

The Book of Her Life
Vision of Hell; St. Joseph's
Chps. 32-33

by **St. Teresa of Avila**

Chapter 32

Discusses how the Lord desired to put her spirit in a place in hell she had deserved because of her sins. Gives a brief account of what was shown her there. Begins to deal with the way in which the monastery of St. Joseph, where she now is, was founded.

1-...while I was in prayer one day, I suddenly found that without knowing how, I had seemingly been put in **hell**. I understood that the Lord wanted me to see that place the devils had prepared there for me and which I merited because of my sins. This experience took place within the **shortest space of time**, but even if I were to live for many years I think it would be impossible for me to forget it. The entrance it seemed to me was similar to a very long and narrow alleyway, like an oven, low and dark and confined; the floor seemed to me to consist of dirty, muddy water emitting a foul stench and swarming with putrid vermin. At the end of the alleyway a hole that looked like a small cupboard was hollowed out in the wall; there I found I was placed in a cramped condition. All of this was delightful to see in comparison with what I felt there...

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2-What I felt, it seems, cannot even begin to be exaggerated; nor can it be understood. I experienced a **fire in the soul** that I don't know how to describe. The **bodily pains** were so unbearable...I saw furthermore that they would go on **without end** and without ever ceasing. This, however, was nothing next to the **soul's agonizing**: a constriction, a suffocation, an unhappiness...To say the experience is as though the soul were continually being wrested from the body would be insufficient... it is more that the soul is tearing itself in pieces...the **interior fire and despair** in addition to **extreme torments and pains ...** I felt myself **burning and crumbling**...I repeat that the worst was the interior fire and despair.

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3-...unable to hope for any consolation, I found it impossible either to sit down or lie down, nor was there any room, even though they put me in this **kind of hole** in the wall. Those walls...closed in on themselves and suffocated everything. There was no light, but all was enveloped in the blackest darkness...yet everything painful to see was visible.

The Lord didn't want me to see anymore of **hell** at that time... I saw another vision of frightful things, the punishment of some vices... I don't know how such an experience is possible, but I well understood that it was a great favor and the Lord wanted me to see with my own eyes the place **His mercy had freed me from**... In sum...being burned on earth is very little when compared to being burned by the fire that is there.

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4-... I recall no time of trial or suffering in which it doesn't seem to me that **everything** that can be **suffered here on earth is nothing**; so I think in a way **we complain without reason**. Hence I repeat that this experience was one of the greatest favors the Lord granted me because it helped me very much **to lose fear of the tribulations and contradictions of this life** as well as to grow strong enough to suffer them and to give thanks to the Lord who freed me ...from such everlasting and terrible evils.

5-Since that time **everything seems to me easy when compared to undergoing what I suffered there in hell**...How obvious it is that You loved me much more than I did myself! How many times, my Lord, have You freed me from so dark a prison, and how often have I put myself in it again against your will!

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6-From this experience also flows the great impulse to **help souls** ... It seems certain to me that in order to free one from such appalling torments I would suffer many deaths very willingly... if we see a person...we love here below, with a great trial or suffering... our own nature invites us to compassion... Well, who is there who can suffer seeing a soul in the **supreme trial of trials** that has no end? No heart can bear it without great pain. For if here on earth knowing life will end ...we are still moved to so much compassion, I don't know how we can rest ... when we see how the devil brings so many souls each day with himself to hell.

7-... I see the place the devils had already prepared for me...it was a terrible torment... It is a **dangerous** thing to be **satisfied with ourselves**, nor should the soul that falls at every step into mortal sin be at rest or content. But for the love of God we should avoid the occasions; the Lord will help us as He did me. May it please the Lord not to let me out of His hand...

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8-...the Lord showed me the glory He will give to the good and the suffering that will go to the evil, I was anxious to know the manner and the way in which I could do penance for so much evil... I was desiring to flee people and withdraw completely from the world. My spirit was not at rest, yet the disquiet was...a delightful one...

9- I was thinking about what I could do for God, and I thought that the first thing was to follow the call to the religious life...and by **keeping my rule** as perfectly as I could. The rule was observed ...according to the **bull of mitigation**...and the monastery had a lot of comfort...but this **disadvantage of going out**... was now a serious one.

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10-... if we couldn't be nuns like the discalced, it would still be possible to **found a monastery**. Since I was having these **desires**, I began to discuss the matter with that lady companion of mine, the widow, who had the same desires. She began to draw up plans to provide the new house with **income**...there was little chance these plans would succeed, but our desire made us think they would. Yet....I was so perfectly **content** in the house in which I was because it was very much to my liking and the **cell** in which I lived was just what I wanted, so I was still delaying. But we agreed to pray fervently to God over the matter.

11-One day after Communion, His Majesty earnestly commanded me to strive for this new monastery with all my powers, and He made great promises that it would be founded and that He would be highly served in it...

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11-cont'd...He said it would be called **St. Joseph** and that this saint would watch over us at one door, and **our Lady** at the other, that **Christ** would remain with us, and that it would be a **star shining** with great splendor. He said that even though religious orders were **mitigated** one shouldn't think He was little served in them; He asked what would become of the **world** if it were not for **religious** and said that I should tell my **confessor** what He commanded, and that He was asking him not to go against this or **hinder me** from doing it.

12- This **vision** ... and **locution** had such effects ... that I couldn't doubt it was from God. I felt the **severest pain** because...the terrible ...**trials** the new monastery would cost me were partly represented to me, and I was **very happy** in my own monastery. Although I had been discussing it, I hadn't done so with the **determination** ... needed to bring it about...

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12- cont'd...I saw I would be starting something that would disturb my calm and was doubtful about what to do. But the Lord **returned often** to speak to me about this new monastery, presenting me with **clear reasons and arguments** that I saw it was **His will** and could no longer help but tell my **confessor**. I told him in writing.

13- ... it wasn't **feasible** from the viewpoint of natural reason...since my companion...had little...means for it. So my **confessor** told me to discuss it with my superior and to do what he advised...my companion spoke with the **provincial**. He **assented very readily**...and told her he would accept the house under his jurisdiction. They discussed the **income** needed, and for many reasons we never desired that it would have more than **thirteen nuns**...the holy friar Peter of Alcantara...counseled us not to fail to make the foundation...

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14-...the knowledge of it began to spread throughout the city and a great **persecution** ...came upon us; **gossip, derision**, saying that it was **foolishness**...they said I was well off in my own monastery...it seemed to me that they were partly right ...very wearied ...His Majesty began to console and encourage me. He told me ... I would see what the saints who had founded religious orders had suffered, that I would have to **suffer** much more **persecution** than I could imagine,... He told me some things to tell my companion....and we were left consoled and with the courage to withstand all... the project seemed to almost everyone in the city to be **a lot of nonsense**.

15-There was ...such an **outcry** in my own monastery that the **provincial changed his mind**...He said the **income** was not secure, that it was **small** and that there was **strong opposition**... it seemed he was right. He finally abandoned the project... and his refusal was most painful...

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16-My companion went to a most learned man...of the order of St. Dominic... as it was said to be just one of our own whims. This lady told the holy man everything and of the income from her estate; I didn't say anything to him about a **revelation** but mentioned only the **natural reasons**...He told us to give him a period of **eight days** to answer and asked if we were determined to do what he would tell us. I told him we were...never did the assurance leave me that the foundation would be made...

17- ...I thought it would be impossible to give up the project...since it didn't go against **Sacred Scripture** or against the law of the **Church**... the **revelation** was true... This servant of God told me later that...he was fully determined to insist that we give up the foundation... but when he began to consider his answer to us...

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17- Cont'd...he felt assured it would be very much in **the service of God** and that we shouldn't fail to go ahead with it. He told us to hurry to bring the project to a conclusion, and he mentioned the ... way in which it should be done. ...He said that though the estate was small, we had to put our trust in God and that anyone who would oppose the plan should come to him and that he would answer...

18-We were very **consoled** by his reply. On account of his help some **holy persons** usually opposed to us were **more satisfied**; and some helped us. Among them was the holy gentleman, whom I already mentioned...to whom it seemed our plan bore promise of great **perfection**, since our whole basis ...was **prayer** ... yet the means seemed difficult and impractical to him ...but he felt it **could be something from God**.

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18-cont'd...It seemed the Lord Himself moved him to this. And the Lord did the same to the Master, the cleric I mentioned...an example to the entire city...He agreed to help me in the project...Having already bought the house...I didn't worry about it being small. The Lord told me to get started as best I could, that afterward I would see what His Majesty would do. And how well I have seen it! Though the income was small, I believed the Lord would help us arrange things through other means.

Chapter 33

Continues on the same subject, about the foundation dedicated to the glorious St. Joseph. Tells how she was ordered not to become involved with the project, of the time she abandoned it, of some trials she had, and of how the Lord consoled her.

1-...when the business matters had reached this state...and in another day the deeds were to be drawn up and the matter concluded, our **Father Provincial changed his mind**. I believe it was **providential**...the **Lord was perfecting the work and ordaining it be done in another way**. Because my provincial didn't want to receive the house under his jurisdiction, my confessor ordered me not to be involved with the foundation ... in spite of the trials and afflictions it had cost me. Even though my provincial had ordered me to do what I had done thus far, the conviction became greater that it was all the **foolishness** of women—and the criticism of me increased...

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2-I was very much **disliked** throughout my monastery because I had wanted to found a more enclosed monastery. They said that I was **insulting** them...that I could also serve God in my own monastery since there were others in it better than I...Several of them said that I should be thrown into **a prison cell**...I saw that in many matters my opponents were right...I couldn't mention the **main factor**, which was that the Lord had commanded me to do this...I remained silent...God granted me the great favor that none of this disturbed me; rather, I **gave up the plan** with as much ease as I would have if it hadn't cost me anything. No one could believe this... not even my confessor... but I felt I had done everything I could...and could never stop believing that the **foundation would come about**...in fact I was **certain** that it would.

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3-What caused me the greatest anguish was something my confessor wrote to me... (The Lord also must have desired that in that areas which would be most **painful** to me I wouldn't be lacking a **trial**). So in the midst of this multitude of **persecutions**, when I thought comfort would be coming from him, he wrote me that I should be able to see from what happened that the project had been all a **dream**...What he said **grieved** me more than everything put together since ... if I had ...been at fault for some offense against God, and if these **visions** had been an illusion then all the **prayer** I had experienced was self-deception and I was being misled and going astray...I was thrown into complete confusion...But the Lord ...often consoled and fortified me...and told me not to be anxious; that I had served God and not offended Him; and that I should do what my **confessor ordered** me to do by being **silent** until it would come time to return to the task. I was left consoled...

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4-In this way the Lord taught me what a tremendous **good** it is to **suffer trials** and **persecutions for Him**. There was an **increase of love of God** in my soul ...that made me unable to stop desiring trials ... I would have been ashamed if the Lord hadn't favored me...The **impulse of love** began to grown in intensity, and the **raptures** became greater although I remained silent...The holy Dominican friar still thought it certain, as I did, that the **foundation would be made**... He and my companion **wrote to Rome** to start negotiation for it.

5- The devil, through one person and another, made it known that I had received some **revelation** about this work. Some persons came to me with the great **fear**...that I be reported to the **Inquisitors**. This amused me and **made me laugh**, for I had never had any fear of such a possibility.

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5- cont'd...If anyone were to see that I went against the Church ... I knew that I would die a thousand deaths for the faith or Sacred Scripture; and, it would be bad for my soul...if I should have to fear the Inquisition. If I thought I did have something to fear I'd go myself to seek out the Inquisitor; and that if I were accused, the **Lord would free me**. I discussed with my Dominican father ...my visions and manner of prayer and the great favors the Lord granted me...He assured me very much ...and it benefited him because from then on he dedicated himself much more to prayer and withdrew to a monastery for more than two years to practice prayer better...

6-...I felt it very much when he went away...the Lord told me that I should be consoled and not troubled...as he was being well guided ...

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6- cont'd...When he came back ... he consoled me not only with his learning, but now he did so also through his **spiritual experience**, for he was receiving a number of supernatural experiences. God had brought him at the time when His Majesty saw there was a need for help in the work of founding this monastery His Majesty desired.

7- Well, for five or six months I remained silent....but I could never get it out of my mind that the **foundation would be accomplished**. The rector of the Society of Jesus was transferred and the Lord brought another very spiritual one... I was in dire need...My confessor ... although he knew my spirit well...would not stir... unless he knew, as all members of the Society, that it was in conformity with the superior's will...My spirit was moving with such great impulses of love that it felt keenly its **bondage** but didn't venture beyond what he commanded me.

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8-One day... greatly troubled that my confessor didn't believe me, the Lord told me...that the affliction would soon end...I rejoiced deeply, thinking ...I was soon to **die**... But afterward I saw clearly He had referred to the **arrival of this rector**...who didn't **restrain** my confessor but told him to console me...and let the spirit of God work, for at times it seemed with these great spiritual **impulses** that my soul couldn't even breathe.

9-This **new rector came to see me**. My confessor ordered me to speak to him in all freedom and clarity... When I entered the confessional I felt a **spiritual joy** and **understanding** that his **soul** would **understand mine** and mine would be in **harmony with his** ...Afterward I saw that my spirit was **not deceived**...His **method** was to detach the soul from everything and to mortify it ...

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10-...I immediately understood his style and saw that his soul was a pure and holy one and that he had a special **gift** from the Lord for discerning spirits... A little while later the Lord urged me to take up once more the matter of the **monastery** and to give my confessor and this rector many **reasons**...why they shouldn't impede me from the work...After much reflection they didn't dare venture to hinder me from carrying out this work.

11-My confessor gave me permission again to dedicate myself entirely to this foundation... I was very much alone and had hardly any means. We agreed to carry on in total secrecy. I got one of my sisters to buy the house and fix it up as though it were for her, with money the Lord provided... I took great care not to do anything against obedience...

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11- cont'd...But I knew that if I said anything to my superiors all would be lost as happened the previous time...I went through so many trials...Sometimes in distress I said: "My Lord, how is it You command things that seem impossible? For if I were at least free, even though I am a woman! But bound on so many sides, without money or the means to raise it or to obtain the brief or anything, what can I do Lord?"

12-Once when in need, I didn't know...how to pay some workmen, **St. Joseph**... appeared to me and revealed...that I would not be lacking, that I should hire them. And so I did, without a penny, and the Lord...provided for me.

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- 12- cont'd...The house struck me as being very **small**...not adequate for a monastery, and I wanted to buy the house next to it, also small, to serve as the church. One day after Communion, the Lord said: "**I have already told you to enter as best you can.**" ... I went to the little house and drew up plans and found that though small it was perfect for a monastery...I arranged to have it fixed up so that it could be lived in...
- 13-On her feast day, while going to Communion, **St. Clare** appeared to me...She told me to take courage... and that she would help me...A nearby monastery of her nuns helps sustain us... and little by little she brought the **desire** of mine to **perfection** that the **poverty** practiced in her house is practiced in this one...For it cost me no small amount of trouble that this observance of poverty would have the backing of the Holy Father and that there would never be any income ...Without any request, our Lord fully provides what is necessary for us...

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14-On one of these same days...while at a monastery of the order of St. Dominic...a rapture came upon me so great that it almost took me out of myself...it seems to me that while in this state I saw myself vested in a white robe of shining brightness...Our Lady was at my right side and St. Joseph at the left, and they were putting that robe on me. I was given to understand that I was now cleansed of my sins...It seemed that our Lady took me by the hands. She told me that I made her very happy in serving St. Joseph ... and that the monastery would be accomplished...and that they would watch over us...and as a sign that this was true she gave me a jewel. It seemed she placed around my neck a very beautiful golden necklace with attached a valuable cross.

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15-The beauty I saw in our Lady was extraordinary...I didn't see St. Joseph so clearly...Our Lady seemed to be a very young girl...I didn't want it to come to an end; then it seems I saw them ascend to heaven ... I was left in deep loneliness...I remained some time without being able to stir... I was left with an impulse to be dissolved for God...I could never doubt that the vision was from God. It left me comforted and with great peace.

16-As for what the Queen of Angels said about obedience, it distressed me not to give obedience to the order....the Lord told me I should petition Rome in a certain way...and that He would take care that we get our request. And so it came about...easily...and it was very fortunate the obedience was given to the bishop. May He be blessed... Amen.