

IS HELL REALLY A PLACE OF FIERY TORMENT?

Note to the speaker:

Emphasize that Jehovah, as a God of love, has taken the necessary steps to restore obedient mankind to a good relationship with him. Do not ridicule the doctrine of eternal torment; instead, warmly appeal to the audience, helping them to reason on the clear teachings of the Bible

WHY WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT HELL (3 min.)

What we believe about hell affects our view of God and our relationship with him

Interestingly, in 1999, Pope John Paul II stated that the word “hell” indicates, not a place, but “the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God” (g00 3/8 29)

Still, many both inside and outside Christendom believe that hell is a place where the wicked are eternally punished and, according to some, tormented by fire (rs 169)

Those who subscribe to such a belief may serve God out of morbid fear rather than out of love (1Jo 4:18, 19)

Such belief can adversely affect our desire to draw close to God (Jas 4:8)

To learn the truth about hell, we need to answer the following questions:

What is the condition of the dead?

What is hell, and why is there so much confusion about it?

What hope is there for those who are in hell?

WHAT IS THE CONDITION OF THE DEAD? (5 min.)

The ancient Hebrews did not believe that a person is conscious after death

Instead, they believed death to be the ceasing of all functions of life (Ps 146:4; Ec 9:5, 10; rs 98)

When Adam sinned, his punishment was, not eternal torment, but a return to a state of nonexistence (Ge 2:17; 3:19)

When a person dies, a disembodied soul does not depart to some netherworld

Rather, the Bible teaches that the soul, or person, simply dies (Isa 53:12; Eze 18:4)

WHAT IS HELL? (5 min.)

In many Bible translations, “hell” is used to render the Hebrew word *She’ol* and the Greek word *Ha’des* (it-1 1086; it-2 922)

A Compendious Hebrew Lexicon states that Sheol is “the common receptacle or region of the dead” (it-2 922)

Therefore, hell is mankind’s common grave, not a place of fiery torment (it-1 1016)

Because Adam sinned, his future offspring would go to the Bible hell, the common grave, where no life or consciousness exists (Ro 5:12)

Since hell is simply the grave, at death both wicked and righteous ones go there (Ge 37:35; Job 14:13; Ac 2:25-27)

WHY IS THERE CONFUSION ABOUT HELL? (17 min.)

Pre-Christian pagans originated the teaching of torment after death (rs 175)

Early evidence of belief in a fiery hell is found in the religion of ancient Egypt

Ancient Babylonian and Assyrian beliefs paint a mythical netherworld as full of horrors

Dating back to sixth century B.C.E., Buddhism has both hot and cold hells

Does not the Bible speak of “the fiery Gehenna”? (Mt 5:22; rs 173)

Reference to Gehenna appears 12 times in the Christian Greek Scriptures, and the word is often associated with fire

For example, Jesus spoke of the casting of one’s “whole body” into Gehenna (Mt 5:29, 30)

He also admonished his followers to “be in fear of him that can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Mt 10:28)

The Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) was located outside the walls of Jerusalem and was the site of abhorrent idolatrous worship, including child sacrifice

By the first century C.E., Gehenna was used as an incinerator for the refuse of Jerusalem, even the bodies of dead animals and executed criminals being thrown there

Since living humans were not put there, Gehenna is, not a place of fiery torment, but a fitting symbol of everlasting destruction

Does not the Bible speak of torment with “fire and sulphur” (“fire and brimstone,” *KJ*)? (Re 14:9-11; 20:10)

Since the dead are not conscious, this must be symbolic

In the Bible, ‘torment’ can result from humiliating exposure (Re 11:10; rs 172-3)

For some, another point of confusion centers on Jesus’ parable of a rich man who was “existing in torments” while in Hades (“hell,” *KJ*) (Lu 16:23)

Is this account literal, or is it an illustration of something else?

In a footnote, *The Jerusalem Bible* acknowledges that it is a “parable in story form without reference to any historical personage” (*rs* 174)

What does the parable portray? (*rs* 175)

The rich man represents the Pharisees (Lu 16:14, 22)

Lazarus represents the common Jewish people who repented and became followers of Jesus (Mt 21:28-32)

The deaths symbolize a change in circumstances (Lu 16:16)

Formerly despised ones came into a position of divine favor

Seemingly favored ones were rejected by God and tormented by the judgment messages delivered by those whom they previously despised (Ac 5:33; 7:54)

Bible translators have allowed their personal beliefs to color their work instead of being consistent in their rendering of Sheol and Hades (*rs* 170-1; *it*-1 1086-7)

The real roots of the God-dishonoring hellfire doctrine go deeper than human ideas (*rs* 175)

Satan the Devil, whom Jesus called “the father of the lie,” conspires to slander the God of love, painting him as cruel and vindictive (Joh 8:44)

WHAT HOPE IS THERE FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN HELL? (12 min.)

The doctrine of eternal torment is not compatible with God’s personality (Jer 7:31; *rs* 174)

Death is the penalty for sin (Ro 6:23)

Since death acquits one from sin, it would not be within God’s justice to add eternal torment (De 32:4; Ro 6:7)

God’s judgment of mankind will take place at the final test after the Thousand Year Reign of Jesus Christ (Re 20:7-9, 12, 13; *rs* 338)

Jehovah, the God of love, will undo all the woes of the past (Heb 2:14; *rs* 396; *dg* 27-8)

Those in hell will be released; Adamic death and Sheol (Hades) thus destroyed (Re 20:13-15; *it*-2 923)

Earthly resurrection of those in common grave of mankind will enable them to receive curative benefits of Christ’s rule

These will be taught the truth and given opportunity to live forever in Paradise (Lu 23:43; Ac 24:15)

Earth will be a paradise, as purposed from the start (Ge 1:28; *rs* 285)

Satan, his demons, and all who willfully rebel will be everlastingly destroyed (Re 20:7-10)

WHAT MUST WE DO? (3 min.)

God has allowed humans to testify that he is a God of love rather than of torment (*jv* 10-12)

Jehovah has extended to us the privilege of becoming his Witnesses

Those who have been enslaved by the doctrine of torment after death must draw close to God and follow his Son (Mt 28:19, 20)

Thus, they can be released from fear of the God-dishonoring teaching that Jehovah torments the dead, who have been acquitted of their sins by death

(Adhere closely to the outlined material, and observe the indicated timing of each section. Not all cited texts need be read or commented on)