

IMAGES OF HELL IN THE
TOURS OF HELL: ARE THEY TRUE?

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INTRODUCTION

An intriguing feature of both Jewish and Christian treatments of Hell is the literary genre that some have called Tours of Hell (or Tours of *Hades*). The most famous example of this genre is Dante's *Inferno*. Yet there were examples of it well over 1,000 years before his time. This genre is characterized by the author's claiming to have received an angelic revelation or vision in which an angel (or a saint) took him on a tour of Hell and explained the often grisly sights.

Going far beyond anything revealed in Scripture, the author's speculative imagination was freely expressed. Often he described a repulsive punishment that he claimed to have seen, and then recorded the explanation that he claimed to have received from the angel, describing the sin for which the individual was being punished. The author's descriptions of what he saw in Hell contain some especially vivid and even gross verbal portraits of its horrors.

II. OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA: JEWISH TEXTS

Since the earliest tours of Hell are found in the Jewish writings of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, these samples of this genre should be considered first.

A. 1 Enoch

The oldest extant records of these tours appear in 1 Enoch which records two of them: (1) 17-20; (2) 21-36. In each of these tours Biblical Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24) is described as being guided and instructed by such angels as Uriel and Rufael. The description of the second tour is longer and more detailed. It includes both Heaven and the extremities of the earth. Among the samples of punishments for the wicked are the retribution of plague and pain forever for those who curse (22:11) and of being accursed forever for speaking unworthily against the Lord (27:2).¹

B. Apocalypse of Zephaniah

Part of a short tour of *Hades* recorded in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah 10:3-11 (Akhmimic text) is as follows:²

I saw the sea which I had seen at the bottom of Hades. Its waves came up to the clouds. I

saw all the souls sinking in it. I saw some whose hands were bound to their neck, with their hands and feet being fettered. I said, “Who are these?” He said to me, “These are the ones who were bribed and they were given gold and silver until the souls of men were led astray. And I saw others covered with mats of fire, I said, “Who are these?” He said to me, “These are the ones who give money at interest, and they receive interest for interest.”

C. Testament of Isaac

The question/answer format is typical of these tours.

From the tour recorded in the Testament of Isaac 5:10-32 is the following excerpt:

Then I observed the deep river whose smoke had come up before me, and I saw a group of people at the bottom of it, screaming, weeping, every one of them lamenting. The angel said to me, “Look at the bottom to observe those whom you see at the lowest depth. They are the ones who have committed the sin of Sodom; truly, they were due drastic punishment.” (5:26-27)³

In response to questions asked during a tour of *Hades* recorded in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, the angel stated that the people in *Hades* would have an opportunity to repent. “Until the day when the Lord will judge” (10:10-11, Akhmimic text).⁴ In contrast, Pseudo Philo 33:2-3 described Deborah (Judges 4-5) as stating that there is no opportunity for repentance after one has died.⁵ Although this topic is not often discussed in it, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha presents conflicting positions on the issue of postmortem repentance.

D. Response

In the Tours of Hell several saints who were given a vision of some horrors of punishment there were profoundly moved to intercede in prayer for the damned. Although the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha is inconsistent as to the feasibility and results of such prayers, it does mention a few instances in which such prayers are described as answered.

After learning about postmortem punishments, Abraham is described as praying first for a man whose good and evil deeds were equally balanced and then for a broader group of clearly wicked people that they might be delivered from their misery-and God is described as answering his prayer affirmatively (Testament of Abraham 14:1-15).⁶

In another tour Zephaniah, after seeing the condition of the wicked in punishment, is described as imploring the Lord to have compassion on them (Apocalypse of Zephaniah 2:8-9, Akhmimic text).⁷ Later he described all the righteous in Heaven, led by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as praying daily for the wicked who were suffering these torments (Apocalypse of Zephaniah 11:1-6, Akhmimic text).⁸ Nothing was stated about the outcome of these prayers..

Nevertheless, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha also contains texts that convey a very different perspective. After asking specifically whether or not the righteous could intervene for the ungodly (especially for loved ones) on the day of judgment, Ezra was informed that the day of judgment will be decisive, its verdicts irrevocable, with the result that no intercessory prayer for the dead will be effective (4 Ezra 7:[102-113]).⁹ Another text attributes to Deborah the

statement that the dead can neither intercede nor pray in any other way (Pseudo-Philo 33:5).¹⁰ Both texts approved of intercession for those who were still living. These words were attributed to Deborah:

Only direct your heart to the LORD your God during the time of your life, because after your death you cannot repent of those things in which you live. . . even hell will not restore what has been received and deposited to it unless it be demanded by him who has made the deposit to it. Now therefore, my sons, obey my voice; while you have the time of life and the light of the law, make straight your ways (Pseudo Philo 33:2-3).¹¹

As far as I can determine, this was the earliest exhortation to straighten up one's life in order to avoid permanent residence in Hell.

The genre, Tours of Hell, originated in intertestamental Judaism. The Jewish Tours of Hell in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha started slowly with few specific connections between individual sins and the punishments for them. Yet it is clear that this material strongly influenced both earlier and later Christian Tours of Hell.¹² Some writings in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are either heavily Christian in themselves or originally Jewish compositions which were later reworked by Christian editors who inserted interpolations expressing Christian ideas. I shall include some of these writings in my survey of Christian Tours.

The Christian Tours of Hell in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the New Testament Apocrypha, and later Christian writings greatly expanded the number of sins connected with the depictions of the punishments applied for them. These descriptions were often vivid and sometimes repugnant. These Tours were produced throughout church history from perhaps the first century through the medieval period and less often afterward.

It is important to observe that these Tours of Hell could hardly have been produced apart from the perspective of the conscious endless punishment of the damned.

III. OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA: CHRISTIAN TEXTS

A. 2 Enoch¹³

The author of 2 Enoch described Enoch (Genesis 5:21-23), while on a tour of Hell, as seeing

a very frightful place: and all kinds of torture and torment are in that place, cruel darkness and lightless gloom. And there is no light there, and a black fire blazes up perpetually, with a river of fire that come out over the whole place, fire here, freezing ice there, and it dries up and it freezes; and very cruel places of detention and dark and merciless angels, carrying instruments of atrocities torturing without pity. (10:1-3 J)¹⁴

Enoch was informed that those suffering in these ways had been guilty of many sins including involvement with demons, stealing, coveting, fornication and murder (10:4-6 J). Later Enoch described the condemned prisoners as "in pain, looking forward to endless punishment" (40:13 J).¹⁵ These punishments were pictured in vivid imagery (fire, pain, instruments of atrocities)

without specific details.

B. Greek Apocalypse of Ezra¹⁶

Excerpts from the Greek Apocalypse picture Ezra as on a tour of Hell in which he was informed of the connections between specific sins and the punishments inflicted.

And they led me down deeper . . . And I saw old men there, and fiery axes were revolving upon their ears. And I said, "Who are these and what is their sin? And they said to me, "These are the eavesdroppers" . . . And they led me away. . . and there I saw a man hanging from his eyelids and the angels were beating him. And I asked, "Who is this man and what is his sin?" And Michael the archistrategos said to me, "This man is incestuous; having carried out a small lust, this man was commanded to be hanged" (4:15-19, 22-24).¹⁷

In these tours certain groups of angelic beings were often described as executors of the punishments that God considered appropriate, including punishments involving varieties of hangings.

C. Vision of Ezra¹⁸

Excerpts from the Tour of Hell that consists of most of the Vision of Ezra include the following:

And they led him lower . . . and he saw in that place men standing in torments. Some [angels] were throwing fire in their faces; others . . . were whipping them with fiery scourges. . . And Ezra said, "Who are they, who are in such torments daily?" The angels said, "They dwelled with married women; the married women are those who adorned themselves not for their husbands, but that they might please others, desiring an evil desire." Ezra said, "Lord, have mercy on the sinners." . . . And he saw virgins with five hundred pound neck irons on. . . And Ezra said, "Who are they?" And the angels said, "They violated their virginity before marriage." . . . And he saw visions of a furnace against . . . which were sent many kings and princes of this world; and many thousands of poor people were accusing them and saying, "They, through their power, wounded us and dragged free men into servitude." . . . And he saw in a most obscure place another furnace burning, into which many women were cast. And he said, "Who are they?" And the angels said, "They had sons in adultery and killed them" And those little ones accused them, saying, "Lord, the souls which you gave to us these (women) took away" (12-13, 15-18, 43-45, 48-49, 51-53).¹⁹

These punishments are not unlike those of other Christian Tours of Hell recorded in the New Testament Apocrypha.

(4) Responses

In response to the extreme torments that he saw in his Tour of Hell (partially quoted above), Ezra repeatedly pleaded with God to have mercy on the suffering sinners (Vision of Ezra

11, 18, 22, 33, 47, 55).²⁰ On another occasion an angel told Ezra to do good deeds while he still could in this life, not waiting until the end when his opportunity would be gone (Questions of Ezra 11-13).²¹

IV. NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The New Testament Apocrypha is a collection of miscellaneous writings, many of them with genres similar to those of the New Testament: gospel (e.g. Gospel of Thomas), apostolic history (e.g. Acts of John), apostolic letter (e.g. Letter of Peter to Philip), and apocalypse (e.g. Apocalypse of Peter). Dates for this literature extend from the second century to the medieval period. With one exception none of these writings was ever recognized as canonical by any early Christian leader or church. Although not Scripture and of pseudonymous authorship, these writings are nevertheless of historical interest in documenting the thought of various segments of the church at various times.

This literature often conveys a traditionalist view of the eternal conscious punishment of the deceased unredeemed wicked.

A. Apocalypse of Peter

Written in the mid-second century and very popular in the early church, the Apocalypse of Peter pictured the risen Christ as addressing His disciples on the Mount of Olives.²² Reproducing the contents of a visionary Tour of Hell, much of this Apocalypse attributes to Christ a series of prophecies concerning what the unredeemed wicked will suffer in Hell.²³ Like the standard visionary tours of Hell, these prophetic pictures were often grotesque, grisly, and even gruesome. The author defended the punishments to be received by the damned as justly deserved, which he pictured them as admitting.²⁴ He anticipated that the righteous will witness the sufferings of the wicked in Hell, an early expression of an idea that is periodically found in the literature on this topic.

For each sin the author pictured what he considered to be an appropriate punishment, usually involving intense physical pain or other unpleasantness. A sample passage will indicate the style and some of the content of the sufferings of the damned in Hell:

Then will men and women come to the place prepared for them. By their tongues with which they have blasphemed the way of righteousness will they be hung up. There is spread out for them unquenchable fire. . . .

And again two women: they are hung up by their neck and by their hair and are cast into the pit. These are they who plaited their hair, not to create beauty, but to turn to fornication, and that they might ensnare the souls of men to destruction. And the men who lay with them in fornication are hung by their thighs in that burning place, and they say to one another, 'We did not know that we would come into everlasting torture.'

And the murderers and those who have made common cause with them are cast into the fire, in a place full of venomous beasts, and they are tormented without rest, as they feel their pains, and their worms are as numerous as a dark cloud. . . . place of eternal judgment.

And near this flame there is a great and very deep pit and into it there flow all kinds of things from everywhere: judgment (?), horrifying things and excretions. And the women (are) swallowed up (by this) up to their necks and are punished with great pain. These are they who have procured abortions and have ruined the work of God which he has created. Opposite them is another place where the children sit, but both alive, and they cry to God. And lightnings go forth from those children which pierce the eyes of those who, by fornication, have brought about their destruction. Other men and women stand above them naked. And their children stand opposite to them in a place of delight. And they sigh and cry to God because of their parents, 'These are they who neglected and cursed and transgressed thy commandment. They killed us and cursed the angel who created (us) and hung us up. And they withheld from us the light which thou hast appointed for all.' And the milk of the mothers flows from their breasts and congeals and smells foul, and from it come forth beasts that devour flesh, which turn and torture them for ever with their husbands because they forsook the commandment of God and killed their children. . . . And those who slew them will be tortured for ever, for God wills it to be so.

Ezrael, the angel of wrath, brings men and women with the half of their bodies burning and casts them into a place of darkness, the hell of men; and a spirit of wrath chastises them with all manner of chastisement, and a worm that never sleeps consumes their entrails. These are the persecutors and betrayers of my righteous ones.

And near to those who live thus were other men and women who chew their tongues, and they are tormented with red hot irons and have their eyes burned. These are the slanderers and those who doubt my righteousness. . . .

In another place situated near them, on the stone a pillar of fire (?) And the pillar is sharper than words—men and women who are clad in rags and filthy garments, and they are cast upon it, to suffer the judgment of unceasing torture. These are they which trusted in their riches and despised widows and the woman (with) orphans . . . in the sight of God.

And into another place nearby, saturated with filth, they throw men and women up to their knees. These are they who lent money and took usury (1:7-10, Ethiopic).²⁵

The punishments for these sins are almost entirely pictured as physical. In addition to references to different forms of fire and burning, people are plunged into darkness, hanging by some part of their body connected with their sin (e.g. tongue, hair), thrown into slime, attacked by ferocious monsters. These sorts of details involve imaginative speculations that go far beyond anything envisioned in Scripture.

Nevertheless, consistent with New Testament teaching, these texts make it clear that these punishments were to last forever—with no letup, no relief, no reprieve, no second chance, and no escape. In spite of its sometimes grisly details, the imagery here is consistent only with the traditionalist view of conscious eternal punishment.

B. ACTS OF THOMAS

In this third century Syrian work, the author pictured the apostle Thomas as receiving a report from an unsaved woman who had just been raised from the dead concerning what she had seen.²⁶ Even though she had been murdered, her narrative was essentially a Tour of Hell, from which she had been delivered by her resurrection. This is what she saw.

A man received me, hateful of countenance, entirely black, and his clothing exceedingly dirty. And he led me to a place in which there were many chasms [Lk 16:36], and much ill odour and a hateful vapour was given off thence. And he made me look down into each chasm, and I saw in the (first) chasm a flaming fire, and wheels of fire were running <hither and> thither, and souls were hung upon those wheels, dashed against each other. And there was a cry there and a very great lamentation, but there was none to deliver. And that man said to me: “These souls are kindred to thee. . . and in the days of reckoning they were delivered for punishment and destruction. And then (when the chastisement of each is ended) others are brought in their stead, and likewise these again to another (chasm). These are they who perverted the intercourse of man and woman” And when I looked, I saw (new-born) infants heaped one upon another, and struggling with one another as they lay upon them. And he answered and said: “These are their children and therefore are they set here for a testimony against them.” And he led me to another chasm, and looking in I saw mire and worms welling up, and souls wallowing there, and (heard) a great gnashing break out thence from among them. And that man said to me: “These are the souls of women who forsook their husbands (and men who left their wives) and committed adultery with others and have been brought to this torment.” Another chasm he showed me, and when I looked into it, I saw souls, some hanging by the tongue, some by the hair, some by the hands, some by the feet head downwards, and (all) reeking with fire and brimstone. Concerning these, that man who was with me answered me: “These souls which are hung by the tongue are slanderers, and such as utter lying and infamous words, and are not ashamed. And those that are being hung by the hair are the shameless who have no modesty at all. . . and go about in the world bare-headed. And those which are hung by the hands, these are they who took away and stole the goods of others, and never gave anything to the needy or gave help to the afflicted <and> did this because they wished to take everything, and paid no heed whatever to justice and the law. And those who hung upside down by the feet, these are they who lightly and eagerly run <upon> evil ways and disorderly paths, not visiting the sick and not escorting them that depart this life. And for this cause each several soul receives what was done by it.” (Sixth Act: 55-56).²⁷

Some of these punishments are similar to and doubtless reflect the influence of the Apocalypse of Peter. In both Tours punishments were often depicted as some form of hanging. Their pictures of Hell are extremely gloomy and depressing.

C. APOCALYPSE OF PAUL

Although difficult to determine, the date of this work was probably late fourth century.²⁸

Perhaps the best known and most influential of the ancient Tours of Hell was the Apocalypse of Paul. It had a strong impact upon Dante who only had to add conversations with the damned to adapt its structure for his Tour.²⁹ This work was known by Augustine who scornfully designated it “fables.”³⁰ At many points the Apocalypse of Paul is strikingly similar to the Apocalypse of Peter, although longer and more detailed.³¹

The Apocalypse of Paul records the alleged content of the revelation actually received by the Apostle Paul when he was taken into the third heaven, a revelation that the apostle described as involving “things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). It consists of an extended tour of what happens after death, including an important segment on Hell on which we shall focus our attention.

As with the Apocalypse of Peter, the Apocalypse of Paul connected specific sins with what were considered appropriate punishments, though giving more details, mentioning more categories of sinners and more types of punishments.³² These included pits, worms, beasts, rivers of fire, and more angels of torment. Grotesque pictures of the sufferings of the damned included wailing and gnashing of teeth, moaning and groaning in utter darkness, sinking in rivers of fire to their knees, stomach, lips or eyelids, depending upon which member of the body had been involved in sin, and torment by worms that do not die.³³ This was the first Apocalypse to connect church-related sins to their appropriate punishment.³⁴

Samples of sins mentioned along with their appropriate punishments include the following:³⁵ Those who left the church and resumed their idle talk will be immersed in a river of fire up to their knees (31). Those who received communion while continuing to sin will wade in that river of fire up to their navels. Those who slandered each other while in church will be immersed in that river up to their lips. Those who nod to each other while secretly plotting evil against their neighbor will be covered up in that river up to their eyebrows.

The elders who ate, drank, fornicated while “serving” the altar in their ministry will be attacked and strangled by the guardians of Tartarus who will use three-pronged forks to pierce their intestines (34). The unjust bishop who shows no compassion for widows and orphans will be pierced and beaten by four angels (35). The deacon with bloody hands will be up to his knees in the river of fire while worms come out of his mouth and from his nostrils (36a). The one who reads the Biblical commandments to the people while failing to keep them will have his lips and tongue lacerated by a blazing razor wielded by an angel (36b). Those who reviled the word of God in church will be confined to a wall while chewing their tongues (37b). Those who broke fasts will be hung over a channel of water with fruit nearby which they will not be permitted to consume.

Usurers will be attacked and devoured by worms (37a). Fornicators will experience unceasing torment in a pit of fire (38). Women who gave up their virginity before marriage will wear blazing chains on their shoulders (39a). Adulterers will be hung by their eyebrows or hair in a river of fire (39d). Male homosexuals will be put in tar and sulphur running in a river of fire (39e). Those guilty of abortion and infanticide will be torn to pieces by wild animals on fiery pyramids and strangled by angels of punishment (40). Those failing to show compassion will be clothed in rags full of sulphuric fire, serpents draped around their bodies, and angels with horns of fire to beat them and close their nostrils. As can be observed from the above, the relationship between sin and punishment is not always clear.³⁶

Sample passages from the Apocalypse of Paul include the following:³⁷

And I saw another man up to his knees in the river of fire. And his hands were stretched out and bloody, and worms came out of his mouth and from his nostrils and he was groaning and weeping and crying, and he said: "Have mercy on me, for I suffer more than the rest who are in this punishment." . . . he said . . . He whom you see was a deacon who ate up the offerings and committed fornication and did not do right in the sight of God. Therefore increasingly he pays the penalty (36).

And in that place I saw another set of pits and in the middle of it a river full of a multitude of men and women whom worms were devouring. I then wept and with a sigh . . . asked . . . he said . . . They are those who exacted usury at compound interest and trusted in their riches and did not hope in God that he would be helper to them (37).

And again I saw men and women with very black faces in the pit of fire, and sighing and weeping I asked . . . he said . . . These are fornicators and adulterers who although they had their own wives committed adultery; and similarly the women committed adultery in the same way, though they had their own husbands. Therefore increasingly they pay the penalty (38).

And I saw other men and women suspended by their eyebrows and hair, and a river of fire drew (?) them . . . They are those who did not give themselves to their own husbands and wives but to adulterers, and therefore they pay their own particular penalty increasingly (39).

And I saw other men and women covered with dust, and their faces were like blood, and they were in a pit of tar and brimstone, and they were running in a river of fire. . . . They are those who have committed the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, men with men. Therefore they pay the penalty increasingly (39).

The descending Christ, in response to the repentance and prayers of the damned and prayers for the damned by the living, will show some mercy by moderating the punishments of Hell, including ease on the Lord's day (44).³⁸ This picture which is contrary to God's Word encourages the practice of prayers for the unredeemed dead, a practice that is also contrary to Scripture.

D. Witness

1. Apocalypse of Peter

After his Tour of Hell during which he had been profoundly moved by the intense and endless sufferings of the damned, Peter was described as being told by the Lord: "Spread thou my gospel throughout the whole world in peace! For there will be rejoicing (?) at the source of my word, the hope of life, and suddenly the world will be carried off" (14).³⁹

According to this non-canonical version of the Great Commission, Peter received his

orders to preach the gospel with his visions of Hell from his recent tour still vividly impressed upon his mind. The gospel that he was sent to preach is God's antidote to that fate. The ominous words at the end of this quoted text warn that that antidote will not be available indefinitely.

2. Acts of Thomas

Previously, we quoted extensively from the Acts of Thomas the testimony of an unsaved woman who had experienced a vision of Hell between her being murdered and her being raised from the dead. In the light of her terrifying report, Thomas was described as giving a passionate exhortation.

You have heard what this woman related. But there are not only these punishments, but also others worse than these. And you also, if you do not turn to this God whom I preach, and desist from your former works and from the deeds which you wrought without knowledge, shall have your end in these punishments. Believe therefore in Christ Jesus, and he forgives you the sins committed before this, and will cleanse you from . . . all your bodily desires which remain on the earth, and will heal you from the trespasses which follow you and depart with you and are found before you (Sixth Act: 58).⁴⁰

This is an example of the urgency present in gospel preaching when there is vivid awareness of the horrifying terrors of Hell.

3. Apocalypse of Paul

After the Apocalypse of Paul had completed its depiction of Paul's tour of postmortem realities including those of Hell, it recorded these observations and exhortations.

. . . the angel who was with me led me out and said with great seriousness: Paul, the mystery of this revelation has been given to you; as it pleases you, make it known and reveal it to men. I, Paul, however, came to myself and I knew and understood what I had seen and I wrote it in a roll. And while I lived, I did not have rest to reveal this mystery, but I wrote it (down) and deposited it under the wall of a house of that believer with whom I was in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia. And when I was released from this temporal life (and stood) before my Lord, he spoke thus to me: Paul, have I shown everything to you so that you should put it under the wall of a house? Rather send and reveal it for its sake so that men may read it and turn to the way of truth that they may not come into these bitter torments (51).⁴¹

Again awareness of the glories of Heaven and especially the horrors of Hell are to motivate Christians to proclaim the gospel with great urgency. For the gospel offers people both the opportunity to receive the marvelous blessings of Heaven and to be saved from the terrifying endless doom of Hell. As wonderful as the former will be, it is the latter that makes gospel proclamation crucial to handling a desperate situation, the outcome of which will have eternal consequences.

V. MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN TOURS OF HELL: DANTE ALIEGHIERE (1265-1321)

Many medieval Christian Tours of Hell were influenced by the Apocalypse of Paul and showed striking similarities to it.⁴² Some of them include the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra (second to ninth century), the Vision of Ezra (third to seventh century), and the Greek Apocalypse of Mary (perhaps eleventh century).⁴³ In spite of their association with Ezra (an Old Testament Hebrew leader), these are Christian compositions.⁴⁴

Dante was a famous Italian poet who wrote the best known and most influential of the Tours of Hell, his *Inferno*, the first canticle of his *Divine Comedy*. Not a professional theologian, Dante presented a popular medieval theology held by the ordinary layman.⁴⁵ Although creating a powerful impression of Hell with his vivid and grotesque imagery, he did little to inform his readers concerning the true picture of Hell that Scripture envisions. Nevertheless, Dante's picture has become the standard portrait of Hell for popular writers in subsequent centuries.

Recognizing his work as imaginative and highly speculative, Dante did not intend for the figurative language of his poetry to be understood as literal doctrine. Problems developed when "many subsequent readers, imitative writers, and preachers *forgot these descriptions were speculations and treated them rather as theological dogma.*"⁴⁶ Misconstruing Dante in this way resulted in setting up a straw man that was easy for skeptics to repudiate. Picturing Lucifer/Satan as a three-faced (one red) monster (XXIV, 34-81) with huge wings and incredible size is hardly a valid basis for repudiating the reality of Satan. The error is in equating this fictional caricature with the Devil.

Dante's *Inferno* is saturated with Biblical allusions that are obscure to most modern readers. It is also saturated with historical and mythological allusions that will be completely meaningless to virtually everyone except for experts in both ancient and medieval history and mythology.⁴⁷ Dante's guide and companion for his Tour of Hell was Virgil, a Roman poet who had died in 19 B.C.⁴⁸

Characteristics of Dante's Hell include fire, darkness, ice, and a foul stench, fiery rivers and sands, grotesque forms and immense size of demonic monsters, being ripped apart by another's teeth, only to be re-formed to repeat the process.

Early in his tour Dante saw an ominous sign on a ledge above a gate through which those headed for Hell would pass:

THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE DOLEFUL CITY,
THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO ETERNAL GRIEF,
THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG A RACE FORSAKEN. . . .

BEFORE ME NOTHING BUT ETERNAL THINGS
WERE MADE, AND I SHALL LAST ETERNALLY.
ABANDON HOPE, FOREVER, YOU WHO ENTER.
(III. 1-3, 7-9)⁴⁹

In Dante's *Inferno* there were few punishments involving some sort of hanging. But there were many torments involving various versions of fire, violence such as ripping flesh apart, sitting in muck and mire. Dante vividly portrayed the experiences and reactions of the damned with regard to their various forms of torment. He wrote:

Here sighs and cries and shrieks of lamentation
 echoed throughout the starless air of Hell;
 as first these sounds resounding made me weep:
tongues confused, and languish strained in anguish
 with cadences of anger, shrill outcries
 and raucous groans in time to slapping hands.
raising a whirling storm that turns itself
 Forever through that air of endless black,
 like grains of sand swirling when a whirlwind blows
 (III. 22-30).⁵⁰

He vividly depicted the distressing torment suffered by those who had committed sins springing from lust.

And now the notes of anger start to play
 upon my ears; and now I find myself
 where sounds on sounds of weeping pound at me.
I came to a place where no light shone at all,
 bellowing like the sea racked by a tempest,
 when warring sounds attack it from both sides.
The infernal storm, eternal in its rage,
 sweeps and drives the spirits with its blast:
 it whirls them, lashing them with punishment.
When they are swept back past their place of judgment,
 then come the shrieks, laments and anguished cries;
 there they blaspheme the power of almighty God.
I learned that to this place of punishment
 all those who sin in lust have been condemned,
 those who make reason slave to appetite;
And as the wings of starlings in the winter
 bear them along in wide-spread, crowded flocks,
 so does that wind propel the evil spirits:
here, then there, and up and down, it sweeps them
 forever, without hope to comfort them
 (hope, not of getting rest, but of suffering less)
 (V. 25-45).⁵¹

Different, but no less repugnant, torment will be the fate of those who were overcome by anger or who were excessively lazy. Dante described these sufferings as occurring in a swamp named Styx.

And I, intent on looking as we passed,

saw ruddy people moving in that marsh,
 all naked, with their faces scarred by rage.
 They fought each other, not with hands alone,
 but struck with head and chest and feet as well,
 with teeth they tore each other from limb to limb.
 And the good teacher said: "My son, now see
 the souls of those that anger overcame;
 and I ask you to believe me when I say
 beneath the slimy top are sighing souls
 who make these waters bubble at the surface;
 your eyes will tell you this—just look around.
 Bogged in this slime they say, 'Sluggish we were
 to the sweet air made happy by the sun,
 and the smoke of sloth was smouldering in our hearts;
 now we lie sluggish, here in this black muck!'
 This is the hymn they gurgle in their throats
 but cannot sing in words that truly sound."
 Then making a wide arc we walked around
 the pond between the dry bank and the slime,
 our eyes still fixed on those who gobbled mud
 (VII. 109-129).⁵²

This pictures the hostile as unleashing their hostility without any restraint, repeatedly inflicting maximum damage and pain on each other while the lazy are too sluggish to move themselves out of the miserable muck that they continue to consume.

Punishments for various sins were ingeniously varied.

This wasteland was a dry expanse of sand,
 thick, burning sand, . . .
 Many separate herds of naked souls I saw,
 all weeping desperately; it seemed each group
 had been assigned a different penalty:
 some were stretched out flat upon their backs,
 others were crouching there all tightly hunched,
 some wandered, never stopping, round and round.
 Far more there were those who roamed the sand
 and fewer were the souls stretched to suffer,
 but their tongues were looser, for the pain was greater.
 And over all that sandland, a fall of slowly
 raining broad flakes of fire showered steadily
 (a mountain snowstorm on a windless day).. . .
 Here too a never ending blaze descended,

kindling the sand like tinder under flint-sparks,
and in this way the torment there was doubled.
Without a moment's rest the rhythmic dance
of wretched hands went on, this side, that side,
brushing away the freshly fallen flames
(XIV. 13-14, 19-30, 37-42).⁵³

Musa suggested that those who lay flat on the ground were blasphemers, that those who crouched while tightly hunched were usurers, and that those who were endlessly wandering were homosexuals.⁵⁴

Although similar in many ways to previous Tours of Hell, Dante has added a few innovative elements. The descriptions of suffering are expanded, more vivid, more detailed including some gruesome ones. The travelers periodically conversed with damned individuals, some of whom were identified as past or contemporary persons. The dark poetic imagery produces a gloomy mood. The punishments continued to be pictured as primarily physical torment with no termination or even relief. One can hardly make sense of Dante's *Inferno* apart from a traditionalist perspective.

VI. POST REFORMATION THEOLOGY AND MODERN THEOLOGY

The frequency of the appearance of Tours of Hell declined significantly after the Protestant Reformation. This happened because of (1) an increased Protestant emphasis upon soteriological issues, (2) the growing popularity of non-traditionalist views of Hell, (3) the declining emphasis upon Hell as eternal punishment. Replacing the Tours of Hell were poets and Hellfire preachers who drew from the imagery used in the Tours of Hell to portray their verbal pictures that dramatized the horrors of Hell.

A. THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1. John Milton (1608-1674)⁵⁵

An English poet and literary genius, John Milton was not a professional theologian and did not write a systematic theology. Influenced by Dante, Milton's picture of Hell was deliberately fictional and speculative. As with Dante, later writers, ignoring Milton's intent, treated his material as a literal picture of Hell, ignoring the figurative nature of his poetic imagery, and repudiated the straw man they had thereby set up.

After describing Satan as the prime instigator of Adam's rebellion against God and consequent expulsion from Paradise (Eden), Milton pictured Satan's rebellion and effort to become equal to God as resulting in his expulsion by God from Heaven into Hell.

If he oppos'd: and with ambitious aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
Rais'd impious War in Heav'n and Battle proud
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power

Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Sky
 With hideous ruin and combustion down
 To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
 In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,
 Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to Arms.
 Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night
 To mortal men, hee with his horrid crew
 Lay vanquisht, rolling in the fiery Gulf
 Confounded though immortal: But his doom
 Reserv'd him more wrath; for now the thought
 Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
 Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
 That witness'd huge affliction and dismay
 Mixt with obdurate pride, and steadfast hate:
 At once as far as Angels' ken he views
 The dismal Situation waste and wild,
 A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
 As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from these flames
 No light, but rather darkness visible
 Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
 That comes to all, but torture without end
 Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
 With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd;
 Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd
 For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd
 In utter darkness, and their portion set
 As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n's
 As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole
 O how unlike the place from whence they fell!⁵⁶

Like Dante, Milton pictured Satan as the ruler of Hell, attributing to him this infamous statement about his reign:

Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
 To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
 Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heav'n.⁵⁷

These authors did much to popularize the notion that contrary to Scripture, Satan is the CEO that administers the affairs of Hell.

Although not written as a Tour of Hell, *Paradise Lost* displays imagery that expands beyond Biblical terminology to an extent that is reminiscent of Dante and earlier Tours, even

though not nearly as explicit. These include bottomless perdition, Adamantine chains, penal fire, massive space, torment by the thought of lost happiness and lasting pain, a huge fiery furnace that produces only darkness, complete absence of rest and hope, endless torture in burning sulphur that is never consumed, uninterrupted misery.

2. Richard Baxter (1615-1691)⁵⁸

Baxter, an English Puritan pastor, pictured the wicked in Hell as aware of the full extent of their loss, especially their fellowship with and delight in God. He stressed their recognition of the enormity of their sin and consequent guilt.

Using fire imagery depicting God's wrath, he portrayed the just suffering of the impenitent in Hell:

The everlasting flames of hell will not be thought too hot for the rebellious; and when they have there burned through millions of ages, he will not repent him of the evil which is befallen them. Woe to the soul that is thus set up as a butt, for the wrath of the Almighty to shoot at, and as a bush that must burn in the flames of his jealousy, and never be consumed.⁵⁹

With vivid imagery Baxter pictured the everlasting torment that portrays God's wrath as inconceivable and intolerable. He described Satan as the executor of God's wrath.

Baxter's emphasis upon eternal punishment in Hell in his preaching reflected his zeal in striving to persuade people to turn to Jesus Christ for salvation and thereby to avoid the everlasting torment that they would otherwise have to face. He wrote:

Preaching heaven and mercy to thee, is entreating thee to seek them and not reject them; and preaching hell is but to persuade thee to avoid it. If thou wert quite past hope of escaping it then were it in vain to tell thee of hell; but as long as thou are alive, there is hope of thy recovery, and therefore all means must be used to awake thee from thy lethargy.⁶⁰

B. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

1. Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

An English pastor and educator, Watts achieved fame as a prolific writer of Christian hymns, including "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "Jesus Shall Reign," "Joy to the World," and "At the Cross."

In his hymn, "Day of Judgment," he wrote:

Hopeless mortals! How they scream and shiver while
devils push them into the pit wide yawning
Hideous and gloomy to receive them headlong
Down to the center.⁶¹

His picture of pushing sinners into the broad hideous pit is contrary to Biblical teaching which portrays demons as prime victims of Hell. Yet in this stanza his imagery is reminiscent of that of Dante and other Tours of Hell.

In a sermon on Mark 9:48 he wrote:

It is confessed, that a discourse on this dreadful subject is not a direct ministration of grace and the glad tidings of salvation, yet it has a great and happy tendency to the same end, even the salvation of sinful men; for it awakens them to a more piercing sight and to a keen sensation of their own guilt and danger; it possesses their spirits with a more lively sense of misery, it fills them with a holy dread of divine punishment and excites the powerful passion of fear to make them fly from the wrath to come, and betake themselves to the grace of God revealed in the gospel.⁶²

Watts did not hesitate to use Hellfire material in order to instill such fear in sinners as to motivate them to turn to God in Christ to be saved from that horrid fate.

2. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

a. General Information

Jonathan Edwards became a Christian while a student at Yale. Both a tutor at Yale and a pastor, he became a powerful preacher. God used him as a major instrument in the Great Awakening (1734-1735) and in a more extensive revival (1740-1741). Later he was a frontier pastor in Stockton, Massachusetts and a missionary to nearby American Indians. A month after being inaugurated President of Princeton, he died from the effects of a smallpox injection.⁶³

Outstanding as both a philosopher and a theologian, Edwards was especially significant for our topic since he was a prolific writer who produced numerous discussions of Hell from a traditionalist perspective. Although famous for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," he devoted even more sermons and essays to Heaven than to Hell! He also produced other important, perceptive, scholarly writings.

b. Unavoidable/Intolerable Punishment

In his sermon, "The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable," Edwards made it clear that in Hell there will be no possibility of any alternatives available to sinners in this present life.⁶⁴ For them there will be no deliverance, no effective intercession to God for them, no appeasing God to soften the ferocity of His wrath and punishment, no relief or rest from their intense suffering in Hell, and no way to escape this dire situation. The hopelessness of their condition will make their pain unbearable. Nevertheless powerless against God, they will have to endure their unbearable punishment forever. This will include both the affliction of physical pain to the body and the anguished awareness of the soul of its complete loss of any fellowship with or blessing from God.

Edwards pictured the anguish and intense pain of endless torment in Hell in imagery reminiscent of the Tours of Hell. He wrote:

The world will probably be converted into a great lake or liquid globe of fire, in which the wicked shall be overwhelmed which shall always be in tempest, in which they shall be

tossed to and fro, having no rest day or night, vast waves or billows of fire continually rolling over their heads, of which they shall ever be full of a quick sense, within and without; their heads, their eyes, their tongues, their hands, their feet, their loins and their vitals shall forever be full of glowing melting fire, enough to melt the very rocks and elements. Also they shall be full of the most quick and lively sense to feel the torments, not for tens of millions of ages, but forever and ever, without any end at all.⁶⁵

After painting such a somber picture of unending torment, Edwards' usual pattern was to develop its implications involving the need, while still in this life, to repent, turning to God who can bring about the new birth. This is the only way to be saved from this awful fate.

c. Satanic/Demonic Participation

Reflecting the imagery of Dante and other Tours of Hell, Edwards pictured Satan and demons as active agents in dragging unwilling, but unrepentant, sinners into Hell. In his famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," he wrote:

The devil stands ready to fall upon them and seize them as his own at what moment God shall permit him. They belong to him; he has their souls in his possession and under his dominion. . . . The devils watch them; they are ever by them at their right hand. They stand waiting for them like greedy, hungry lions that see their prey and expect to have it, but are, for the present, held back. If God should withdraw His hand by which they are restrained, they would in one moment fly upon their poor souls. The old serpent is gaping for them. Hell opens its mouth wide to receive them, and if, God would permit it, they would be hastily swallowed up and lost.⁶⁶

This is powerful, emotionally charged imagery. Nevertheless, it does not fit the picture painted by Scripture. The Bible pictures Satan and demons as being punished in the lake of fire (e.g. Revelation 20:2, 7-10). Although depicting Satan and demons as exerting their evil influence in the world, the Bible does not teach that Satan and demons have the power and authority to drag anyone into Hell or to punish anyone in Hell. Only God can do that.

d. Purpose of Hellfire preaching

Edwards made a strong emotional appeal, using vivid imagery to picture Hell in its terrifying reality in order to shock people out of their apathy toward God and the issues involving their eternal future. Yet his main thrust was to appeal to their reason. As Davidson well summarized Edwards' logic, "Hell is the only logical destiny for the unrepentant soul, and denying that is only an illogical exercise in self-delusion."⁶⁷

Edwards' rationale for preaching Hell included the following reasons: God commands it. The sinner needs to be warned of his approaching doom. Instilling fear in the sinner will, hopefully, arouse him out of his spiritual lethargy, producing such a fear and revulsion of their future that they would repent, turning to God through faith in Jesus Christ for the new birth that only God can give.⁶⁸ That is why he usually closed his sermons with an extended application in which he would urge his audience to do just that.

e. Evangelistic Hellfire Preaching

Although sometimes using imagery similar to Dante, Milton, and the earlier Tours of Hell, Edwards was more restrained and less speculative. For example, he warned that the clothing coveted by many will become cloaks of fire in Hell.⁶⁹ This warning led to an urgent appeal to repent, turning to Jesus Christ.

Edwards was so convinced of the reality of Hell that he considered it essential as well as logical that he should warn people against it. In defending his approach he wrote:

Some talk of it as an unreasonable thing to fright persons to heaven, but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from hell. They stayed upon its brink, and are just ready to fall into it, and are senseless of their danger. Is it not a reasonable thing to fright a person out of a house on fire?⁷⁰

Edwards' preaching was often intense, being more personalized than the Tour writers. In an effort to alert the lost to their dire dangers to which they are oblivious, he wrote:

The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.⁷¹

In his "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Edwards vividly portrayed sinners as dangling over Hell, protected only by God who was already angry with them:

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in. It is a great furnace of wrath, and a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of, nothing that you have ever done, nothing that you can do to induce God to spare you one moment.⁷²

With such picturesque imagery Edwards sought to make each individual feel that he was the one in this precarious predicament so close to disaster. He warned that even within his congregation there were those who were about to suffer that dreadful endless torment that he had depicted. His goal was to shatter their delusions of well-being in order to help them to perceive their imminent danger of ultimate doom. Facing that threat clearly, they would, hopefully, repent, placing their faith in the only One capable of saving them from that horrifying doom: the Lord Jesus Christ. Edwards testified that during the Great Awakening his converts had differing testimonies, but that the common thread running through all of them was their fear of eternal damnation.⁷³ Thus for him evangelistic outreach was a logical and natural consequence of his keen awareness of the endless torment of the damned.

C. THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

1. Charles G. Finney (1792-1875)⁷⁴

An exceptional individual, Finney was born in Connecticut, raised on the shores of Lake Ontario in western New York, and served an apprenticeship at law. Converted as an adult in 1821, he had a multi-faceted career as pastor, college professor, and president (Oberlin College in Ohio), and especially as a highly effective traveling evangelist. His national reputation as an outstanding American revivalist was established through his ministry in revivals of 1825-1831.

Finney became an outstanding orator with extraordinary clarity, tone, ranges of vocal power and pitch. During his early ministry in western New York, his preaching was vehement, scolding, dramatic, and highly personal. A unitarian made these observations about Finney's preaching style:

You raise your voice, lift high your head, bend forward your trunk, fasten your staring eyes upon the auditors, declare that they know it to be God's truth that they stand upon the brink of hell's gaping pit of fire and brimstone, and bending your body and bringing your clenched fist halfway from the pulpit to the broad aisle, denounce *instant and eternal damnation* upon them unless they repent forthwith.⁷⁵

Another critic pictured Finney's Hellfire preaching in terms of imagery reminiscent of the Tours of Hell genre: "Look, look, see the millions of wretches biting and gnawing their tongues as they lift their scalding heads from the burning lake [of hell] . . . Hear them groan amidst the fiery billows as they lash and lash and lash their burning shores . . ."⁷⁶

Another description of Finney's preaching style included a response of his captivated audience:

While depicting the glories or the terrors of the world to come he trod the pulpit like a giant. He gave his imagination full play. His voice, wide in scope and mellow in pathos, now rung in tones of warning and exhortation, and anon melted in sympathetic accents of entreaty and encouragement. . . . As he would stand with his face toward the side gallery, and then involuntarily wheel around, the audience in that part of the house towards which he threw his arm would dodge as if he were throwing something at them. In describing the sliding of a sinner to perdition, he would lift his long finger towards the ceiling and slowly bring it down till it pointed to the area in front of the pulpit, when half his hearers in the rear of the house would rise unconsciously to their feet to see him descend into the pit below.⁷⁷

Finney's traditionalist perspective was a major factor in propelling him into evangelistic ministry. His vivid imagery of Hell and his dramatic flair in warning people against it were designed to bring people to repentance and conversion, the only way to avoid the horrors of Hell. For all his God-given abilities, Finney was well aware of his dependence upon the Holy Spirit's effective operations through him for his successful ministry.

2. Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

An evangelical Calvinist and Baptist, Spurgeon was an English pastor who was renowned for his exceptional preaching. A firm traditionalist, Spurgeon's vivid imagery and emotionally moving pictures are clear in selected quotations from his sermons. "The angel, binding you hand and foot, holds you one single moment over the mouth of the chasm. He bids you look down—down—down. There is no bottom, and you hear coming up from the abyss, sullen moans, and hollow groans, and screams of tortured ghosts."⁷⁸

You cannot compare the pains of this life with the agonies to be endured hereafter. Could all the misery that ever startled the keepers of our hospitals be conceived, it could not convey the least idea of the pains of the spirits that are doomed to dwell in eternal fire and everlasting burning. The woe, however, will act its terrible part on the soul. The memory aghast—hope and fear, thoughts and imaginations, conscience and judgment, all will be racked, every one be stretched on a bed of fire, every nerve strained to its utmost, every vein made a road for the hot feet of pain to travel on.⁷⁹

In another passage Spurgeon painted an imaginative portrait of Hell in terms not unlike those of Dante and earlier Tours of Hell:

There is a real fire in Hell, as truly as you have a real body—a fire exactly like that on this earth, except this: that it will not consume though it will torture you. You have seen asbestos lying amid red hot coals, but not consumed. So your body will be prepared by God in such a way that it will burn forever without being consumed. With your nerves laid raw by searing flame, yet never desensitized for all its raging fury, and the acrid smoke of the sulphurous fumes searing your lungs and choking your breath, you will cry out for the mercy of death, but it will never, never, no never, give you surcease.⁸⁰

Spurgeon's purpose was not merely to dramatize the horrors of Hell, but to make people sufficiently aware of the alternative to the gospel that they would be motivated to turn to Jesus Christ and be saved from endless doom. His ministry had a strong evangelistic element that he evidently succeeded in imparting to his flock. For during his 38 years of ministry in London, membership in his church more than tripled from 6,000 to almost 21,000.

(9) Albert B. Simpson (1845-1919)⁸¹

Born on Prince Edward Island near Nova Scotia, Canada (northeast of Maine), Simpson decided early to prepare for pastoral ministry. He served Presbyterian churches as pastor in Hamilton (Prince Edward Island), Louisville (Kentucky), and New York City. Leaving the presbytery, Simpson ministered independently of any denomination. His involvement in street evangelism and other ministries to the unchurched eventually led to the establishment of an independent church called the Gospel Tabernacle (in New York City).

Although never going overseas himself, Simpson was renowned for his contribution to world missions. He did this as his growing movement expanded into a non-denominational missionary society called the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Its purpose was to recruit, train,

and send out missionaries for the rapid evangelization of the world. In the decades after Simpson's death, the Christian and Missionary Alliance gradually developed into a denomination with a lively emphasis upon missions.

Simpson recognized that by their receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior, sinners, no longer condemned, are saved from eternal damnation in Hell. Yet this negative aspect for the unsaved was minimally treated in his writings as a whole. In his hymn, "A Missionary's Cry," he deplored that the masses were headed for Hell and urged God's people to hasten into missionary service.

A hundred thousand souls a day
Are passing one by one away,
In Christless guilt and gloom;
Without one ray of hope or light,
With future dark as endless night,
They're passing to their doom,
They're passing to their doom.

O Holy Ghost, thy people move,
Baptize their hearts with faith and love
And consecrate their gold.
At Jesus' feet their millions pour,
And all their ranks unite once more,
As in the days of old,
As in the days of old.

The Master's coming draweth near;
The Son of Man will soon appear;
His kingdom is at hand.
But ere that glorious day can be,
This gospel of the kingdom we
Must preach in every land,
Must preach in every land.

Oh, let us then His coming haste,
Oh, let us end this awful waste
Of souls that never die.
A thousand millions still are lost;
A Saviour's blood has paid the cost.
Oh, hear their dying cry,
Oh, hear their dying cry.

They're passing, passing fast away,
A hundred thousand souls a day
In Christless guilt and gloom,

O Church of Christ, what wilt thou say
When in the awful judgment day,
They charge thee with their doom,
They charge thee with their doom.

Refrain:

They're passing, passing fast away
In thousands day by day;
They're passing to their doom,
They, re passing to their doom.⁸²

The points to note especially are Simpson's sensitivity to the stark tragedy of the masses headed for eternal punishment and the urgency of motivating Christians to endeavor to put a stop to it by means of large scale evangelistic and missionary ministry.

D. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

1. Introduction

The Tours of Hell as a literary genre seems to have virtually disappeared after the medieval period. Yet the imagery used in picturing Hell did recur in the more fiery Hellfire preachers during the next century (e.g. Jonathan Edwards). But even this imagery largely faded out during the twentieth century as most of the relatively few remaining preachers who still stressed Hell softened their language when addressing more sophisticated audiences.

Nevertheless, in the second half of the twentieth century, glimmers of this genre began to reappear, though not necessarily conforming entirely to the ancient Tours.

2. Jimmy Hatlo

Hatlo was a cartoonist with a flair for humor, perceptive insights into annoying human foibles, and clever imaginative ideas for appropriately (?) punishing them. Evidently not writing from a Christian perspective, he called his cartoons *Hatlo's Inferno*. Originally published in newspapers, many of them were later collected and republished in book form,⁸³ As his title, *Inferno*, may suggest, his pictures of Hades (or Hell) were more like those of Dante than of the Bible.

In several of his cartoons Hatlo drew a tour vehicle or place for observation where a demonic tour guide was with a group of people who were looking at demons inflicting punishments upon the residents in Hades (or Hell). Either the tour guide or another demon would explain the significance of the punishment which they saw being inflicted.

Cartoon 1 pictures the punishment placed upon the man who regularly drove his car through mud puddles, splashing anyone nearby.

Cartoon 2 portrays the fate of the golfer who only yelled 'fore' *after* his ball had hit someone.

Cartoon 3 depicts two women forced to push heavy furniture up an upgrade forever—their punishment for constantly rearranging the furniture in their homes.

Contrary to the Bible, but similar to the early Tours of Hell, Hatlo pictured demons as inflicting punishments on people in Hades (Hell). His portrayals were almost entirely physical punishments for physical annoyances, there often being a relationship between the two. These humanly conceived torments, though extremely unpleasant and painful, could not begin to approach the terrors of God's punishment in Hell. As a result, *Hatlo's Inferno* was intended to produce laughs, while the ancient Tours of Hell and Hellfire preaching were designed to produce fear of and turning to God. Nevertheless, *Hatlo's Inferno* provides a series of snapshots that could have been taken on a tour. And his various vehicles and overlooks for tourists indicate that these snapshots are merely pauses in the ongoing tour.

3. Mary Kathleen Baxter

A Pentecostal, Baxter was ordained at the Full Gospel Church of God in Taylor, Michigan and, at the time her book was published, was ministering with the National Church of God in Washington, D.C. According to her testimony, in 1976 Jesus in human form, first spoke to her in dreams, visions, and revelations, and also on many occasions since then. To a large extent, these revelations portrayed the depths, degrees, levels, and torments of the damned in Hell. It took several years to put this material into written form. The published result of these revelations is her book, *A Divine Revelation of Hell* (1993).⁸⁴

Although entirely different from any recent work with which I am familiar, Baxter's book is strikingly similar in both format and content to Dante and earlier Tours of Hell. In fact, her book is a modern reincarnation of that ancient genre.

During her tour Jesus was her Guide. She understood much of what He informed her about what she had seen, but she understood little that He did not explain. Once in Hell she sensed intense evil and heard fearful cries of despair from the damned. Typical of this genre was her inability to write and describe certain things which she failed to understand or was told not to write.

The structure of Baxter's picture of Hell is like that of a human body lying down. She described its sections as a left leg, right leg, belly, heart, right arm, left arm, center, and jaws. She also depicted its outer darkness.

As with other Tours, Baxter portrayed many sorts of sinners as suffering in Hell. She repeatedly emphasized pastors who had been saved and had faithfully preached the gospel, but who later compromised, rejected Jesus and His salvation, stole from church offerings to satisfy their love for money, taught lies and half-truths, and denied basic doctrines such as Hell and the baptism of the Holy Ghost.⁸⁵

Other sinners included participants in the occult (witches, sorcerers, mediums, palm readers, and Satan worshipers). Those guilty of sexual sins included prostitutes, adulterers, lesbians, and homosexuals. Other transgressors included liars, gossipers, thieves, murderers, and the rebellious.

Although punishments varied, there is a greater consistency of common features among virtually all punishments in Baxter's picture of Hell than in earlier Tours. Throughout Hell in

varying degrees there is a foul, nauseating repugnant odor of burning, decaying flesh that characterizes the stench of death. Her Hell is never silent from the screams and moans of the damned in their agony and despair.

The constant burning was a standard feature in different sections of her Hell—in the pits of fire, cells, and lake of fire. In the lake of fire people were chained together, all burning, while being dragged under its surface. The pits of fire were each four feet across and three feet deep. One person was in each pit. Each person's flesh was painfully burnt away, leaving a skeletal frame with a misty gray soul within it. Worms were crawling all through the skeleton. The constant restoration and reburning of the flesh produced excruciating agony and deep depression.

Time and time again the damned in their agony desperately cried out to Jesus, pleading for the opportunity to repent and to be saved from their intolerable torment, and promising to proclaim the gospel while living godly lives. Each time without exception, with tears flowing from His eyes, Jesus lovingly informed them that their opportunity to repent had died when they had died. Their doom in Hell had been sealed forever. They were simply TOO LATE! They then showed their true nature by expressing their rage against Him.

Many times Baxter expressed her compassion for the damned in their agony, even asking Jesus to release them. Each time He corrected her, explaining that it was too late to prevent their torment from lasting forever.

These experiences prompted Baxter to give a passionate, urgent invitation to her readers to repent, turning to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, receiving forgiveness of sins, salvation from endless torment, and eternal life that only He can provide. This she did often.

In view of all of these considerations, she also urged Christians to preach the gospel in order to give people an opportunity to be saved from the horrors of Hell. She also exhorted them to remain faithful to their Lord.

Like the earlier Tours of Hell, Baxter's vivid imagery of some details of torment went way beyond what the Bible has to say about them. Yet her general picture of Hell as involving torment, being unchangeable, inescapable, and lasting forever is Biblical. She is clearly a traditionalist.

It was not unusual for authors of earlier Tours of Hell to express compassion for the sufferers in Hell and even to ask for their release—only to have their request rejected. Yet Baxter's contributions to this genre were her repeated exhortations to repent, turning to Jesus, and her urging Christians to spread the gospel. For her, fearful concern for the awful doom in Hell for the lost is and should well be a trigger for evangelism—a trigger that needs to be fired.

E. CONCLUSION

The Christian writings in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha contain developments from Judaism in the Tours of Hell. These include bizarre descriptions of punishments connected with specific sins. Writings surveyed include 2 Enoch, the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, and the Vision of Ezra. They express the writers' compassion for the damned and exhortations to do right in this life.

Christian Tours of Hell in the New Testament Apocrypha were especially vivid in picturing grisly punishments that were somehow related to the sins of which the damned had

been guilty. These writings include the Apocalypse of Peter, Acts of Thomas, and Apocalypse of Paul. Exhortations to witness and to evangelize appeared in both non-Tour and Tour portions of the New Testament Apocrypha.

Many medieval Tours of Hell displayed the influence of the Apocalypse of Paul. The most significant and famous of these was Dante's *Inferno* which has been immensely influential in forging popular concepts of Hell from then until now—even though Dante never intended for his poetic imagery to be understood in physical terms.

Since their energies were largely concentrated upon soteriological issues, the Protestant Reformers had little to say about Hell. They evidently continued to teach Augustinian traditionalism.

Milton's *Paradise Lost*, although poetry, was (like Dante's *Inferno*) influential in molding popular concepts of Hell from then until now, even though it also pictured Satan as the ruler of Hell—contrary to Scripture. Traditionalist Richard Baxter emphasized Hellfire preaching to bring the lost to salvation.

The most important and influential traditionalist of this period was Jonathan Edwards. He used vivid Hellfire imagery (like Dante's) to scare people into realizing their danger and turning to Jesus Christ to be saved. He combined his Hellfire preaching with powerful evangelistic appeals.

During the nineteenth century Finney and Spurgeon used Tour of Hell imagery to increase the vividness of their verbal portraits of Hell.

The twentieth century saw a revival of the Tour of Hell genre in the stirring work of Mary K. Baxter.

We have discussed numerous details in the images of Hell recorded in the Tours of Hell that are imaginative and speculative, going beyond the picture given in Scripture and, on occasion, conflicting with it. These images do not convey Biblical truth. Nevertheless, their emphasis upon the everlasting permanence is true in accurately reflecting Biblical teaching.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth (2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), I, 25, 27. Different scholars wrote introductions to and translated the various Pseudepigraphal writings. In referring to their work, I shall name the scholar, followed by the volume and page numbers of this work which I shall designate as OTP.

2. OTP, I, 514-515. These tours are described sometimes as of *Hades* and other times as of *Gehenna* (Hell).

3. OTP, I, 909. In his Introduction, W.F. Stinespring considered this work to have originally been a product of Egyptian Judaism, though containing some later Coptic Christian interpolations. He dated it in the second century A.D. (OTP, I, 904).

4. OTP, I, 515.

5. OTP, II, 347. In his Introduction, D. J. Harrington described Pseudo Philo as a Palestinian Jewish work produced in the first century A.D., probably about the time of Jesus (II, 299-300).

6. OTP, I, 890-891. In his Introduction E.P. Sanders described the Testament of Abraham

as an unmistakably Jewish work produced between A.D. 75 and 125. (OTP, I, 874-875).

7. OTP, I, 510.

8. OTP, I, 515.

9. OTP, I, 540-541.

10. OTP, II, 348.

11. OTP, II, 347.

12. For a thorough study of both Jewish and Christian Tours of Hell from 1 Enoch to the Medieval period, and the relationships between them, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: an Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

13. In his "Introduction to 2 Enoch," F.I. Anderson, *OTP*, I, 91, 94-97, suggested a late first century A.D. date, but in his discussion he considered its date to be unknown, although probably very early in its original form. He classified it as a Jewish work produced in the Christian era.

14. *OTP*, I, 118.

15. *Ibid.*, 166. Fudge, 1994, 91, considered this language in 2 Enoch to be ambiguous, perhaps referring to the irremediable effect of the burning. Nevertheless, references to endless pain, torture, and torment are more plausibly understood as conscious everlasting punishment.

16. In his "Introduction to the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra," M.E. Stone identified it as a Christian composition in its present form, produced between 150 and 805 (*OTP*, I, 562-563). The range of possible dates for both his work and the Vision of Ezra covers parts of both the early church and medieval periods. Somewhat arbitrarily, I have chosen to cover it here.

17. *OTP*, I, 575.

18. In their Introduction to the Vision of Ezra, J.R. Mueller and G.A. Robbins identified this Vision as a Christian document to be dated between 350 and 600 (*OTP*, I, 581, 583).

19. *OTP*, I, 587-590.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 596 (date unknown).

22. C. Detlef G. Muller, "Introduction to the Apocalypse of Peter," *New Testament Apocrypha*, revised edition of a collection initiated by Edgar Hennecke, edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, English translation edited by R. Mc L. Wilson (2 volumes; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991, 1992), II, 622, hereafter *NTA*.

23. Richard Bauckham, "Early Jewish Visions of Hell," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 41, 1990, 385, noted that this transformation of a Tour of Hell into a prophecy of the sufferings of the damned is unique.

24. Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Resurrection in this Ancient and Early Christian World*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 283, 287.

25. *NTA*, II, 628-631.

26. *Ibid.*, II, 323.

27. *Ibid.*, II, 362-363.

28. Bernstein, 1993, 292. In their "Introduction to the Apocalypse of Paul," Hugo Duensing and Aurelio de Santos Otero, *NTA*, II, 713, suggested a late fourth century to early fifth century date.

29. Bernstein, 1993, 293.
30. *Ibid.*, 292.
31. For an informative discussion of the relationship between the Apocalypse of Peter and the Apocalypse of Paul, see Himmelfarb, 1983, 140-147.
32. Himmelfarb, 1983, 17.
33. Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), 23-24.
34. Bernstein, 1993, 297
35. *Ibid.*, 297-299, Apocalypse of Paul, 31, 34-40, *NTA*, II, 730-733.
36. *Ibid.*, 299.
37. *NTA*, II, 731-733.
38. Bernstein, 1993, 302-303.
39. *NTA*, II, 633.
40. *Ibid.*, II, 363.
41. *Ibid.*, II, 743.
42. Jewish Tours of Hell continued to be produced in the Christian era throughout the medieval period. For a helpful discussion of the interaction between Jewish and Christian Tours in the early Christian era, see Himmelfarb, 1983, 128-139, 147-167.
43. *Ibid.* 24-46, 159-167. Himmelfarb considered it probable that the two Ezra Apocalypses were derived from an early Christian Tour of Hell that was written before the Apocalypse of Paul had become so dominant in its influence (167).
44. *OTP*, I, 562, 581.
45. Jon E. Braun, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 70.
46. *Ibid.*, 71.
47. Guy P. Raffa, "Dante's Beloved Yet Damned Virgil," *Dante's Inferno: the Indiana Critical Edition*, translated and edited by Mark Musa Indianapolis: Indiana Univ., 1995), 266. I found Musa's prose summaries and numerous end notes explaining these many otherwise obscure allusions to be extremely helpful in gaining quickly a measure of understanding of this material.
48. *Ibid.*, 266-268. Virgil had written of his descent to the underworld in his *Aeneid* (about Aeneas' travels) and *Georgics* (about Orpheus).
49. Musa, 1995, 34.
50. *Ibid.*, 34-35.
51. *Ibid.*, 48-49.
52. *Ibid.*, 65.
53. *Ibid.*, 109-110. The punishment for those who cause discord and schism is especially grisly, involving splitting the body from chin to buttocks, spilling out the entrails, and restoring it, only to repeat the process *ad infinitum* (xviii. 19-42, *Ibid.*, 203-204).
54. *Ibid.*, 113, end notes for lines 22-24.
55. My discussion is based largely upon that by Irene Samuel, *Dante and Milton: the Commedia and Paradise Lost* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1966), 71-93.
56. *The Complete Works of John Milton*, edited by Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966): *Paradise Lost* Book I: Lines 41-75, pp. 212-213.

57. *Ibid.*, lines 261-263, p. 218.
58. My discussion in this section is based upon Buis, 1957, 85-86; Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell: a Biblical and Theological Overview* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1986, 168-169. Baxter devoted two chapter to the topic of Hell in his *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*.
59. Cited by Buis, 1957, 85-86, from *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 98.
60. Cited by *Ibid.*, 86, from *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 105.
61. Cited by Braun, 1979, 85.
62. Cited by *Ibid.*
63. The material in this brief paragraph is based upon the article by Paul Helm, "Jonathan Edwards," *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by J.D. Douglas et. al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 334.
64. *Ibid.* 255, 261-266.
65. Cited by Vernon Grounds, "The Final State of the Wicked," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 24, 3, 1981, 217.
66. *The Wrath of Almighty God: Jonathan Edwards on God's Judgment Against Sinners*, edited by Rev. Don Kistler (Morgan, Penna.: Sol. Deo Gloria, 1996), 64-65.
67. Bruce W. Davidson, "Reasonable Damnation: How Jonathan Edwards argued for the Rationality of Hell," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 38, 1, 1995, 55-56, provided the basis for my discussion in this paragraph.
68. John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 86-87.
69. *Ibid.*, 56.
70. Cited by *Ibid.*, 85.
71. Cited by Braun, 1979, 82.
72. Edwards (Kistler), 1996, 73.
73. Jonathan M. Butler, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism, 1870-1920* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson, 1991), 22.
74. The source for my material on Finney is Butler, 1991, 33-37.
75. Cited by *Ibid.*, 34.
76. Cited by *Ibid.*
77. Cited by *Ibid.*
78. Cited by Buis, 1957, 101.
79. Cited by *Ibid.*, 102.
80. Cited by Braun, 1979, 86.
81. For a helpful treatment of Simpson's career, see Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin, Samuel J. Stoesz, *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years* (Camp Hill, Penna.: Christian Publications, 1986), 3-142.
82. *Hymns of the Christian Life* (Harrisburg, Penna.: Christian Publications, 1978, revised and enlarged edition), #462.
83. *Hatlo's Inferno* (New York: Avon, 1955)
84. Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Hell* (New Kensington, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1993).
85. Many evangelical theologians, on the basis of what God has revealed in His Holy

Word, rightly disagree with Mary Kathleen Baxter's views about losing salvation and about her Pentecostal doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.