

The Doctrine Of Hell

Hell is one of those subjects that make people uncomfortable. We hear stories of hell being a place of fire, demons, and endless torment. Throughout history many authors have written about it -- Dante's Inferno, for example. Western culture is very familiar with the concept. Even Hollywood has made it the subject of many movies.

Whatever the context, whatever the belief, hell is definitely taught in the Bible. But even the doctrine of hell is not without its controversy. Some say it is only the grave with no consciousness. Others say it is a place of correction and punishment that is not eternal. Others say it is an endless agonizing punishment in fire. Whichever it is, hell is the total absence of the favor of God.

The words associated with Hell

Gehenna

In the Old Testament the word for hell is 'ge-hinnom', meaning "Valley of Hinnom." It was a place to the southwest of Jerusalem. This place was once "called 'Topheth' and derived from an Aramaic word meaning 'fireplace.' It was here that some pagan kings practiced human sacrifice by fire ([2 Chron. 28:3](#); [33:6](#); [Jer. 7:31](#); [32:35](#)). This is probably why in the New Testament the word came to be associated with destruction by fire. The word 'gehenna' is found in the New Testament 12 times and every instance is spoken of by Jesus. In the New Testament, "gehenna" is used of a condition and never of a place.

Hades

This word only occurs in the New Testament ten times, and corresponds to the Old Testament word "sheol." Jesus uses the word four times: [Matt. 11:23](#); [16:18](#); [Luke 10:15](#); [16:23](#). The other six occur in [Acts 2:27,31](#); [Rev. 1:18](#); [6:8](#); [20:13,14](#). It was probably the "subterranean abode of all the dead until the judgment. It was divided into two departments, paradise or Abraham's bosom for the good, and Gehenna or hell for the bad." In particular, in the account of Lazarus and the Rich man of ([Luke 16:19-31](#)), it is the place of the conscious dead who are wicked.

Sheol

"The Hebrew word Sheol is probably derived from a root "to make hollow," and was seen as the common receptacle of the dead and in the great many places the word appears in the OT, it is referring to the grave. It is a place and is mentioned in [Gen. 37:35](#); [Num. 16:30,33](#); [Psalm 16:10](#), etc. Sheol has many meanings in scripture: the grave, the underworld, the state of the dead. It was supposed to be below the surface of the earth ([Ezek. 31:15,17](#); [Psalm 86:13](#)).

Is Hell Eternal Conscious Torment?

There are some Christian groups and many cults that deny the idea that hell, in the general sense, means eternal, conscious punishment. Some maintain that God's eternal punishment is annihilation, or non-existence. Others say it is temporal and that eventually all will be saved out of hell. Perhaps the most common objection is that a loving God would never punish people in eternal torment. We agree that God is love ([1 John 4:8](#)), but He is also just ([Neh. 9:32-33](#); [2 Thess. 1:6](#)), and eternal ([Psalm 90:2](#); [1 Tim. 1:17](#)). God punishes the evildoer ([Isaiah 11:13](#)) and this punishment will be eternal. But the question remains, is this eternal punishment conscious or not?

There are verses that can be interpreted to support the idea that the dead are not conscious after death: ([Ecc. 9:5](#) - the dead know nothing and [Psalm 146:4](#) - their thoughts perish, are good examples.) Other verses compare the dead to sleep: [Acts 13:36](#); [1 Cor. 15:1-6](#); [1 Thess. 4:13](#), etc. But these latter verses are merely comparing the similarity between the appearance of the dead and the appearance of someone sleeping.

The Dead are Conscious After Death

The wicked descend alive into Sheol

[Num. 16:30](#), "But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have 10.5 they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly."

Cast to outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth

[Matt. 8:12](#), "but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Those cast into the fire suffer consciously

[Matt. 13:41-42](#), "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." See also [Matt. 13:50](#).

Cast into a tormenting fire

[Rev. 14:9-11](#), "And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11

"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." See also, [Rev. 21:8](#).

Thrown into the lake of Fire

"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

Hell Is a Place of Eternal Fire and Punishment

Unquenchable Fire

[Matt. 3:12](#) "And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Fiery Hell

[Matt. 5:22](#), "whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." See also, [Matt. 5:29,30](#).

[Matt. 18:8-9](#), "And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. 9 "And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell."

Eternal Fire

[Matt. 25:41](#), "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels."

Eternal Punishment

[Matt. 25:46](#), "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The word "eternal" in both places is "aionios" which means 1) without beginning and end, that which always has been and always will be; 2) without beginning; 3) without end, never to cease, everlasting. The word "punishment" is the word "kolasis" and it means "to punish, with the implication of resulting severe suffering - 'to punish, punishment.'"

Eternal Fire

[Jude 7](#), "Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

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Lake of Fire

[Rev. 20:15](#), "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Lazarus and the Rich Man

In [Luke 16:19-31](#) is the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Basically, Lazarus is a poor man who suffers during life. The rich man is, of course, rich. They both die. The rich man goes to Hades. Lazarus goes to Abraham's bosom, another term for paradise. In Hades, the rich man lifts up his eyes and sees Lazarus far off. He cries out to Abraham and asks for mercy because he is in agony in flame. Abraham says no. Then the rich man asks if someone from the dead were to rise and go tell his brothers not to come to this terrible place. Abraham teaches him that that will not be done either.

Some say that this is a parable. However, if it is, it is unique because no other parable actually names a person. It isn't a story. It is history.

It really happened. But many who believe in no consciousness after death will say it is still a parable. The question is then, if it is a parable what is it teaching? If hell fire is false and if self-awareness after death is also false, then Jesus is using false doctrines to teach a truth.

Parables illustrate truth. If it is a parable, what does the consciousness after death symbolize? Also, what does the agony in flame symbolize? Are they not real? Of course they are.

Conclusion

Hell is a real place. It is not mere unconsciousness. It is not temporal. It is eternal torment. Perhaps that is why Jesus spoke more of hell than heaven and spent so much time warning people not to go there. After all, if people just stopped existing, why warn them? If it was temporal, they'd get out in a while. But if it were eternal and conscious, then the warning is strong.

Jesus said, "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 "And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell," ([Matt. 5:29-30](#)).