for the dead.
- *Sheol* sometimes is associated with judgment (Num. 16:33).

I would encourage you to read the articles on Sheol in various Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias. However, in many of those articles, the conclusions are somewhat vague and obtuse. So read carefully.

### • **Was Paradise Moved by Christ? -- Issues in the Two-Compartment Theory**

The Scofield Reference Bible highlighted what can be called the two-compartment theory concerning the place of Sheol. In this theory, the two compartments which make up Sheol are the following: (1) the holding place for the wicked dead [perhaps called Hades, although Hades is sometimes a LXX translation of Sheol itself]; (2) the holding place for the righteous dead called Paradise. This holding place is thought to exist under the earth's crust (e.g., Korah and his rebellious followers were swallowed up alive into Sheol as the earth opened up [Num. 16:33]).

In the general scheme of things, the two-compartment view sees this holding place consisting of two parts as the place of the afterlife prior to the time of Christ. Hence, Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, etc., all went to the "good" side of Sheol rather than to the abode of God in heaven. The wicked dead went to the "bad" side of Sheol which was a place of fire and torment. The example given by Christ in Luke 16 of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and the rich man in Hades would then be an example of these compartments of Sheol separated by the great gulf with both sides under the earth.

Furthermore, this theory suggests that when Christ died, His spirit went to the "good" side of Sheol to preach good news to the OT saints there (1 Pet. 3:19-20; 4:6) which they presumably accepted. Then He led them in a victorious processional (which is described in Eph. 4:8) to heaven or Paradise. In short, the "good" side of Sheol (called Paradise) was moved to heaven the

abode of God. Now after the death of Christ, the spirits of saved men who die go to be with the Lord in Paradise or Heaven. Only the "bad" side of Sheol or Hades remains below the earth. Both Christ's statement to the thief on the cross (Lk. 23:43) and Paul's statement about Paradise (2 Cor. 12:2-4) appear to identify Paradise with heaven as the abode of God.

Although this theory attempts to deal with the data given in Scripture, some issues to resolve would be the following: (1) Jewish tradition sometimes uses the expression "Abraham's bosom" to refer to heaven; (2) some of the passages used such as Eph. 4:8 seem to have better contextual interpretations which do not fit into the scheme of things; (3) the passages on Christ's descent into hell are not self-interpreting and have a much varied history of interpretation. The issue in my mind is far from settled.

### • **The Issue of Immortality**

It is clear that biblical words translated "immortal" or "imperishable" in passages like I Cor. 9:25; 15:52-53; 1 Tim. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:4 all relate to the human body. Thus, the emphasis of words in the Greek NT with respect to immortality is on the body and not the soul. Of course, if the body is immortal, by implication the soul would be also. The biblical concept of the immortality of the soul could be established via the passages which emphasize the eternity of the person in general (John 3:16, Rev. 20).

The significance of the biblical immortality seems to be the following:

1. There is a holistic view of man in which the body is important. The body is not a throwaway container as in Hinduism and Buddhism. That is why we bury the dead and do not cremate the dead.
2. The image of God in man is demonstrated by the fact that even the lost man is immortal, albeit in eternal torment. God has chosen not to destroy man (as in elimination).

### • **Heaven**

The Bible appears to use the word "heaven" in three ways (2 Cor. 12:2):

1. The abode of God -- where special angels live as they stand in the presence of God
2. Stellar space -- where the stars are located and where the myriad of angels abide
3. The atmosphere of earth -- where Satan and his dominion exerts authority

Even Satan has current access to the third heaven, the abode of God (Job 1, 2).

The nature of heaven:

1. A real, physical place with form -- parallel to "earth" in many statements
2. The abode of God where God has chosen to localize his presence (Ez. 1, Dan. 7)
3. Glorious -- Rev. 21-22
4. Place of recognition -- compare the intermediate state (Lk. 16, Mt. 17, et al)
5. Place of no sorrow or death -- Rev. 21:4

The future of heaven is wrapped up in its merger with the earth in Rev. 21:1-4. In a very real sense, heaven comes down to earth.

- **Hell**

The biblical words for hell:

1. Hades -- Mt. 11:21-24, 16:8; Lk. 16:19-31
2. Gehenna -- Mt. 5:22-30, 10:28; historical background of the Valley of Hinnom; see Isa. 33:14
3. Tartarus -- 2 Pet. 2:4; some take this as a separate holding place from Hades or Hell

The nature of hell:

1. A place of outer darkness (Mt. 8:11-12; 22:13; 25:30)
2. A place of sorrow (implied by weeping in the various passages)
3. A place of anger (implied by the gnashing of teeth)
4. A place with no comfort (Lk 16)
5. A place with torment (Lk 16; Rev. 20)
6. A place designed for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41, Rev. 19:20, 20:10)
7. A place of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:15; 2 Thess. 1:9)
8. The home of the wicked (Ps. 9:17; Rev. 20)
9. A place with levels of punishment (Mt. 11:21-24; Lk. 12:47-48)

The issue of *symbolism and hell* centers primarily on the images of outer darkness and fire (which presupposes light). Some opt for figurative language suggesting loneliness and separation from God as implied in the terms. The terms are not taken literally by some since light and dark contradict as images. However, in the natural world there are flames that are not visible to the naked eye. So it is not necessary to abandon the literalness of the images to harmonize the text.

Theodicy refers to justifying the ways of God to man. Oftentimes the Bible is ridiculed because of the supposed contradiction between God's love and the existence of hell. This is especially emphasized in the connection of eternal (infinite) punishment for a finite number of sins. Some ways to respond would include the following:

1. Sin cannot be treated as a substance. It is not a time issue. The essence of sin is relational.
2. Hell is philosophically necessary because the absence of eternal punishment, in the end, leaves little or no punishment at all since a temporary situation is nothing in the light of eternity.
3. Those who reject hell also reject the seriousness of sin. There is no greater wrong than rebellion against the Creator.
4. Those who affirm the contradiction between God's love and hell ignore the Cross upon which Jesus died which is the supreme expression of the love of God.
5. Those who affirm the contradiction use contemporary definitions of love. For the Bible to contradict itself you must use terms as it used terms. For God to be a God of love does not mean He is a "mush" God who cannot punish or inflict pain. Usually,

people who use this argument against the Bible really are affirming that God has to let you get away with anything you choose in order to demonstrate that He is a God of love.

6. The image of God in man requires the eternal nature of the punishment. God's love demonstrates that eternal punishment is better than annihilation. For us to argue otherwise is to put ourselves in the place of God.

- **The Salvation of Infants Who Die As Infants**

#### Various Views

- Roman Catholic -- baptized infants who die go to heaven; unbaptized infants go to a place called Limbo where there is no punishment but where there is also no vision of God
- Reformed -- God predestines so elect infants go to heaven; nonelect infants go to hell; it is God's choice since all infants are born in sin.
- "Safe" Salvation View -- God has chosen to elect all infants who die since they have not reached the age or level of accountability. Appeal is made to "hints" in Scripture such as the last verse of Jonah and the example of David's little baby who died in 2 Sam. 12.

In my opinion, the Bible does not give us a whole lot of information on this issue. I lean to the latter although I am not dogmatic on the issue. All views have problems (which is generally the case when we are not given a lot of information).

- **The Book of Life**

There are several "books" alluded to in Scripture which are apparently kept by God as a record of various human events and states. Several passages are listed in your notes. The main interpretation issue is the use of Exodus 32:32-33 to justify a denial of eternal security and assert that a person can be blotted out of the book of life (the book of the saved) which is mentioned in the Book of Revelation. However, such an approach is simplistic and does not do justice to the context of passages. It seems that the following books can be seen (the titles are mine):

1. ***The book of the living*** -- contains the names of all persons physically alive at any given moment (Ex. 32:32-33)
2. ***The book of life or the book of the elect*** -- contains the names of all persons elect from before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8)
3. ***The book of deeds*** -- contains the actions, good and bad, done by all persons (Rev. 20:12, 15 where it is applied to the lost)

Your name can be blotted out of #1 but not #2.