

Hell

1) What is hell?

- A) The English word “hell” is used in the New Testament (NT) to translate three different Greek words: *tartarus*, *hades* and *gehenna*.
- (1) Tartarus. The word *tartarus* is found only once in the NT: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*tartarus*) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;” (2 Pet 2:4).
- (a) This word describes a place where some (but not all) of the fallen angels are being kept until the judgment. We know almost nothing else about this place of imprisonment (see also Jude 1:6 which seems to be speaking of the same place).
- (2) Hades. The word *hades* occurs ten times in the NT, and it is the normal referent of the English word “hell” (see Luke 16:22–31).
- (a) It is the place where the spirits of sinners go after physical death (Luke 16:22–23).
- (i) Human beings will not spend eternity as bodiless spirits. Each person, sinner and saint, will receive a new resurrected body that will last forever—either on the New Earth or in the Lake of Fire (John 6:40; 1 Cor 15:35–50; Rev 20).
- (b) It is a place of fire, flame and unbearable heat (Luke 16:24).
- (i) Some have argued that the flames of hell cannot be literal (how can spirits be burned with fire?) but this argument misses the point. Whatever they are, the flames are most certainly real, and the spirits in hell, although they do not have physical eyes, ears and hands, are still capable of sensation and pain. That pain is described in “bodily” terms to facilitate our understanding of the torment being experienced.
- (c) It is a place of darkness (Matt 25:30).
- (i) Jesus spoke of sinners being “cast into outer darkness.” Although fire and darkness seem mutually exclusive, Scripture is clear that Hell is a horrible combination of the two. Hell’s fire burns and sears, but gives no light to those trapped within.
- (d) It is a place of memory and regret (Luke 16:25).
- (i) The rich man had full memory of his former life on earth. He could remember his wealth and luxury. He could also remember the many chances he had to repent, and he would spend the rest of eternity wishing he had obeyed God.

- (e) It is a place of torment and agony (Luke 16:23, 24, 28).
 - (i) Jesus' repeatedly warns us that hell is a fearful place of agony and pain. The fire of hell not only burns but also creates an intense feeling of what is described in physical terms as thirst (v. 24).
- (f) It is a place of separation from God and the righteous (Luke 16:26).
 - (i) The parable uses imagery that underscores the complete separation of the wicked from God and those in Heaven.
- (g) It will be cast into the lake of fire (*gehenna*) at the end of the Millennium, Christ's future thousand-year reign on this present fallen earth.
 - (i) John said, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire (*gehenna*). This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:11-15).
- (3) *Gehenna*. The word *gehenna* occurs twelve times in the NT, and it refers to what is commonly called "the lake of fire" (Rev 20:14-15). The term *gehenna* is derived from the Valley of Hinnom which was used as a burial place for criminals and for burning garbage.
 - (a) It was created for the Devil and his angels, and is the final destiny of all who reject God and practice wickedness (Matt 25:41).
 - (b) It is a place of unquenchable, eternal fire and brimstone (Mark 9:43-45), and those who burn there will weep and wail and gnash their teeth (Matt 8:12).
 - (c) It is a place of eternal torment and death for both body and spirit (Matt 10:28). This is why it is called the "second death" (Rev 20:14).
- B) To summarize: hell is a place of torment and regret where the spirits of wicked men and women await their final day of judgment. At that day, they will receive a resurrected body, and then they, along with the Devil and his angels, will be thrown into the lake of fire where they will burn forever in torment and agony.

2) Where is hell?

- A) Various theories on the location of hell have been put forward. A traditional view is that hell is in the center of the earth. This view comes from Jesus' statement, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell" (Luke 10:15 KJV). We should note, however, that this passage is not concerned with the

geographic location of hell. Capernaum's being thrust "down" is better understood as a reference to its being condemned rather than being pushed in a certain direction.

- B) In the King James Version, Ephesians 4:9 says that before Jesus ascended into heaven, "he also descended...into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph 4:9 KJV). Some Christians take "the lower parts of the earth" as a reference to hell, where they say Jesus spent the time between His death and resurrection. However, the New International Version gives a better translation: "he also descended to the lower, earthly regions" (Eph 4:9 NIV). This verse is simply saying that Jesus came to earth. It is a reference to His incarnation, not to His location after death.
- C) Scripture does not tell us the physical location of hell. Hell is a literal place of real torment, but we do not know where it is. Wherever it is, the location of hell is far less important than the need to avoid going there.

3) Does the punishment of the wicked last forever?

- A) Scripture is clear: there is no hope of ever escaping the endless torment of hell. Jesus said, "And these [the wicked] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt 25:46). Note that the judgment for both groups of people is "eternal." If eternal life is never-ending, then it follows that eternal punishment is never-ending.

4) How can a loving God send people to a place of eternal torment?

- A) Remember this important truth: God is not willing that any should perish, and He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (John 3:16-17; 2 Pet 3:9; Ezek 33:11).
- B) However, you must understand the true magnitude of sin. The penalty for sin is death. God, because He loved you, sent His only Son to die in your place so that you might be saved (John 11:26). If you reject so great a salvation, you are rejecting the life and blood of the infinite, eternal Son of God. What punishment is just for such a crime? The eternal torment of hell and the lake of fire is the only fitting punishment (Heb 2:2-3).
- C) C. H. Spurgeon was right when he cautioned, "When men talk of a little hell, it is because they think they have only a little sin, and believe in a little Savior. But when you get a great sense of sin, you want a great Savior, and feel that, if you do not have Him, you will fall into a great destruction, and suffer a great punishment at the hand of a great God." We must preach the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the fearful punishment of hell, but an ever greater and more merciful Savior.

5) If a righteous person turns from God and does evil, will they go to hell?

- A) Consider what God said: "But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a

righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die” (Ezek 18:24-26).

- B) The eternal destiny of each person does not depend on whether they did enough righteous things during their life. Rather, it depends on the spiritual condition of their heart when they die. That is why we must live each day in love and faith and submission to the Holy Spirit.

6) How should the reality of hell affect the way I live?

- A) You should fear God and hate sin (Matt 10:28; Ps 97:10).
- B) You should be willing to make any sacrifice, no matter how great, in order to escape the fearful torment of hell (Matt 18:8-9).
- C) You should carry a burden for the lost and do all you can to save them.