

HELL, PUNISHMENT, SINNERS

For centuries, in order to motivate converts and prospective converts to strive to 'go to heaven' when they die, religious leaders have tried to frighten them with the threat of eternal punishment in a place called hell. As fearful as many people are of going to hell, most people do not have the slightest understanding of what the Bible actually teaches about this subject.

Does the Bible actually teach an ever-burning hell fire where people are punished forever, or is this belief and teaching not in the Bible? What is the purpose of the place noted in the Bible as the Lake of Fire? Is the punishment for a wicked lifestyle to be tormented with fire for eternity or is the punishment something far worse?

Surprisingly what most people believe about hell is not found in the Bible. If you want to know what the Bible actually says about hell, you might want to pay careful attention to the information contained in this broadcast. Because, you will not find very many people who know or understand what I am about to tell you about this subject.

In most Christian theologies, Hell is a place of punishment after death. Although there are many different and confusing explanations as to exactly what and where hell is, there are three widely accepted beliefs surrounding punishment in hell:

Hell is generally believed to be under the earth.
Hell's fire burns forever.
Hell is where the wicked are tormented forever.

Although Catholic and Protestant theology differ radically in many respects, the foundation for the Protestant belief in 'hell-fire' is firmly fixed in early Catholic theology. The main difference between the two, is that Catholics believe in a conditional stay in Hell, which they call 'purgatory', but Protestants believe that the wicked go straight to Hell and stay there for eternity.

The translators of the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, lived at a time when the doctrine of 'hell-fire' and damnation was generally

accepted. When it came to translating the original Hebrew meaning of the word 'sheol', which simply refers to a hole in the ground, a pit, or a grave, they used the English word 'hell'; thereby, they effectively concealed the true meaning of scriptures while confirming their preconceived belief in a place where unrighteous people would be punished forever.

However, the translators found it impossible to use the word 'hell' in every instance as a translation of the word 'sheol', because to do so would place some of the most righteous individuals in the Bible in a place of torment with the wicked. Therefore, whenever necessary, they used other words in place of 'sheol' that would not conflict with their belief system. Had these translators simply left the word 'sheol' untranslated, the concept and meaning of each verse where it is used would have been readily understood by any serious reader of the Bible.

In order to expose the false teaching of hell as a place of eternal torture and fiery torment, it is important to review many of the scriptures in which the Hebrew word 'sheol' and the Greek word 'hades' are translated into the English word 'hell.'

The Biblical Sheol

Both Job and the Psalmist indicate that 'sheol' is a place where the body resides to rot and decay in the dirt of the earth. Job also says that God has the power to bring one out of sheol and back to life and finish the work that he started in his human creation:

Job said:

"But man dies and is cut off, and expires; and where is he? As waters go from the sea, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Who will grant that you would hide me in sheol; You would hide me until your anger turns back; that you would set a limit for me and remember me? If a man dies, will he revive? All the days of my warfare will I wait, until my change comes. You

shall call, and I will answer you; you shall long to the work of your hands" (Job 14:10-15 Para.).

The Psalmist said of humans and the resurrection from the grave:

"Like sheep, they are appointed to sheol [the grave]; death shall reign for them; and the upright ones shall rule over them in the morning; and their form is for rotting; Sheol is home for them. But God will redeem my soul from the hand of sheol; for he will take me. Selah" (Psa.49:14-15 Para.). See also Psa.6:5; 30:3; 89:48.

The Condition of Death

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible that indicates humans have an immortal soul or that any human life function continues after death. The Bible indicates just the opposite; it clearly shows that the physical life of a human is a temporary condition that can be terminated forever.

At death, the cerebral functions cease, the brain dies and there are no more thought processes, no reward, no memory, no knowledge, no access to this world; the dead are simply dead.

King Solomon said of death:

"For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in any thing that happens under the sun" (Ecc.9:5-6 NIV).

Solomon also said:

"All that your hand finds to do, do it with your strength. For there is no work, or planning, or knowledge or wisdom, in sheol, where you go" (Ecc.9:10 Para.).

The Psalmist said of the dead:

"Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall thank

you?" (Psa.6:4-5 KJV Para.).

The Psalmist also said:

"Put your trust not in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa.146:3-4 KJV). See also Isa.38:17-19.

The reason there is no remembrance of God in the grave and that no one can praise God from the grave is because a dead person is no longer alive; their life has been silenced. In death there is no thought process:

Where is Sheol of the Bible?

Although the Bible does not indicate a specific geographical location on earth for sheol, there are many descriptions of the location of sheol. It is said to be under the mountains, the earth, the waters, and it is a place to where people descend. See Num.16:30; Psa.104:29; Job 26:5; 34:14-15; Pro.1:12; Isa.14:14-19; Ezk.32:23; Jon.2:6.

Sheol is a place of darkness, silence, and rest; moreover, it is a condition of unconsciousness. It is a place where there is no communication between God and man (Psa.6:5; 31:17-18; 94:17; 115:17; Ecc.9:5-6;10; Job 10:21-22).

Sheol is also a place where only the physical element of man resides, but not the spirit of man. It is a place where both righteous and wicked individuals go to await a resurrection to immortality, an opportunity for salvation, or the second death.

King Solomon said that after the death of a human: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (Eccl 12:7).

Article Offer

One of the major reasons people believe that wicked individuals will be punished in an ever-burning hell is because they have believed the first lie recorded

in the Bible. Satan told Eve that she would not die if she ate the forbidden fruit, and she believed him. Since then, Satan has deceived most of humanity into thinking they have an immortal soul. However, humans do not have an immortal soul. Humans are mortal and human life is a temporary condition.

Although beliefs differ radically about the immortality of the soul. Most professing Christians believe that humans only die physically, but the spirit (that is, the soul—the sentient being) remains alive in heaven, hell, or some other transitory state in-between.

However, these beliefs no matter how sincere cannot be proven from the Bible. Moreover, the concept of purgatory as a place or condition of spiritual cleansing is also a non-biblical teaching. Neither of these teachings are valid biblical concepts; they are simply figments of theological imagination, which were conceived to explain the state of the dead in the context of humans having an immortal soul.

If you want to know whether or not humans have an immortal soul according to the Bible and exactly what happens to the two elements of the human creation at death get a copy of my studies, *Eternal and Immortal life and the State of the Dead*.

From the context of the many scriptures that speak of sheol, it is evident that sheol is not limited to one specific geographical location on earth. Instead, it is often used to describe a physical resting place for a dead body. It is also used to describe a condition of rest. In the broadest sense, sheol simply means 'where dead bodies are.'

In most English translations, 'sheol' has been translated 'hell' with the conceptual meaning of a place of torture and suffering. However, 'sheol' does not even remotely denote a place of fiery torment.

There is no contradiction in the usage of the Hebrew word sheol in the Bible; the contradiction is between what people believe and what the Bible actually teaches.

HADES

In the new Testament the Greek word 'hades' refers to the same place as the Hebrew word 'sheol' (that is, the realm of the dead, a hole in the ground, a pit or grave).

Jesus Went to Hell

If hell is a place of eternal torment for the wicked as is commonly taught, we have a problem of monumental proportions, because the Bible clearly shows that Jesus went to hell after he was crucified and before he was resurrected:

If we take the King James translation of Peter's quotation of Psalm 16 in Acts chapter 2 literally, using today's theological beliefs about hell, then the only conclusion that we can come to is that Jesus went to an ever-burning hell when he died:

Peter said this:

"For David speaks concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore, my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One [that is, Jesus Christ] to see corruption." "He [that is, David] seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:27; 31 KJV).

When translating this prophecy of Christ's death and resurrection, the translators found themselves in a doctrinal dilemma. A correct translation of the word 'hades' as 'grave' would not harmonize with current theology concerning the immortality of the soul, because it would have shown that Jesus did not have an immortal soul, but that he was dead in a grave until God the Father resurrected him. In order to solve their problem they used the word 'hell' in order to obscure the true intent of the scriptures.

The quotation of Psalm 16 by Peter, is irrefutable proof that hell is not a place of eternal fiery

torment. Was Christ sent to a place of torture before his resurrection? Of course not! Christ was buried in a tomb, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word 'sheol' and the Greek word 'hades'. He did not go to a place of torture; his body lay in a tomb and his spirit went back to God the Father for safe keeping until his body was resurrected and his spirit was placed back into his body.

The prophet Isaiah said of Christ's burial:

"Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he has poured out his soul to death: and he was numbered with transgressors. . ." (Isa. 53:12 KJV).

If the biblical sheol is a place of fire and torment for the wicked, why would Jesus and other righteous individuals be found there? The simple fact revealed in scripture is that all humans who die go to the same place at death. Their bodies go into the earth or some other physical place on earth and their spirit goes back to the Sovereign God who gave it, there to await a resurrection to either immortality, another physical life or the second death.

Article Offer

Few today understand that there are many resurrections mentioned in the Bible as a part of God's plan for the salvation of humanity. Most of professing Christianity believe that there are only two categories of people on earth: the saved who are assured heavenly bliss and the lost who are to be tormented forever in an everlasting hell-fire.

Many worry that if their loved ones do not accept Christ in this life, they will lose out on salvation. Many grieve over their dead relatives, because they think these loved ones are going to burn in a hell-fire for all of eternity, because they never acknowledged Christ as their Savior.

Is today the only day of salvation? Have God the Father and Jesus Christ been trying to save all of humanity from the time of Adam to this present day? The Biblical answer may surprise you, because it is not what is taught preached in most churches

today.

If you are interested in understanding the four major resurrections in the Bible, get a copy of my studies on this topic.

Resurrection From Hell

Speaking of the resurrection the prophetess Hannah said in 1st Samuel chapter 2, verse 6:

"The Lord kills, and makes alive: he brings down to the grave [sheol], and brings up" (1.Sam.2:6 KJV). See also Job 21:23-32; 30:23; Psa.30:3; 49:15; 86:13; Hos.13:14; Nah.1:14; Rev.1:18.

In the Book of Revelation chapter 1, we see that Jesus has the authority and power to unlock the grave and resurrect those who reside there. See Acts 10:42; Rom.14:9.

Beginning in verse 17 of chapter 1, the apostle John said when he saw Christ:

"And he put his right hand on me, saying to me, do not fear. I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I became dead; and behold, I am living forever and ever. Amen. And I have the keys to Hades, and of death" (Rev.1:17-18 Para.).

The apostle Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, "O death, where is your sting? O grave (hades), where is your victory?"

In Paul's statement about victory over death the King James translators interpreted the Greek word 'hades' correctly as 'grave'. They did this in order to not conflict with their theology of an ever-burning fire where the wicked suffering continual punishment.

Listen, a short honest study into the references where the Greek word 'hades' is used in the New Testament will easily show that it means the 'grave' and not an 'ever-burning place of eternal torment.

GEHENNA/GEHINOM

The Greek word 'gehenna' and the Hebrew word 'gehinnom' are also translated as 'hell' in the New

Testament and come from the Hebrew phrase 'Gay Ben Hinnom', which means 'The Valley of the Son of Hinnom'. This small valley was located south of Jerusalem between the territories of Judah and Benjamin (see Josh.15:8). Periodically, during the times of the Kings of Israel, the sacrificial burning of children was practiced there:

Chronicles chapter 28, records that 'The Valley of the Son of Hinnom' was used as a place of sacrifice and worship to false gods:

Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 28:

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father: For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel" (2.Chron.28:1-3 KJV). See also 2.Kg.23:7-10; 2.Chron. 33:1-6; Jer.7:31;32:35.

These sacrifices were a part of the worship of Molech. Jeremiah and many other prophets condemned this practice and prophesied that the valley would be called 'The Valley of Slaughter' because of the events that would transpire there (see Jer.19:5-6). The location in the Valley of Hinnom where the children were burnt in sacrifice to pagan gods was called 'topet', which means 'a burning place'.

The Gehenna of Christ's day was the name of a deep ravine about a thousand yards south of the temple area just outside of the city of Jerusalem. This ravine was used as the city's garbage dump.

It is said that all sorts of things were disposed of there, such as bones and the bodies of animals and criminals. Fires were kept continually burning in the Valley of Gehenna in order to consume whatever was thrown there.

Because of the circumstances associated with Gehenna, the Hebrew word 'gehinom' became an

idiomatic expression for 'a place of fiery destruction.' When Jesus spoke of Gehenna it was for the purpose of describing an act of destruction, not an act of torture:

Jesus said:

"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in gehenna [hell]" (Matt.10:28 KJV Para.). See also Gen.6:1-7; Lk.12:4-5 KJV.

The Greek word for 'destroy' is 'apollumi', which means 'to destroy fully', 'to kill', 'to perish', 'to completely do away with.' The usage of the word 'apollumi' in the New Testament always indicates complete destruction. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for 'destroy' mean 'the destruction and cessation of existence'.

There is no doubt that Jesus' audience knew exactly what he was referring to when he spoke of gehenna. His symbolic usage of gehenna in portraying destruction was a very graphic illustration and an unmistakable reference to total destruction.

Jesus warned the scribes and Pharisees the final judgement and punishment in the Lake of Fire when he said:

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened graves which outwardly indeed appear beautiful, but within are full of bones of the dead, and of all uncleanness. So you also indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but within are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the righteous. And you say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. So you witness to yourselves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. And you fill up the measure of your fathers. Serpents, offspring of vipers! How shall you escape the judgment of gehenna?" (Matt.23:27-33 Para.).

Jesus gives a powerful rebuke and warning to these wicked religious leaders. Notice that, if they do not repent, there is no escape from the punishment for sin, which is utter, final destruction by fire.

The destructive power of fire was used many times to destroy those who opposed the Creator God or his people. There are many warnings in the Bible, which show that those who oppose God, his prophets, and his people will be destroyed with fire. See Gen.19:24; Deut.4:23-24; 9:3; Isa.9:18-19; 30:26-23; Matt.3:10; 5:21-22; 2.Thes.1:7-8.

The Gehenna fire that Jesus warned of is not a place of eternal torture; it is a place where the death penalty will be administered. It is a place of the final destruction of wicked humans and spirits.

Every time Jesus referred to gehenna, those listening knew exactly what he was saying. They did not imagine a place of fiery torture under the earth or anywhere else. They visualized a foul, stinking garbage dump where refuse and unwanted waste of all kinds was thrown to be destroyed by fire.

The Worm of Gehenna

In another reference to Gehenna, Jesus makes the picture of destruction more graphic by referring to the ever-present worms that infested the garbage and dead bodies that were thrown there:

Jesus said:

"And if your hand offend you, cut it off. For it is profitable for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go away into the fire of gehenna that cannot be put out: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out. And if your foot causes you to offend cut it off, for it is well for you to enter into life lame, than having two feet to be thrown into gehenna, into the fire that cannot be put out: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out. And if your eye offends you, cast it out. For it is profitable for you to enter into the kingdom of God one-eyed, than having two eyes to be thrown into the fire of gehenna: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out" (Mk.9:43-48 Para.). See also Matt.5:29-30; 18:8-9.

Many people believe that what Jesus said about the wicked being thrown into gehenna, proves that wicked people will be tortured forever. However, Jesus uses the city dump where garbage was burned as an example of the total destruction of the wicked.

But what about the worm that does not die? Many believe that because Jesus said 'their worm does not die', there must be eternal punishing for sinners? However, Jesus is using the city dump and its fires as a symbolic representation of a final punishment.

The English word translated as 'worm' is the Greek word 'skolex', which refers to 'a grub', a 'maggot', or 'earth worm,' which fits perfectly into the symbolism of the Gehenna-fire garbage dump. When a carcass was thrown into Gehenna, but it was not totally consumed by the fires or did not reach the fires to be burned, it would be consumed by animals, birds, insects, maggots, and/or worms.

When dead flesh is infested with maggots and worms, their endless reproductive cycle will eventually totally consume the flesh. This is what Jesus meant when he said 'their worm does not die'. He did not mean that the worm was eternal, he was using the city dump and its destructive nature as an allegory for the finality of the punishment for sinfulness.

The prophet Isaiah also used the symbolism of a worm and fire when he foretold the total destruction of the wicked during the millennial reign of Christ:

Isaiah said:

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come and worship before me, says the Lord. 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 abhorrence to all flesh" (Isa.66:22-24 KJV Para.).

When Jesus spoke of Gehenna and worms that did not die, he was giving a graphic description of the finality of the destruction of the wicked to his audience. They knew that he was speaking of a most foul and miserable destruction in a Gehenna type garbage dump where worthless things were disposed of.

TARTAROO

Peter said:

"For God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down into hell [that is, tartaroo], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved to judgment;" (2.Pet.2:4 KJV). See also 1.Pet.3:19-20; Jude 6.

The beings who will be sent to tartaroo are not people; they are wicked spirit-beings. Tartaroo is neither gehenna nor hades; it is a place of darkness and restraint and its literal meaning is 'incarceration' or 'restraint'. It does not necessarily mean a place at all. Moreover, in no way whatsoever can this word be applied to a place of punishment for humans.

SUMMARY

The Incurably Wicked

Well what will happen to the incorrigible sinners? Are they all to be tortured with fire forever? No, they will not be tortured forever. The wages of sin is death (Rom.6:23)—not eternal life in torment. Those who willfully disobey and reject God will receive eternal punishment, not eternal punishing. They will be cast into a fire that will terminate their existence forever (Matt.13:38-42; Rev.20:15), and they will be ashes under the feet of the righteous according to Malachi.

The book of Revelation chapter 21, verse 8 tells us this about the fate of the wicked:

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving, and those having become foul, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all the lying ones, their part will be in the Lake

burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev.21:8 Para.).

Hell Fire

It is evident that the popular concept of hell as an ever-burning place of torture for the wicked cannot be substantiated by honestly translating the Bible. Because it cannot be proven from scripture, it is obviously a false teaching and a deception of Satan who is the God of this world's religions.

The traditional teaching of an eternal 'hell-fire' torture that is reserved for the wicked is false. Such a place simply does not exist as a teaching of the Bible. Although Jesus and the prophets did not teach ever-burning torture for the wicked, they did teach a final punishment for the wicked.

Yes, the wicked will be punished by fire. However, this fire is far hotter and more permanent than most believe. The fire that will be used to punish the wicked will consume both body and spirit; therefore, it will terminate the totality of their existence forever:

Jesus said:

"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in 'gehenna'" (Matt.10:28 KJV). See also Gen.6:1-7; Lk.12:4-5 KJV

The prophet Malachi said of this future punishment:

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch . . . And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.4:1;3 KJV).

Malachi does not say whether these wicked individuals are evil spirits or humans. What is clear from many other scriptures is that there is a time in

the future when both evil spirits and humans who oppose God will be destroyed in a lake of fire and become ashes. These ashes are the lifeless remains of those who have their life terminated by fire. These individuals will never exist again because their existence will be erased; they will totally cease to exist.

If the King James translators had been honest and consistent with their interpreting and translating the Hebrew word 'sheol' and the Greek word 'hades' the popular teaching of hell as a place of eternal punishment would not exist today. However, this deceptive teaching does exist and is being taught by many spiritual leaders who know better or at least should know better.

There are many sincere and dedicated people who believe that they are worshiping God in truth and that there is an ever burning hell fire where the wicked are punished forever. However, this is not what the Bible says. Sincerity and dedication do not equal truth! Only truth is truth! Sincerity only shows the attitude with which people do what they do.

Only God determines what truth is and is not. The Bible teaches that "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro.14:12 KJV).

It is apparent that many people are truly dedicated to their religious precepts, but this does not mean that they understand the truth of God. The sad fact, is that, most people today who profess to believe in the Bible, have been misled by false prophets and teachers, who teach a counterfeit of God's truth.

If this were not true there would only be one truth being taught and only one unified body teaching this one truth. Instead there are more than 20,000 differing associations and organizations who profess to teach biblical truth, but they all differ in what they believe and teach as truth. Logic tells us that, because the bible says that there is only one truth, these 20,000 plus differing opinions as to what is biblical truth cannot all be right, and if any one of them is right, then the rest are wrong, and are teaching a false belief system.

As confusing as all of the opinions are about what hell is and is not, you do not have to be deceived, because a small amount of study into the original Hebrew and Greek language of the Old and the New Testaments will easily disprove the teaching of an ever-burning place where wicked people are tortured for eternity.

I see that my time is up, but if you want to know more about what the bible actually says about the punishment of the wicked or the other subjects that I have briefly touched on in this in this broadcast, Write to me at the address given in the following announcement. Until next time this is Bud Cocherell for Bible Research.

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