

An Introductory Teaching: Eternal Punishment

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The Forbidden Subject

Theologian F.C. Kuehner states “Death is the most democratic institution on earth... It allows no discrimination, tolerates no exceptions. The mortality rate of mankind is the same the world over; one death per person.”

How the Bible says it: Psalms 89:48; 2 Sam 14:14; Eccl. 3:1-2; Job 30:23; He 9:27

Today in an age of organ transplants, micro-surgery, “wonder drugs” and other medical advances; all the most gifted physician can do is postpone the inevitable; man is destined to die. There are some staggering death rate numbers (1995). Three people die every second, 180 every minute, nearly 11,000 every hour, about 260,000 every day, 95,000,000 every year.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

Death comes to young and old, rich and poor, good and bad, educated and ignorant, king and commoner. No gender is spared, no age exempt, and no race excused. The dynamic young businessman, the glamorous actress, the great athlete, the brilliant scientist, the powerful politician; none of them can resist the moment when death will lay its hand upon them and bring their fame and achievements to nothing. In the Bible’s words, “No one has power over the day of his death.” NIV

In short, four things: 1 Death is universal. 2 Death has fear and dread (He 2:15). 3. Death is penal; it is a judgement, the righteous punishment by a holy God of unholy people (Gen. 2:15-17; Ezek. 18:4). 4. Death is not final; the Bible nowhere teaches that death marks the end of a person’s existence. Death is not a terminus; it is the point at which we switch tracks.

THE ULTIMATE HORROR

1. It is calculated that 1,870 verses recording words that Jesus spoke, thirteen percent are about judgment and hell. Most New Testament teaching on Hell comes from the mouth of Jesus.
2. Jesus spoke about 40 parables, more than half of them related to God's eternal judgment of sinners.
3. **Gehenna**- The strongest word for "hell" appears 12 times in the New Testament. Jesus was the speaker of this word 11 times.
4. The "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus preaches and warns about "danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:22), the danger of "thy whole body should be cast into hell." (Matt. 5:29), and the need to avoid the road "that leadeth to destruction," (Matt. 7:13).

The Hebrew word Sheol is found 63 times in the Old Testament. Sheol is translated "hell" 32 times, "grave" 29 times and "the pit" 2 times. The corresponding Greek word Hades is translated "hell" 10 times and "grave" once in the New Testament. The general meaning of Sheol and Hades is the unseen state, the place to which the soul and spirit of the dead go between death and the resurrection of the body. Neither Sheol nor Hades denotes the "Hell" of final punishment of the wicked. That is called in the Hebrew of the Old Testament "Tophet" and in the Greek of the New Testament "Gehenna." Neither do they denote the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3) that is "Abussos" nor the prison house of the fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6), that is "Tartarus".

THE ENVIRONMENT OF HELL –

Hell is more than a philosophical concept or state of mind; Jesus taught that the whole resurrected person –body and soul is punished in hell.

As to location of hell observe Matt. 22:13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The phrase "outer darkness" is a word that Jesus used frequently when speaking about hell.

Valley of Hinnom-

In Jewish history the place where idolatrous kings offered human sacrifices to pagan gods. About 750 B.C., King Ahaz was ruler of Judah (2 Chronicles 28 chapter). An idolater, he adopted the heathen practices of the day. The worst was the offering of human sacrifices, where he even had his own sons burned to death. These atrocities were carried out in the valley of Ben Hinnom, a place just south west of Jerusalem and today called Wadi al-Rababi.

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Ahaz paid dearly for his sin. His political alliances dissolved and in one battle alone he lost 120,000 men. His place was taken by the godly King Hezekiah, who was succeeded in turn by his son Manasseh, who undid all the good his father had done. He rebuilt altars to heathen idols, reinstated human sacrifices and, like Ahaz, burned his own sons to death, again in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. Manasseh was followed by his equally corrupt son Amon, who lasted only two years before being assassinated.

Amon's eight year old son Josiah took his place, and by the time he was sixteen had begun a program of reformation. Idol altars were torn down, images were smashed, and the pieces scattered over the graves of those who had bowed down to them in worship. In his crusade, Josiah singled out the valley of Ben Hinnom for particular attention. From being a place of idol worship, he turned it into a public rubbish dump in which all the filth of Jerusalem were poured. Later, the bodies of animals and even the corpses of criminals were flung there and left to rot or to be consumed by the fire that was kept constantly burning to dispose of the stinking mass of garbage. As Robert A. Morey comments, "the fires never stopped burning and the worms never stopped eating."

We can see how this otherwise unimportant piece of land fits into the picture. The Hebrew place-name was originally Ge(ben)Hinnom (the valley of the son(s) of Hinnom). The shortened form of the name was Ge-hinnom of which the Greek translation became Gehenna. The English word for Gehenna, with all its imagery of shame, disgrace, sin, guilt, judgement, and punishment is "hell."

This final hell or "Lake of Fire" was prepared for the devil and his angels. They will be joined by the wicked after the Great White Throne judgment. The wicked will spend eternity there. (Matt. 25:41; Rev 20:12-15)

Old Testament reference is "Tophet" - 2 Kings 23:10; Isa 30:33; Jer 7:31; 19:6, 11-13. New Testament reference is "Gehenna" – Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,15,47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6.

Luke 14:34 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? 35 It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out... Hell is God's cosmic garbage dump, and all who go there become the garbage of the universe—wasted and worthless.

The Prison-

Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 12:56-59

Matt 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

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Luke 12:58 When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison.

Earthly prisons vary in their conditions and amenities, from the cruel and even barbaric to those with creature comforts and sometimes better food than their inmates would normally enjoy outside. Some people have been known to commit crimes to get back “inside”. In hell, there will be no comforts, pleasures, or friendships, nor will there be any facilities for rest or recreation. Hell will make the worst prison seem like an amusement park.

There is another radical difference. Earthly prisons only confine the body, the spirit can still be free to worship, create, imagine, anticipate, and hope. In, hell, the prisoner is incarcerated “soul and body” (Matt 10:28); his spirit is crippled and confined as his body, with no instinct to worship God and no interest in doing so. An imprisoned spirit is stilted, stale, and sterile.

Earthly prisoners have opportunity to work, achieve, influence, be a means of inspiration and help to others, and gain some dignity for themselves. What the bible says about hell as a prison it seems that the inmates have neither instinct nor opportunity to achieve anything but are helpless, hopeless, and powerless, absolutely drained of all ideas and inspiration.

A Pit –

Psalms 7:15 He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.
Psalms 7:15 Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit they have made.
(NIV)

David sees the whole life of the ungodly person as a process of “scooping out” the pit into which he will eventually fall. In that sense, hell is self-made and the more sin a person commits, the deeper that persons pit becomes. Yet God is also involved in the sinners doom; David says, “But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction:” (Ps 55:23a), words with all the vile connotations of Gehenna (one Greek version of the Old Testament uses the word Gehenna to translate David’s phrase).
Isaiah 24:17 Terror and pit and snare await you, people of the earth. (NIV)

In the bible there are several references in Revelations to “the bottomless pit” (Rev 9:1-2; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3). The “bottomless pit” (modern bible versions tend to call it “the Abyss”) will be the temporary holding place of Satan and his demonic angels. There is

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hint of this in the gospel of Luke when Jesus was about to cast demons out of a man and “they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss” (Luke 8:31).

Darkness-

Job 10:21 Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; 22 A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.

Darkness is another aspect of hell’s environment. Jesus warned of the fate awaiting those Jews who rejected him in spite of their special privileges and said that the “... children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness:” (Matthew 8:12).

In a parable Jesus states, “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Mt 25:30.

Apostle Peter states: 2Pe 2:10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. 14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: 17 These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; *to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.*

Apostle Jude in condemning those with similar sinful lifestyles, including the rejection of authority expresses, “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, *to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*” (Jude 1:11, 13)

The bible offers no specific explanation of what this “darkness” means, but as “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and as darkness is the opposite of light, the description could not be more negative. Jesus did not describe hell as “darkness” but as “the darkness” as maybe to emphasize that it will be infinitely worse than any physical, moral, mental, or spiritual darkness ever experienced here on earth. A place with no mornings, no ray of sunshine, no clear sky and where every day is night.

The Fire-

There are 21 references in scripture to the portrayal of hell described as fire. Here we have a brief survey of some of them from the new international version of the bible. In the authorized version of the bible, scriptures in the book of revelation where the word “sulfur” is noted, it is written “brimstone”

Psalm 11:6 On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.

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Isaiah 26:11 Lord, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people and be put to shame; let the fire reserved for your enemies consume them.

- For those who reject God's rule in their lives...

Isaiah 30:33 Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.

- A message targeting the godless king of Assyria but applying equally to all the wicked.
- Topheth (the name is believed to come from an Arabic word meaning "a fireplace") was where the child sacrifices were offered to pagan gods in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. This name carried with it all of the shameful associations to these horrendous acts.

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"

- Part of another message in connection with punishment of pagan Assyria, Isaiah prophesies that when the wicked people living in Zion (that is Judah) see God's power at work in the destruction of his enemies, they will realize the danger they are in.

Isaiah 66:24 "And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.

Nahum 1:6 Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him.

- Both verses address those who rebel against God's authority.

Mal 4:1 Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them.

Matt 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

- John the Baptist warns that Jesus will take decisive action against sinners.

Matt 13:40 As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his

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kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- A Jesus parable relating to the way in which a farmer would deal with weeds in his fields.

Matt 13:50 and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

- A verse in a Jesus parable expressing what is done with everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

Heb. 10:27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

- If people continue to live their sinful lives in open rebellion against the truth their prospects are bleak.

Jude 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

- For those who fill their life with sexual immorality and perversion.

Rev. 14:10 They, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.

- You who plunge yourself into sin will pay a terrible price.

Rev 19:20 But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur

- They will suffer the same consequences as those they have deluded and destroyed.

Rev 20:10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

- Satan's own fate.

Rev 20:15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

- Anyone who has not gotten right with God during his lifetime.

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The Worm –

Isaiah 66:24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

Mark 9:48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

The thought of a worm gnawing away at a person's body forever is so revolting that some people use this as an excuse to throw out the whole idea of hell. That would ignore the fact that the bible uses figurative and symbolic language to express abstract concepts.

For example, the writer did not say "the worm" but "their worm" as if this part of suffering is internal not external. It seems not only will the unbeliever be in hell, but hell will be in him too. Conscience exercises a powerful influence on emotions, either positive or negative. In the most traumatic times, a clear conscience (Acts 24:16) can be a source of peace, strength, and resolve. In brief, the conscience will make the sinner acutely aware that he deliberately and freely chose the lifestyle that led him to hell. That he is there because of his willfulness and stubbornness. In addition it will force him to admit the truth of every charge it brings and the justice of every pain he suffers. This rebuke will be uninterrupted, for the sinner will have "no rest day or night" (Rev 14:11).

The Company-

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Rev 20:10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Matt 13:41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

The first phrase points to those who have been a snare or stumbling block to others – drug pushers, porn makers, prostitutes and others.

Revelation 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death