

The Truth about Hell

In 2009, USA Today ran an article that stated that only 59% of Americans believe in hell, compared with 74% who believe in heaven. The article goes on to tell about a workshop for preachers that dealt with the topic, “What ever happened to Hell?” The man leading the workshop asked how many of the preachers in attendance had ever preached on Hell.” The answer? None of them had. It went on to offer this quote: “[Preachers] do shy away from the topic of everlasting damnation...It's pressure from the culture to not speak anything negative. I think we've begun to deny hell.” A very interesting quote.

In this study, we’re going to talk about Hell. And we’re going to do so by answering three questions:

1. What is Hell?
2. What is Hell not?
3. What is Hell going to be like for those who go there?

We’re going to let the Bible describe for us this horrible place.

What is Hell?

You know, there’s a great deal of misunderstanding about Hell. For some people, their knowledge of Hell doesn’t extend beyond the cartoons that they viewed as children. They envision Hell as the house of the devil, where he sits with a red boiling pot and a pitch fork. Other people think of “hell” as merely a figurative term that the Bible uses in a figurative sense. Still, others think of Hell as a brief stint of suffering until a person is burned up, and then he ceases to exist. So, in light of all of the misunderstanding, let’s answer the question, “What is Hell?”

First, Hell is a real place. Matthew 5:29 — Jesus says, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” Jesus speaks of Hell as a real place.

What is Hell? Secondly, Hell is a place of torment and suffering. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Revelation 14:11 describes the suffering of those who go to Hell, and it uses this language: “And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night...” And so, Hell is going to be a terrible place of torment and suffering.

What is Hell? Thirdly, the Bible tells us that Hell is a place specially prepared for the devil. Matthew 25:41 — “Then He [Jesus] will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

Fourthly, I also learn from this same verse that Hell will not only be the eternal dwelling of the devil, but it will also be the place to which God will send all of wicked mankind. Friends, Hell is a real place, and it's a place that will be worse than the most intense suffering that we've known in this life.

Now before we move on to our next point "What is Hell not?" I want to address an objection that is sometimes made. Sometimes someone will make an argument that goes something like this: "It's not fair! It is unjust to punish someone eternally for something that he did in just a short time on this earth. It isn't fair to punish a few years of sin with an eternity of suffering." Friends, we understand that the punishment for a crime almost always last longer than the crime. You know, we understand that on this earth. If a man walks into a place of business and he shoots and kills an employee, he might be sentenced to jail for the rest of his life for a crime that took him 2 minutes to commit. Why is the sentence so much longer than the crime? And the answer is because the severity of crime is not measured by the length of time it takes to commit it. You see, we understand that and we agree to this on the earth. And, when a person admits this, his argument about Hell being too long becomes self-defeating.

Secondly, it's interesting that people will argue that it's unjust to punish someone forever for sins committed in just a short time, but no one ever argues that it's unjust to reward men forever. You see, the argument is an emotional one, and really doesn't deal fairly with the subject. Heaven and Hell must both stand and fall together, because both are based on the justice and mercy of God. And, when someone says, "I just can't follow a God who would send men to Hell eternally," he's forgetting the extreme lengths that God went to prevent it. God sent His Son, a member of the Godhead Himself died, was crucified at the hands of His own creation, to try to keep men out of Hell. But even with all of that, God doesn't force men to go to Heaven. In the final analysis, he allows men to choose. Sadly, some choose Hell.

What is Hell not?

The word "hell" actually appears 23 times in the King James Version of the Bible. Unfortunately, those 23 occurrences are not all talking about the place that we are studying in this lesson. The King James translators took three different Greek words and translated all of them with one English word "hell." Their choice to do that has caused a great deal of confusion. And so, I want to list for you these 3 words, and then we'll briefly talk about what each one means.

First, there is the word for Hades. The Greek "hades" is translated "hell" ten times in the King James Version. Hades is not, however, the eternal place of punishment. Hades is the place where all men go when they die. The righteous who die go to Hades. The wicked who die go Hades. Hades is simply a holding area for disembodied spirits until the Day of Judgment. Because of this, "hades" is sometimes used interchangeably to refer to death. It's where men go when they die. For example, in Matthew 16:18 when Jesus promised to build his church, he said "...the

gates of hell [the KJV uses the word “hell”] would not prevail against it.” Now, the word in the original is not the word “hell” but rather it is “hades”; the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. It means that death will not prevent or stop his kingdom from coming. In Acts 2:31 in the KJV, the Bible speaks of Christ after his death as being “in hell.” Again, this is not the place of eternal punishment. Instead, it’s the Greek word “hades.” When Jesus died his spirit went into Hades, specifically the area of Hades known as paradise (Luke 23:43).

Secondly, there is another word, the word “tartarus.” A form of this word appears in 2 Peter 2:4. That text says “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment...” The word “hell” in this verse, once again, is not the word for eternal punishment. Many people believe this to be the place in Hades where the wicked go to await the Day of Judgment. This would be the place called “torments” in Luke 16. Other people believe it is a special waiting place for the angels who sinned and were cast down. Either way, it is not a reference to the eternal fires of Hell, “gehenna.” I believe the first view is the correct answer — that it is a reference to the compartment in Hades, where the wicked go to await the Day of Judgment, the place Luke 16 refers to as a place of torment. But, it is not the place of eternal punishment.

Then there is the word “gehenna.” This is the place we are studying in this lesson. This is the place of eternal punishment. This is the place properly called Hell. The word “gehenna” is used 12 times in the New Testament. Eleven of those times it is used Jesus himself. All right, let’s move to the third question.

What is Hell going to be like?

To help us get an appreciation for this horrible place, I want us to examine 7 horrors of Hell.

Horror of Darkness: Jude verse 13 talks about people who live away from Christ. He says they are like “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame...” They’re like “wandering stars for whom is reserved...” Now watch this because this is important: “the blackness of darkness forever.” Isn’t that interesting? In Matthew 25:30 the master in dealing with his unprofitable servant said, “He is to be cast into outer darkness.” Do you see how this intensifies? It’s not simply “darkness,” but the “blackness of darkness.” It’s not simply the “blackness of darkness,” but “outer darkness.” You see, Hell is the place farthest removed from the source of light. I heard a preacher say that he used to wonder why Hell had to be dark. Maybe it’s because I John 1:5 says, “God is the light and in him is no darkness at all.” James 1:17 calls God “the Father of lights.” But you see, God will not be in Hell. He won’t be there to listen to your constant pleading in torment. He won’t be there as you scream and beg for mercy.

You know, it seems like men are born with an almost innate fear of darkness. Children, almost from the beginning, are afraid to be in the darkness. Loneliness is intensified, depression increases. Hell is a place of darkness. In Matthew, 3 different times, Hell is described as “outer darkness”: Matthew 8:12, Matthew 22:13, and Matthew 25:30. But in every case where it says

that Hell is outer darkness, it adds this: “Where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Friends, it’s going to be miserable.

Horror of Fire: Hell is burning with fire. In Matthew 25, we have a glimpse into the Judgment Day, and the Lord divides mankind to His right hand and to His left, and to those on his left he says (Matthew 25:41), “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” The second horror of Hell is the horror of burning eternally with fire. Now, some people have put forth the idea that Hell is simply the idea of being burned up and that you cease to exist. This idea is called “annihilationism.” It means that you are annihilated by fire, and then you are just gone; you no longer exist. Friends, the Bible does not teach this. Listen to this passage from Mark 9:43, “...It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.’” Hell is described as the place where “the worm does not die.” What does that mean? Normally when a person dies, they bury the body, the worms come and consume the body, and then the process of destruction is over, but that is not the case in Hell. There is consumption that never ends. The thought here means it never ends. You are burned with fire, but the consumption process never ceases. And, repeatedly in this chapter, the Lord refers to Hell as the place where the “fire is not quenched.”

Dear friend, one of the great horrors of Hell is that its occupants will burn in fire. There are numerous times in your NT that Hell is connected with fire, but there is not one of those where it’s spoken of as being metaphorical or just in a figurative sense. You’ll have other times in the Bible where it uses terminology such as “like as of fire” or “as fire,” but it’s not used that way in reference to Hell. It’s always simply fire. And so, Revelation 21:8: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Horror of Things Not There: I know that we could make a rather long list of things that will not be in Hell, but I just want to mention two right now. Number one, there will be no mercy in Hell. You know, mercy is such a wonderful thought. Titus 3:5 says “not by works of righteousness that we have done [that saves us], but by his mercy we are saved...” And if any of us are going to be in heaven, it will be by the mercy of God. And so, there’s no mercy in Hell. That makes sense because who would offer it? You realize that everyone in Hell is in the same situation. Who would turn to you in Hell and say, “Let me help you?” They don’t have the means to do it. And so, there’s no mercy in Hell. There’s a period of time in which God extends his mercy, and that period of time is right now while you and I are alive. He extends his mercy to us through Christ Jesus. He gave us His church. We can be members of that church, and only in that institution can we be saved from Hell. But that mercy will not exist for those who go live this life unprepared; for those who go to Hell.

Secondly, there will be no hope in Hell. Suppose that you were in Hell, but in a thousand years, there would be another Judgment Day in which you might get a second chance. Maybe you

could get paroled. Maybe there would be some sort of relief. But it's not going to be that way. I have friend who says, "Hell wouldn't be so bad if it only lasted a million years." Now, you may say, "What kind of crazy statement is that? Hell wouldn't be so bad if it only lasted a million years?" The point is because after the first year, you could say, "Only 999,999 years to go and I'll be out of this awful place!" What's his point? The point is there would be hope, but there's no hope in Hell. The day of hope will be gone. And so, one of the horrors of Hell has to be the things that will not be there. There will be no mercy, no hope, no laughter of little children there.

Horror of Memory: In Luke 16, we read the account a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Lazarus was faithful to God, but the rich man died in a lost condition. I want to read this text, and then we're going to make an observation related to memory. Luke 16:19 says, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades [the KJV uses the word "hell" here, but it is "Hades"], he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.'"

Here we have an account of a man who dies in a lost condition. He breathes his last breath in this world, and he opens his eyes in Hades, specifically in torment (Tartarus). He hasn't gone to Hell yet. That's not going to happen until the Day of Judgment when God judges all of mankind, but he's already begun his suffering. He already has a foretaste of Hell to come. And what I want you to notice is that he's already crying for mercy. He's begging for some relief. He says that he's being tormented in the flames. Clearly, this experience in torment is similar to, if not the same as Hell. One difference, however, is that torment is temporary. It is just until the Day of Judgment. Hell, on the other hand, will be eternal.

I think sometimes about the atheist who spends his life denying the existence of God, and then he dies, and he lifts up his eyes in Torment, and he realizes he was wrong. But at that point it's too late. And he's suffering in fire, burning in fire — he's in misery, and there is nothing that he can do about it. But here's the point I want you to get to right now: one of the horrors of Hell is memory. When the rich man asked for mercy, Abraham responded, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented." But he uses the word "remember."

What kind of things did he remember? In fact, there's a better way to ask this, because we need to get a grip on the fact that this rich man we read about in Luke 16 is in torment still today. He's there right now. It isn't as if this occurred back when Jesus was walking the earth, and now he's

out of there. He's there right now. So, I think the better way to ask it is, "What kind of things does he remember today?" I suspect he remembers his physical prosperity. The Bible calls him a rich man. I suspect he remembers the people around him and how he could have blessed them with that prosperity, but he didn't do it. I suspect he remembers his selfishness. I suspect that he remembers the knowledge he had at the time about how to obey God, but he was too busy. There were other things in life. I suspect he remembers people around him who were righteous, who from time to time would encourage him, and how he felt about them. I suspect he remembers — in fact, I know he remembers his brothers, because as he continues his conversation with Abraham he says, "Please send Lazarus to my brothers..." He says in essence "because I don't want to have happen to them what has happened to me." And friends, that's why I have often said, "If live men knew what dead men know, the whole world would be Christians."

Dear friend, I want you to ponder with me what it would be like to die lost, and be burning in fire and suffering in torment, and all the while having your memories of this life. Imagine being able to remember all of the opportunities that you had to make your life right, and turning them down. Is there going to be memory in Hell? Yes. Do you suppose you'll remember this video?

Horror of Repulsive Population: Now, you got to understand that not everyone in Hell will be what you and I consider to be "repulsive," because not everyone in Hell is what we think of as being "wicked" people. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So there's going to be people there who we think of as good, moral people, but they are people who simply never made the decision to obey the gospel. They never became New Testament Christians. They never decided to serve Jesus Christ. They were good neighbors, they were good civic workers, but they weren't Christians. They weren't "in Christ," and they'll be in Hell.

Friends, if people could have been saved just by being good, moral people, then the cross of Jesus Christ was a colossal mistake. You see, people could have been good, moral people without the cross. The fact is, that isn't enough, that wasn't enough, and that's why Jesus had to die. And only people who make contact with the blood of Christ by obeying the gospel, only they, will not be there. And, the Lord says there will be religious people there. Jesus says this in Matthew 7:21. He says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day [He's talking about the Day of Judgement], 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" Now listen: "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" And so, there are people today who are choosing the religions of men rather than the church of the New Testament because they like it better. They're going to be there. There will be people there who had good intentions about one day obeying gospel; people who had heard the truth, who knew the truth, who planned one day to make their life right with God. In Acts 24:35 Felix said to Paul, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." But you know, for a lot of people that "convenient" season never comes.

Friends, not all the people in Hell are going to be what you and I would call wicked people, but the wicked people are going to be there. One time, there was a teenager who was older. She was about to leave her teenage years and she was quite rebellious. Her parents were faithful Christians, but she didn't want to obey the gospel. She wasn't interested in those kinds of things. She saw hypocrites in the church sometimes and it just wasn't her thing. "I don't want to talk about it. Just leave me alone, I don't want to discuss it!" That was her attitude. Her family happened to live close to the church building, and one night they were walking to the assembly and this car passed by them very slowly. It was a junky heap of a car and the windows were rolled down and it was full of men and they were drunken. And they saw this girl, and they made obscene gestures toward her and shouted obscenities toward her as they went by. She didn't even know them. When they were out of sight, she was disgusted by it. She thought it was repulsive, she loathed it. And she expressed to her parents how much she loathed people who were like that, and who acted like that. Her father, who was a wise Christian man, said, "Honey, if you don't get your life right with the Lord, you will spend your eternity with them." Who's going to be there? The Jezebels and Ahabs will be there. The Ananias and Sapphiras will be there. The Diotrophes, the Neros, and the Hitlers will be there. The murderers, and the rapists, and the liars are all going to be there. And so, we must include in the list of the 7 Horrors of Hell its occupants; those who will be there.

Horror of Eternity: You know, "eternity" is not a bad concept in and of itself. In fact, in a different discussion, it's a wonderful concept. But in the context we're discussing it now, it is one of the horrors of Hell. In 2nd Thessalonians 1:7 the Bible says, "...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels..." The first part of the verse is promising rest to faithful Christians. But listen to the second part: "...in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power..."

Sometimes uncomfortable things happen to us, and we will ask the question, "How long is this going to take?" because we're looking forward to the end. If we can see the end coming, it makes it more bearable. You know, sometimes a student in school might think, "Just four years. If I can make it four years it will be okay." A man in prison might be marking off the days on his calendar thinking "Twenty years and I'll be out of here." But eternity has no end.

I know you can't comprehend that. None of us can because we've never experienced that. Everything that we know in this world has a beginning and it has an end. But think about this: "Torment without end." Friends, I've got to tell you that the thought of dying lost, and knowing that I would have tomorrow, and the next day, and the next year, and the next one million years — in fact, forever and ever, in torment without end, makes me sick to my stomach. Friend, it makes me think that I will do anything I have to do to make my life right with the Lord. If I die lost, there will be no changing it. There will be no "do-over." In light of that, what could possibly hold you back from making your life right?

Horror of Not Being Alone: Somebody says, “How can that be one of the horrors of Hell, that I won’t be alone? Haven’t you heard the old saying, ‘misery loves company’?” Friend, can you imagine with me what it would be like to be in Hell, and have people around you, and to hear the screams behind you, and you realize that it’s someone over whom you had influence? “That’s my child! That’s my son that I raised to adulthood, but I raised him to believe that the world and the things of this world were more important than the afterlife; that material things were more important than spiritual things.” Can you imagine what it would be like to not be alone, and know that during your life, you used it to bring your loved ones to this place instead of heaven?

Those are the 7 horrors of Hell. And in view of these things, there is one penetrating question. Mark 8:36: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

It’s powerful, isn’t it? You know, I deserve to go to Hell, and you deserve to go to Hell. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” And so we all have earned Hell. But it doesn’t have to be that way, because the Lord has provided a way for us to escape that. By his grace, he gave his son, and he extends to us the Gospel plan of salvation. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” The question is, how do avail myself of the blessing of that grace? And the answer is, you do that by obeying the Gospel plan of salvation and becoming a member of the body of Christ, which is the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23).

The Gospel plan of salvation teaches that man must hear and believe the gospel. In Mark 16:16 the Lord said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” John 8:24 — Jesus said, “...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

Secondly, after a man has heard the Gospel and he believes, he must repent. In Acts 2:38 Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins.” Acts 17:30 — “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”

Thirdly, a man must confess his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, just as the Ethiopian did in Acts 8:37 when he said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Romans 10:9-10 — “With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Finally, a man must be baptized in water for the remission of his sins. I Peter 3:20-21 says, “There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

At this point, God will add you to his church (Acts 2:47), and if you live faithfully for the rest of your days, you'll find a home in heaven. And, you'll be able to lay your head on your pillow tonight and rest in ease knowing that the fires of Hell are not in your future.

For a deeper study on what you must do to be saved, I encourage you to visit www.BeingSaved.org.

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