

Hell Gives Up Its Dead

*"I am he that
liveth, and was
dead; and, behold,
I am alive for
evermore, Amen;
and have the keys
of hell and
of death."
—Revelation 1:18*

IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL, nearly two thousand years ago, there occurred the most dramatic news event of all time, but it was then hardly known except by a few followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Their Lord and Master, crucified by his enemies less

than three days before, had been raised from the dead by divine power. Now, once again, we have reached the time of year when this greatest of all miracles will be commemorated. For a short time, at least, many will give thought to this manifestation of the mighty power of God.

Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus was a miracle, upon which one of the great cornerstones of Christian faith and hope rests! The mighty power of the Creator of the universe was exercised to restore life to the one who had voluntarily died for the sins of the people, in order that they might have an opportunity to live. The fact that Jesus was raised

from the dead gives us confidence that every promise of God will be fulfilled. It assures us that we can study his Word and plan in faith, believing that nothing he has promised is too difficult for divine power to accomplish.

The world today is filled with chaos and suffering, and the people fear that tomorrow will be even worse. The main reason for this is the inability of human wisdom and power to cope with the problems which have been created by sin and selfishness. Many countries of the world are fearful of the aggressive designs of other countries, and the only means of protection known to man is the bulwark of armament. However, the success of God's plan for saving mankind from the results of its own sin is guaranteed by divine power. It is the same power which the Creator demonstrated by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

In the Apostle Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill he declares that God has given assurance unto all men of a future righteous day by raising Jesus from the dead. (Acts 17:31) His resurrection proved that God was well pleased with Jesus' sacrificial ministry, and it also attested that divine power is abundantly able to bestow the blessings of life provided for by the Master's death. This miracle further demonstrated that, supported by divine power, the resurrected Christ is fully capable of establishing control in the affairs of men, and that the promises of his kingdom are certain of fulfillment. This means that we can confidently believe that in God's due time there will be peace on Earth, that nations will "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." These are among the many blessings

which have been promised, and we know that the “zeal of the LORD of hosts” will accomplish all his good purposes.—Mic. 4:1-4; Isa. 9:7

INFALLIBLE PROOFS

Luke informs us that Jesus “shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs.” (Acts 1:3) The miracle of the resurrection is therefore well authenticated. Even after the resurrected Jesus ascended up into glory, and appeared no more to his disciples, he spoke to the Apostle John in vision on the Isle of Patmos, thus furnishing another proof that he was alive. Indeed, he emphasized this when, in the words of our opening text, he declared, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.”—Rev. 1:9-18

In various ways, millions associate their own hope of life with the miracle of Jesus’ resurrection. “Because he lives, we also shall live,” is a common sentiment among professing Christians, and it is very true. However, just how those redeemed by Jesus shall live, where, and when, are questions which usually go unanswered. Certainly, not many are accustomed to associating the words of our text with their own hope of life through Christ, yet it is one of the most meaningful statements of the Bible bearing on the subject.

Jesus not only announced to John that he was now “alive for evermore,” but also that he has the keys of hell and of death. Until Jesus was raised from the dead, no one had these keys. The world continued to suffer and to die, and there was nothing that any human power could do about it. “Sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” (Rom. 5:12) It

was a just penalty, and could not be set aside, for the unalterable law of God is that “the wages of sin is death.”—Rom. 6:23

Thus, there was no solution to the problem of suffering and death. However, after Jesus was raised from the dead it was different, for then he had the keys which would, in due time, unlock the great prison house of death and hell and set its captives free. (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18) Paul gives us a similar thought to this in Romans 14:9, which reads: “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.” To “be Lord” implies having control or power, which is essentially the same thought Jesus symbolized by saying he had the “keys” of hell and death.

JESUS' SOUL IN HELL

Jesus associates his death and resurrection with the fact that he now has the keys of hell and of death, as though it were by his own death that he secured these keys. This is true. During the time Jesus was dead he was, in reality, in the Bible hell. This is brought to our attention in Psalm 16:10. This is a prophetic prayer which represents Jesus as expressing his confidence that he would be raised from the dead, saying, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” The Apostle Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, quoted from this prophecy and confirmed that it was applicable to Christ Jesus, who had indeed been raised from the dead.—Acts 2:25-32

To appreciate the full depth of meaning contained in this beautiful expression of faith on the part of the Master, it is essential to take into consideration

his use of the word hell, both in his prayer and in our text, where Jesus tells us that he now has the keys of hell. In the Old Testament, hell is a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and in our text it is translated from the Greek word *hades*, which has the same meaning.

This Hebrew word *sheol* is the only one in the Old Testament which is translated hell, but the same word is also translated grave and pit. The word *sheol* appears, in all, sixty-five times. Thirty-one times it is translated grave, thirty-one times hell, and three times pit. Since this was the only "hell" of the Old Testament, it was therefore the only hell the ancient servants of God knew about over a period of some four thousand years.

In reality, the Bible hell is simply the condition of death, or the state of the dead. Its meaning is defined in Ecclesiastes 9:10, which reads, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [*sheol*], whither thou goest." This shows clearly that *sheol* is a condition of complete unconsciousness, which is one reason both the Old and the New Testaments often refer to those who have died as being asleep.—Deut. 31:16; Ps. 13:3; John 11:11-14

In most instances the translators of our *King James Version*, because of their own misunderstanding, have translated *sheol* by the word "grave" when the reference is to a righteous person. However, they translate the same Hebrew word as "hell" when the text in which it appears is concerned with a wicked person. To surface readers of the Bible, this tends to give the impression that the

righteous and the wicked go to different places or conditions when they die. The traditional view holds that the wicked go to hell, which—though not scripturally—is believed to be a place of torment, while the righteous go into the grave.

However, even this is not wholly in keeping with the traditional viewpoint, which is that the righteous go to heaven. Probably the translators hoped that the student, when reading a text which revealed a righteous person as going into the grave, would think of it merely as the body finding its resting place in death, whereas it is the soul which goes to heaven.

However, in Psalm 16:10, Jesus' prophetic expression of confidence that he would be raised from the dead, the translators used the word hell to translate *sheol*, even though they must have known that the text applied to Jesus, God's only begotten Son. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," and therefore not worthy of being punished in a hell, as they supposed, of torment. (Heb. 7:26) Why did the translators do this? Why did they not follow their usual custom and use the word grave, when the reference was so clearly to a righteous person?

The answer, we believe, is quite obvious. In the text, Jesus declares that his soul would not be left in hell. Those who translated our *King James Version* did not believe that Jesus' soul went into the grave. They did not, in fact, believe that human souls, whether righteous or sinful, go into the grave, or death condition, so they could not very well translate the text in a manner which would reveal the views of all Christendom to be in error.

Thus they used the word hell, even though they must have known that it would cause some to wonder why Jesus went to hell when he died. They were caught in a dilemma, and chose the best solution they could. After all, traditionally—but not scripturally—those in hell are alive, not dead, so to put Jesus' soul in hell by their translation would mean that at least it was still alive.

We do not particularly object to the word hell as a translation of *sheol*, for after all, the original meaning of this English word hell is simply a "hidden" or "covered" condition. It was only when the word was given a false meaning by those who did not understand the teaching of the Bible relative to death, that suggestions of fire and torment became associated with it. The word grave, if we think of it as an actual place of burial, is likewise not a good translation of *sheol*, which denotes the "condition" of death—not a place of burial.

Jesus' soul went into the condition of death. The Prophet Isaiah declares that "he hath poured out his soul unto death," and also that his soul would be made an "offering for sin." (Isa. 53:12,10) The word soul, as used in the Bible, means the living being. The thought of Jesus pouring out his soul unto death is simply that he laid down his life. He did this, Isaiah explains, as an offering for sin.

It was through one man's disobedience that "sin entered into the world," Paul explains, "and death by sin." (Rom. 5:12) Thus the entire human race has, in reality, been going into the Bible hell, the great prison house of death. They are not suffering torture there, but are dead. The Bible represents them as being asleep; first, because they are unconscious, and

also because in God's due time they are to be restored to life by divine, miracle-working power. The reason for this is that Jesus, by pouring out his own soul unto death, redeemed Adam and his race from death. He took the sinner's place in death, in *sheol*, *hades*, the Bible hell.—vss. 17-19; I Cor. 15:20-22

In our text, Jesus confirms this viewpoint, declaring, "I am he that liveth, and was dead." Jesus was indeed dead, from the time he cried on the cross, "It is finished," until God raised him from the dead. (John 19:30; Matt. 28:5-7) He died, voluntarily, giving up in death his perfect manhood as a ransom, or corresponding price, for the sin-cursed race, and thereby acquired the keys—the right or authority—to open the locks of hell and of death.—Matt. 20:28; I Tim. 2:3-6

In a very wonderful promise to the Apostle Peter, Jesus referred to hell—*hades*—as having gates. Jesus spoke about building his church, and said that the "gates of hell" would not prevail against it. (Matt. 16:18) Paul later explains that the church, faithful Christians of the present age, comprise the "body" of Christ, and that the Christ is not "one member, but many." (Eph. 1:22,23; I Cor. 12:12,14) The word Christ of the New Testament corresponds with the word Messiah of the Old Testament. What Jesus and Paul meant, therefore, is that the Messianic promises of the Old Testament must await fulfillment until the entire church class is complete. Then, as the Master told Peter, the "gates of hell" shall not prevail against the fulfillment of these divine promises.

God's promises were that, through the Messiah, which as we have seen, is to include the church, the

world is to receive life. The church, therefore, will share with Jesus in the promised work of blessing all the families of the earth, as originally promised to father Abraham. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) Peter explains that this blessing includes the resurrection of the dead. He describes it as restitution, which means restoration, and asserts that there are to be “times of restitution of all things,” and that this great future time of blessing was promised by the “mouth of all his [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

This promised blessing is sure to come. While each generation of the sin-cursed race has gone down into the great prison house of death—the Bible hell—the gates of hell will not prevail to keep them there. Jesus has the keys to those gates. He will throw them wide open, and will call forth the prisoners to freedom. (Isa. 49:7-9) The members of his body, the church, are the first ones to return from death through those gates. Theirs is referred to as the “first resurrection,” and the explanation is given that they “shall reign with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4,6

The church, raised from death and exalted to glory and power with Jesus, will be associated with him in the thousand-year work of awakening the remainder of the dead, keeping the gates of hell open until all the prisoners of death are set at liberty. We are assured of this in Revelation 20:13, where we read, “The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.”

Most assuredly, hell will give up its dead! The Creator, who gave life, has promised to restore life,

and Jesus ratified these promises by giving himself in death as a ransom for Adam and his condemned and dying offspring. Through the substitutionary death of the perfect man Jesus, all mankind became the ransomed of the Lord, and one of the reassuring promises of God is that “the ransomed of the LORD shall return [from death], and come to Zion [the Messianic kingdom] with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:10

THREE GREAT MIRACLES

Thus seen, that greatest of all events in human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, was in reality the first of three outstanding miracles in God’s plan to redeem mankind from the penalty of death and to restore the people to life. The second of these miracles is the resurrection of the footstep followers of Christ and their exaltation to the divine nature to live and reign with him during the thousand years of his kingdom. The third great miracle will be the awakening from death of all who are in their graves, that they also may have an opportunity to participate in the blessings purchased by Jesus’ death on Calvary’s cross.—John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 21:3-5

Herein, then, is a sure foundation for faith and hope, even though the world today is more afflicted with suffering and death than ever before. In a prophecy concerning our day, Daniel spoke of a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) There is every reason to

believe that this prophecy is being fulfilled in the present worldwide fear and distress of the people. The outlook would be dark and gloomy but for the fact that associated with this prophecy is assurance of deliverance, not only from the trouble, but also from death.

“At that time,” Daniel continues, “thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:1,2) The expression, “thy people,” is a reference to Daniel’s people, who in reality are God’s people, faithful Christians of the present age—spiritual Israelites. They are the first to be delivered, and this takes place in the first resurrection. Then will follow the awakening of those who “sleep in the dust of the earth.” When awakened from death, these will have an opportunity to accept the provisions of divine grace through Christ. If they do this, and obey the laws of the kingdom then in force, they will receive everlasting life upon the earth.—Matt. 6:10

It is a glorious prospect, both for the followers of Jesus, and for mankind in general. The fact that the world is presently going through a great time of trouble and distress means that these promised blessings of life are very close at hand. Realizing this, our commemoration of Jesus’ resurrection this year should be more than ever meaningful and hope-inspiring. Though we may be presently surrounded with sorrow and death, the divine promises of joy and life are near at hand. The guarantee of this is that nearly two thousand years ago, God raised Jesus from the dead! ■