

The experience of an author who reads his own stories can be markedly different from that of his readers. It is due, in part, to his awareness of places where he struggled with dialogue or what would happen next, compared to how it all turned out. This story, in particular, is like that for me. There were occasions when I questioned if I should even write this tale, if I could imagine what Sheol would be like without contradicting what the Bible says about it. Although the Bible has more to say about Sheol than Heaven, the overall message, that it's a terrible place to be, can be daunting for an author like me, who likes happy endings.

But it seemed important to me to convey the depth of despair that awaits people who chose to live their eternity without the Savior, Jesus the Christ. Even before the incarnation of Christ, many false religions existed in the world, promising severe punishment to the unfaithful. But none had the sense of conscious finality and hopelessness found in the description of life in Sheol. Nobody would choose to go there voluntarily if they believed it was a real place. That's why it's almost a universal truism that everyone who is there thought they would be somewhere else or that they would cease to exist at their physical death.

We've all been wrong about many things in our lives but being wrong about this thing, our eternal destiny, has worse consequences than all the others because there's no way to fix our mistake. There's no belated rescue from hypothetical places like Purgatory, no payment by living relatives for our sins. There is only the certainty of our conviction at the White Throne judgment of the Savior.

Often I have heard friends reflect on their past mistakes saying, "If only I had known the outcome, I would have done something else." Well, the Savior has anticipated this reaction by telling us in advance the result of rejecting his offer to forgive our offenses against God. The result is what some of us ask for, life without the Savior. They make this decision without knowing that goodness and mercy in our physical lives comes only through him. Yet it makes logical sense that you can't have benefits without a benefactor. The problem is that most people can't make the connection between Jesus and eternal blessings. They think goodness exists in its own right, without an antecedent. Where did they get that idea if not from the mind of deceivers? If you can't get something for nothing in this world, why would goodness be free? Even false religions say you must do good works for acceptance by God.

No, the life of goodness and mercy is the gift of salvation through the Savior. There is no better eternity and there is no worse alternative than Sheol and the Lake of Fire.

