

HELL, THE LAKE OF FIRE, AND THE SECOND DEATH

- A. Introduction: Jesus' first promise to His followers when He left this world two thousand years ago was: I'll be back. The return of Jesus to this world draws closer with each passing day. Acts 1:9-11
1. The Bible makes it clear that the years leading up to His return will be filled with worldwide trouble and tribulation (Matt 24:21-22; II Tim 3:1; etc.). We are witnessing the beginnings of this chaos. We are taking time to discuss what is happening and why to make sure that we are prepared for what is ahead.
 - a. You and I need to know that God is not behind the calamity and chaos of the years that precede the Lord's return. God is good and good means good. He is our source of help and protection as the days, months, and years grow darker.
 1. We are working on sorting out what is and will happen and why so that we can walk in faith, confidence, and joy as we expectantly await the Lord's return.
 2. To that end we have been examining certain commonly misunderstood topics connected with the Lord's return that make sincere Christians afraid when there is no reason to fear.
 - b. We spent several weeks looking at the Book of Revelation, an account of a vision that was given to the apostle John. He was shown many of the major events and people in the years immediately preceding the Lord's return.
 1. The term second coming actually covers a significant period of time and includes a number of events. Our purpose is not to discuss each event in detail, but to explain the big picture or the overall plan of God so that we have a context for the individual events.
 2. Remember the big picture: God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ. He made the earth to be a home for His family. Both the human race and the earth have been damaged by sin. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; etc.
 - A. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin and make it possible for sinners to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Him.
 - B. Jesus will come again to cleanse the earth, restore it to a fit forever home for the family as He establishes His eternal kingdom here on earth.
 2. Last week we began to discuss what will happen after most of the events described in the Book of Revelation, when Jesus finally does return to this world. He will begin the process of restoring the world to what God intended it to be before it was damaged by sin.
 - a. Part of that process includes judging the world, meaning all humanity—everyone who has ever lived. The purpose of this judgment is not to decide if you go to Heaven or Hell. Its purpose is to reward those who are God's and to punish those who are not His. Acts 17:31; Rev 14:7; Rev 11:18
 - b. No one ceases to exist when they die. At death, humans separate from their body and pass into another dimension—either Heaven or Hell, depending on how they responded to the revelation of salvation through Jesus given to their generation.
 1. Heaven and Hell are temporary because God never intended for people to be separated from their physical body. Death of the body and the resulting separation from the body is a consequence of Adam's sin. Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12; etc.
 2. In connection with the second coming of Jesus all men and women will be reunited with their body raised from the dead through resurrection of the dead.
 - A. Those who belong to God through faith in Christ will be rewarded with a return to this earth after it has been renewed and restored to live forever. II Pet 3:13; Rev 21
 - B. Those who are not His will be forever banished from the presence of God, His family, and the family home in a place of punishment called the Lake of Fire and the Second Death. Rev 20:14
 - c. In this lesson we're going to talk about Hell, the Lake of Fire, and the Second Death. All three

names are terms used for the eternal or forever state or dwelling place of the wicked.

- B. The existence of a place of eternal punishment raises a number of questions that need to be answered, not the least of which is how a loving God can consent to a place of eternal punishment let alone send humans there.
1. Most people don't realize it, but Jesus talked a lot about this place of eternal punishment. Thirteen percent of His words are about Hell and coming judgment. And, future punishment is mentioned by every New Testament author.
 - a. There are two Greek words that are translated Hell in the New Testament—*hades* and *gehenna*.
 1. Hades refers to the place of departed spirits or the intermediate (temporary) state between death and resurrection of the body.
 2. The name Gehenna comes from an actual valley located just southwest of Jerusalem, the Valley of Hinnom. It is a deep, narrow ravine with steep, rocky sides.
 - A. In this valley, pagan rituals were carried out and the Hebrew people burned their babies alive as sacrifices to the god Molech. I Kings 11:7; II Kings 16:10-13; Jer 7:31; Jer 19:2-6
 - B. King Josiah (640 BC-609 BC) converted it to a place where anything that defiled the city was thrown (such as sewage). Dead bodies were also thrown and burned there (II Kings 23:10). In New Testament times trash was burned there.
 - b. By the time that Jesus came into this world, Gehenna had become a picture of the final judgment on the wicked and was a popular name for Hell.
 2. Luke 16:19-31—Jesus revealed information about *hades* or Hell (the temporary, intermediate dwelling place of the wicked) in an account He gave of two men who died at about the same time, a beggar named Lazarus and a rich man.
 - a. We aren't going to discuss this account in detail, but we need a few points of explanation before we talk about its description of Hell.
 1. Before Jesus went to the Cross, even righteous people like Abraham, Moses, and David did not go directly into Heaven. In Jesus' day, their dwelling place, as they awaited resurrection of the dead, was popularly known as Abraham's bosom which was a place of comfort.
 2. Abraham's bosom, along with the place of punishment, was believed to be in the heart of the earth. It is more accurate to say that both places were located in another dimension.
 3. Notice that even though both men were separated from their bodies, they still looked like themselves and recognized each other. Both remembered their past life and the people that they left behind. Both were conscious and aware of their surroundings.
 - b. Note the description of the place of punishment. There is one reference to flame, and four times Hell is described as a place of torment (v23-25; 28). Two Greek words are used. One means to grieve or sorrow. The other means torture. (Torture can be anguish of body or mind.) These words are translated as anguish, suffering, and misery.
 3. Jesus made a number of other statements about the conditions in Hell. The Greek word *gehenna* is used twelve times in the New Testament—eleven times by Jesus.
 - a. In Mark 9:43-48 He spoke of fire that is never quenched or extinguished and a worm that never dies. Worm literally means a grub, maggot, or earthworm. It is used here figuratively for unending torment. Adam Clarke (a great 19th century Bible scholar) calls the worm a metaphor for remorse.
 - b. In Matt 8:12 and Matt 22:13 Jesus referred to the place of punishment for the wicked as outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Consider what this meant to the first readers of the gospels.
 1. First century people had a dread of darkness that we cannot appreciate because we live in the age of electricity. Lamps were kept burning in the house all night. Lamps that were extinguished became a symbol of great calamity. Job 21:17; Ps 18:28; Prov 20:20; Rev 2:5

2. Note the context of the term outer darkness in Matt 22:1-13. Jesus told a parable of a wedding where an uninvited guest was found and was removed from the festivities.
 - A. In that culture wedding banquets took place at night. In Jesus' parable, the uninvited guest went from light into dark, shut out in darkness that was made darker by contrast with the festive lights in the house.
 - B. Notice that the guest was speechless (or muzzled, gagged). In other words, he had nothing to say in his defense when asked why he had not come according to protocol.
 3. Weeping and gnashing of teeth was a familiar idiom. In the Old Testament it represented rage, anger, and hatred (Job 16:9; Ps 37:12; Ps 112:10). In the New Testament it expresses disappointment, despair and agony of spirit (Matt 8:12; Matt 13:42; 50; etc.).
- c. People make a mistake when they try to take these various descriptions too far and paint a picture of how Hell looks and feels—flames burning bodies, devils torturing humans, worms eating flesh, etc.
1. The torment or punishment of Hell cannot be physical because the rich man in Jesus' account did not have a physical body, yet he was in anguish. In Matt 25:41 Jesus said that Hell was prepared or provided for the devil and the angels, all of whom are spirit beings without bodies.
 2. Hell is a place of spiritual suffering or mental anguish like regret and loss. You know that you are forever separated from all that is good and there is nothing you can do about it.
 3. Hell is described as a place of darkness, yet there is fire which is a source of light (a seeming contradiction). These descriptions are symbolic as opposed to literal. They are meant to emphasize the permanence and the unendingness of Hell, along with the fact that the conditions are the result of being cut off from God who is the source of all light, peace, and joy.
- C. People mistakenly think of Hell in terms of an angry God who delights in throwing people into eternal punishment. Consigning people to Hell is not emotional—it is judicial. Punishment is the penalty for a crime (*Webster's Dictionary*). It is the administration of justice. Justice is doing what is right.
1. All human beings have a moral obligation to obey their Creator and all have failed in that duty. It is not a failure that comes out of ignorance. It is failure that comes out of willful rebellion. Eccl 12:13-14; Isa 53:6; Rom 1:19-25; Rom 3:23; II Pet 3:5; etc.
 - a. God, in His love, devised a way to be true to His righteous and carry out justice in regard to our sin and make it possible for sinners to become His sons and daughters.
 - b. The just and right punishment for our sin went to Jesus on the Cross (Isa 53:4-5). Once the price for sin was paid God could then justify men (declare us not guilty) and transform us into sons and daughters by His power when we believe on Jesus as Savior and Lord. God can begin the process of restoring us to our created purpose as holy, righteous sons and daughters.
 1. God's wrath is His just and right response to our sin. His wrath was expressed at the Cross. But you must accept this expression in order for His wrath to be removed from you. If you do not, you face the penalty for your sin in the life to come. John 3:36
 2. The penalty for sin is eternal separation from God, first in Hell and then in the Lake of Fire and the Second Death. Jesus referred to Hell as a place of damnation (Matt 23:33). The Greek word (*krino*) means a separation, then a decision (or a judgment) for or against.
 - c. The words punish, punished, and punishment are used nine times in the New Testament. Only four times does it refer to God punishing people (Matt 25:46; II Thess 1:9; Heb 10:29; II Pet 2:9). All four verses refer to punishing people who have rejected Jesus and His sacrifice and three of them directly connect it with the second coming.
 1. Those that have rejected the Lord will be brought out of Hell to stand before the Lord, and it will be shown that it is right and just to forever banish them from His presence. Rev 20:11-15
 2. II Thess 1:7-9—When the Lord Jesus appears from Heaven he will come with his mighty

angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power (NLT).

A. The word translated judgment is from a word that means to carry out justice. Punishment comes to them because it is right—not because God is really ticked off.

B. The word destruction does not mean to be destroyed in the sense of ceasing to exist. It means ruin. Beings made in the image of God for sonship and relationship, because of their willful rejection of Almighty God, will experience ruin. They will be forever lost to their created purpose—their destiny unfulfilled, and they know it.

1. The Lake of Fire and the Second Death is unending death and conscious existence completely apart from God who is Life. That in itself is indescribable torment.

2. God does not torment people in Hell. The torment of Hell is the ruin of being eternally separated from all that is good, from all that is love, from all that is life.

d. Matt 10:28—Jesus referred to Hell as a place of destruction. This word comes from the same root word that is used in II Thess 1:9. It means to destroy or to ruin. Jesus was warning His twelve apostles of the hardships they would face as they proclaimed the gospel (Matt 10:16-27).

1. He urged them not to be afraid of the men who would seek to harm them, but to fear God—have awe, respect, and reverence for the One Who holds their eternal fate in His hands.

2. Body and soul is a reference to the entire person who will be consigned to the Second Death in the Day of Judgment if he does not remain faithful to the Lord.

A. The word that is translated as destroy in Matt 10:28 is the same Greek word that is translated as perish in John 3:15-16 and lost in Luke 19:10.

B. God so loved the world that He took on flesh and died in our place so that we would not come to ruin and be lost to our created purpose.

3. Hell (the Lake of Fire, the Second Death) is about upholding justice. But it is also about removing from God's creation everything that hurts, harms, and destroys.

a. Remember, Jesus Himself said: At the end of the world (this present age) I, the Son of Man, will send my angels, and they will remove from my Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. And they will throw them into the furnace and burn them. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:40-42, NLT).

1. The Greek word translated sin means a trap, to entice to sin. Do evil refers to lawbreakers (God's Law). This removal and separation will happen because it is just and because it will produce and insure peace and righteousness in God's kingdom on this earth. Matt 13:43

2. Rev 11:18—He will destroy those who destroy the earth. Destroy is a different word meaning to rot thoroughly and by implication to ruin—Destroying the corrupters of the earth (Amp).

b. There will never be peace in the universe without a place called Hell (Lake of Fire, Second Death). Those who corrupt the earth would continue to do so throughout eternity if they were permitted to return. Remember, they have refused the cleansing and transformation God, by His power, offers through Jesus.

D. Conclusion: The question is not: How could a loving God consign anyone to Hell? The question is: How could a loving God not remove all that hurts and harms for the good of His beloved family? How could a loving God not be true to His own righteousness?

1. The fact that God always does what is right (and it is right to punish lawbreakers) is proof that we can trust Him to be what He is, faithful and good.

2. Lots more next week!!