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Is Hell Real?

Matthew 25:41: (NASB) *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...*



One of the more difficult tasks of Christianity is understanding the future judgment regarding those who do not come to Jesus in this life. There are many different and contradictory teachings that we as Christians have drawn from the Scriptures regarding this judgment. On one hand, these range from the teaching that they will mercilessly burn in the torture of hell forever, to the other hand which says that God is far too loving to hurt or destroy anyone forever. This morning we will open the book and look critically at what we think the Bible actually teaches on this matter. Is hell real?

The concept of hell varies within Christian denominations, but one of the first questions we must at least think about is "What kind of God is God?"

Option #1: God is a tyrant - a merciless and barbaric ruler to those who do not obey Him.

Option #2: God is a God of love, to the extent that He will put justice aside and no matter what people do, no matter how heinous the crimes that they commit, they will always be forgiven and blessed.

Option #3: God is a God of great power who expresses that power through the wisdom of eternity and applies that power through justice, tempered with mercy, for the ultimate purpose of showing His love for His creatures.

What did Jesus say about the concept of hell? Matthew 13:40-42

Matthew 13:47-50: Is this literal or symbolic? How can we know? Jesus not only mentions some very unsettling imagery, he repeats it many times. The question is, what is the lesson he is teaching?



Hell - The Devil's Domain, Hell imagined from times beginning, History Channel

- *Hell has been imagined in countless ways - those perceptions began to take shape ages ago, in a time before Jesus walked the earth.*
- *The hell of fire and brimstone is but the most well-known vision of the underworld...Humankind has created strikingly similar images of an unpleasant afterlife, portraits of our darkest imaginings.*

Many ancient cultures had similar imaginings of what the afterlife was like. The Egyptian culture, for one example, taught a lot about the imagined underworld of torture. This was in drastic contrast to what the Hebrews of the Old Testament believed. Did the Egyptians know more about God's truth than God's own chosen people? Mark 9:43-47

In the Old Testament, we will see that there is only one word translated "hell":

Hell: Strongs #7585 she'owl (sheh-ole'); or sheol (sheh-ole'); a subterranean retreat
The Old Testament word "sheol" (Strongs #7585) is used 66 times: 31 times it is translated into English as "grave," 31 times it is translated "hell," and four times it is translated as "pit."

Let's look at some of the "warnings" using this word: Deuteronomy 32:21-23: (KJV) ²¹*They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. (This text quoted in Romans 10:19-21 relating to the Gentiles coming to favor.)* ²²*For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell <7585>, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. Is God talking about literal flames or was the fire of His anger used as a metaphor? Psalms 9:17: *The wicked shall be turned into hell <7585>, and all the nations that forget God. Psalms 55:15: *Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell <7585>: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them. Proverbs 27:20: **Hell <7585>** and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied. Wickedness/Sheol/Hell - these all seem to fit together, don't they?***



Hell - The Devils Domain, Sheol is the grave, History Channel



- *Biblical conceptions of hell evolve over the course of the Bible. The Old Testament contains only fleeting and indirect references to hell.*

Sheol, the Hebrew abode of the righteous and unrighteous dead, was synonymous with the grave and separation from God.

- *Everybody went there; it wasn't a reward or punishment. It was just another way of describing what happens to you when you die.*

The previous scriptures correlated sheol with wickedness. But let's look at other scriptures that use the exact same Hebrew word: 1 Samuel 2:6: *The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the **grave <7585>**, and bringeth up.* Here we see a concept of resurrection...bringing back up. This isn't associated with wickedness. Job 14:13: *O that thou wouldest hide me in the **grave <7585>**, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!* Job is praying to go to hell to be hidden, because the word for "hell" and "grave" are the same. Psalms 49:14-15: ¹⁴*Like sheep they are laid in the **grave <7585>**; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the **grave <7585>** from their dwelling.* ¹⁵*But God will redeem my soul from the power of the **grave <7585>**: for he shall receive me. Selah.* If this is a place of torment, why are sheep going there as well? Hosea 13:14: *I will ransom them from the power of the **grave <7585>**; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O **grave <7585>**, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.* If we replace the English word "grave" with "hell" in the translation, it would create for many a big contradiction. The common belief is that there is no ransoming from hell because it is for eternity. So what does this mean?



Hell gives purpose to Jesus' death, Guidelines.org

- *If there is no hell, God didn't need to send His son to be cruelly treated, rejected, and ultimately crucified to point the way back to heaven. He could have sent a spokesperson, even an angel, but not demand the death of His one and only son.*

This view is saying that hell makes Jesus' death purposeful. If there is no hell of torment, there is no reason for Jesus' sacrifice. But wait - Jesus died in sacrifice as a ransom price for Adam. To give mankind an opportunity at life, a price had to be paid. A spokesperson making an announcement doesn't pay a price, they just say something. The death sentence would have continued without Jesus. Daniel 12:1-2: This talks about resurrection for everyone - some to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt. In the Old Testament, the word "everlasting" means "age lasting." There was no word in Hebrew for everlasting. So this actually would be interpreted as "age-lasting contempt." It actually makes more sense that everyone is in the dust of the ground before the resurrection process. Why is this one word translated in different ways if it means the same thing all of the time?

So, is hell the same in both the Old and New Testaments?

New Testament Primary word for "Hell" - "Hades" -

Hell: Strongs #86, haides (hah'-dace); unseen, i.e. "Hades" or the place (state) of departed souls:

The next two examples are undeniable links between Sheol and Hades:



Psalms 16:10: (NIV) *because you will not abandon me to **the grave**, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.* (Hebrew)

Acts 2:27: (NIV) *because you will not abandon me to **the grave**, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.* (Greek)

The New Testament is quoting from the Old Testament, and uses Sheol (Hebrew) and Hades (Greek). The word itself has no connotation of torture. It literally means the grave, being buried. If hell exists as a place of eternal torment which will never go away, then is it logical to conclude that hell is victorious over those who are incarcerated therein? Does hell "win" the vast majority of humanity or does God triumph over evil?

Isaiah 25:8: (NIV) *He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.* Hosea 13:14: (NIV) *I will ransom them from the power of **the grave <(sheol) 7586>**; I*



will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O **grave <(sheol) 7586>**, is your destruction? I will have no compassion...**Both the above verses are quoted partially below:** 1 Corinthians 15:54-55: (NIV) ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵Where, O **death <(Hades) 86>**, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? We agree with the History Channel that the scholars agree that Sheol and Hades are describing the same thing.

We also agree that justice must be served, but what does that mean? What is just? Is Hitler a typical or an extreme example of those who would be sentenced to hell? He is the extreme! However, by Christian denominational teaching, the vast majority of the world is sentenced to hell. Looking through the history of time, that could be as many as 30 billion people. So if Hitler is an extreme example, what about the "typical" person? Does justice demand that an eternal suffering be the price of a finite life lived in sin? Is *that* God's justice?

Here is God's justice: Acts 17:31: The Apostle preached to pagans that God will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus. It is not based on emotion or anger. Righteousness is essentially an emotionless approach. Romans 5:18: There seems to be a very clear-cut, just approach to eternity. Transgression came because of one man, therefore the ransom price that Jesus paid means that righteousness and justification come to all men. A man for a man - that's justice. Everyone stuck in the downward spiral of sin is included in the upward spiral of righteousness.

God created us in His image and gave us dominion over the earth. Would it not be sensible to think that as our Father, God would have taught us the basics of justice? In the Old Testament, it was justice that prevailed - an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life. When Jesus came on the scene, he wanted us to live not by the letter of the law, but by the spirit of the law. We were to apply mercy. God's justice is life for life, not an eternity of suffering for a few life-changing decisions. The vast majority of those we look at as being sentenced to eternal torment and torture with their few life decisions - is it just to put them into an eternal, no-way out situation? Does that reflect the God that we know? Is justice part of God's plan? Yes, it is. **Jesus' own words:** John 14:6: Even though we look at the concept of goodness in all people as pretty important, this scripture tells us unequivocally that we can only come to God through Jesus. So what does it mean if one is outside of this requirement? Mark 9:43: Now flames are being introduced! What does this mean?


 **Hell - The Devils Domain - Jesus - Gehenna is an image of hell, History Channel**

- *Jesus also gives his followers a visual depiction of what Hell might be like. Just outside of Jerusalem was Gehenna, a noxious trash dump where refuse was burned.*
- *Christ speaks of Gehenna as a metaphor for the fires that will not cease to burn.*

Hell: Strongs #1067 *geena* (g'eh'-en-nah); of Hebrew origin; valley of (the son of) Hinnom.

(Source: Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary) What is "Gehenna" The Valley of Hinnom: In the time of Jesus the Valley of Hinnom was used as the garbage dump of Jerusalem. Into it was thrown all the filth and garbage of the city, including the dead bodies of animals and executed criminals. To consume all this, fires burned constantly. Maggots worked in the filth. When the wind blew from that direction over the city, its awfulness was quite evident.

Nothing alive was thrown into this garbage dump, but the everlasting flames were good imagery at that time, because the fires consumed everything within and were always kept going. **Here is the awful history of Gehenna and its "imagery" that is presented:** Jeremiah 19:2-6: Child sacrifices were being made by Israel in this valley! God was livid by this idea. Torturing human beings by fire was not considered by Him. God changed its name, every living thing was moved out of this valley and it was turned into a garbage dump. Is it reasonable to assume that Jesus took a God-proclaimed symbol of utter destruction and shame and relabeled it a symbol of torture - which God Himself said never entered his mind?

 **Is there a Hell? Unrepentant will get something, Bill O'Reilly**

- *I think God wants everybody to repent. God wants everyone to be good and gives everybody the opportunity to do that - free will. But if you spit in the face of God, kill millions of people, I think there has to be a reckoning.*



People who turn their back on good - unrepentant people who do evil in this world - I believe will get something when they die. They will not be with the Lord in heaven.

KEY POINT: Just because we are saying there is no fire in hell does not mean we are saying there is no consequence for sin.

God taught us about justice and His plan is full of justice and accountability. Romans 6:23

Destroyed: Strongs #1842, *exolothreuo*, to destroy out of its place, destroy utterly, to extirpate

Acts 3:23: (KJV) *And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be **destroyed <1842>** from among the people.* God remembers sins, and that is what the Day of Judgment is about. **These next verses are Jesus warning about stumbling any of his followers:** Mark 9:43-48: Clearly the imagery in this text has nothing to do with torture and everything to do with Jesus pleading with us to do whatever is necessary to live righteously. It would be contrary to his teachings for him to literally mean that we should cut off our own hands and feet and gouge out our eyes. If where we are going is going to keep us from God - don't go there! If what you see is tempting you - don't look! Jesus is using the imagery of the day. For the Jewish mind, the Valley of Hinnom stunk, fires burned, and what the fire didn't destroy, the worms did. Whatever was thrown in there was for the purpose of complete, utter destruction and annihilation. Nothing was tortured. It was a valley of destruction *because* of the torture man had done. Jesus was comparing entering life eternal with Gehenna - utter destruction.

Jesus quoted from here: Isaiah 66:22-24: Jesus is referencing that Valley of Hinnom. What would you be looking at? Corpses! He uses the exact imagery quoted from Isaiah describing the death, destruction, and utter consuming of those that had done evil.

Whenever we see "weeping (or wailing) and gnashing of teeth," it is accompanied by either outer darkness or a furnace of fire - so what does this mean? Torture?

The account of the Centurion asking for the healing of his servant: Matthew 8:10-12: This outer darkness is in no way connected with torment by fire. This refers to the children of Israel, having rejected the Messiah, who were cast into disfavor. Jesus predicted that upon the realization of that in the next age, they will exhibit anger and lamentation over their loss, looking in from the outside, so to speak. This isn't torment or torture, it is a reaction to something lost. Isaiah 60:1-3: This gives clear explanation of who is in the light and who is subject to "outer darkness." Being cast into darkness is the gross darkness that covers the people here in Isaiah 60. The light is the light of the gospel through Jesus. We are trying to find the scriptural basis and apply the principle. The Basis: Isaiah 60:1-3; The Principle: Weeping and gnashing of teeth; outer darkness, away from the favor of God. There are billions and billions that are reportedly in torment for eternity. What happens to the atheists who live their lives in service of others? Does that doom them to eternal torment? Eternity really is something beyond our ability to grasp. Is such a punishment just for a belief choice? Matthew 13:40-43: Fire, especially in a furnace, does two things: It purifies and destroys. This demonstrates the great day of trouble - there will be a day of God's wrath, but it is not eternal. The fire devours but doesn't torture forever. It is a contained fire, a furnace of fire.

This text reflects the heart and will of God and shows His justice, wisdom, power and love: 1 Timothy 2:3-6: (NASB) ³*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,* ⁴*who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* ⁵*For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* ⁶*who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*

We believe God is love and has a plan for all mankind. Does the concept of a hell of torture and torment equal to what you believe God is?

*So is hell real...?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*