

John Bunyan's Vision of and Visit to Hell

John Bunyan (1628-1688) is best known as the author of one of the most widely-read Christian books ever written: *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory of what a Christian life is like. However, Bunyan at one time attempted suicide. It was just as he was [to use his own words] "about to murder himself," that an angel came to him and took him in a vision on a tour of Hell. Bunyan's vision of Hell has withstood the scrutiny of skeptics (both within and outside of the church) for over 300 years.

Bunyan later became a very popular preacher and was one time imprisoned for his faith. His [Pilgrim's Progress](#) is still widely read.

His vision [below] was taken from a work by Mrs. M.A. Daoud named [Hell is Real](#), and is available on the internet.

Introduction

I kneeled down on the ground and said, "O You invisible, eternal Power, which though unseen by men, beholds all his actions, and who has now withheld me from defacing your image, I give you humble thanks. Yes, O, You sovereign BEING of all beings, I give You thanks that I am still alive and able to acknowledge there is such a being. Oh, let the Sun of Glory shine upon me and chase away the blackness of my soul that I may never more question Your being or omnipotence, which I have this moment so greatly experienced."

Then, rising from my knees, I went and sat down on a river bank, my mind being greatly taken up with the adoring thoughts of that Eternal Goodness that had saved me from the dreadful gulf of everlasting ruin just as I was about to plunge myself into it. And now I could only wonder that I should be such a fool as to call in question the being of the Deity of which every creature is a witness, and which a man's own conscience could not but dictate to him.

Now while my thoughts were taken up thus as I sat upon the bank, suddenly I was surrounded with a glorious light, the exceeding

brightness of which was such as I had never seen before. This both surprised and amazed, me and while I was wondering where it came, I saw coming toward me a glorious appearance, like the person of a man, but circled round about with beams of inexpressible light and glory, which streamed from him on the way he came. His countenance was very awful, and yet mixed with such an air of sweetness as rendered it extremely pleasing, and gave me some secret hope that he did not come to me as an enemy. And yet I knew not how to bear his bright appearance; and endeavoring to stand upon my feet, I soon found I had no more strength in me, and so fell down flat on my face. By the kind assistance of his arm, I was soon set upon my feet again and new strength was put in me. Then I addressed myself to the bright form before me saying, "O my shining deliverer, who hast strengthened my feeble body and restore me to new life, how shall I acknowledge my thankfulness, and in what manner shall I adore you?"

To which he replied, both with an air of majesty and mildness, "Pay your adorations to the Author of your being, and not to me who am your fellow-creature. I am sent by Him Whose very being you have so lately denied, to stop you from falling into that eternal ruin whereinto you were going to throw yourself."

This touched my heart with such a sense of my own unworthiness that my soul melted within, and I could not forbear crying out, "Oh, how utterly unworthy I am of all this grace and mercy!"

To this the heavenly messenger replied, "In showing mercy, the divine Majesty does not consult thine unworthiness, but His Own unbounded goodness and vast love. He saw with how much malice the grand enemy of souls desires your ruin, and let him go on with hopes of overcoming you, but still upheld you by His secret power; through which, when Satan thought himself most sure, the snare is broken and you are escaped."

Beyond The Sun and Stars

"Well," said this heavenly visitor with a pleasing countenance, "that you may never doubt any more the reality of eternal things, the end [result] of my coming to you is to convince you of the truth of those things; not by faith only but by sight also. For I will show you

such things as were never yet beheld by mortal eye; and to that end your eyes shall be strengthened and made fit to behold immaterial objects.”

At these surprising words of the angel, I was much astonished, and doubted how I should be able to bear it. I said to him, “O my lord, who is sufficient to bear such a sight?”

To which he replied, “The joy of the Lord shall be your strength.” And when he had said thus, he took hold of me and said, “Fear not; for I am sent to show the things you have not seen.” And before I was aware I found myself far above the earth, which seemed to me a very small point in comparison with that region of light into which I was translated.

Then I said to my bright conductor. “Oh, let it not offend my lord if I ask a question or two of you.”

To this he answered, “Speak on. It is my work to inform you of such things which you shalt inquire of me. For I am a ministering spirit, sent forth to minister to you and to those who will be heirs of salvation.”

I then said, “I would gladly be informed what that dark spot, so far below me, is, which has grown less and less as I have mounted higher and higher, and appears much darker since I have come into this region of light.”

“That little spot,” answered my conductor, “that now looks so dark and contemptible, is that world of which you were so recently an inhabitant. You may see how little that whole world appears from here. So many [both angels and spirits of people who have already left their bodies] do continually labor for a small part of it, and give out all their strength and time to purchase it. Yes, this is that spot of earth, to obtain a small part of, so many men have run the hazard of losing—no, many have actually lost their precious and immortal souls. So precious are their souls that the Prince of Peace has told us that if a man gained the whole world, it could not recompense so great a loss. And the great reason of their folly is, that they do not look to things above. For as you ascended nearer to this region, the world appeared still less, and more contemptible; and it will be the same to all who can, by faith once get their hearts above it. For could the sons of men below but see the world as it really is, they would

not covet it as they now do, but they, alas, are in a state of darkness; and which is worse, they love to walk in that darkness. For although the Prince of Light came down among them and plainly showed them the true Light of Life, yet they continue in darkness and will not bring themselves into the light, because their deeds are evil.”

I asked him further, “What were those multitudes of black and horrid forms that hover in the air above the world; those forms which I would surely have been much afraid of, except I saw, as you passed, they fled—perhaps because they were not able to abide the brightness with which you are arrayed?”

To this he answered me, “They were the fallen and apostate spirits which because of their pride and rebellion were cast down from heaven and wander in the air by the decree of the Almighty—being bound in chains of darkness and kept unto the judgement of the great day. From there they are permitted to descend into the world, both for the trying of the elect and for the condemnation of the wicked. And though you now see they have black and horrid forms, yet once they were the sons of Light, and were arrayed in robes of glorious brightness, like what you see me wear, the loss of which, though it was the effect of their own willful sin, fills them with rage and malice against the ever-blessed God whose power and majesty they fear and hate.”

“Tell me” I said, “O blessed guide, do they not have any hope of ever being reconciled to God again, after some duration of time, or at least some of them?”

This is a very important paragraph. Ponder each word carefully!

“No, not at all. They are lost forever. They were the first that sinned, and had no tempter; and they were all at once cast down from heaven. Besides, the Son of God, the blessed Messiah by whom salvation can be had, did not take upon himself the angelic nature, but left the apostate angles all to perish, and took upon Himself only the seed of Abraham. And for this reason they have so much malice against the sons of men, whom it is a torment to them to see made heirs of heaven while they are doomed to hell.”

By this time we were above the sun whose vast and glorious body, so much greater than the earth, moved round the great expanse wherein it was placed with such a mighty swiftness that to relate it would appear incredible. But my guide told me this mighty immense hanging globe of fire was one of the great works of God. It always keeps its constant course, and never has the least irregularity in it daily or in its annual motion; and so exceeding glorious is its body that, had not my eyes been greatly strengthened, I could not have beheld it. Nor were those mighty globes of fire we call the fixed stars less wonderful; whose vast and extreme heights, so many leagues above the sun, make them appear like candles in our sight. And yet they hang within their spheres without any support, in a pure sea of ether. Nothing but his Word that first created them, could keep them in their position.

“These words are enough,” I said to my guide, “to convince anyone of the great power of their much more adorable Creator, and of the blackness of that infidelity which can call in question the being of a Deity, who has given the whole world so many bright evidences of his power, and glory, that if men were not like beast still looking downwards, they could not help but acknowledge his great power and wisdom.”

“You speak what is true,” replied he. “But you shall see far greater things than these. These are all but the scaffolds and outworks of that glorious building wherein the blessed ones above inhabit that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, a view of which (as far as you are capable to comprehend it) shall now be given you.”

What I had been told by my guide I found good in a few moments, for I was presently transferred into the glorious mansions of the blessed, and saw such things as it is impossible to represent and heard that ravishing melodious harmony that I can never utter. Well, therefore, might the beloved apostle John tell us in his epistle, “Now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be!” Whoever has not seen that glory can speak but very imperfectly about it, and they that have seen it, cannot tell the thousandth part of what it is. And therefore the great apostle of the Gentiles, who tells us he had been caught up into paradise, where he

had heard unspeakable words which are not possible for a man to utter, gives us no other account of it, but that “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God has laid up for those who love him.” I will give you the best account I can of what I saw and heard of the blessed discourses I had with some of the blessed, as best as I can remember.

Conducted to Hell

“I have,” said my angel-guide, “a commission to re-conduct you to the world below; not only to the earth from where I took you, but to the regions of the prince of darkness, that you may there see the reward of sin, and what incensed Justice has prepared as the just judgment of the rebellion of those who would exalt themselves above the throne of the Most High. But do not be afraid, for as I have a commission to take you there, so I have likewise to bring you back again, and leave you in the world from where I took you.”

To leave heaven for earth was extremely distasteful and would have rendered me unhappy, but that I knew the divine will was such. But to leave Heaven for hell was that which turned my very heart within me. However, when I knew that it was the divine good pleasure that I should be returned from there to earth again, and there later put off mortality, and then be re-conducted up to heaven, I was a little comforted, and found within myself an entire resignation to the will of God. Therefore I said with some assurance to my bright guide, “That which the blessed God has ordered I shall always be willing to obey, of whose great mercy I have already had so very large an experience, that even in hell itself I will not fear, if I may but have His presence with me there.”

To this my shining guardian answered me, “Wherever the blessed God grants His presence, there is heaven, and while we are in hell He will be with us.”

Then bowing low before the Almighty’s throne, swifter than thought my guardian angel carried me more than ten thousand leagues below the imperial heaven.

By this time we were come down to the lowest regions of the air where I saw multitudes of horrid forms and dismal dark appearances fly from the shining presence of my bright guide.

“Surely,” I said, “these are some of the vanguard of hell, so black and so affrighting are their forms.”

“These are,” said my guide, “some of the apostate spirits that wander up and down in the air and on the earth like roaring lions seeking whom they may devour. And though they are led there, you will see them quickly in their own dark territories, for we are now upon the borders of the infernal pit.”

I quickly found the words of my guide very true; for we were soon surrounded with a darkness much more black than night, which was attended with a stench far more suffocating than that of burning brimstone; my ears were likewise filled with horrid yellings from the damned spirits, that all the most discordant notes on earth were, in comparison of this, melodious music.

“Now,” said my guardian angel, “you are on the verge of hell, but do not be afraid of the power of the destroyer, for my commission from the Imperial Throne secures you from all dangers. Here you may hear from devils and damned souls the cursed causes of their endless ruin. And what you have a mind to ask, inquire, and they shall answer you. The devils cannot hurt you, though they would, for they are bound by Him that has commissioned me, of which themselves are sensible, which makes them rage and fret and roar and bite their hated chains, but all in vain.”

First Encounter in Hell: Seeing Lucifer

There, in a sulphurous lake of liquid fire, bound with the unbreakable chain of heaven’s fixed decree, sat Lucifer upon a burning throne, his horrid eyes sparkling with hellish fury, as full of rage as his strong pains could make him. Those wandering fiends that, as we came from heaven, fled before us, had (I perceived) given notice of our coming, which put all hell in an uproar and thus made Lucifer to vent his horrid blasphemies against the blessed God, which he delivered with an air of arrogance and pride.

I was amazed to hear his impious speech, and could not forbear saying to my guide, “How justly are his blasphemies rewarded!”

“What you have heard from this apostate spirit is both his sin and punishment; for every blasphemy he belches against heaven, makes hell the hotter to him.”

Second Encounter: Two Friends in Hell

We then passed on further, among dismal scenes of pure sorrow, we saw two wretched souls tormented by a fiend who without ceasing plunged them in liquid fire and burning brimstone, while they at the same time accused and cursed each other.

One of them said to his tormented fellow sufferer, “O cursed be your face, that ever I set eyes upon you! My misery is due to you; I may thank you for this, for it was you who ensnared me thus. It was your covetousness and cheating and your oppression and oppression of the poor that brought me here. If you had but set me a good example as you did an ill one, I might have been in heaven, and there have been as happy as I am now miserable. But, O wretch that I was! My following your steps has put me in this wretched state and ruined me forever; O that I never had seen your face, or you had never been born to do my soul that wrong that you have done.”

The other wretch replied, “And may I not as well blame you? For do you not remember how at such a time and place you did entice me and drew me out and asked me if I would not go along with you, when I was about my lawful business? But you called me away, and therefore are as much at fault as I. Though I was covetous, yet you were proud, and if you learned your covetousness from me, I am sure I learned of you my pride and drunkenness; and though you learned of me to cheat, yet you taught me to lust, to lie, and scoff at goodness.

“Thus, though I stumbled you in some things, you stumbled me as much in others; and therefore if you blame me, I can blame you as much. And if I have to answer for some of your most filthy actions, you have still to answer for some of mine. I wish you never had come hither; the very looks of you do wound my soul, by bringing sin afresh into my mind. It was with you, it was with you that I sinned. O grief unto my soul! And since I could not shun your company there. O that I could have been without it here!”

From this sad dialogue I soon perceived that those who are companions upon earth in sin shall be so also in hell in punishment. And though on earth they love each other’s company, they will not care for it in hell. This, I believe was the true reason why Dives [the rich man in the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus] seemed so

charitable to his brethren, that they might not come into this place of torment; it was love unto himself and not to them that was his motive; because had they come hither, his torments would have thereby been increased.

Third Encounter—A Wicked Woman

But there were yet more tragic scenes of sorrow, for leaving these two cursed wretches, accusing each other for being authors of each other's misery, we passed on further, beholding several woeful spectacles; and among others, one who still had flaming sulphur forced down her throat by a tormenting spirit; which he did with such horrid cruelty and insolence I could not but say to him, "Why should you so delight in the tormenting of that cursed wretch as to be thus perpetually pouring that flaming, infernal liquor down her throat?"

"This is no more but a just retribution," replied the fiend. "This woman in her life time was such a sordid wretch that though she had gold enough, could never be satisfied, and therefore now I pour it down her throat. She cared not who she ruined and undid, so she could get their gold. And when she had amassed together a greater treasure than ever she could spend, her love of money would not let her spend so much of it as to supply herself with what the common necessities of life required; for she then went often with an empty stomach, though her money bags were full, or else she filled her stomach at another's charge. And as for her apparel, it either never grew old or it was always so supplied with patches that at last it was hard to say which piece was on the original. She kept no house because she would not be taxed; nor keep her treasure in her hands for fear she should be robbed; nor let it out on bonds and mortgages for fear of being cheated; although she ever cheated all she could, and was herself so great a cheat she cheated her own body of its food and her own soul of mercy. Since gold then was her god on earth, is it not just that she should have her belly full of it in hell?"

When her tormentor had done speaking, I asked her whether what he said was true or not. To this she answered me, "No, to my grief it is not."

"How! to your grief?" I said.

"Yes, to my grief," said she. "Because were that which my tormentor tell you true, I should be better satisfied. He tells you that

it is gold that he pours down my throat; but he is a lying devil and speaks falsely. Were it but gold I never should complain. But he abuses me, and instead of gold he only gives the horrid, stinking sulphur."

I could not forbear telling my guide I was amazed to hear a wretch in hell itself so to dote upon her riches and that too, while in the tormentor's hands.

"This may," said he, "convince you it is sin that is the greatest of all evils; and where love of that sin prevails—the love of gold (to which this cursed creature is given up) is a more fatal punishment than that which the apostate spirits here inflict on her."

Fourth Encounter—A Lost Soul Speaks

We had not come much farther before we saw a wretched soul lie on a bed of burning steel, almost choked with brimstone; who cried out as one under a dreadful anguish, with a note of desperation; which made me desire of my guide to stay a while that I might listen more attentively to what he said and here I heard him speak as follows:

"Ah, miserable wretch! Undone forever, forever! Oh, these killing words forever! Will not a thousand thousand years suffice to bear that pain which if I could avoid it, I would not bear one moment for a thousand thousand worlds? No, no my misery will never have an end; after the thousand thousand years it will be forever still. On, hapless, helpless, hopeless state indeed! It is this forever that is the hell of hell! O cursed wretch! Cursed to all eternity! How willfully have I undone myself? Oh, what stupendous folly am I guilty of to choose sin's short and momentary pleasure at the dear price of everlasting pain! How oft have I been told it would be so! How often pressed to leave those paths of sin that would be sure to bring me to the chambers of eternal death! But I, like the deaf adder, lent no ear unto those charmers though they charmed so wisely. They told me often that my short-lived pleasures would quickly result in eternal pain; and now, this sad experience tells me, it tells me it is so indeed, but it is too late to help it, for my eternal state is fixed forever.

"Why had reason been given me? Why was I made with an immortal soul, and yet should take so little care of it? Oh, how my own neglect stings me to death, and yet I know I cannot, I must not

die! But live a dying life, worse than ten thousand deaths; and yet I might once have helped all this and would not! Oh, that is the gnawing worm that never dies! I might once have been happy, salvation once was offered me and I refused it. Ah, had it been but once, yet to refuse it had been a folly not to be forgiven, but it was offered to me a thousand times, and yet (wretch that I was) I still as often refused it. O cursed sin, that with deluding pleasures bewitches mankind to eternal ruin! God often called, but I as often refused; He stretched out His hands, but I would not mind it. How often have I set at nought His counsel. How often have I refused His reproof! But now the scene is changed, the case is altered; for now He laughs at my calamity, and mocks at the destruction which is come upon me.” He would have helped me once, but then I would not, and therefore those eternal miseries I am condemned to undergo are but the just reward of my own doing.” [Proverbs 1:26]

I could not hear this doleful lamentation without reflecting on the wondrous grace that ever blessed GOD has shown to me; eternal praises to His holy name! For my heart told me that I had deserved as much as that sad wretch to be the object of eternal wrath; and it is His grace alone that has made us differ! O how unsearchable are His counsels! And who can fathom His divine decree?

After these reflections, I addressed myself to the doleful complainer, and told him I had heard his woeful lamentation, by which I perceived his misery was great, and his loss irreparable; and told him I would willingly be informed of it more particularly, which might possibly be some lessening of his sufferings.

“No, not at all; pains are such as can admit of no relief, no not for one small moment. But by the question you have asked, I do perceive you are a stranger here; and may you ever be so. Ah! had I but the last opportunity still remaining, how I would kneel and cry and pray forever to be redeemed from hence! But ah! it is all in vain, I am lost forever. But so that you may beware of coming hither, I will tell you what the damned suffer here.”

“Our miseries in this infernal dungeon are of two sorts; what we have lost, and what we undergo. And these I will name under their several heads. First then for what we have lost.

What we have lost:

“In this sad dark abode of misery and sorrow, we have lost the presence of the ever blessed God. And this is that which makes this dungeon hell. Though we had lost a thousand worlds, it would not be so much as this one loss. Could but the least glimpse of His favor enter here, we might be happy; but we have lost it to our everlasting woe.

“Here we have likewise lost the company of saints and angels, and in their place have nothing but tormenting devils.

“Here we have lost heaven too. The seat of blessedness. There is a deep gulf between us and heaven, so that we are shut out from there forever. Those everlasting gates that let the blessed into happiness are now forever shut against us here.

“To make our wretchedness yet even more wretched, we have lost the hope of ever being in a better state, which renders our condition truly hopeless. The most miserable man upon earth still has hope. And therefore, it is a common proverb there that were it not for hope, the heart would break. Well may our hearts break then since we are both without hope and help. This is what we have lost; which, but to think on, is enough to fear and rend and gnaw upon our miserable souls forever. Yet, oh, that this were all! But we have a sense of pain as well as loss. And having showed you what we have lost, I am trying to show you what we undergo.”

What we under go:

“And first, we undergo variety of torments: we are tormented here a thousand, nay, ten thousand different ways. They that are most afflicted upon earth have seldom any more than one malady at a time. But should they have the plague, the gout, the stone, and fever at the same time, how miserable would they think themselves? Yet all those are but like the biting of a flea to those intolerable, pungent pains that we endure. Here we have all the loathed variety of hell to grapple with. Here is a fire that is inextinguishable to burn us with; a lake of burning brimstone ever choking us; an eternal chain to tie us; here is utter darkness to frighten us, and a worm of conscience that gnaws upon us everlastingly. And any one of these is worse to bear than all the torments mankind ever felt on earth.

“But as our torments here are various, so are they universal,

too, afflicting each part of the body, tormenting the powers of the soul, which renders what we suffer most unsufferable. In those illnesses you men are seized with on earth, though some parts are afflicted, other parts are free. Although your body may be out of order, your head may yet be well; and though your head be ill, your vitals may be free; or though your vitals be affected, your arms and legs may still be clear. But here it is otherwise: each member of the soul and body is at once tormented.

“The eye is here tormented with the sight of the devils who do appear in all the horrid shapes and black appearances that sin can give them. The ear is continually tormented with the loud yellings and continual outcries of the damned. The nostrils smothered with sulphurous flames; the tongue with burning blisters; and the whole body rolled in flames of liquid fire. And all the powers and faculties of our souls are here tormented. The imagination, with the thoughts of the present pain; the memory lost with reflecting on what a heaven we have lost, and of those opportunities we had of being saved. Our minds are here tormented with considering how vainly we have spent our precious time, and how we have abused it. Our understanding is tormented in the thoughts of our past pleasures, present pains, and future sorrows, which are to last forever. And our consciences are tormented with a continual gnawing worm.

“Another thing that makes our misery awful is the extremity of our torments. The fire that burns us is so violent that all the water in the sea can never quench it. The pains we suffer here are so extreme that it is impossible they should be known by any one but those that feel them.

“Another part of our misery is the ceaselessness of our torments. As various, as universal, and as extremely violent as they are, they are continual, too. Nor have we the least rest from them. If there were any relaxation, it might be some allay. But this makes our condition so deplorable that there is no easing of our torments, but what we suffer now we must forever suffer.

“The society or company we have here is another element in our misery. Tormenting devils and tormented souls are all our company; and dreadful shrieks and howlings, under the fierceness of our pain, and fearful oaths, is all our conversation. And here the

torments of our fellow sufferers are so far from lessening our misery that they increase our pain.

“The place in which we suffer is another thing that increases our sufferings. It is the abstract of all misery, a prison, a dungeon, a bottomless pit, a lake of fire and brimstone, a furnace of fire that burns to eternity, the blackness of darkness forever; and lastly, hell itself. And such a wretched place as this must needs increase our wretchedness.

“The cruelty of our tormentors is another thing that adds to our torments. Our tormentors are devils in whom there is no pity; but being tormented themselves, they yet take pleasure in tormenting us.

“All those particulars that I have reckoned up are very grievous; but that which makes them much more grievous is that they shall ever be so; and all our most intolerable sufferings shall last to all eternity. ‘Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fires’ is that which is perpetually sounding in my ears. Oh, that I could reverse that fatal sentence! Oh, that there was but a bare possibility of doing it! Thus have I showed you the miserable situation we are in, and shall be in forever.”

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This wretched soul had scarcely made an end of what he was saying before he was afresh tormented by a hellish fury, who bid him cease complaining, for it was in vain. “Besides,” said he, “don’t you know you deserved it all? How often were you told of this before, but would not then believe it? You laughed at those who told you about a hell; nay you were so presumptuous to dare Almighty Justice to destroy you! How often have you called on God to damn you. Do you complain that you are answered according to your wishes? What an unreasonable thing is this that you should call so often for damnation, and yet be so uneasy under it. You yourself know you had salvation offered you, and you refused it; with what face then can you complain of being damned? I have more reason to complain than you, but I was turned into hell as soon as I sinned. You had salvation offered you, and pardon and forgiveness were often extended to you; but I never had any mercy offered me, but was consigned was soon as I had sinned to everlasting punishment. If I had had the offer of salvation, I never would have slighted it as you have done. And you would have been better off if you had never

been offered it; for then damnation would have been easier to you. Who do you think should pity you that would be damned in spite of heaven itself?"

This made the wretch cry out, "Oh, do not thus continue to torment me. I know that my destruction is of myself. Oh, that I could forget it! The thoughts of that is here my greatest plague. I would be damned, and therefore justly am so."

Then turning to the fiend that tortured him he said, "But it was through your temptations, cursed devil. It was you that tempted me to all the sins I have been guilty of, and do you now upbraid me? You say you never had a Savior offered you, but you should call to mind you never had a tempter either, as I have had continually of you."

To this the devil scornfully replied, "I admit it was my business to entice you here! and you have often been told so by your preachers. They told you plainly enough we sought your ruin, and we went about continually like roaring lions seeking whom we could devour; and I was oft afraid you would believe them, as several did, to our great disappointment. But you were willing to do what we would have you, and since you have done our work, it is but reasonable that we should pay you wages." And then the fiend tormented him afresh, which caused him to roar out so horribly I could no longer stay to hear him.

"How dismal is the condition of these damned souls," I said to my guide. "They are the devil's slaves while upon the earth, and when they come to hell, he reproves them and then torments them."

"Their malice against all of Adam's race," said my guide, "is exceeding great. And because many souls are ignorant of their devices, they easily prevail upon them to their eternal ruin. And how they treat them here, for listening to their temptations, you have seen already and will see more of it quickly."

Fifth Encounter—Christian Ministers in Hell

Passing a little further we saw a multitude of damned souls together, gnashing their teeth with extreme rage and pain, while the tormenting fiends with hellish fury poured liquid fire and brimstone continually upon them. They, in the meantime, cursing God, themselves, and those about them, with tremendous blasphemies. I could not forbear asking of one fiend that so tormented them who they were that he used so cruelly?

Said he, "They are those that very well deserve it. These are those cursed wretches that would teach others the right road to heaven, while yet themselves were so in love with hell that they came hither. These are those souls that have been the great factors of hell upon the earth, and therefore do deserve a particular regard in hell. We use our utmost diligence to give every one their utmost share of torments, but will be sure to take care that these shall not lack punishment; for these have not only their own sins to answer for, but also those whom they have led astray both by their doctrine and example."

I answered him, "Since they have been such great forces for hell, as you say, I'm thinking you should show gratitude to them for doing your work while on earth."

To this the impudent fiend answered me in a scoffing manner. "They that expect gratitude among devils will find themselves mistaken. Gratitude is a virtue, but we hate all virtue and profess an immortal enmity against it. Beside, we hate all mankind, and were it in our power, not one of them would be happy. It is true we do not tell them so upon earth, because there it is our business to flatter and delude them. But when we have them here where they are fast enough (for from hell there is no redemption), we soon convince them of their folly in believing us."

From the discourse I had heard from this and others of the devils, I could not but reflect that it is infinite and unspeakable grace by which any poor sinners are brought to heaven, considering how many snares and baits are laid by the enemy of souls to entrap them by the way; and therefore it is a work well worthy of the blessed Son of God to save His people from their sins, and to deliver them from the wrath to come. But it is an unaccountable folly and madness in men to refuse the offers of His grace, and to close in with the destroyer.

Sixth Encounter—Following the Wrong Minister

Going on a little farther, I heard a wretched man complaining in a heartbreaking strain against those men that had betrayed him hither.

“I was told,” said he, “by those that I depended on and thought had informed me correctly, that if I only said, ‘Lord, have mercy on me’, then, when it came time to die, that would be enough to save me. But oh, wretchedly I find myself mistaken, to my eternal sorrow! Alas, I did call for mercy on my deathbed, but found it was too late. This cursed devil here told me that I was safe enough—but now he tells me it was too late, and hell must be my portion.”

“You see I told you the truth at last,” said the devil, “and then you would not believe me. Isn’t it a very pretty business? You spend your days in the pursuit of sin, and wallow in your filthiness, and you expect to go to heaven when you die! Would anybody except an imbecile think that would ever do? No! A person who earnestly intends to be accepted into heaven when he dies, must walk in the ways of holiness and virtue while he lives. You say some of your lewd companions told you that saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on me’ when you came to die would be enough. A very fine excuse! You might have known, if you’d given yourself but leisure, to have read the Bible that ‘Without holiness no one shall see the Lord.’ Therefore this is the sum of the matter. You were willing to live in your sins as long as you could, you did not leave them at last because you did not like them, but because you could not follow them while lying on your death bed. You know this is true. And could you have the impudence to think to go to heaven with the love of sin in your heart? No, no, no such matter. You have been warned often enough that you should take heed of being deceived, for God would not be mocked, but such as you sowed you should also reap. So that you have no reason to complain of anything but your own folly, which you now see too late.”

“This lecture of the devil was a very cutting one to the poor tormented wretch,” said my guide, “and contains the circumstance of many now on earth as well as those in hell. But oh, what a far different judgment do they make in this sad region from what they did on earth.

“The reason for this is,” continued my guardian angel, “that they will not allow themselves to think what the effect of sin will be, nor how evil it is, while upon the earth. It is this intentional neglecting the salvation of the soul that is the ruin of so many thousands who do not think about the result of what they are doing, nor where they are going until it is too late to help it.”

Seventh Encounter—A Famous Atheist in Hell

We had not gone much farther on before we heard another tormenting himself and increasing his own misery by thinking of the happiness of blessed souls. We were diverted from giving any further ear unto these stinging self-reflections of this poor lost creature by seeing a vast number of tormenting fiends lashing incessantly a numerous company of wretched souls with knotted whips of ever-burning steel, while they roared out with cries so very piercing and so lamentable I thought it might have melted even cruelty itself into some pity, which made me say to one of the tormentors, “Hold on, quit using such cruelty; this man is your fellow creature—and you may be the one who betrayed him to all this misery.”

“No,” answered the tormentor very smoothly, “though we are bad enough, no devil ever was as bad as they, nor guilty of such crimes as they have been. For we all know there is a God, although we hate Him! but these are such as never could be brought to own (till they came here) that there is such a Being.”

“Then these,” said I, “are atheists, a wretched sort of men indeed, and who once wanted to ruin me, had not eternal grace prevented it.”

I had no sooner spoken, when one of the tormented wretches cried out with a sad mournful accent, “Sure, I should know that voice. It must be Epenetus¹.”

I was amazed to hear my name mentioned by one of the infernal crew; and therefore being desirous to know what it was, I answered, “Yes, I am Epenetus. But who are you in that sad lost condition that knows me?”

¹ Apparently, Epenetus was a name that John Bunyan used in his younger days.

To this the lost unknown replied, “I was once well acquainted with you upon earth and had almost persuaded you to be of my opinion. I am the author of the celebrated book so well known by the title of *Leviathan*.”

“What! the great Hobbs²?” I said. “Are you come hither? Your voice is so much changed I did not recognize it.”

“Alas,” replied he, “I am that unhappy man indeed. But so far from being great that I am one of the most wretched persons in all these sooty territories. Nor is it any wonder that my voice is changed; for I am now changed in my principles, though changed too late to do me any good. For now I know there is a God. But oh! I wish that there were not, for I am sure He will have no mercy on me. Nor is there any reason that He should. I do confess I was His foe on earth, but now He is mine in hell. It is that wretched confidence I had in my own wisdom that has thus betrayed me.”

“Your case is miserable, and yet you needs must own you suffer justly. For how busy you were to persuade others, and so involve them in the same damnation. None has more reason to know this than I, who had almost been taken in the snare and perished forever.”

“That is the thing,” he said, “that stings me to the heart: to think how many perished by my actions. I was afraid when first I heard your voice that you had likewise been consigned to punishment here. Not that I can wish any person happy, because it is my punishment to think that many are being punished because of my actions, while I am miserable; but because every soul that is brought here through my seduction while I was on earth, doubles my pain in hell.”

“But tell me,” I continued, “because I would like to know: Did you really believe when you were on earth that there is no God? Did you imagine that the world could make itself, and that the creatures were the causes of their own production? Did you not have any secret whispers in your soul that told you that it was someone else that made you—and not you yourself? Didn’t you ever have any doubts about this matter?”

²Sometimes spelled Hobbes.

“I have often heard it said that though there are many who profess that there is no God, none of them really thinks that way; and it would be strange that they should, because there is no one who does not carry in his bosom a witness of that God whom he denies. Now you can tell if it is so, because you now have no reason to hide your beliefs.”

“Nor will I, Epenetus,” he answered. “Although those thoughts sting me afresh, I did at first believe there was a God, but falling afterwards to vicious habits/lifestyles, which made me open to His wrath, I had some secret wishes there was none. For it is impossible to think there is a God, and not to think of Him as just and righteous, and consequently that He is obliged to punish the transgressors of His law. And because I was conscious that I was obnoxious to His justice, it made me hate Him, and wish that there was no such Being. But still pursuing the same vicious courses, and finding justice did not overtake me, I then began to hope there was no God; and from those hopes began to frame in my own breast ideas suitable to what I hoped. And so having in my own thoughts formed a new system of the world’s origin, excluding from there the being of a Deity, I found myself so fond of these new notions that I at last prevailed upon myself to give them credit, and then endeavored to fasten belief in them on others. But before I fell low, I do acknowledge that I found several checks in my own conscience for what I did, and from time to time was troubled with some strange uneasy thoughts, in the end I would not find everything to be all right; rather, I tried to put it out of my mind, as much as I could.

But now I find that those checking thoughts that could have helped me, they are the things that torment me most of all here. And I must own the love of sin hardened my heart against the Maker, and made me hate Him first, and then deny His being. Sin, that I hugged so close within my bosom, has been the cursed cause of all this woe; the serpent that has stung my soul to death. For now I find, in spite of my vain philosophy, there is a God. I find, too, now that God will not be mocked, although it was my daily practice in the world to mock at heaven and ridicule whatever things are sacred, which were the means I used to spread abroad my cursed notions, which I always found very successful. For those I could but get to ridicule oracles,

I always looked upon as persons likely to become my disciples. But now the thoughts thereof are more tormenting to me than all the torments I sustain by whips of burning steel.”

I replied, “I would ask another question. I heard yourself and others cry out of burning steel and fire and flames; and yet I cannot discern it. Where there is fire there must be some degree of light; and yet from what appears to me you are still in utter darkness.”

“O that I could but say I felt no fire! How much easier my torments would be compared to that which I now find them! But alas, the fire that we endure ten thousand times exceeds all culinary fire in fierceness; and is of quite a different nature from it. There is no light at all attends it, as goes with such fire that burns on earth. But not withstanding all the fire in hell, we are in utter darkness. But then the fire you burn on earth is of a preying and devouring nature; for whatsoever it takes hold of, it consumes to ashes; and when it meets with no more fuel it goes out. But here it is not so. For though it burns with that tremendous fierceness, which none but those that feel it know, yet it does not consume, nor never will. We shall ever be burning, yet not burned. It is a tormenting, but not a consuming fire. Here the fire seizes upon our souls and puts them into pain so tormenting that it cannot be expressed.

It was my ignorance of this when on earth that made me ridicule the notion of immaterial substances being burned by fire; which here, to my own cost, I find too true. And then another difference betwixt the fire that burns us here and that which burns on the earth is this, that you can kindle that whenever you please and quench it when you will. But here it is otherwise; this fire is like to a stream of brimstone or sulfur, and it burns forever. And this is my answer to the last sad question that you asked me.”

“Sad indeed,” said I. “See what Almighty Power can inflict on those that violate His righteous law.” I was making some further observation on what I heard, when the relentless fiend who was before tormenting them, thus interrupted me.

“You see by him what sort of men they were when in the world; and do you not think that they deserve the punishment they undergo?”

To which I answered. “Doubtless it is the just reward of sin which now they suffer, and which hereafter you shall suffer too; for you, as well as they, have sinned against the ever blessed God, and for your sin shall suffer the just vengeance of eternal fire. Nor is it in the least any excuse to say you never doubted the being of a God; for though you knew there was a God, yet you rebelled against Him, and therefore shall be justly punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

To this the fiend replied, “It is true we know we shall be punished as you have said. But if there is a reason why mankind should have pity shown them, it is because they fell through the temptations of the devil. It is the same case with me and all the rest of the inferior spirits, for we are tempted by the Bright Sun of the Morning to take part with him. And therefore, though this aggravates the crime of Lucifer, it should extenuate that of inferior spirits.”

To this my bright guide, who had not spoken to them since my coming there, thus replied with a stern angry countenance.

“O you apostate, wicked, lying spirit! Can you affirm those things and see me here? Do you not know it was your proud heart that made you take part with Lucifer against the blessed God who had created you a glorious creature? But priding of yourself in your own beauty, you would have been above your blessed Creator, and were ready to take part with Lucifer, and justly are with him cast down to hell; and your former comeliness and beauty changed to that horrid monstrous form in which you now appear, as the just punishment of your rebellious pride.”

To this the apostate spirit only said, “Why do you thus invade our territories, and come here to torment us before our time?” And when he had said thus, slunk away, as if he dared not stay to have an answer.

Pay close attention to this sentence. It reveals the very essence of what causes suffering in Hell.

“I have observed,” I said, “that all of them complain most of the torment that arises from their own sense of guilt, which justifies the punishment. This gloomy prison is the best glass [mirror] to

behold sin in its most proper colors; for were there not the greatest malignity [sinfulness] in sin, it would not be rewarded with so

extreme a punishment.”

“Your inference is very natural. But there is yet a better glass than this to see the just demerits due to sin; and that is by contemplating and beholding the blessed Son of God on the cross. There we may see the dire effects of sin. There we may see its true malignity. For all this sufferings of the damned here are still but the sufferings of creatures; but on the cross you see a suffering God.”

“Surely,” I said, “justice and mercy did never so triumph and kiss each other as in that fatal hour on the cross. For there justice was fully satisfied in the just punishment of sin, and mercy triumphed and was pleased because thereby salvation for poor sinners was affected. And oh, eternal praises to His holy name forever, that His grace has made me willing to accept this salvation, and thereby to become an heir of glory, for I remember that some of those lost wretches here have in their bitter lamentation let me know that when salvation was offered them, they refused it. It was therefore grace alone that helped me to accept it.”

Return to Earth

At that point, my shining guardian told me that he must now conduct me to the earth again, and leave me there to wait with faith and patience till my expected happy change should come. “Come then,” said he, “and let us leave these realms of woe and horror to the possession of their black inhabitants.”

And in a very little space of time I found myself on earth again, and in that very place where I designed to have committed that black sin of being my own murderer, having been overcome by the temptations of the devil, who had persuaded me there was no God. But how was it that I came here, I am not at all able to determine. As soon as I was by the river bank that I before had sat on, the bright appearance by whom I had been all along conducted, said to me, “Now, Epenetus, you know where you are, and I must stay no longer with you now, I have another ministration to attend. Praise the one who sits upon the throne forever, who has all power in heaven, earth, and hell for all the wonders of His love and grace, that He has shown you in so short a space.”

As I was going to reply to him, my bright guide disappeared, and I was left alone, And having for some time considered the amazing visions I had seen, and the wondrous things that I had heard, I scarce believed I was again on earth, nor did I know how long I had been absent. I kneeled down and prayed that I might never lose a lovely sense of all those wondrous things that had been shown me, and then I rose up again, blessing and praising God for all His goodness.

Being returned unto my house, my family was much surprised to see my countenance strangely changed and looked upon me as if they scarce had known me, I asked them what the meaning was of their unusual admiration. They answered that it was the change in my face that caused it. “In what respect,” said I, “is it that I am altered so?”

They told me, “Yesterday your looks were so extremely clouded and cast down that you seemed the very image of despair; but now your face appears abundantly more beautiful and carries all the marks of perfect joy and its satisfaction.”

“If you had seen,” said I, “what I have seen today, you would not wonder at the change you see.” Then going into my closet I took my pen and ink and there wrote down what I had heard and seen, declaring the whole vision from first to last. All which I hope may have the same effect on those that read them as they had on me in writing them.”

— John Bunyan

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