

Biblical Truths About Hell You May Not Know

While still rejoicing in the victory of the cross and the celebration of Christ's resurrection, it is deeply disappointing to read reports—during Holy Week— of some prominent, liberal leaders in the larger body of Christ, who are turning away from some of these important scriptural truths, which their denomination has affirmed for 2,000 years.

The current head of that church has been reported to privately deny the existence of hell and the immortality of the human soul, suggesting that unrepentant non-believers merely “disappear” at their death. Church spokesmen have issued a weak denial of the secularly-sourced accusations, suggesting only that these may not have been the leader's “exact words.”

While we wait for clarification on this most recent turmoil in this denomination, it has been noted that this leader has “misspoken” before, when relating extemporaneously. His somewhat careless ways and words sometimes make it hard to understand his true meanings or motives. His background in the Liberation Theology of South American origins exposes him to grave deceptions and confusion.

Let us pray that Jesus, the light of the world, will shine His light and truth on this and other questionable matters in the family of God, while we all “wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.” (1 Thess. 1:10).

We must, as Jude teaches, contend for the faith which has been entrusted to us. The Bible says Jesus was killed on the cross and buried in the tomb before Shabbat, at sundown on Friday of that Holy Week. But, early on Sunday morning the angels asked the women at the tomb, “Why do you seek the living among the

dead?" (Luke 24:5b). What had happened between the monumental events of the crucifixion and the resurrection? If Jesus' body was in the tomb, where was His spirit/soul?

In the Old Testament, the place of departed souls is variously described, dependent on their status of righteousness, at death. The righteous dead went to Paradise (sometimes called "Abraham's bosom"), while the souls of the unrighteous were and are incarcerated in a place of torment, known as *Sheol* in the Old Testament Hebrew and *Hades* in the New Testament Greek. (Compare Ps. 16:10 when quoted in Acts 2:27.)

Solomon warned young men of the dangers of the enticing prostitute, saying "her house is on the way to *Sheol*, going down to the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:27) and that her guests are "in the depths of the grave (*Sheol*)" (Prov. 9:18).

Peter tells us that sometime during this significant series of days, Jesus "preached to the spirits in prison." These are thought to be the disembodied, disobedient people from the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:18-20), in their hellish after-life abode.

This proclamation did not change their status or state. Christ's preaching to these condemned souls may have been to convincingly justify to them their damnation. The punishment of the unrighteous in hell, and later the Lake of Fire, is just as eternal as eternal life will be for the righteous (See Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:14-15, 21:1-8). This is called the "classic theology of Holy Saturday."

In Peter's sermon on Pentecost, he declared to the excited and confused crowds that although evil men had put Jesus of Nazareth to death on a cross just weeks before, God set him free from death and raised him to life. "Whom God raised up by loosening the pull of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:24).

He went on to tell them that King David spoke of this Jesus of

Nazareth when he spoke 1,000 years before in Psalm 16:10: "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You suffer Your godly one to see corruption." Speaking of the Christ, David declared God would not abandon him in the grave nor let his body decay or decompose (see Acts 2:31).

Peter explained that this prophecy had been fulfilled in the fact that God had raised Jesus from the dead, affirming that he is the Messiah/Anointed One, who was promised to come. Not only did God raise him from the dead, His body did not experience any decay whatsoever, in the three days from the time of His death until His resurrection.

You may recall that Jesus' friend Lazarus (John 11) had been dead several days when Jesus commanded that the stone covering the tomb's entrance be removed. His sisters protested that "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days!" *Higb 11:39b).

The Apostle's Creed of the early church describes the belief that Christ descended into hell between the cross and the resurrection. This possibly occurred on Holy Saturday. As one writer describes it, Jesus "entered into Hades after his death and raided Hell to ransom the righteous of the Old Testament."

Jesus had told the disciples (see Matt. 12:40) he would spend three days and three nights in "the heart of the earth," reminiscent of Jonah being in the belly of the fish for that period. More than just meaning His body was to be entombed for those three days, Jesus' spirit/soul was to be "in the heart of the earth." What did that mean?

Consider these clues:

1. He told the repentant thief on the cross near him He would be with him *in Paradise* that very day (see Luke 23:43). Where was that and when was He there?
2. He told Mary, in the garden on resurrection morning, that He had not yet ascended to His Father (see John

20:17).

3. He once told a story of two people who died, one was named Lazarus and one was noted as a rich man. Lazarus was righteous and the other was not. Luke 16:19-26 explains how that in death the each had traveled to their respective places of the afterlife as spirits/souls. Lazarus went to "Abraham's bosom" or Paradise and the unrighteous man went to Hades, the place of torment, where the unrighteous dead await God's final judgment, when "Hades" will eventually be cast into the "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14) or "hell."
4. The Scriptures says that when Jesus ascended to heaven from the lower parts of the earth, "He led captivity captive," (Eph. 4:8-9: Ps. 68:18). It appears that He delivered these spirits of righteous ones temporarily living in Paradise ("Abraham's bosom") and led them with him to His Father's house in heaven, to wait their glorified bodies.

The Bible says "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this comes the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Once an unrepentant person dies, he is given no "do-overs". The concept of purgatory, an after-death purification process to purge us of our earthly sins and make us ready for heaven, cannot be found in scripture.

Rather, the unrepentant who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They shall be punished with eternal destruction, isolated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (see 2 Thess. 1:6-9).

However, when a true disciple dies, his spirit goes *immediately* to heaven to be with the Lord (see 2 Cor. 5:6-8, Phil. 1:2-23 and 1 Thess. 4:14). He or she will share in the future "Bema Seat Judgement," where true disciples will give an account of what we did or did not do while in our bodies and be rewarded accordingly (see 1 Cor. 3:5-15). We are not saved *by our works*, but we are saved *for our works*, in the

kingdom of God!

In these post-Easter days, let affirm the scriptural reality of immortality and seek to “populate heaven and rob hell” as we “work 'til Jesus we are gathered home!” {eoa}

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