

# Heaven, Sheol, and Gehenna: What Happened to Heaven and Hell?

by R. Magnusson Davis, founder, New Matthew Bible Project

PART 1: The hope of the faithful, and the grave from which we are dug. The traditional (patristic and early Reformation) doctrine of heaven and hell.

PART 2: The “Larger Hope” and lesser grave taught in the 1894 Revised Version. The assault on the doctrine of eternal retribution and re-definition of the Hebrew *sheol*.

PART 3: The treatment of *sheol* in the 1537 Matthew Bible. Comparing the Geneva Bible, Revised Version, and modern Bibles. The problems with the modern translations.

MYLES COVERDALE WAS one of the co-authors of the 1537 Matthew Bible, together with William Tyndale and John Rogers, during the Reformation of the early 16th century. Coverdale complained at that time that, “The devil hath sore assaulted the Church by men of great authority and learning [who deny] there is an eternal life and damnation.”<sup>1</sup> To refute these men, he published an English translation of *The Hope of the Faithful*,<sup>2</sup> a short book written by the German Reformer Otho Wermullerus. It is a masterful review of biblical teaching about heaven and hell, which also looks in considerable depth at the writings of Augustine and Jerome. I will rely on Wermullerus’s book to refute a modern assault on orthodox doctrine, one which has again been mounted by men of great authority and learning. Coverdale and Wermullerus would be pleased to see their work used this way.



“The Last Judgement.” By Giotto, 1304-5.

There is today a great deal of uncertainty and disagreement concerning what the Bible says about hell. Some people believe the Old Testament did not say or teach anything about it. This is due in part to the trend in modern Bibles to put “Sheol” where earlier versions had “hell” in the Old Testament. Some question how Sheol, which they believe to be the abode of all departed spirits, differs from hell, where only the wicked go. A friend recently commented, “I have heard people use ‘Sheol’ as a way of lessening the justice of judgement, softening it.” People also wonder if hell is a real place, or if it will not come into existence until after the judgement. Since the late 19th century, leading scholars have obscured the orthodox doctrine by their new translations, and by certain popular reference works that re-define the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek *hades*, as will be shown. But first, to review what Wermullerus had to say about heaven and hell.

## PART 1

### **The hope of the faithful, and the grave from which we are dug. Patristic and early Reformation doctrine.**

Wermullerus does not soften the teachings of hell. I wish to begin by saying that my purpose in reviewing all the unhappy teachings here is not to dwell on hell's misery, from which I take no pleasure at all. However, if these things are true, it is right to speak them. Further, they show how great is our salvation. The prophet Isaiah cried, "Hearken unto me, ye that hold of righteousness, ye that seek the Lord! Take heed unto the stone from which ye are hewn, and the grave from which ye are dug" (Isa. 51:1, lightly updated).

#### *There is an eternal hell*

The 28th chapter of *The Hope of the Faithful* is entitled "The refutation of them that denied the punishment of the ungodly to be eternal." Selected excerpts follow below. Obsolete English may be gently updated. The original work is cited in endnote 1, and pages are referenced in-text after the quotations. Drawing first on the Old Testament, Wermullerus wrote:

St. Augustine saith in the last book of *The City of God*, that some people have been so merciful, that they dare promise grace, deliverance, and life even to those that are damned and adjudged to eternal death. The same witnesseth also St. Jerome, in his writing upon the last chapter of Isaiah. But no one ought to be swayed by such a foolish and erroneous opinion of certain unbelievers, which faithful men have always rejected. For [the Scriptures] speak simply and plainly, that the punishment and damnation of the ungodly or unbelievers is everlasting; and not only of long continuance, as some expound it, but so great, that it cannot be expressed, and so perpetual, that it is without end....

Isaiah says, "Thy rivers shall become resin, and the dust brimstone, the earth burning pitch, not able to be quenched day or night. The smoke shall eternally go up; from generation to generation shall there be a destruction; neither shall any man be able to walk there in everlasting eternity." The prophet doubtless speaks of hell, minding with many words to declare that the punishment and pain of hell is eternal and without end. For first he says, "Day and night shall it not quench." Then he saith further, "The smoke shall go up forevermore." Also, yet more plainly, "From generation to generation there shall be a destruction"; namely, a dwelling wherein is nothing but pain and undoing. And at the end he addeth, "Neither shall anyone be able to walk there in the everlasting eternity," which is such a manner of speech that scarcely anything could more distinctly, evidently, and plainly express the eternity. For what else is the everlasting eternity, but a time without end? But [not] to be able to dwell or walk there meaneth not that no one shall dwell in hell, but that it is a loathsome and horrible place, wherein everyone desireth neither to dwell nor walk. (208-9)

Wermullerus explained that the righteous and unrighteous have separate eternal destinies:

In the holy prophet Daniel it is written thus: "They [the righteous] who have instructed the multitude unto godliness shall shine as the stars *in seculum et in perpetuum*, forever and ever." Now lest by this word *seculum* anyone should understand a long season, as

a hundred, or a thousand, or ten thousand years, he addeth immediately *in perpetuum*; that is, to the eternity, or forevermore.

And like as the eternity is appointed for the righteous, so is there an everlasting eternity ordained for the wicked. For the Lord saith plainly, "they that have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of judgement" [Joh. 5]. Note here the manner of speech: "to the resurrection of life, and to the resurrection of judgement." Now I have shown before that this saying, "to rise up unto the resurrection of judgement," is as much as to rise to a continual and still-remaining state, in which the raised-up bodies endure perpetually in torment.

We find also the like in the same Gospel of John, that the Lord saith, "Whoso believeth on the Son hath eternal life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" [Joh. 3:36]. Lo, what could be more evidently and pithily spoken? "He shall not see life," saith the Lord. Note: "the wrath of God remaineth upon him." If he shall not see life, how shall he then, as those men say, be preserved or saved? Note: if "the wrath of God abideth upon him," then surely the vengeance, which is the pain and punishment, shall not be taken away from him. And note that he saith the wrath of God abideth, yea, abideth on him – as if he would say, the punishment hangeth upon him, sticketh fast, moveth not away, altereth not, but worketh in the unbelievers without ceasing, forevermore.

The Lord saith, "All sins shall be forgiven the children of men, and also the blasphemies wherewith they blaspheme, but whoever blasphemeth the Holy Spirit hath no forgiveness forevermore, but is liable to eternal judgement" [Mk. 3:29]. "Forevermore," he saith, "hath he no remission." And to this he addeth, "He is in danger of eternal judgement"; that is, he shall be punished with everlasting, continual punishment. The Lord saith moreover in the same Evangelist, "Better it is for thee to enter into life halt or lame, than, having two feet, to be cast into hell fire, the fire that never quenqueth, where their worm dieth not and their fire goeth not out [Mk. 9:45-6]." He repeats here once again, "the fire never quenqueth," and addeth thereto that "the worm never dieth." Therefore, as the bodies continue forever, so endureth their worm also perpetually. For the worm liveth and is sustained only by the body or carrion.

St. John also saith in his Revelation, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured in the cup of his wrath; and he shall be punished in fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forevermore, and they have no rest, day or night, etc." [Rev. 14]. And the like is repeated in the 20th chapter. (209-10)

And so there is an eternal hell. But what more can we or should we know? Where is it, and when and how do people go there? The same questions may be asked about heaven. Further, will things change after the general resurrection and final judgement, and if so, how?

### *About heaven and hell: Summary of the teaching*

Wermullerus answered most questions a person might have, with many references to the Old and New Testaments. He also cautioned readers against being "curious" about the things that are hid. (Perhaps the fate of unbaptized infants is one such thing.) I will summarize my understanding of the main points here, followed by more excerpts from his book:

(1) Every human being is both body and spirit (or soul, as Wermullerus says).

(2) After death, the natural bodies of all people, believers and unbelievers alike, go to their grave, whether in the earth or the sea. This is the common death.

(3) After death, the spirits or souls of the unrighteous go to a place represented in Scripture as being down below the earth. All people who have died without a saving faith, including in Old Testament times, are there. Until the advent of the Revised Version of the Bible, this place was usually called "hell" or "the pit," and sometimes the "lower habitations," "the deep," etc. It is depicted as having different depths (which it seems represent different degrees of punishment, suffering, or evil). In hell, the souls of the unjust and the unsaved await the second coming of the Lord and final judgement. In this interim state, they are conscious, awake, and aware of suffering.

(4) However, after death the souls of believers – those who are saved and redeemed in Christ – go up to heaven to be with the Lord, there to await his return to the earth. All who have died in the faith in all ages, including Old Testament times, are in heaven. In this interim state, they are conscious of pleasure and peace. (I note, however, that William Tyndale was not convinced of the conscious state of believers after the first death. He thought it possible that they rest in a literal sleep, and would not commit to a firm position.)

(5) At the second coming of the Lord, the souls of all the dead, both the saved and unsaved, will be reunited with their bodies. In a tremendous feat of divine power, their bodies will be raised from their graves and joined with their disembodied spirits.

(6) All the newly raised dead, together with all who are living when the Lord returns, will then appear before the Great White Throne for a swift judgement. At this final judgement, they will be sentenced to receive in their own flesh the due recompense for the things that they did while they were in their bodies (2Co. 5:10), whether good or evil. Since the body is used by man as an instrument of both good and evil, it must also be judged.

(7) At the final judgement, which Wermullerus refers to as doomsday, the unjust shall be turned back, both body and soul, into hell, to live out their eternal sentence. The reward or suffering of the unjust will be in accordance with the nature and extent of their evil. Further, they will be forever in the company of the demons and foul spirits.<sup>3</sup> For the devil and his evil angels will also, at the judgement, be cast out of the earth, and will take up their habitation beneath.

(8) Those who are redeemed and forgiven in Christ Jesus will, after the judgement, inhabit the new heavens and earth in glorified bodies, in a world purified of every injurious thing. They will be joyous in God's presence, and in the presence of the good and holy angels and of the Lord himself. They will be rewarded according to their labours and virtues in this life, as the Scripture clearly says (1Co. 3:8, Ac. 24:16).

### *Hell and heaven are real places, though many secrets are hid from us*

Hell is a sure and certain place. Wermullerus writes:

Touching the place of punishment, or where the souls with their bodies shall be tormented, the Scripture saith simply and plainly that the unbelievers go down into hell. From this it is easy to perceive that hell is under us in the earth. Notwithstanding, to go about to describe, to show and compare precisely the place and the room where it lieth, and to print it, does not truly become us, but is a foolish presumption. The testimonies of the Scripture are simple and plain. For the prophet David saith, "Let death fall suddenly upon them, and let them go down quick into hell; for wickedness

is in their houses and private chambers."... In Luke, the hell is placed beneath, downwards ... Isaiah also speaketh of hell, and saith, "the Lord has set hell in the deep, and made it wide." (204-5)

Heaven is also a sure and certain place. Wermullerus begins this discussion by explaining that the Scripture uses the word "heaven" in various ways, to indicate outer space, the air, or the skies, depending on the context. However, there is a fourth sense:

Though God is infinite and cannot be compassed about with any place, as the most wise Solomon said ... yet the Scripture calleth the heaven that is above us a dwelling of God, which dwelling is ordained for all faithful and virtuous believers, and is named "the heaven." Paul witnesseth to this, saying, "We know that if our earthly mansion of this dwelling were destroyed, we have a building of God, a habitation not made with hands, but eternal in heaven." There heaven is taken for the kingdom of God, for the kingdom of the Father, or joy and eternal life, which is peace and rest. The heaven, I say, is a seat and dwelling of the faithful, or blessed believers; a determinate place also, into which the Lord Jesus was received when he was taken up into the heaven.

And this doth the Scripture plainly declare unto us; namely, that above us there is a certain determinate place prepared for us. For Luke saith, "He was received upon high, and a cloud took him up away out of their sight." Note, "And while they looked steadfastly up towards heaven, the Angels said, this same Jesus, who is taken away from you into heaven, shall so come even as you have seen him go into heaven." Who is so ignorant now, that he does not know where heaven is, or the clouds, or into which heaven the apostles looked so steadfastly? ... Paul also saith in another place, "If you are risen again with Christ, then seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." And therefore the Lord Jesus has gone up into the heaven that is above us; namely, into that sure, certain place that is prepared for the blessed. (152-53)

However, Wermullerus said that, as it is with hell, so it is with heaven: it behoves us not to be overmuch "curious" about the secret things, which have yet to be revealed (156). Rogers wrote to this effect in a note on Luke's parable of poor Lazarus, whom the Lord described as being in Abraham's bosom after he died:

**Rogers' note on Luke 16:22, NMB:** By Abraham's bosom some understand the faith of Abraham. Some also understand it of the place where the elect and chosen, who follow the faith of Abraham, rest after their death. But where that place is (because the Scripture does not expressly determine it,) we cannot tell, and therefore no man may be so bold as to define it.

However, though much remains a mystery, it is evident that the place of the elect and chosen is a separate place to which the unjust cannot go. That was the Lord's teaching on the parable, when he said that there was a great chasm between Lazarus and the rich man.

### *The interim state of the soul, believers and unbelievers*

It remains to consider more closely the condition of departed spirits until the resurrection. Wermullerus taught that they are conscious and passible; that is, they are able to experience sensation and emotion. To prove this, he drew upon the Lazarus parable:

There are some who think that, seeing the soul is a spirit, it cannot, neither may suffer; yea, that it is not subject to any passion [*suffering*] at all. Therefore, against such curious

teachers I will set now the soul of the luxurious rich man in the gospel, who expressly and plainly says, "O send Lazarus, that he may dip the tongue of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." Lo, the rich man's soul is tormented in fire. On this it followeth that the souls are passible, and subject to suffer. And all this is shown to us by the Lord as a parable, yet it is done for this intent, even to describe and show to us the state and case of the souls that are separated from their bodies. (203)

Ezekiel testified in the Old Testament about the fate of Pharaoh and the cruel Egyptians, who, upon their deaths, would descend to "the lower habitations" to join those already there. This passage is one of the clearest to describe the nature of hell, and to show that it is a real place under the earth, where the "uncircumcised" (unbelievers) go, and where they mourn:

**Ezekiel 31:15-18, MB** Thus saith the Lord God: In the day when he goeth down to the grave, I will cause a lamentation to be made. I will cover the deep upon him ... I will make the heathen shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell, with them that descend into the pit. ... [they] shall mourn with him also in the lower habitations: for they shall go down to hell with him, unto them that be slain with the sword ... Yet art thou cast down under the earth (among the trees of Eden) where thou must lie among uncircumcised, with them that be slain with the sword.

As to believers, Wermullerus gave the example of Steven to show that after death their spirits are received immediately into heaven, where they are joyful:

The heaven, into which Christ ascended with his true body, is even the same place and rest that faithful believers are taken up into. And into the same heaven Steven desired to be received when he lifted up his eyes into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the father, to whom he committed his soul and said, "O Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (213) ... If the souls now in everlasting salvation have a perfect rest - yea, such a rest as their body, which they have put off, hath not received [*back*] again, and seeing that they are yet alive ... how much more perfect joy shall they then first have and possess when their bodies shall come again, and when they shall see that all their brethren, whom they in this life had loved so entirely before, are together in honour and glory, when now the time of frailty hath ceased, and when in the eternal time there can now be no cause of heaviness and grief. (221)

### *Of the end of the age and of this world*

Of the momentous things that will occur at the end of the age, Wermullerus wrote:

But to the intent that this may yet be more plainly understood, I will now tell how our bodies shall rise, and what nature and kind they shall be of in the resurrection. At the end of the world the Lord shall come with great majesty and judgement, and shall declare and show himself in and with a right true, essential body. Hither also too shall he be brought, and shall stand in the clouds of heaven so that all flesh may see him; yea, all men that are upon earth shall behold him, and know him by his glory. In the mean season also shall he send his archangel to blow the trump. Then shall all the dead hear, and perceive the voice and power of the Son of God. And so all people who died, from the first Adam, shall immediately arise out of the earth. And all they who live until the last day shall, in the twinkling of an eye, be changed. And thus all people, everyone in his own flesh, shall stand before the judgement seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, and shall wait for the last judgement and sentence of the Lord; which sentence

being given, quickly and without delay, he shall call one part unto heaven and thrust out the other into hell. (176)

As to the resurrected bodies of the believers and unbelievers, Wermullerus said:

When the [believer's] body taketh upon it the glorification and immortality, [all infirmities] shall be wholly removed and fall away.... The glorified bodies shall be clear, bright, and shining bodies, even as the body of Christ was in his transfiguration upon the mount of Tabor. (178,179) Again, glorification comprehendeth deliverance; that is, the laying away and clear discharge of all these miseries and sorrows. So that now glorification is called (and so it is in very deed) pureness, perfect strength, immortality, and joy; yea, a sure, quiet, and everlasting life. (180)

But to the intent that no one should doubt touching the resurrection of the flesh of the unbelievers, I will bring forth certain testimonies of holy Scripture that do manifestly declare that the unbelievers, or ungodly, shall with their own true bodies rise again. The prophet Isaiah, in the last chapter of his book, saith, "They shall go forth and look upon the bodies of them that have vilely behaved themselves against me; for their worms shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and all flesh shall abhor them." With this sentence doth the prophet play, after the manner and custom of those who have just gotten the victory, who with great desire, after the battle is one, go out from the city into the field to view and look upon the bodies of those who are slain ... since now Christ also has fought prosperously, overcome his enemies on doomsday, and made them his footstool, the faithful shall go out to see the bodies of the ungodly. The prophet does for this cause call them bodies, even to show that the bodies raised up from death shall be very true flesh. He continues further also in the sentence and saith, "their worms shall not die." For the bodies, or corpses, are full of worms; neither are they anything but worms' meat. Not only the souls, but also the bodies of unbelievers doth the Lord destroy. From which it followeth that they shall rise again. For if they should not rise again, they could not be tormented and plagued. Neither shall any other body rise again to pain and punishment, but even the same that with its vile works has deserved the plague.... For the body is an instrument or vessel by which something is done, and therefore in the last judgment of God the body, according to the divine righteousness, shall not be omitted, neither forgotten at all. (198-99)

I confess a personal reluctance to understand "the worm that never dies" literally, as expressed above. But in any case, after the judgement, believers in their glorified bodies will be gathered together to be with the Lord and with each other for eternity. However, the unbelievers will be cast into hell beneath, to spend eternity with the devil and his evil angels:

The ungodly shall be in the fellowship of most foul spirits, with whom they had their lust in this life. There shall all be full of confusion, loathsome and great torments, and so shall all burn together for eternity. For thus shall the Judge give sentence with plain and expressed words: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels." ... And holy Scripture saith that the ungodly are given over to the devil to burn perpetually. (208)

### *The fruit and blessings of the resurrection of Christ*

It is terrible to contemplate these things. But they reveal the greatness of the victory Christ won by his bodily resurrection from death. Wermullerus again:

Now I will declare the occasion, why I have with such diligence and so earnestly pressed on to this, that Jesus Christ with his true body did truly rise again: that is, how

profitable and necessary it is so to believe, and what fruit the true resurrection of Christ doth bring and engender unto us. And albeit that hereof, as of a plentiful treasure, much might be spoken, yet will I comprehend it all in a short sum.

Though we be complete and made perfect through the death of Christ, while the just judgement of God is satisfied, the curse taken away, and the penalty recompensed and paid, yet Peter saith that “we are born again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ unto a living hope.” For just as Christ with his resurrection overcame death, so standeth also the triumph and victory of our faith in the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, through his death sin is taken away, and by his resurrection righteousness is brought again. For how could he with his death have delivered us from death, if he himself had been overcome by death? Or, how could he have obtained the victory for us, if he had been destroyed in the battle himself? Therefore, through death is death discomfited, and with the resurrection is life to us restored...

And finally, out of the words of the holy apostle Paul, we learn that, through the example of Christ who was raised up, we are not only moved to take upon us a new life, but that we also through the power of Christ are renewed so that we may lead an innocent and holy life. (148-49) ...

Christ also, with his ascension into heaven, thought to show to us his power and might, wherein consisteth our strength, our power, riches, and triumph against sin, death, world, devil, and hell. For he, ascending up on high, led captivity captive. (165)

Thus the traditional doctrine, garnered from both the Old and New Testaments, as set forth by Wermullerus.

#### *Four final points*

Some final thoughts:

(1) *The second death.* The turning back of unbelievers into hell with their bodies after the judgement is the “second death” spoken of in Revelation 2, 20, and 21. However, as the Scripture says, the second death will not hurt anyone who had part in the first resurrection. The first resurrection is the new birth, when a person believes on the Son of God; the Lord then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, sets him free from the dominion of the devil, which is the kingdom of death, and raises his soul to eternal life:

**John 5:24, NMB** Truly truly I say to you, he who hears my words and believes on him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into damnation, but is escaped from death to life.

**Revelation 20:6, NMB** Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. For on such the second death shall have no power.

(2) *The descent of Christ into hell.* What is the meaning of the confession in the Apostles’ Creed, that the Lord “was crucified, died, and was buried; he *descended to hell*; the third day he rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven”? This must be taken at face value. It is no more than a restatement of the Scripture. The prophet Paul wrote, “He ascended up on high, and has led captivity captive, and has given gifts to men. That he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended first, into the lowest parts of the earth? He who descended is the same also who ascended up, even above all heavens, to fulfil all things” (Eph. 4:8-10. See also Ro. 10:7). The Scripture speaks plainly.



(3) *The spirits in prison*. It is said in 1 Peter that Jesus, after his resurrection, went and preached to the spirits who were in prison. Who were they, and what was the prison? As discussed later, the Hebrew word *bore*, which was often translated “the pit,” in one sense referred to a dungeon or pit beneath the earth where prisoners were held. In this sense it was used in the Old Testament to speak about hell. It is believed that the spirits of certain ancient folk were held in the pit, and Jesus went to preach to them, just as the text says. See the verses and Rogers’ note, from the New Matthew Bible:

**1 Peter 3:18-9** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, in order to bring us to God; and was killed as concerning the flesh, but was quickened to life in the Spirit. In which Spirit he also went and preached to the spirits who were in prison, who were in time past disobedient, when the longsuffering of God abode exceedingly patiently in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared.

**1 Peter 4:6** To this purpose was the gospel <sup>1</sup>preached to the dead: that they should be judged like other men in the flesh, but should live before God in the spirit.

**Note 1:** As certain learned expositors will, that which Peter here calls the preaching of the gospel to the dead, he called in the preceding chapter [3] preaching to the spirits that were in prison. This, they say, means that also to the dead, or the spirits in prison, came the salve or medicine of the gospel and of the glad tidings of Christ’s passion, whereby they were released, the power of it being so great that they were brought out of prison to immortality. And because it might be asked how the souls of these blessed ones came forth out of prison – whether in their bodies, or only in the pure substance of the spirit – therefore Peter says that they will be judged like other men in the flesh, that is, when all others shall be judged in the flesh, but they will live before God in the spirit, which signifies that in the meantime, until the judgement comes, their souls will live and rejoice before God through Christ.

(4) *Sheep fallen into the pit*. Jesus’ parable about rescuing a sheep from the pit on the Sabbath day assumes a new meaning when we understand truly about the pit that his sheep have been lifted out of. He it is who rescues the sheep, and now is that Sabbath day.

And thus the deep grave out of which we are dug.

## PART 2

### The “Larger Hope” and lesser grave of the 1894 Revised Version. The assault on the doctrine of eternal retribution and re-definition of the Hebrew *sheol*.

My 1895 British edition of the Revised Version of the Bible (RV) says, “The revision of the Authorized Version was undertaken in consequence of a Resolution passed by both houses of the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury.” The RV New Testament was published in 1881, the Old in 1885, and the Apocrypha in 1894.

In their preface to the New Testament, the scholars of the RV revision committee claimed that their work was a badly needed review and correction of the King James Bible. They condemned the KJV sources and the “character” of that translation:

**RV, preface to New Testament:** Of the many points of interest connected with the Translation of 1611, two require special notice; first, the Greek Text which it appears to have represented; and secondly, the character of the Translation itself ...

1. All [the KJV Greek sources] were founded for the most part on manuscripts of late date, few in number, and used with little critical skill. But in those days, it could hardly have been otherwise. Nearly all the more ancient of the documentary authorities have become known only within the last two centuries ... While therefore it has long been the opinion of all scholars that the commonly received text needed thorough revision, it is but recently that materials have been acquired for executing such a work with even approximate completeness.

2. They [the KJV translators] profess in their Preface to have studiously adopted a variety of expression which would now be deemed hardly consistent with the requirements of faithful translation.... It cannot be doubted that they carried this liberty too far, and that the studied avoidance of uniformity in the rendering of the same words, even when occurring in the same context, is one of the blemishes in their work.<sup>4</sup>

“Little critical skill,” “hardly consistent with faithfulness,” “blemished,” sources that “needed thorough revision,” materials not even “approximately complete”: this was a severe condemnation. It was also false in many respects. The ancient documentary authorities touted by the revisers was a reference to Alexandrian manuscripts used in their New Testament revision, instead of the Received Text (RT) that was used for the KJV. However, it was not true that the Alexandrian manuscripts had “become known only within the last two centuries.” They were known in the 16th century when Erasmus first compiled the RT. In fact, Erasmus had a friend who worked in the Vatican library, and he had access to the manuscripts kept there, if he had so desired.<sup>5</sup> Further, it is almost blasphemous to say that the RT was inadequate: it was the text God provided to his servants in the Reformation, many of whom sealed their work with their blood at his calling. In other writings some of the RV committee members dared to call the RT “corrupt.”<sup>6</sup> These condemnations implied that any New Testament based on the RT – including Tyndale’s and Luther’s as well as the KJV – was

inadequate and “corrupt.” Finally, it is a fact that very few of the significant revisions in the RV New Testament – that is, revisions that significantly affected meaning or doctrine – were due to textual variants: the figure has been put at less than 1%.<sup>7</sup> Most were due to variant *interpretations*.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, while the revisers’ Greek texts and much-vaunted critical skills were promoted as vital for biblical scholarship, it was all a gigantic red herring and a bundle of evil speaking. In the final analysis, their documentary authorities were helpful for promotion, but hardly relevant to their work. Much more relevant were their private theological opinions.

### *Fenton Hort’s quiet process: Variant interpretations and indirect influences*

Not only in the New Testament, but also throughout the Old Testament of the RV, there were many new translations, as well as many new “alternate readings” offered in marginal notes. These changed the meaning of the biblical text. They touched on such matters as the second coming, judgement, and eternal retribution, which we will see here, and also the law, salvation, the New Covenant, the person and work of Jesus, creation, and more (discussed further in *The Story of the Matthew Bible, Part 2*). The new meanings could only have been intentional. The private correspondence of Fenton Hort, a Cambridge professor and a leader of the revision committee, evidences a rejection of, and even a conspiracy against, orthodox doctrine, which he referred to as “traditionalism”:

The errors and prejudices, which we agree in wishing to remove, can surely be more wholesomely and also more effectually reached by individual efforts of an indirect kind than by combined open assault. At present very many orthodox but rational men are being unawares acted on by influences which will assuredly bear good fruit in due time, if the process is allowed to go on quietly; and I cannot help fearing that a premature crisis would frighten back many into the merest traditionalism.<sup>9</sup>

The RV indeed initiated a quiet process of removing traditional doctrine from the Bible. Since its publication, modern versions have taken over many of its new translations, and have also brought its alternate readings from the margins directly into the biblical text, so that over time the meaning of hundreds of verses has been incrementally changed, in ways both great and small. By this means, the influence of the RV has grown over time, even though it was never itself a popular Bible. But no one could have suspected or anticipated its impact from the assurances given by the revisers. Their Old and New Testament prefaces say their guiding principles included:

1. To introduce as few alterations as possible into the Text of the Authorized Version consistently [*sic*] with faithfulness.
2. To limit, as far as possible, the expression of such alterations to the language of the Authorized and earlier English Versions.
3. We do not contemplate any new translation of the Bible, or any alteration of the language, except where, in the judgement of the most competent scholars, such change is necessary.<sup>10</sup>

These guidelines appear very confining and respectful of orthodoxy. However, given the number of substantive revisions, many items evidently fell within the 3rd principle: the “most competent scholars” judged an alteration, or a note suggesting an alteration, to be necessary – including, though they never said so, doctrinally significant ones. Revisions that affected doctrine were presented as mere “alterations of the language.” I will attempt to show

that many of these alterations were a covert way, or as Hort said, an indirect way, to remove the teaching of eternal retribution from the Scriptures.

### *Universalism and the Revised Version*

At least some of the leaders and members of the RV revision committee did not believe in eternal retribution. Hort's correspondence, and that of his fellow committee member and Cambridge associate Brooke Westcott, reveal disbelief. They also reveal sympathy for the doctrines of universal salvation and purgatory.<sup>11</sup> Universal salvation, or universalism, is the belief that all people will eventually be saved and that there is no hell: it is heaven without hell. When the RV was published, universalism was being preached as "the Larger Hope." The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory holds that, after death, people will only temporarily suffer the consequences of their sins. Hort wrote:

Finite sin cannot deserve infinite punishment.<sup>12</sup>

The idea of purgation, of cleansing as by fire, seems to me inseparable from what the Bible teaches us of the Divine chastisements; and, though little is directly said respecting the future state, it seems to me incredible that the Divine chastisements should in this respect change their character when this visible life is ended.<sup>13</sup>

What Hort fails to understand is that, although the deed passes away in time, the guilt endures, unless forgiven or remitted.

If a person believes there is no eternal retribution, he will understand the second coming of Jesus in a new light. Westcott wrote that when the Lord returns:

All the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him in penitential sorrow, and not, as [in] the Authorized Version, shall wail because of him, in the present expectation of terrible vengeance.<sup>14</sup>

Westcott suggests that at the second coming, all will repent, or at least will have a new claim on the Lord's mercy (a whole other question; suffice to say that this life is the time of decision). Westcott's view was evidently a 3rd principle item, which required an "alteration of the language," and Revelation 1:7 was changed accordingly in the RV New Testament:

#### **Revelation 1:7**

**KJV** He cometh with clouds ... and all kindreds of the earth *shall wail because of him.*

**RV** He cometh with the clouds ... and all the tribes of the earth *shall mourn over him.*

This was a significant revision, and only one of many that were completely unrelated to the scholars' documentary authorities.

It is noteworthy that Westcott and Hort held to their own concept of progressive revelation; that is, the idea that the biblical covenants or ages have had as a main purpose to advance the knowledge of grace and Christian doctrine, which is one of the tenets of so-called covenant theology. Their ideas were not quite John Calvin's (that Jesus manifested in order to be a new way of teaching the former doctrine,<sup>15</sup> see *Story Part 2*); however, like him they assigned a progressively didactic (instructive) purpose to the biblical covenants. They blended progressive revelation and evolutionary dogma, and treated the second coming and final judgement as the last in a series of divine unveilings that were intended to help man develop in Christian knowledge:

Hort: There is a present unveiling of him simply as he is, without reference to any special action of his, such as came to St. Paul on his conversion. There are apparently

successive unveilings of him, successive Days of the Lord. There is clearly indicated a supreme unveiling, in which glory and judgement are combined.<sup>16</sup>

Westcott: Do you not understand the meaning of Theological "Development"? It is briefly this, that in an early time some doctrine is proposed in a simple or obscure form, or even but darkly hinted at, which in succeeding ages, as the wants of men's minds grow, grows with them – in fact, that Christianity is always progressive in its principles and doctrines.<sup>17</sup>

Westcott also spiritualized the second coming, describing it as part of a continuous revelation. But worse, another member of the RV revision committee, Vance Smith, completely denied the second coming:

This idea of the second coming ought now to be passed by as a merely temporary incident of early Christian belief. Like many another error, it has answered its transitory purpose in the providential plan, and may well, at length, be left to rest in peace.<sup>18</sup>

And so, according to this learned doctor, as man becomes wiser, earlier Christian doctrine must be cast aside. And never mind that this is inconsistent with the position the revisers took to promote their Greek manuscripts; viz, that they were from an earlier time, and therefore more reliable. Smith also suggests the early Christians were deceived about the second coming as part of a the Lord's "plan" – as if the Lord deceives his own. But whether the second coming is blasphemously denied like this, or subtly denied by allegorizing it as Hort did, it is false. And Smith's unorthodoxy went even further. He was a Unitarian, and denied the Trinity. The Unitarians in Britain had for years been seeking a revision of the Bible to remove alleged corruptions, such as the Johannine comma in the New Testament, which supports the Trinity. Nonetheless, Westcott and Hort fought for Smith's inclusion on the revision committee; Westcott even threatened to quit if the Convocation ejected him. Smith was not the only Unitarian on the committee, as will be seen.

These, then, were some of the men who convened to correct the English Bible, and to ensure its faithfulness, language, and character.

### *New transliterations begin the quiet process of removing "hell" from the Scripture*

The RV men mounted a comprehensive attack on the doctrine of eternal retribution. Their first advance was to remove the word "hell" itself from the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, as much as possible. This was accomplished by the ingenious means of transliterating two of the four words that had previously been translated "hell"; namely, the Hebrew noun *sheol* and the Greek *hades*. Transliteration is not translation. It is the process of representing a foreign word phonetically in the letters of the receptor language. It is generally used only for proper nouns (Israel, Jordan, Satan) and expressions accepted into the language (Amen). However, the RV revisers took the unusual step of transliterating, and even capitalizing, *sheol* and *hades*, to give us "Sheol" and "Hades." The new words were semantically empty in English, so the revisers were now nicely positioned to build a new meaning upon them.

In the Old Testament, much turns on the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew noun *sheol*. In their OT preface, the RV revisers obfuscated the reason for the new transliteration, and also avoided saying directly what they believed about eternal retribution:

**RV preface to the Old Testament:** The Hebrew *Sheol*, which signifies the abode of departed spirits, and corresponds to the Greek *Hades*, or the underworld, is variously rendered in the Authorized Version by 'grave,' 'pit,' and 'hell.' Of these renderings 'hell,' if it could be taken in its original sense as used in the Creeds, would be a fairly adequate equivalent for the Hebrew word; but it is so commonly understood of the place of torment that to employ it frequently would lead to inevitable misunderstanding. The Revisers therefore in the historical narratives have left the rendering 'the grave' or 'the pit' in the text, with a marginal note 'Heb. Sheol' to indicate that it does not signify 'the place of burial'; while in the poetical writings they have put most commonly 'Sheol' in the text and 'the grave' in the margin. In Isaiah xiv, however, where 'hell' is used in more of its original sense and is less liable to be misunderstood, and where any change in so familiar a passage which was not distinctly an improvement would be a decided loss, the Revisers have contented themselves with leaving 'hell' in the text, and have connected it with other passages by putting 'Sheol' in the margin.

When I first read this, I was confused. I understood little, except that the revisers said *sheol* and *hades* were equivalent, and they wished to avoid suggesting that these words indicated the place of torment. It was not clear why *sheol* did not mean a place of burial but should be defined in the margins as "grave." The alleged "original sense of hell" in the Creeds – as if it had some lost meaning – was not explained. The revisers appear to wrongly suggest that the Apostles' Creed did not use "hell" in the traditional sense, and to overlook that the Creed of St. Athanasius holds the doctrine of eternal torment to be an essential tenet of the faith.

It took me months of research to sort out what the RV revisers really did. I have been obliged to compare all their translations of *sheol* and *bore* (OT), and *hades* and *Gehenna* (NT), with the MB, KJV, and other versions. I have been obliged to review the works of some of the men on the revision committee and the authors they admired. In the end, based on what I now know, I would rewrite the RV preface to explain the purpose of the transliteration *sheol* as below (tongue-in-cheek, but quite accurate, I believe):

The Revisers and most competent scholars do not agree with the traditionalists, that the Hebrew *sheol*, which corresponds to the Greek *hades*, indicates a place of retribution and suffering where the wicked go. The place of torment is represented by the term *Gehenna* in the New Testament, and it refers to the place or state to which the devil and evil angels will be consigned after the judgement. *Gehenna* is separate from, or a separate part of, *sheol* (*hades*). There is some uncertainty about whether *Gehenna* has yet been created, or if reprobate men will also go there, or if it is a purgative fire, or even if it is literal or figurative. However, the Revisers agree that the Old Testament said little, if anything, about this place.

The Hebrew *sheol* signifies the place below the earth where the departed spirits of the deceased go. Some of the most competent scholars believe that all persons, including the OT saints, are in *sheol*, and that biblical references to heaven are purely figurative. Others, however, believe heaven is real, and that the deceased saints are in heaven now, later to be joined by virtuous souls from *sheol*. Since there was no consensus, the Revisers accommodated diverse views by defining *sheol* ambiguously as "the abode of the dead." (see Ge. 37:35). Thus they avoided clearly describing it as an interim or permanent abode, and also did not clarify whether it is the abode of *all* the dead or only the unsaved. The Revisers are confident that this obscurity will avoid needless division in the Church. However, they acknowledge that the use of the definite article

suggests the dead are not in any other abode, heavenly or otherwise, and the marginal notes upon the historical narratives indicate that all souls, including the patriarch Jacob and King David, are in *sheol* (*hades*). In this regard, they are grateful to their esteemed colleague and member of the American revision committee, Joseph H. Thayer, for his forbearance. They note that, in his *Lexicon of the New Testament*, Dr. Thayer declares the contrary view; namely, that the OT saints are already in heaven.

In order, therefore, to disassociate *sheol* and *hades* from the concept of hell, the Revisers transliterated these words as “Sheol” and “Hades.” This alteration of the language helped clear the term “hell” out of the Bible, and enabled the Revisers to develop a new meaning upon the new words. They have contented themselves with leaving the translation “hell” in the OT prophetic books and in the NT to translate *Gehenna*.

Thus a corrected preface. The charts below show that the RV revisers reduced the mention of “hell” by about 50% in both the Old and New Testaments. Since then, certain modern translators, who apparently accept that the Hebrew Scriptures did not teach about eternal retribution, have taken the removal to 100% in the Old Testament. The numbers tell the story:

Use of “hell” or “Sheol” in the Old Testament		
Bible version	Hell	Sheol
MB	50	0
GNV	21	0
KJV	31	0
RV	15	15
NKJV	19	13
NIV	0	0*
ESV	0	31
* Used “grave,” etc. See chart p.28.		

Use of “hell” or “Hades” in the New Testament		
Bible version	Hell	Hades
MB	23	0
GNV	21	0
KJV	23	0
RV	13	10
NKJV	16	11
NIV	13	8
ESV	14	9

### *New notes to re-define “sheol”*

So then, the first step in Hort’s quiet process was to introduce the new transliterations. The next step was to add a series of marginal notes, which appear merely philological, to develop the desired new meaning on the new words. It proceeded thus: hell = Sheol = the grave = the abode of the dead. The notes cross-referenced as follows:

- Hell = Sheol                      Everywhere “hell” was kept in the RV (which was only in the prophets) there was a note: “Heb. *Sheol*.”
- Sheol = the grave                Often, where the transliteration “Sheol” was used, the RV had a note: “Or, *the grave*.”
- Grave = the abode of the dead    Often, where the translation “grave” was used, the RV had a note: “Heb. *Sheol*.” Sometimes the note referred the reader to Genesis 37:35, where the note gave the meaning “the abode of the dead” (see below).

Thus the (semantically tortured) notes all lead to the definition of *sheol* as “the abode of the dead.” This word “abode” is not benign, but is key to the re-definition. An “abode” is simply a dwelling place, with no suggestion of fire, pain, or the usual associations with hell. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines it as “a place of ordinary residence.”<sup>19</sup> The RV introduced the new definition at the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 37. Here the patriarch Jacob had just been told of the apparent death of his son Joseph:

**Genesis 37:35**

**MB** He would not be comforted, but said, I will *go down into the grave* unto my son mourning.

**RV** He refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will *go down to \*the grave* to my son mourning.

**\*RV note:** Heb. *Sheol*, the name of the abode of the dead, answering to the Greek Hades, Acts 2:27.

It is enormously significant that the meaning of the RV note is that the patriarch Jacob did not expect to go to heaven when he died, but to join Joseph in a dwelling place beneath the earth, an abode called “the grave,” but which is really the place “Sheol.” Needless to say, this is contrary to the traditional understanding. Rogers explained in a note on Genesis 42 that the expression “go down to the grave” was used figuratively. It meant that Jacob would join his son *in death: sheol* as ‘the grave’ was a figure of death in a generic sense. In Genesis 42, Jacob did not want his son Benjamin to go down to Egypt with his brothers because he feared some calamity along the way, and he used the same expression again:

**Genesis 42:38**

**MB** Some misfortune might happen upon him by the way which ye go. And *\*so should ye bring my gray head with sorrow unto the grave.*

**\*MB note:** Bring me to my grave: that is, ye shall bring me to my death, as in Isaiah 38.

**RV** If mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye *bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to \*the grave.*

**\*RV note:** Heb. *Sheol*. See ch. 37:35.

The RV thus re-interpreted the figurative sense of *sheol*.

This leads to another problem in that version: *sheol* and *hades* were capitalized. So was “Abaddon,” which means “destruction.” The problem is that (in English) capitalization indicates a proper noun. It limits the meaning to a proper sense, and makes figurative and common senses difficult to derive, as will be seen later. No one would write, “The marriage was Hell,” but that is effectively the result when *sheol* is capitalized. Capitalization would be wrong in “The armies left Destruction in their wake.” One wonders, who is Destruction? Capitalization broke orthographic convention, made it difficult or impossible to understand the full meanings of the words, and turned *sheol*/a grave/pit/hell into Sheol/the abode.

***Individual efforts of an indirect kind: New and scholarly reference texts***

Another important step in Hort’s quiet process was the publication of biblical reference texts – grammars, lexicons, and study guides for popular and academic use – which redefined *sheol* and *hades*. These were powerful “indirect influences.” Two of the most effective, considering their popular reach, have been *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* by James Strong, and *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* by Joseph H. Thayer.



The plot thickens when we learn that both men were part of the RV revision team. Strong was invited by Philip Schaff to join the American revision committee, and he assisted also with the English edition of the RV. Thayer sat on the American committee.

### *Strong's Concordance*

Strong published his Concordance in 1890, concurrent with the final preparation of the RV. In his Hebrew and Greek lexicons, he indicated that *sheol* and *hades* are names for one and the same place, and there is no hint that it might be a place of suffering:

**Strong, Hebrew *sheol* (#7585):** *hades* or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean *retreat*), includ. its accessories and inmates.

**Strong, Greek *hades* (#86):** the place (state) of departed souls.

When I first realized what Strong had written, I was perplexed. Sheol and Hades are a *retreat*? The "inmates" are in a *retreat*? Words matter, so again I checked the OED, wondering if "retreat" had perhaps changed meaning since the 19th century. It has not. The only possible meanings in this context are and always have been, since the 1400s:

**OED, definition of *retreat*, Entry#4:** (a) A place providing shelter or security; a refuge. (b) A place providing privacy or seclusion for the purposes of prayer, study, or meditation, or for rest and relaxation; a quiet or secluded dwelling or residence. (d) A hiding place.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, a "retreat" has always been a safe and even restful place – an abode to which Jacob could happily descend, perhaps even to sup with the Pharisees. It is nothing at all like Wermullerus described *sheol*. In Strong's Concordance only the Greek *Gehenna*, which was used in the New Testament, is defined as the place of retribution:

**Strong, Greek *Gehenna* (#1067):** a valley of Jerusalem, used (fig.) as a name for the place (or state) of eternal punishment.

Thus Strong's definitions create a distinction between Sheol/Hades and Gehenna, making them two separate places. They also indicate that only the New Testament spoke expressly about hell, the place of eternal retribution. I then checked Strong's entries under "heaven," and discovered to my surprise that his definitions indicate also that only the New Testament spoke of heaven as "the abode of God" – and apparently God alone, since there is no mention of departed spirits:

**Strong, Hebrew/Chaldee *shamayim, shamayin* (#8064, 8065):** The *sky* (as *aloft*; the dual perh. alluding to the visible arch in which the clouds move, as well as to the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve).

**Strong, Greek *ooranos* (#3772):** The *sky*, by extens. *heaven* (as the abode of God); by impl. *Happiness, power, eternity*; spec. the Gospel (Christianity).

How could the Hebrew lexicon omit any reference to heaven as the abode of God? It seems this could only have been an oversight, but how could such an oversight occur in so foundational a matter? And how then was it not overlooked in the Greek lexicon? In any case, Strong created several false impressions: (1) that just as the OT did not teach about hell, neither did it teach about heaven; (2) that there are two places beneath the earth where the dead go, one friendly and one a place of punishment; (3) that no one is in heaven in the interim state, but all are below in the abode called Sheol. The end result is that the traditional distinction between heaven and hell is destroyed, and there is a great deal of uncertainty concerning other questions.

### *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*

Joseph Thayer authored his Lexicon in 1885, with a corrected edition in 1889, also during the time of preparation of the RV. The publisher's introduction to the 4th edition of Thayer's lexicon cautions the reader that "Thayer was a Unitarian.... The reader should be alert for both subtle and blatant denials of such doctrines as the Trinity [...and] the eternal punishment of the wicked." No doubt Thayer was a welcome voice on the RV revision committee.

Thayer's entries in his lexicon were often long, much more in the nature of a theological discourse than a definition. But perhaps this is to some extent inescapable when it comes to defining biblical terms - which highlights the risk to students who rely on the reference works of unbelievers. Thayer's definition of *hades* differed from Strong's. He described it as a "dark and dismal place in the very depths of the earth." He wrote that *hades* is "the common receptacle of disembodied spirits" (#86), but, in his definition of *ooranos*/heaven, opined that the Old Testament saints and Christians go to heaven after death, and will apparently later be joined by the virtuous dead, who will be raised from Hades, as explained in the quotation below. Thayer divided heaven into "several distinct heavens," but would not say who dwelt where in these various heavens:

**Thayer on heaven (*ooranos*, #3772):** Several distinct heavens are spoken of also in Eph. iv.10; cf. Heb. vii.26, if it be not preferable here to understand the numerous regions or parts of the one and the same heaven where God dwells as referred to. The highest heaven is *the dwelling-place of God*.... Into heaven have already been received the souls both of the OT saints and of departed Christians, Heb. xii.23, and heaven is appointed as the future abode of those who, raised from the dead and clothed with superior bodies, shall become partakers of the heavenly kingdom, 2Co. v.1, and enjoy the reward of proved virtue, Mt. v.12; Lk. vi.23. (Emphasis original)

Concerning questions about the existence and locality of *hades*, Thayer referred readers to a book by the 19th century author Edward Greswell. I consulted Greswell's book, and found that he cautioned his readers not to approach the doctrine of eternal retribution with "prejudices." He taught that Hades is (or would be, it was not clear to me) divided in two parts: one for the good, and *Gehenna* for the devil and the reprobate.<sup>21</sup> Greswell also asserted that the Psalmist David was in Hades.<sup>22</sup> However, since this contradicts Thayer himself, one wonders why Thayer referred the reader to him.

It is all quite contradictory and confusing, but in the end, it tends to the same thing: to re-define *sheol* and *hades*, undermine traditional doctrine, and leave the reader in a fog.

### *Girdlestone: Synonyms of the Old Testament and Modern Ideas*

In 1871, the Hebrew scholar Robert B. Girdlestone published *Girdlestone's Synonyms of the Old Testament*.<sup>23</sup> A second edition followed in 1897. In his discussion of *sheol*, Girdlestone wrote, "Not in one single passage is [*sheol*] used in the sense of the place of punishment after the resurrection, concerning which little, if anything, is definitely revealed in the OT." (308) He said verses that had been traditionally linked with hell, which describe misery, suffering, and destruction, have to do only "with ordinary history, without at all referring to the destiny of the individual in any state of existence beyond this world." (298) In his subtly worded introduction, he said, without actually saying so, that the "verdict" of the Scriptures concerning man's destiny after death is "smooth things," and this even despite "passages in the NT that point in another direction." (295) This, of course, is the Larger Hope.

Girdlestone was the head of the translation department of the British and Foreign Bible Society from 1877-1889. In 1887, only two years after the publication of the RV Old Testament, he published a small book entitled *How to Study the English Bible*.<sup>24</sup> In it he quickly passed over the history of previous translations of the Bible and concluded:

Various attempts have been made to revise the Translation [i.e. the 1611 KJV] in later times, but none need be referred to here except the Revised Bible, which was issued in 1885. This Bible was prepared by companies of learned men of various Protestant denominations, and is of very great value, not only as a book of reference when we wish to know the literal meaning of the words of Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, but also for enabling the English reader to get a much clearer idea of the meaning of such books as Job in the Old Testament, and the Epistles in the New. (11)

Girdlestone closed chapter VI of his little book, which ostensibly dealt with doctrine, with the unorthodox admonition that when we read the Bible, "We must distinguish between the fate of the devil and the destiny of those whom he deceives." (96) Also, in his chapter on Christian doctrine, Girdlestone advised people to study ancient and heathen religions as part of their Christian education. (107) Pagan literature, regardless of the fact that it was demonically inspired, was a popular study among higher critics of the 19th century, who believed it might help them understand some of the concepts and semantics of the Bible.

Girdlestone also wrote a book entitled *Old Testament Theology and Modern Ideas*.<sup>25</sup> The title alone is a red flag, and the book confirms Girdlestone's unorthodoxy. He wrote:

There is evidently hope, even for the most desperately wicked of natures ... We are sure that they will justify God in the day of visitation (Ps li,4), but we do not clearly see how. It is impossible to conceive that the patriarchs imagined men to be like the beasts that perish. They must have shared, to say the least, the current beliefs of Chaldea and Egypt in their time. The prophets taught that Death and Sheol were to be done away with (see Hos. xiii,14).... The Old Testament did not declare the whole truth.... As a system of theology, it is incomplete. (84-85)

This is an unbelieving soup of progressive revelation, universalism, higher criticism, and heathenism: imagine thinking that the patriarchs, chosen out of the world, shared the beliefs of the world. Girdlestone does not present Christ as the Messianic hope, but asserts that faith must be in "the known attributes of God," in his love and mercy- the pagan approach to God without Christ. He also asserts that there will be restitution for Sodom and Gomorrah. (86) This proves him a universalist and false teacher, whose work cannot be trusted.

### ***Gesenius: Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon and "shades of the dead"***

H.W.F. Gesenius (1786-1842) was an influential German scholar and one of the early lights of higher criticism. He wrote *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*. The editor of his English edition warns the reader of Gesenius's "neologian" tendencies; that is, his novel and rationalistic views. Gesenius approached Hebrew by studying its historical development through the Semitic languages of heathen peoples. He did not ask, "What did the Hebrew say?" but, rather, "What might we understand from the etymology of the word, and from how other nations and religious groups used related words?" Like Girdlestone, he treated God's word as a natural book with shared heathen roots.

Gesenius's entry for *sheol* accords with the RV definition, though, like Thayer, he did not go as far as Strong, to portray *sheol* as a retreat. He described it as "a subterranean place, full of thick darkness, in which the shades of the dead are gathered together" - whatever "shades

of the dead” might be. In an explanatory note, Gesenius restricted the meaning “hell” to Syriac and Ethiopian usage, thus denying this meaning to the Hebrew. In a further note, he added that he had been impressed by an etymological study of the German words *holle*, *hohle*, and *hohl* (hell, cave, and hollow), and the German etymology led him to deduce that the Hebrew *sheol* meant no more than “a hollow and subterranean place.” The fanciful and speculative nature of this ought to be obvious. In any case, Gesenius’s work has been widely received, and informs modern Hebrew studies. I saw his influence in the RV, in a marginal note that referred to “shades of the dead.”

***Two schools of thought. The biblical evidence supports the traditional school.***

Therefore, since the opening of the 20th century there have been two prominent schools of thought. One is the traditional school, which agrees more or less with Wermullerus. The other, the modern school, holds that *sheol* and *hades* do not denote the place of eternal punishment, and that the OT taught little if anything about it. I have read modern commentators who say David and the prophets did not understand about hell (or heaven). But not only modern transliterations and lexicons contribute to this view, so also do unclear translations of related biblical passages. Eternal retribution is inextricably tied in with the final judgement, so when verses concerning the judgement are obscured, it adds to the impression that the OT revealed little about these important things. The Geneva Bible is responsible for initially obscuring some such passages, of which the Ecclesiastes verse below is only one example. Since the GNV, it has never been clearly translated:

**Ecclesiastes 3:17**

**MB** God shall separate the righteous from the ungodly, and then shall be the time and judgement of all counsels and works.

**GNV** God will judge the just and the wicked: for time is there for every purpose and for every work.

**KJV, RV** God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

**NIV** God will bring into judgement both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.

The NIV appears to refer to several judgements and equates them with activities.

However, the prophets spoke clearly about the judgement, as in Job and Daniel below. Daniel 12:2 is still intact in most modern versions:

**Job 19:29, MB** But beware of the sword, for the sword will be avenged of wickedness; and be sure, that there is a judgement.

**Daniel 12:2, MB** Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some to the everlasting life, some to perpetual shame and reproof.

Further, the witness of the New Testament itself supports the traditional school. It is clear from the Gospels that teachings about the general resurrection, judgement, and hell, were known to the first century Jews. They could only have learned these things from the OT. Some of the Jews denied the doctrines; some believed; but all were aware. The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection and the afterlife, tried to trap Jesus with their question about the seven brothers who married one woman, but Jesus told them they did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God (M’t 22:23-32). Martha, the sister of Lazarus, was wiser

than the Sadducees; she believed her brother would rise again in the resurrection at the last day (Joh. 11:24). Further, when Jesus preached to the Jews, he spoke concerning hell and the judgement in terms that made it clear he assumed the people knew what he was talking about:

**Matthew 12:42** The queen of the south will rise at the day of judgement with this generation and will condemn them, for she came from the furthest parts of the world to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, one greater than Solomon is here.

**Mark 9:45-46** If your foot causes you to offend, cut it off. For it is better for you to go lame into life than, having two feet, to be cast into hell, into fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm dies not and the fire never goes out.

In Acts 24, the apostle Paul confirmed the widespread expectation of the Jews about the coming resurrection and judgement. Even non-believing Jews expected this judgement. The New Testament had not yet been written, and it is beyond question that the expectation of the Jews arose from Old Testament teaching. This must have included teaching about *sheol*. Paul's whole point was that the Jews expected the same resurrection and judgement that he did. Here is what he said, when the Jews accused him before Felix:

**Acts 24:14-15** This I confess to you: that in accordance with the Way, which they call heresy, so do I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and the prophets. And I have hope in God, that the same resurrection of the dead that they themselves look for also will come, both of the just and the unjust.

In Acts 24:25, we learn that when Paul spoke to Felix about the coming judgement, the ruler "trembled." It was not the *sheol* of the RV Old Testament, Jacob's abode, that made him tremble. Only the *sheol* of hell could have done that. The RV re-definition was wrong.

### *The re-definition of "sheol" undermines the gospel*

The Scripture represents hell by different words (more on this in part 3). The RV revisers seized on this to say that there are *two* places below the earth, one an "abode" and the other a *Gehenna*. In addition to heaven, this makes three possible places, depending who you believe, where the spirits of the departed may go. However, the gospel limits man's destiny to two places: hell below without God, or heaven above with God. There is no third option. Hell is where man by nature goes, unless saved. Salvation is by Christ alone, through believing the gospel, which opens the way to heaven:

**2 Thessalonians 1:6-10** It is surely a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus shows himself from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to those who do not know God, and to those who will not heed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting damnation, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he comes to be glorified in his saints and to be made marvelous in all who believe.

To add a second place outside of heaven where departed spirits may go, a place other than hell, suggests there is another criterion besides faith and believing on Christ that determines our destiny. It struck me that this is a subtle denial of the Trinity. Believing *on* the Son of God means being *in* him, and *through* him entering into eternal life in the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For our life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 1:3), by whom we are made one with the Father, as Jesus did testify:

**Excerpts from John 17, NMB** These words Jesus spoke, and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come. Glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you. For you have given him power over all flesh, so that he may give eternal life to as many as you have given him. This is life eternal: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent..

I have declared your name to the men that you gave me out of the world.... I pray not for them alone, but also for those who will believe on me through their preaching: that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they may also be one in us.

This oneness with God is salvation, and it is found only in Christ, by whom we become partakers of the divine nature (2Pe. 1:4) by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we are not found in the oneness of the Trinity, we are lost. There is no place outside the Son to escape this fate. Granted there must be degrees of suffering in hell below, but that does not make two places of it, any more than it makes three, four, or five places of it.

It is a great mystery, but the only doctrine that makes consistent sense of the teaching of the Bible is the traditional doctrine of heaven and hell. Either we are saved, or we are lost. Either we know God through Christ, or we do not. Again, either we are dead in Adam, or alive with Christ (Ro. 5:17-18). In Adam all die, but in Christ, all are made alive (1Co. 15:22). Through the gospel God calls the sheep unto him, who then live with him through Christ. To be called unto him means that we will be with him. To be with him is to belong in heaven. Not be with him is to belong in hell. Thus there is heaven, and there is hell. Period.

The RV revisers said they would "introduce as few alterations as possible" into the biblical text, but this was deceptive. They said they would limit their alterations to the language of the KJV, but where it was of foundational importance, as with "hell," they did not. In their explanation for the alteration to "Sheol," they did not openly deny eternal retribution, but neither did they clearly affirm it. This omission must be construed against them. With everything else we have seen, it is evident that they considered the traditional doctrine of eternal retribution to be one of the "errors and prejudices" that should be quietly eliminated from the Scriptures, and they laboured diligently to that end.

## PART 3

### **The treatment of *sheol* in the 1537 Matthew Bible. Comparing the Geneva Bible, Revised Version, and modern Bibles. The problems with the modern translations.**

*Notes to reader:*

1. Quotations from the Geneva Bible are from my modern-spelling Tolle Lege version of the 1599 Geneva Bible, © 2006-2007. The RV quotations are from my 1895 original edition. Quotations from other Bible versions were taken from BibleGateway.com from 2019-2020. I also used BibleGateway to compile my charts. All the foregoing are used for review and comment only. Matthew Bible quotations are from my facsimile of the 1537 edition, sometimes cross-checked with my original 1549 edition.

2. When comparing translations, I do not comment on them as translations per se, but consider their meaning and import. I am not qualified to discuss questions of Hebrew or Greek, and in any case, source language grammatical and interpretive arguments are inconclusive, as the very different translations reveal. Also, for the reasons we have seen, it will not help to refer to modern Hebrew or Greek texts. Further, the faith, calling, and doctrine of a translator are just as important as linguistic expertise. It is sufficient to compare translations and make a judgement informed by an understanding of other relevant factors, of which there are many.

As discussed, until modern times *sheol* was often translated “hell” in English Bibles, as well as “pit” and “grave.” It was the only Hebrew word translated “hell,” but other Hebrew words, such as *bore*, are also important: used in certain contexts, they round out the picture of *sheol* as ‘hell.’ In one sense, *bore* means a dungeon or pit in the earth where prisoners are held. In this use, it was sometimes a synonym for hell. For reasons best known to themselves – probably because it was not necessary to make “hell” disappear – the RV revisers did not transliterate *bore*. Historically *bore* has been translated “pit” and “grave,” and I also found “the deep” in the MB. The Hebrew word *shakhath* was also translated “pit,” as well as “destruction,” “corruption,” etc. *Shakhath* and words that indicated destruction or misery were sometimes used to flesh out a depiction of hell and the pit, as in Psalm 55:23 (“The pit of destruction,” Heb. *bore* and *shakhath*), and Proverbs 15:11 (“Hell and her pain are before the Lord,” Heb. *sheol* and *abaddon*). In the New Testament, *Gehenna*, a powerful figure of evil and suffering, and *tartaroo*, indicating casting into a dungeon, are used as well as *hades* with reference to hell.

I went through the Old Testament in the Matthew Bible and reviewed every use of *sheol*, the word on which so much depends. Rogers added several explanatory notes throughout, from which two things emerge. First, *sheol* had a variety of meanings, and second, the abode of all departed spirits is not one of them. Jacob is not in *sheol*. However, Rogers’ notes explain that *sheol* was indeed used generically at times in the Old Testament; that is, with reference to all people, not just with reference to the wicked or to the place of eternal torment. The failure to distinguish generic from particular uses appears to have misled the RV revisers; or, at least, it provided occasion for them to improperly define the word. Depending on the context, according to Rogers’ notes in the Matthew Bible, *sheol* might mean:

1. The place of torment beneath the earth, where the unjust go after they die. This particular sense was well understood in 1537, as it is now, though often disbelieved.
2. Figuratively, the evils and afflictions of hell or the power of the devil. In expressions like “the sorrows of hell,” it may refer to the afflictions of hell beneath, or generically to hellish afflictions that are suffered in this life by both the just and the unjust. For until the Lord returns, the devil still has power on earth (under God).
3. In a broad, generic sense, *sheol* means the grave or pit where the bodies of all people go when they die. This may include the ocean deep, which is the grave of sailors lost at sea. Figuratively in this sense, *sheol* indicates the common death, through which all people must pass, and the condition or estate of death.

Uses in the first sense hardly required an explanation. Rogers did clarify who is in hell:

**Psalm 6:5**

**MB** In death no man remembereth thee; O who will give thee thanks *in the hell*?

**\*MB note:** They be in death and in hell who dispraise and blaspheme God, as it is said Psalm .cxv.

You will not find a single note to this effect in the Revised Version of the Bible. Later we will see how other Bibles have handled this verse.

Rogers’ main concern was to explain the generic and figurative uses of *sheol* in the OT, which are potentially the greatest source of confusion. In the Psalm below, Rogers explained the second sense of *sheol* carefully, so people would not think David feared going to hell:

**Psalm 18:4-5**

**MB** The sorrows of death compassed me, and the brooks of ungodliness made me afraid. The *pains of hell* came about me; the snares of death took hold upon me.

**\*MB note:** By the sorrows of death and brooks of ungodliness (by which is meant the obstinate multitude of the wicked and ungodly), the *pains of hell*, and the snares of death, are signified the jeopardous and terrible fears which, by the wickedness of his enemies, happened to him, and brought him very often even to death’s door, so that by the judgement of the flesh he thought himself utterly cast away.

As to the third sense of *sheol*, Rogers explained in a note on Jonah 2:2, “The Scripture speaketh of hell [*sheol*] commonly as of a place common for all them that go down into the earth, as into a grave or into the deep of the sea, etc., as ye have in Genesis and in the Psalms.” This was the sense in the Genesis passages where Jacob spoke of “going to the grave.” Another use is in Psalm 30 below; however, Coverdale translated “hell” here, and since this might lead readers to think that King David feared going to the place of the wicked, Rogers clarified the generic sense:

**Psalm 30:2-3**

**MB** O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. Thou Lord hast *brought my soul out of \*hell*; thou hast kept my life, whereas they go down to the pit.

**\*MB note:** Here it is manifest that hell is taken for the estate of the dead, as well of the good as of the evil, as it is said in Genesis 37:35.

In Psalm 30, the GNV and KJV revised to “grave.” In my view this was an appropriate revision, because it better suggests that David was referring to the common death. However, there were places where the context indicated hell itself, and in those places it was misleading to substitute “grave,” as we shall now see.



### *Misleading translations in the GNV as well as the RV*

The charts on page 15 showed that, in the Old Testament, the RV had 70% fewer mentions of “hell” than the MB, but also that the 1599 GNV had 58% fewer mentions. Both versions reduced mention by over half. As discussed, the RV revisers often substituted “grave” or “Sheol” for “hell,” and then changed the meaning to the abode of departed spirits. However, the puritan scholars in Geneva also substituted “grave” for “hell,” and then changed the meaning in their own way. Their meaning, which we will have a closer look at in this part, was the common death and corruption of the body. This was an effective re-definition that also suppressed the teaching of hell. Further, their new focus suggested the common death, not hell, is man’s chief danger. A glaring example is in the book of Job:

#### **Job 26:6**

**MB** All *they which dwell beneath in the hell* are not hid from him, and the very destruction itself cannot be kept out of his sight.

**GNV** *The grave is* <sup>1</sup>*naked* before him, and there is no covering for <sup>2</sup>*destruction*.

**\*GNV note 1:** There is nothing hid in the bottom of the earth but he seeth it.

**\*GNV note 2:** Meaning, the grave wherein things putrify.

**KJV** *Hell is naked* before him, and destruction hath no covering.

**RV** <sup>1</sup>*Sheol is naked* before him, and Abaddon hath no covering.

**\*RV note 1:** Or, *The grave*.

In Coverdale’s translation it is clear that hell is a real place with dwellers, or inhabitants. However, the change to “grave” in the GNV changed the imagery and the meaning.<sup>26</sup> Note 2 then limited the application of the verse to “things” (not spirits) that “putrify” (that is, which produce a foul smell when they rot). This ignores hell and the soul. Note 1 also referred to things (“nothing”). The GNV thus made it impossible to understand this verse as a literal reference to *sheol*/hell as a real place with real inhabitants.

In Proverb 15:11, the GNV was first again to defeat a clear and simple teaching of *sheol* as ‘hell.’ The translation “hell” was kept, but the notes present it as a metaphor – as if hell is not a real place, but just a figure or metaphor of the Lord’s all-seeing eye:

#### **Proverbs 15:11**

**MB** The hell with her pain is known unto the Lord; how much more then the hearts of men?

**GNV** <sup>1</sup>Hell and destruction are before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the sons of men?

**\*GNV note 1:** There is nothing so deep or secret that can be hid from the eyes of God, much less man’s thoughts.

**RV** <sup>1</sup>Sheol and <sup>2</sup>Abaddon are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men!

**\*RV note 1:** Or, *The grave*.

**\*RV note 2:** Or, *Destruction*.

The GNV note on Proverbs 15:11 is false, even though what it says is true. It is false because it wrongly changed the meaning. If hell is a real place, this verse needed no note. It simply meant what it says: hell and its suffering are known to the Lord. But the GNV taught that the

verse means that *everything* is known to the Lord. This makes a metaphor out of hell, which implicitly denies its reality. The RV also denied hell by referring to “Sheol” and “the grave.” In Psalm 49 below, King David was rejoicing in his soul’s deliverance from hell. However, the GNV revision to “grave” wrongly suggests that David was referring to deliverance from the bodily death. Certainly there is a time and place for that rejoicing (see Isaiah 38 on the next page); however, here again it is wrong, because the context is the soul and eternal salvation. Rogers gave the context in his chapter summary:

**Psalm 49:15**

**Chapter summary, MB:** The misery and madness of them that set by riches, who receive their felicity in this world, and shall after continually remain in hell: whereas the virtuous shall have everlasting joy.

**MB** God shall deliver my soul from the \*power of hell, when he receiveth me.

\***MB note:** That is, from perdition and eternal damnation.

**GNV** God shall deliver my soul from the power of the grave, \*for he will receive me.

\***GNV note:** Or, because he hath received me.

**RV** God will redeem my soul from the \*power of Sheol.

\***RV note:** Heb. *hand*.

The Matthew Bible presents hell as a danger to man’s soul, but the GNV presents the grave as a danger to the soul. It might be argued that this use was figurative, but there was no need for a figure here, much less a figure of the common, bodily death. Further, the GNV suggests David would be delivered from the grave. He would not, and the apostles emphasized in their preaching that he died and was buried in a grave (Ac. 2:29, 13:36).

In the next example the GNV and RV both kept “hell,” but used their notes to divert the focus to the grave:

**Isaiah 5:14**

**MB** Therefore gapeth hell, and openeth her mouth marvelous wide, that pride, boasting, and wisdom, with such as rejoice therein, may descend into it.

**GNV** Therefore <sup>1</sup>hell hath enlarged itself, and hath opened his mouth without measure, and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth among them, shall descend into it.

\***GNV note 1:** Meaning, the grave shall swallow up them that shall die for hunger and thirst, and yet for all this great destruction it shall ever [*sic*] be satiate.

**RV** Therefore <sup>1</sup>hell hath enlarged her desire, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their <sup>2</sup>pomp, and he that rejoiceth among them, descend into it.

\***RV note 1:** Or, *the grave* Heb. *Sheol*. See Gen. xxxvii.35.

\***RV note 2:** Or, *tumult*.

After deflecting focus to the grave, the GNV note speaks of bodily death from hunger and thirst, ignoring the soul’s eternal punishment for pride, etc. Though prior verses indeed referred to hunger and thirst, the GNV note defeated the true meaning of this verse by suggesting it referred only to the physical death. The RV re-definition is also troublesome: *sheol*/hell/the grave is revealed as an undesirable place where the wicked go, but if it is where the patriarch Jacob is, then it appears that he dwells with the pompous multitude. The RV notes do nothing to resolve the dilemma.

The new meanings in the GNV and RV were too persistent, and too similar in consequence, to be inadvertent or coincidental. Both versions suppressed the truth of the existence and reality of hell. This strongly indicates that the same spirit guided them both. Other inappropriate revisions in the GNV included Psalm 16:10, where the translation was changed from “Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell” to “Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave.” Again, it is confusing to suggest that souls go to the grave. In Psalm 55:15, an imprecation against the wicked was changed from “Let them go down quick into hell” to “Let them go down quick into the grave,” as if their destiny and punishment is the physical death. The King James Version restored “hell” in these places, but many moderns have substituted “grave,” as the GNV had, or “realm of the dead,” which is the core definition of the RV. Does this not indicate that the same spirit has also guided the modern revisions, even if the translators are unaware? Step by subtle step, and with increasing boldness, hell has been removed from the Old Testament.

### *The denial of hell is no new thing*

In a note on Isaiah, Rogers made a pertinent argument about the suppression of the doctrine of hell in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 38, the righteous King Hezekiah, who had been sick but was miraculously healed, said he had feared “the gates of hell [*sheol*].” Rogers explained that he meant this in the generic sense: the king had feared an untimely death. Rogers also added a complaint against certain heretics who denied that hell even existed in the Old Testament age:

#### **Isaiah 38:10 in the Matthew Bible**

I thought I should have *\*gone to the gates of hell* in my best age, and have wanted [been deprived of] the residue of my years.

**\*MB note:** That is, I thought I should have gone to my grave and died in my best age, etc. The Hebrew word [*sheol*] signifieth both hell and a grove, pit, or ditch. Ye may perceive this in Genesis 42:38, where Jacob saith that if any misfortune should happen to Benjamin in his journey into Egypt with his other brethren, his grey head would be brought with sorrow unto his grave. Here the common translation readeth “hell” for “grave.” As for Hezekiah, he neither feared hell nor purgatory, as ye may well see in that a little before he saith, “Remember O Lord that I have walked before thee in truth and a steadfast heart, and have done the thing that is pleasant to thee.” Which thing, whosoever doeth it need not to fear any of those two places. Besides that, the Duns men and sophisters themselves, who were (as most learned men think) the inventors and devisers, yea and the very makers of purgatory, say that before the time of Christ’s coming there was no such place. Therefore, Hezekiah is by their judgement free and quit of that place. And the word of God doth acquit him of hell, which saith there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8 A.<sup>27</sup>

Thus there was no chance that the righteous king would descend to pass endless days with the pompous multitude.

Rogers’ reference to Duns men and sophisters needs an explanation. These were Roman Catholic scholastics who, with their subtle philosophical disputations, destroyed the simplicity of the faith and devised many heresies. The early English Reformers rejected their teaching. Since many scholastics were followers of a medieval Scottish priest named John Duns, the term “Duns men” arose. (It was often written “dunce men” in English Reformation writings, whence the unflattering term “dunce.”) The Duns men, like the RV men and higher

critics, denied that the concept of hell belonged in the Old Testament. Further, some shared a sympathy for the doctrine of purgatory. The same old heresies just keep resurfacing to plague Christendom!

***“Hell” in the Old Testament: From 1537 to the present***

For an overview of what has happened to the translation of *sheol* over the centuries, I tracked all 31 instances in the Old Testament where, according to Strong’s Concordance, the KJV translated *sheol* as “hell,” and then checked to see what other Bibles have done. The chart below shows that the transliteration “Sheol” has been adopted by several modern main-stream versions. (Note, the numbers do not match up with the chart on page 15 because they deal with different data):

<b>Comparing translations of <i>sheol</i> in Bible versions. Limited to verses where the KJV translated <i>sheol</i> by “hell.”</b>						
<b>Bible version</b>	<b>Hell</b>	<b>Grave</b>	<b>Pit</b>	<b>Sheol</b>	<b>Place/realm world of dead</b>	<b>Other *</b>
MB	30		1			
GNV	20	11				
KJV	31					
RV	13		3	15		
NKJV	17			13		1
LB	15	1		1	1	13
NIV	0	5			17	9
NASB	0			31		
CJB	0			30		1
NLT	0	19			5	7
ESV	0			31		
* Other translations include “death,” “the dead,” “the depths,” “underworld,” “netherworld,” and “devil.”						

Thus many modern Old Testaments do not mention “hell” at all, including the ESV, which has been adopted by many Churches. Along with the influence of modern reference texts, it is no wonder people today do not believe the OT taught anything about hell – the very situation Rogers decried in his note on the Duns men. The NIV generally preferred “realm of the dead” to translate *sheol*, but since this is the RV re-definition, it appears that Hort’s quiet process has come to full fruition in that version.

Following is a comparison of three verses from each of the Old and New Testaments, showing their translation since the Reformation. These examples reveal tendencies that we have already seen in the GNV: they either made a metaphor of that which the MB made literal,<sup>28</sup> or they changed the metaphor. An example of the latter is in Psalm 86:13 below.

Here Rogers explained the figurative sense of *sheol*, so that it would not appear that David was in danger of the hell beneath. The GNV also gave a figurative sense, but again the grave is a different metaphor, and the teaching differs:

**Psalm 86:13**

**MB** For great is thy mercy toward me; thou hast delivered my soul from *the nethermost hell*.

**\*MB note:** That is, out of extreme jeopardies.

**GNV** For great is thy mercy toward me, and thou hast delivered my soul from *the lowest grave*.

**\*GNV note:** That is, from most great danger of death: out of the which none but only the almighty hand of God could deliver him.

**KJV** For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from *the lowest hell*.

**RV** For great is thy mercy toward me; And thou hast delivered my soul from *the lowest pit*.

**\*RV note:** Or, *Sheol beneath*.

**NIV** For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me *from the depths, from the realm of the dead*.

**ESV** For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the *depths of Sheol*.

The RV note is again troublesome, because Sheol/the pit is presented as the last place David would want to be, yet previous notes indicate that Jacob is there. In the ESV, the capitalization of "Sheol" destroys any possibility of deriving a figurative sense.

In Psalm 6:5 below, the Matthew Bible brought clarity to the translation of *sheol*, so that the faithful need not be confused by the idea that after death they will not praise God:

**Psalm 6:5**

**MB** In death no man remembereth thee; O who will give thee thanks *in the hell?*

**\*MB note:** They be in death and in hell who dispraise and blaspheme God, as it is said Psalm .cxv.

**GNV** In death there is no remembrance of thee: *in the grave*, who shall praise thee?

**\*GNV note:** He lamenteth that occasion should be taken from him to praise God in the congregation.

**KJV** In death there is no remembrance of thee: *in the grave*, who shall give thee thanks?

**RV** For in death there is no remembrance of thee: *in Sheol* who shall give thee thanks?

**\*RV note:** See Gen. 37:35.

**NIV** Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you *from the grave?*

**ESV** For in death there is no remembrance of you; *in Sheol* who will give you praise?

According to the RV and ESV, Jacob is not praising God in Sheol.

In Proverbs 15:24 below, the ways of heaven and hell are compared. The MB unambiguously depicted heaven as the true reward of following the way of life, but the GNV presents the "way on high" as metaphor for the moral high ground. This subtly denies the reality of heaven above, and has uncertain implications for the meaning of "hell beneath":

### Proverbs 15:24

**MB** The way of life *leadeth unto heaven*, that a man should beware of *hell beneath*.

**GNV** The way of life *is on high* to the prudent, to avoid from *hell beneath*.

**KJV** The way of life *is above* to the wise, that he may depart from *hell beneath*.

**RV** To the wise the way of life *goeth upward*, that he may depart from *\*Sheol beneath*.

**\*RV note:** Or, the grave.

**NIV** The path of life *leads upward* for the prudent to keep them from going *down to the realm of the dead*.

**ESV** The path of life *leads upward* for the prudent, that he may turn away from *Sheol beneath*.

The many revisions to the Old Testament over the years have changed the meanings of *sheol* and have destroyed the traditional doctrine. The Matthew Bible alone presents it clearly and unambiguously.

### *"Hell" in the New Testament*

As mentioned, most modern Bibles have not entirely removed references to hell in the New Testament. However, silence in the OT followed by references to hell in the NT supports progressive revelation and the doctrine of the Duns men. Also, the mixed use of the words "Hades" and "hell" suggests that they are separate places, as Greswell taught – which, of course, was the point. Keeping "hell," therefore, has not precluded significant changes in meaning. Another semantic twist can be seen in the RV and ESV below. The new translation, arising from a reinterpretation of the genitive case, says the danger is not of hell, but of fire. This suggests the fire of purgatory:

#### Matthew 5:22

**MB** Whosoever saith, Thou fool, shall be in danger of *hell fire*.

**GNV** Whosoever shall say, Fool, shall be worthy to be punished with *hell fire*.

**KJV** Whosoever shall say, Fool, shall be worthy to be punished with *hell fire*.

**RV** Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger <sup>1</sup>of the <sup>2</sup>hell of fire.

**\*RV note 1:** Gr. *Unto* or *into*.

**\*RV note 2:** Gr. *Gehenna of fire*.

**NIV** Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of *the fire of hell*.

**ESV** Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to *the hell of fire*.

No textual variant that I found accounts for the new meaning in the RV and ESV.

The GNV had two notes on Matthew 5:22. I omitted them above, because they are unpleasant and distracting. However, they show what the puritan scholars did to New Testament, not to mention how unpleasantly they must have distracted 16th century readers, so I give them below:

**M't 5:22, GNV** Whosoever shall say, Fool, shall be worthy to be punished with <sup>1</sup>hell <sup>2</sup>fire.

**\*GNV note 1:** Whereas we read here, Hell, it is in the text itself, Gehenna, which is an Hebrew word made of two, and is as much to say, as the Valley of Hinnom, which otherwise the Hebrews called Tophet: it was a place where the Israelites were wont most cruelly to sacrifice their children to false gods, whereupon it was taken for a place appointed to torment the reprobates in Jer. 7:31.



**\*GNV note 2:** The Jews used four kinds of punishments, before their government was taken away by Herod, hanging, heading, stoning, and burning: this is it that [which] Christ shot at, because burning was the greatest punishment, therefore in that he maketh mention of a judgment, a council, and a fire, he showeth that some sins are worse than other sins, but yet they are all such that we must give account for them, and will be punished for them.

These notes reveal again (as shown in *Story Part 2*) the unsettling, punitive focus of the Geneva Bible. They were an indirect justification for the burnings, beheadings, and cruel punishments and persecutions meted out in Geneva under Consistory rule. Later in England, during the puritan revolution and rogue Parliament, there was more of the same. Also, in Massachusetts, where the puritans brought their Geneva Bible, there were hangings, burnings, ducking stools, and so forth. It is sobering to consider how the GNV contributed to such atrocities – and also to think that, for the majority of people in the 16th century, this was their introduction to God’s word, and to the gospel of mercy and forgiveness that is in Christ our Lord. It is not an exaggeration to say that, when the true history of the puritans is known and understood, it becomes clear that, although their Bible made a metaphor of the hell that is below the earth, it contributed to making hell a reality upon the earth.

A GNV note on Revelation 20 below is also disturbing. It indicates that the dead, (even the “repugnant”!) do not live again (to serve God?) until the general resurrection. It strongly suggests a belief that the soul does not endure conscious and alive after the physical death – which would explain the frequent changes from “hell” to “grave” in the Geneva version. The MB translation was closely followed in the GNV and KJV, so I will not repeat the translations, but show significant revisions in {special brackets}. English updates are in [square brackets]:

#### **Revelation 20:11-15**

**MB, GNV, KJV** 11 And I saw a great white seat {G,K throne} and him {G one} that sat on it, from whose face fled away both the earth and heaven, and their place was no more found {K and there was found no place for them}.

12 And I saw the dead, both great and small, stand before God. And the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged [by] those things which were written in the books according to their deeds {G,K works}.

13 <sup>G1</sup>And the sea gave up her dead, [who] were in her, *and death and hell delivered up the dead [who] were in them*, and they were judged every man according to his deeds {G,K their works}.

14 <sup>G2</sup>And *death and hell were cast into the lake of fire*. This is the second death.

15 And *whosoever was not found written in the book of life* was cast into the lake of fire.

**MB:** No note.

**\*GNV note 1:** This is a prevention or an answer {to an objection; for haply [perhaps] some man will say, but they are dead, whom the sea, death, and the grave hath consumed. How shall they appear before the judge? S. John answereth by resurrection from death, whereunto all things (however repugnant) shall minister and serve at the commandment of God, as Dan. 12.

**\*GNV note 2:** The last enemy which is death shall be abolished by Christ (that he may no more make any attempt against us) 1Cor. 15:16, and death shall feed upon the

reprobate in hell forevermore, according to the righteous judgement of God, in the next verse.

The GNV does speak of eternal torment here, but the concept of “death feeding on the reprobate” is not meaningful English. To show how moderns handled Revelation 20, I will give only the last two verses. One of the chief differences between the RV and ESV as opposed to other Bibles is the change to the conditional mood in verse 15: *if* anyone was not found written in the book of life, as opposed to the indicative mood, *whoever* was not found written there. The second sentence in verse 14 reveals a manuscript difference in the Alexandrian manuscripts, which could be significant, depending how one interprets it:

#### **Revelation 20:14-15**

**RV** And *death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.*

**NIV** Then *death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

**ESV** Then *Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

In the next and final example, the Reformation Bibles referred to “hell,” but the GNV and KJV changed it. In the RV and modern versions, the new wording is due to a textual variant; in the RT the Greek was *hades*, but not in the Alexandrian manuscripts. This served the cause of the Larger Hope and could help explain the RV revisers’ preference for the Alexandrian texts:

#### **1 Corinthians 15:55**

**MB** Death, where is thy sting? *Hell*, where is thy victory?

**GNV** O death, where is thy sting? O *grave*, where is thy victory?

**KJV** O death, where is thy sting? O *grave*, where is thy victory?

**RV** O death, where is thy victory? O *death*, where is thy sting?

**NIV** Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O *death*, is your sting?

**ESV** O death, where is your victory? O *death*, where is your sting?

Only the Matthew Bible teaches that the Messiah was victorious over *hell*.

#### **Conclusion**

The Matthew Bible taught clearly, in both the Old and New Testaments, about the general resurrection, the judgement, and hell. Only the Matthew Bible gave full heed to the grave out of which we have been dug. Beginning with the Geneva Bible, and continuing in great measure after the RV, the teachings were destroyed. The present situation, and the state of modern Bibles, entails serious consequences:

(1) The transliteration and re-definition of *sheol* and *hades*, along with the new treatment of *Gehenna*, resurrects the doctrine of the Duns men, that hell did not exist in the Old Testament age. Further, no longer does the Bible teach about heaven and hell; it posits two abodes beneath the earth, and teaches about heaven, Sheol/Hades, and hell. The new translations enable universalism, annihilationism, and purgatory, which attack the foundation of the



gospel: if man is not in danger of hell, what need is there of the salvation that is in Christ? Nothing is more important than man's eternal destiny, but modern Bibles do not teach truly about it.

(2) The new transliterations have created massive confusion. In a recent Facebook thread, someone said *hades* is a "paradise" where the Old Testament saints are waiting for Christ to come and take them to heaven. Depending who you read or consult, *hades* is a paradise, a retreat, an abode, a dark and dismal place, or hell itself. Anything is possible.

(3) Though the unbelievers and unrepentant may mock the fear of hell, it is a prod and a goad to the faithful, who, traversing the narrow and difficult road to heaven, do battle with the flesh and the devil. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Pr. 9:10). The wise fear his judgements. This fear needs to be clearly taught, even if only the faithful will give it heed, just as they alone give heed to the gospel – and rejoice in their salvation.

(4) The problems with modern Hebrew and Greek reference texts call for cautious reliance on them. The risk of misleading earnest Bible students, who are often trying to make sense of obscure translations, is great. How much better to simply have a clear Bible and a few trusted expositors. Ideally, that would mean the Matthew Bible and the best of the Church fathers and early (pre-Geneva) Reformation writings.

(5) This brings me to the next point: modern Bibles have changed the language of the faith, which makes traditional resources less accessible. But, of course, that was the purpose.

(6) Taking the concept of hell out of the Old Testament severs doctrinal unity between the Testaments and makes the OT less relevant. It creates an internal inconsistency in the Bible, as we saw with Paul's testimony before Felix in Acts 24: if the OT did not teach about hell, then the passage makes no sense. It also contributes to the error of progressive revelation.

However, we can truly say that one thing has advanced progressively: the *suppression*, not the revelation, of the knowledge of the coming judgement and of eternal retribution. This suppression has advanced steadily since we received the Matthew Bible in the Reformation. The incremental revisions to the Scriptures, new commentaries, and the influence of higher criticism, have gradually brought us to the state that Tyndale prophesied would prevail at the end of the age:

**William Tyndale, prologue upon 2 Peter. As updated in the October Testament:** In the latter days, the people, through unbelief and lack of fear of the judgement of the last day, will be even as Epicures, wholly given to the flesh. Which last day shall yet surely and shortly come, he says; for a thousand years and one day is with God the same thing. And he shows also how terrible that day will be, and how suddenly it will come. Therefore he exhorts all to look earnestly for it, and to prepare themselves for it with holy conduct and living.

Tyndale summed up the wisdom of the truth, and of the godly fear of the judgement. This fear was faithfully taught in the Matthew Bible. However, the Geneva Bible taught the wrong fear, and the RV revisers and their associates, who preached the Larger Hope, denied that fear has any place in Christian doctrine.

© Ruth Magnusson Davis, Baruch House Publishing, May 2020. Minor revisions June 2020.

This paper is extracted and adapted from *The Story of the Matthew Bible, Part 2: The Scriptures Then and Now*, due for publication in late 2020.



Ruth M. Davis is a retired lawyer and student of Early Modern English and the Reformation. Ruth founded the New Matthew Bible Project, dedicated to gently updating the 1537 Matthew Bible for today. The New Testament was published as *The October Testament*. Work on the Old Testament is ongoing. Part 1 of *The Story of the Matthew Bible* was published in 2018, and Part 2 is due out in 2020.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Myles Coverdale, preface to “Hope of the Faithful,” in *Remains of Myles Coverdale ... Containing Prologues to the translation of the Bible. Treatise on death. Hope of the faithful. Exhortation to the carrying of Christ’s cross ... [etc.]*. Edited by George Pearson (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), 140. I believe this to be Coverdale’s preface, because Wermullerus set out his purpose in chapter 1. However, it is possible that Coverdale translated the preface from Wermullerus.

<sup>2</sup> As cited above.

<sup>3</sup> The final casting into hell with the demons must be the time the demons themselves referred to in Matthew 8:29, when they asked Jesus if he had come to torment them before the time was come.

<sup>4</sup> Quotations from the RV are from my original 1895 Oxford University Press edition.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore P. Letis, “The Quest for the Historical Text,” a lecture delivered at the Van Andel Museum Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan, on May 16, 2003. Viewed on YouTube. Letis explains how this quest, disguised as textual criticism, originated as a quest to disprove orthodox Christian doctrine.

<sup>6</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *History of the English Bible*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan and Co., 1872), 134. See also *StoryPart1*, chapter one and note 15 (pages 33-34 in the print edition). Moderns also say the RT was “corrupt.” In 1964 Bruce Metzger published *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Letis (see preceding note) shows how textual criticism was used to try to prove that passages in the RT that affirm doctrines such as the Trinity (such as the Johannine comma) were later additions to, and therefore “corruptions of,” the text. By this means they would reveal those doctrines as unchristian. Many previously devout persons, such as Isaac Newton, were led to disavow the Trinity after investigating textual criticism. However, to those who have eyes to see, there are many other passages in the New Testament that affirm the Trinity and the divinity of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 3 of *Story Part 2*. See also Dennis Kenaga, *Skeptical Trends in New Testament Textual Criticism: Inside the Alexandrian Priority*, [www.all-of-grace.org/pub/kenaga/SkepticalTrends.pdf](http://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/kenaga/SkepticalTrends.pdf), 3. Kenaga estimates that less than 1% of textual variants have any real significance.

<sup>8</sup> For Greek text comparisons, for the RT I use the *Greek Text New Testament* set by Stephen Austin and Sons for the Trinitarian Bible Society in 1976, which was based on *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Text Followed in the Authorized Version*, edited by F. Scrivener and published 1894-1902, as set forth in Green, *Interlinear Bible, Hebrew, Greek, English*, 2nd edition (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986). For CT Bibles I use the *Nestle Greek New Testament* of Eberhard Nestle, which was based on Westcott and Hort along with two others, as set forth in Zondervan’s *Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English*, ed. Alfred Marshall (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).

<sup>9</sup> Fenton Hort, from *The Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, Vol. I, 400, as cited in Benjamin Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (Washington, D.C.: No pub., 1930), 160.

<sup>10</sup> These guiding principles are given in the OT and NT prefaces to the RV.

---

<sup>11</sup> The universalist Samuel Cox rejoiced that the RV supported universalism, and asserted that Westcott and Hort believed in the Larger Hope, per Samuel C. Gipp, *An Understandable History*, see note 13. Also, Westcott is identified as sympathetic with the Larger Hope by Thomas Allin in *Christ Triumphant: Universalism Asserted as the Hope of the Gospel on the Authority of Reason, the Fathers, and Holy Scriptures* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2015), 190. Viewed on Google books.

<sup>12</sup> *Life of Hort*, Vol. I, 118, as cited at <https://heritagebbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Views-Complete-4a-and-b.pdf>. Accessed January 2020.

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Samuel C. Gipp, *An Understandable History of the Bible*, chapter 8, posted at [https://www.eaac.org/bibleversions/understandable\\_history\\_bible/08.htm](https://www.eaac.org/bibleversions/understandable_history_bible/08.htm).

<sup>14</sup> B. F. Westcott, *Some Lessons of the Revised Version of the New Testament*, 196, as cited in Wilkinson, *Vindicated*, 196.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin's words from his commentary on Jeremiah 31, one of the most important prophecies of the New Covenant, were, "God has never made any other covenant than that which he made formerly with Abraham, and at length confirmed by the hand of Moses... Let us now see why he promises to the people a new covenant. It being new, no doubt refers to what they call the form; and the form, or manner, regards not words only, but first Christ, then the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the whole external way of teaching." (Discussed in *Story Part 2*. Calvin opposes Luther. See my paper posted on Academia.edu, [www.academia.edu/41932368/Luther\\_vs\\_Calvin\\_on\\_the\\_New\\_Covenant](http://www.academia.edu/41932368/Luther_vs_Calvin_on_the_New_Covenant)).

<sup>16</sup> Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 4, as cited in Wilkinson, *Vindicated*, 197.

<sup>17</sup> B. F. Westcott, from *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, Vol. I, 78, as cited in David Blunt, "From Their Own Mouths - Westcott and Hort," at <https://savedbygrace.com/bible/mouths-westcott-hort>.

<sup>18</sup> Vance Smith, *Bible and Theology*, 281, as cited in Wilkinson, *Vindicated*, 197-98.

<sup>19</sup> *OED online*, s.v. "abode." See entry 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. "retreat."

<sup>21</sup> Edward Greswell, *An Exposition of the Parables and Other Parts of the Gospels* (Oxford: J.G.&F. Rivington, 1835), 364. Viewed on Amazon.com by the look inside feature. Greswell's lengthy, wandering, sometimes self-contradictory chapter X, which Thayer referenced specifically in his entry on *hades*, was entitled "On the Existence and Locality of Hades." He emphasized that all souls go to *hades*: the good go down to one part, and the bad to another (366).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>23</sup> Robert B. Girdlestone, *Girdlestone's Synonyms of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (MI: Baker Book House, no date). Girdlestone said the translation "nether world" might have been better than the transliteration "Sheol." Some modern Bibles now use "nether world."

<sup>24</sup> Girdlestone, *How to Study the English Bible* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1887). Viewed on [https://issuu.com/theologyontheweb/docs/how-to-study-the-english-bible\\_gird](https://issuu.com/theologyontheweb/docs/how-to-study-the-english-bible_gird).

<sup>25</sup> Girdlestone, *Old Testament Theology and Modern Ideas* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909). Viewed at [https://issuu.com/theologyontheweb/docs/old-testament-theology\\_girdlestone](https://issuu.com/theologyontheweb/docs/old-testament-theology_girdlestone).

<sup>26</sup> The Great Bible, the base of Geneva version, had "hell," but did not refer to dwellers as such.

<sup>27</sup> Quotation updated (syntax, subjunctive, also obsolete words: "finder" to "deviser," "sentence" to "judgement" or omitted, "dunce men" to "Duns men," "skilled" to "free and quit").

<sup>28</sup> *Story Part 2* reveals, in their own words, how Calvin and the Geneva Bible revisers made metaphors of Messianic prophecy. Briefly discussed in my blog post at [baruchhousepublishing.com/calvin-on-prophecy-30-pieces-of-silver](http://baruchhousepublishing.com/calvin-on-prophecy-30-pieces-of-silver). Also discussed in *The Judaizing Calvin*, written by 16th century Lutheran theologian, Aegidius Hunnius. Available on Amazon.