

An Extract Out Of Josephus's Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades

The Works of *Flavius Josephus*

Note from Pastor Jeremy: Flavius Josephus was a Jewish Historian who lived during the time of Jesus and who witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The following is his extra biblical writing where he explains to the Greeks what the Jews believed about Hades, or the holding place of the dead. The Bible is for the most part silent about what exactly "hades" is like. In Luke chapter 16:19-31, Jesus gave the clearest teaching about this spiritual holding place. Before you read the account of Josephus, take time to read the account of Jesus. Then as you read Josephus' account, notice the similarities. Also noted in the text [in italics] are other scripture references to point us to the scriptures.

The following are the Strong's definitions of Hades and Sheol.

Hades: NT:86 haides (hah'-dace); from NT:1 (as negative particle) and NT:1492; properly, unseen, i.e. "Hades" or the place (state) of departed souls: KJV - grave, hell.

The Old Testament uses the word "sheol" when referring to the grave or holding place of dead.

OT:7585 she'owl (sheh-ole'); or sheol (sheh-ole'); from OT:7592; Hades or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat), including its accessories and inmates: KJV - grave, hell, pit.

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

1. NOW as to Hades, wherein the souls of the good things they see, and rejoice in the righteous and unrighteous are detained, it is necessary to speak of it. Hades is a place in the world not regularly finished; a subterraneous region, wherein the light of this world does not shine; from which circumstance, that in this region the light does not shine, it cannot be but there must be in it perpetual darkness (Matthew 25:30). This region is allotted as a place of custody for souls [1 Peter 3:19], in which angels are appointed as guardians to them, who distribute to them temporary

punishments, agreeable to every one's behavior and manners.

2. In this region there is a certain place set apart, as a lake of unquenchable fire, where into we suppose no one hath hitherto been cast; but it is prepared for a day afore-determined by God, in which one righteous sentence shall deservedly be passed upon all men; when the unjust, and those that have been disobedient to God, and have given honor to such idols as have been the vain operations of the hands of men as to God himself, shall be adjudged to this everlasting punishment, as having been the causes of defilement [*Matthew 25:41, Revelation 19:20-21, 20:13-15*]; while the just shall obtain an incorruptible and never-fading kingdom [*1 Peter 1:4*]. These are now indeed confined in Hades, but not in the same place wherein the unjust are confined.

3. For there is one descent into this region, at whose gate we believe there stands an archangel with an host; which gate when those pass through that are conducted down by the angels appointed over souls, they do not go the same way; but the just are guided to the right hand, and are led with hymns, sung by the angels appointed over that place, unto a region of light, in which the just have dwelt from the beginning of the world; not constrained by necessity, but ever enjoying the prospect of the good things they see, and rejoice in the expectation of those new enjoyments which will be peculiar to every one of them, and esteeming those things beyond what we have here; with whom there is no place of toil, no burning heat, no piercing cold, nor are any briars there; but the countenance of the and of the just, which they see, always smiles them, while they wait for that rest and eternal new life in heaven, which is to succeed this region. This place we call The Bosom of Abraham [*Luke 16:20-22, 25*].

Jesus spoke of the "Bosom of Abraham" during His ministry on earth. After Jesus paid the price for sin on the cross, He made a way for these souls to enter heaven through the forgiveness afforded by His vicarious suffering. Now the Saints are in paradise rather than the good part of Hades and Paradise is a synonym for heaven (Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, Revelation 2:7 with Revelation 22:14).

The Bible teaches that Jesus had power over the gates of Hades (Matthew 16:18), set the captives free (Isaiah 61:1 with Luke 4:18, Eph 4:8), has the keys of Hades (Revelation 1:18), and that when a believer is absent from the body (died) they are present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), not present with "Abraham." Therefore the reader should realize that Josephus was out of date in his understanding when he was explaining Hades to the Greeks.

4. But as to the unjust, they are dragged by force to the left hand by the angels allotted for punishment, no longer going with a good-will, but as

prisoners driven by violence; to who are sent the angels appointed over them to reproach them and threaten them with their terrible looks, and to thrust them still downwards. Now those angels that are set over these souls drag them into the neighborhood of hell itself; who, when they are hard by it, continually hear the noise of it, and do not stand clear of the hot vapor itself; but when they have a near view of this spectacle, as of a terrible and exceeding great prospect of fire, they are struck with a fearful expectation of a future judgment [*Revelation 20:13*], and in effect punished thereby: and not only so, but where they see the place [or choir] of the fathers and of the just, even hereby are they punished; for a chaos deep and large is fixed between them; insomuch that a just man that hath compassion upon them cannot be admitted, nor can one that is unjust, if he were bold enough to attempt it, pass over it [*Luke 16:26*].

5. This is the discourse concerning Hades, wherein the souls of all men are confined until a proper season, which God hath determined, when he will make a resurrection of all men from the dead, not procuring a transmigration of souls from one body to another, but raising again those very bodies, which you Greeks, seeing to be dissolved, do not believe [their resurrection] [*Mark 12:26-27*]. But learn not to disbelieve it; for while you believe that the soul is created, and yet is made immortal by God, according to the doctrine of Plato, and this in time, be not incredulous; but believe that God is able, when he hath raised to life that body which was made as a compound of the same elements, to make it immortal [*1 Corinthians 15:51-54*]; for it must never be said of God, that he is able to do some things, and unable to do others.

We have therefore believed that the body will be raised again; for although it be dissolved, it is not perished; for the earth receives its remains, and preserves them; and while they are like seed, and are mixed among the more fruitful soil, they flourish, and what is sown is indeed sown bare grain, but at the mighty sound of God the Creator, it will sprout up, and be raised in a clothed and glorious condition, though not before it has been dissolved, and mixed [with the earth]. So that we have not rashly believed the resurrection of the body; for although it be dissolved for a time on account of the original transgression, it exists still, and is cast into the earth as into a potter's furnace, in order to be formed again, not in order to rise again such as it was before, but in a state of purity, and so as never to be destroyed any more [*1 Corinthians 15:53*]. And to every body shall its own soul be restored. And when it hath clothed itself with that body, it will not be subject to misery, but, being itself pure, it will continue with its pure body, and rejoice with it, with which it having walked righteously now in this world, and never having had it as a snare, it will receive it again with great gladness.

But as for the unjust, they will receive their bodies not changed, not freed from diseases or distempers, nor made glorious, but with the same diseases

wherein they died; and such as they were in their unbelief, the same shall they be when they shall be faithfully judged.

6. For all men, the just as well as the unjust, shall be brought before God the word: for to him hath the Father committed all judgment [*Jude 14-15*]: and he, in order to fulfill the will of his Father, shall come as Judge, whom we call Christ. For Minos and Rhadamanthus are not the judges, as you Greeks do suppose, but he whom God and the Father hath glorified [*John 5:22-27*]: **CONCERNING WHOM WE HAVE ELSEWHERE GIVEN A MORE PARTICULAR ACCOUNT, FOR THE SAKE OF THOSE WHO SEEK AFTER TRUTH.** This person, exercising the righteous judgment of the Father towards all men, hath prepared a just sentence for every one, according to his works; at whose judgment-seat when all men, and angels, and demons shall stand, they will send forth one voice, and say, **JUST IS THY JUDGMENT** [*Revelation 16:7*]; the rejoinder to which will bring a just sentence upon both parties, by giving justly to those that have done well an everlasting fruition; but allotting to the lovers of wicked works eternal punishment.

To these belong the unquenchable fire, and that without end, and a certain fiery worm, never dying, and not destroying the body, but continuing its eruption out of the body with never-ceasing grief [*Psalms 18:5*]: neither will sleep give ease to these men, nor will the night afford them comfort; death will not free them from their punishment, nor will the interceding prayers of their kindred profit them; for the just are no longer seen by them, nor are they thought worthy of remembrance [*Mark 9:44, Isaiah 66:24*].

But the just shall remember only their righteous actions, whereby they have attained the heavenly kingdom, in which there is no sleep, no sorrow, no corruption, no care, no night, no day measured by time, no sun driven in his course along the circle of heaven by necessity, and measuring out the bounds and conversions of the seasons, for the better illumination of the life of men; no moon decreasing and increasing, or introducing a variety of seasons, nor will she then moisten the earth; no burning sun [*Revelation 21:23*], no Bear turning round [the pole], no Orion to rise, no wandering of innumerable stars. The earth will not then be difficult to be passed over, nor will it be hard to find out the court of paradise, nor will there be any fearful roaring of the sea, forbidding the passengers to walk on it; even that will be made easily passable to the just, though it will not be void of moisture.

Heaven will not then be uninhabitable by men, and it will not be impossible to discover the way of ascending thither. The earth will not be uncultivated, nor require too much labor of men, but will bring forth its fruits of its own accord, and will be well adorned with them [*Revelation 22:2-3, Isaiah 65:21*]. There will be no more generations of wild beasts, nor will the substance of the rest of the animals shoot out any more; for it will not

produce men, but the number of the righteous will continue, and never fail, together with righteous angels, and spirits [of God], and with his word, as a choir of righteous men and women that never grow old, and continue in an incorruptible state, singing hymns to God, who hath advanced them to that happiness, by the means of a regular institution of life; with whom the whole creation also will lift up a perpetual hymn from corruption, to incorruption, as glorified by a splendid and pure spirit. It will not then be restrained by a bond of necessity, but with a lively freedom shall offer up a voluntary hymn, and shall praise him that made them, together with the angels, and spirits, and men now freed from all bondage [*Revelation 15:3*].

7. And now, if you Gentiles will be persuaded by these motives, and leave your vain imaginations about your pedigrees, and gaining of riches, and philosophy, and will not spend your time about subtleties of words, and thereby lead your minds into error [*Philippians 3:4-11*], and if you will apply your ears to the hearing of the inspired prophets, the interpreters both of God and of His word, and will believe in God, you shall both be partakers of these things, and obtain the good things that are to come; you shall see the ascent unto the immense heaven plainly, and that kingdom which is there [*Isaiah 11:10, 60:3, Ephesians 2:11-14*]. For what God hath now concealed in silence [will be then made manifest,] what neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him [*1 Corinthians 2:9-10*].

8. In whatsoever ways I shall find you, in them shall I judge you entirely: so cries the END of all things. And he who hath at first lived a virtuous life, but towards the latter end falls into vice, these labors by him before endured shall be altogether vain and unprofitable, even as in a play, brought to an ill catastrophe [*Ezekiel 33*]. Whosoever shall have lived wickedly and luxuriously may repent; however, there will be need of much time to conquer an evil habit, and even after repentance his whole life must be guarded with great care and diligence [*Ephesians 5:15-16*], after the manner of a body, which, after it hath been a long time afflicted with a distemper, requires a stricter diet and method of living; for though it may be possible, perhaps, to break off the chain of our irregular affections at once, yet our amendment cannot be secured without the grace of God, the prayers of good men, the help of the brethren, and our own sincere repentance and constant care.

It is a good thing not to sin at all; it is also good, having sinned, to repent; as it is best to have health always, but it is a good thing to recover from a distemper. To God be glory and dominion for ever and ever Amen.

Note: As Josephus mentions in this last paragraph, now more than ever we need to walk in diligence. We must decide to continue in the Word, being watchful in our prayers, and in habitual fellowship of the saints. We should

watch over the state of our souls and minds as one who guards the riches found at Fort Knox. Because the flesh wars against the spirit and our enemy the devil, walks about like a roaring lion seeking to devour.

Also, may God pierce our hearts with the reality of the end of the wicked and ungodly. Their end is undesirable. But God, who is rich in mercy, cries out to all, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (Hebrews 3:15) God sent His Son Jesus, that all may have life, "For God so loved the world, that He gave in only begotten Son, that whosoever would believe in Him, would not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him, might be saved." (John 3:16-17).

Now, in stark contrast to the above, the following is an excerpt from the daily Berean Call email newsletter.

TBC Today : Bogus Beliefs

May 05, 2006

Brian McLaren's Inferno: the provocative church leader explains his view of hell [Excerpts]

No contributor to "Out of Ur" ["Christianity Today's" blog] has elicited more responses than Brian McLaren. Part of McLaren's appeal is his courage to rethink long-held evangelical assumptions and call the church to shed the baggage of modernity. Brian's critics, however, accuse him of throwing the orthodox baby out with the modernist bath water. In this interview McLaren discusses his view of hell and judgment, and explains why some have mislabeled him a universalist.

Brian, in your book, *The Last Word and the Word After That*, you focus heavily on "deconstructing" the evangelical view of hell. Some critics think your deconstruction has moved to the point of your embracing a "universalist" position. Are you a Universalist?

McLaren: No, I am not embracing a traditional universalist position, but I am trying to raise the question, When God created the universe, did he have two purposes in mind -- one being to create some people who would forever enjoy blessing and mercy, and another to create a group who would forever suffer torment, torture, and punishment? What is our view of God? A God who plans torture? A God who has an essential, eternal quality of hatred? Is God love, or is God love and hate?

It might sound surprising to state it that way, but you'd be surprised at some of the emails I've received. For example, someone quoted Scriptures like Psalm 5:5 or Psalm 11:5 and said, "If you don't believe in a God of hate, you don't believe in the God of the Bible." Here's my concern: if you believe in a

god of hate, violence, revenge, and torture, it makes you very susceptible to becoming a person made in that god's image.

Even though this subject is so controversial and I don't like controversy, we have to address it because we're dealing with our view of God, and the consequences of our essential view of God are staggering. The only thing that's more important, I guess, is God's view of us!

Anyway, Western Christianity has been overly preoccupied with the question of who's going to heaven or hell after death, and not focused enough on the question of what kind of life is truly pleasing to God here in the land of the living. We've got to look at that. In *The Last Word and the Word After That*, I wanted to raise the issue of "Judgment," that all will be judged rightly and fairly by God alone, who weighs the scales rightly, and does this for everyone. Again, when we put ourselves in the position of judge -- making pronouncements on the eternal destiny of others -- I think it's pretty dangerous, especially in light of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount.

My approach is a little different. Although in many ways I find myself closer to the view of God held by some universalists than I do the view held by some exclusivists, in the end I'd rather turn our attention from the questions WE think are important to the question JESUS thinks is most important.

We obsess on "who's in" and "who's out." Jesus, however, seems to be asking the question, "How can the kingdom of God more fully come on earth as it is in heaven, and how should disciples of the kingdom live to enter and welcome the kingdom?"

Most people aren't willing to reopen these issues with an open mind, and those who do find the process painful and socially dangerous in many of our churches. In the end, I suppose I am truly an evangelical Protestant in the sense that I believe we must go back and search the Scriptures and look at them afresh and see if there isn't something better than what we have been taught. Ironically, we could stand before God and have to answer for our judgmentalism and heartless attitudes that were, to a significant degree, consequences of a popular and longstanding misreading of the Scriptures on this subject of hell.

[The Berean Call Ministry Response: According to McLaren's logic, Jesus was one of those who was "overly preoccupied with the question of who's going to heaven or hell after death." Look to the Scriptures. Jesus spent far more time warning of the dangers of hell than of the joys of heaven. Apparently this subject was important to our Savior.]

In these last days, we see an increasing number of "pastors" and

“evangelical Christians” departing from the Biblical truths concerning Heaven and Hell. In the book of 1 Timothy Paul the apostle wrote, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners”. Save sinners from what? The answer is that Jesus, in His atoning death on the cross, saved sinners from God’s righteous judgment. The Bible says that “the wages of sin is death”, and “the soul that sins shall surely die”. The reality of judgment should drive the sinner to repentance and trust in the savior Jesus. But if there is no judgment, then there is no need of repentance and faith in Jesus.