

WHAT IS HELL?

- A. Introduction: For the past couple of months we've been discussing the second coming of Jesus—why He is returning and what it will mean for humanity. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for a family of sons and daughters with whom He will live forever on this earth. Eph 1:4-5; Rev 21:3
1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross so that sinful people can be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. He will return to cleanse the earth of all corruption and death and restore it to a fit forever home for Himself and His family.
 - a. People fear the second coming because they mistakenly believe that it will mean the end of the world. This planet will not be destroyed. It will be renewed by the power of God, and restored to what the Bible calls the new heavens and the new earth. Isa 65:17; II Pet 3:10-13; Rev 21-22
 1. Recently, we've been looking at the process of cleansing and restoring the earth. Part of the process involves removing everything and everyone from creation that doesn't belong to God.
 2. This involves judgment. The Greek word translated judge in the New Testament (*krino*) means to separate, to distinguish between good and evil, to choose out the good and render a decision. Only those who belong to God will be permitted to live on the new earth.
 - b. In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John described a judgment scene that ends with those who won't be on the new earth thrown into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. Rev 20:11-15
 2. In this lesson we're going to begin to talk about this final removal and the ultimate fate of those who don't belong to the Lord, as well as what this judgment reveals about God's goodness and love.
- B. Before we get to the lake of fire and brimstone, we must talk about Hell. Jesus talked a lot about Hell when He was on earth. Thirteen percent of His words in His teachings are about Hell and future punishment.
1. Two different Greek words are translated Hell in the New Testament—Hades and Gehenna. But, they have slightly different meanings. Hades refers to where those who have died without the Lord currently reside. Gehenna refers to the final judgment on the wicked when Jesus returns (the lake of fire).
 - a. All humans have an inward (non-physical) part and an outward (physical) part to their makeup. The physical part is the body. The non-physical portion includes the mind, emotions, and personality (sometimes referred to as soul), and spirit. No one ceases to exist when their body dies.
 - b. At physical death the inward portion and the outward part separate. The body returns to dust and the person (spirit, mind, emotions) passes into another dimension, either Heaven or Hell (Hades).
 1. Both Heaven and Hell, as they are now, are temporary. God never meant for us to be separated from our physical bodies. The separation is a consequence of Adam's sin. Rom 5:12
 2. This condition will be rectified in connection with the second coming of Jesus. All who have died will be reunited with their body raised from the grave at the resurrection of the dead.
 - c. Following their resurrection, all who died without the Lord will be consigned to Hell (Gehenna). (That's what John saw in Revelation.) Gehenna comes from the name of a valley located just southwest of Jerusalem, the Valley of Hinnon, a deep, narrow ravine with steep, rocky sides.
 1. Pagan rituals were once conducted in this valley. And, at certain times in their history, the Israelites burned babies alive in sacrifice to the gods Molech and Baal. I Kings 11:7; Jer 7:31
 2. One of Israel's kings (Josiah, 640-609 BC) converted the valley to a place where anything that defiled the city was thrown, such as sewage and dead bodies. Dead bodies were also burned in the valley. In New Testament times trash was burned in the Valley of Hinnom.
 3. By Jesus' day, Gehenna had become a picture of the final judgment on the wicked and was a popular name for Hell. Gehenna is Greek for the Hebrew word *hinnom*.
 2. Let's talk first about Hell (Hades), the temporary dwelling place of the wicked. Jesus gave us some information about this place in an account He gave of two men who died at about the same time, a beggar

named Lazarus, and a rich man who went to Hell (Hades). Luke 16:19-31

- a. Jesus was not giving a detailed teaching on what Hell is like. He related this account to address the greed of the Pharisees (religious leaders in Israel) and make the point that the rich man's wealth did not keep him out of Hell—and neither would the Pharisees' fortunes keep them out of Hell.
 1. Jesus related the account in terms that were consistent with 1st century Israel's concept of the place where those who have died go to await resurrection of the dead.
 2. Jewish tradition said that those who die go to a place with two compartments located in the heart of the earth. The upper portion housed the righteous dead and was known as Abraham's bosom or paradise. The lower place was for the punishment for the unrighteous dead.
- b. Note several key points in this account. Even though these men were separated from their bodies, they still looked like themselves and recognized each other. Both were fully conscious, aware of their surroundings, and had memories of their life before death.
 1. But that's where the similarity ends. Lazarus the beggar was comforted, but the rich man was tormented—Lazarus dwells in the comfort of paradise and you are in agony (v25, TPT).
2. Jesus described Hell as a place of torment four times (v23-25; 28). Two Greek words are used for torment. One means to grieve or sorrow. The other means torture (of body or mind). They can be translated as anguish, suffering, and misery. Note, the reference to flames (v24).
3. Jesus made other statements about the conditions in Hell (Gehenna), the permanent (eternal) home of the wicked. The Greek word Gehenna is used twelve times in the New Testament, eleven times by Jesus.
 - a. Mark 9:43-48—Jesus spoke of fire that is never extinguished and a worm that never dies. Worm means a grub, maggot, or earthworm, but is used figuratively here for unending torment.
 - b. Matt 8:12; 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 century people.
 1. First century people had a dread of darkness that we can't 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 about a wedding where an uninvited guest was discovered and removed from the festivities. Wedding banquets took place at night. In the parable, the uninvited guest went from light into dark, shut out in darkness made darker by contrast with the festive lights in the house.
 - A. 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.).
 - B. Note that the wedding guest was speechless (Matt 22:12). He had nothing to say about the fact that he came into without a wedding garment. (This point is he didn't belong there.)
4. People make a mistake when they take these various descriptions too far and try to paint a literal picture of what Hell is like—flames, burning bodies, devils torturing humans, worms eating flesh, etc.
 - a. These descriptions are symbolic as opposed to literal and meant to emphasize the permanence and the unendingness of Hell. Notice that Hell is described as a place of darkness, yet there is fire which is a source of light. This seeming contradiction shows us that the descriptions are symbolic.
 - b. The torment or punishment of Hell can't be physical because the rich man in Jesus' account did not have a physical body, yet he was in anguish. Jesus said that everlasting fire (Hell) was prepared for the devil his fallen angels (Matt 25:41), all of whom are spirit beings without physical bodies.
 1. 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.
 2. God does not torment people in Hell. The torment of Hell (Hades and Gehenna) is the realization that you are lost to your created purpose (sonship and relationship with God), and

there is nothing you can do about it because you refused the proper wedding attire—the righteousness (rightness with God) that comes through faith in Christ.

- C. The idea of different ultimate destinies for different people, based on their response to Almighty God, was not a new concept for first century Christians, most of whom were Jewish.
1. They knew from the writings of the Old Testament prophets that the Lord will one day come to earth to restore this planet to pre-sin conditions, set up His kingdom, and live on earth with His people. They knew resurrection of the dead will take place at that time—with different outcomes for different people.
 - a. Daniel the prophet wrote: Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan 12:2, NLT).
 - b. Isaiah wrote this about those who belong to God: Yet we have this assurance: Those who belong to God will live; their bodies will rise again! Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy! For God’s light of life will fall like dew on his people in the place of the dead (Isa 26:19, NLT). He also wrote about the fate of those who have rebelled against God: For the worms that devour them will never die, and the fire that burns them will never go out (Isa 66:24, NLT).
 2. As we’ve already seen, Jesus used these same symbolic terms when He describe the ultimate fate of the wicked (worms, fire). Note something else Jesus said. John 5:28-29
 - a. Jesus said that a time is coming when one group of people will rise to life and another will rise to damnation. The Greek word that is translated damnation is *krisis* a form of *krino* (to judge).
 1. It means a decision for or against and can be translated as judgment or condemnation. To condemn means to pronounce guilty, to sentence or formally pronounce punishment.
 2. In connection with Jesus’ second coming those who have never surrendered to Him as Savior and Lord will be formally sentenced to the lake of fire. We’ll talk more about this next week.
 - b. Notice, Jesus said that those who have done good will have life, and those who have done evil will be condemned.
 1. From this passage you could conclude that entrance into Heaven or Hell depends on how many good or bad deeds (works) you have done.
 2. But many other verses make it clear that our works (our deeds) aren’t the basis of salvation. Faith in Jesus and His shed blood is the basis of salvation. Rom 5:1; Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8-9; etc.
 3. This shows the importance of learning to read verses in context and to think in terms of how the first Christians heard Jesus’ words. Even before Jesus went to the Cross, He made many statements that make it clear that the work that saves men and women from sin is faith in Him. Consider several:
 - a. John 3:16—God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.
 - b. John 6:29—When the crowds who had come to see Jesus asked Him what they must do to work the works of God, He replied: This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he has sent.
 - c. John 8:24—In one of many of His contentious encounters with the Jewish leadership who rejected Him, Jesus warned them: Unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.
 1. In some English translations the word “he” is added after Jesus says I am. However, “he” is not present in the original Greek text. “He” was added by translators to make it less awkward in English. But this addition loses the impact of Jesus’ statement.
 2. This is one of many times that Jesus took the name I Am for Himself. I Am that I Am was the name that God (Yahweh, Jehovah) gave for Himself when He commissioned Moses to lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt (Ex 3:14). That’s why people tried to stone Jesus for blasphemy.
 3. Jesus told the Pharisees that unless you believe that I am God (Lord and Savior) you will die in your sins. And, you will rise to condemnation or judgment—the penalty for rejecting Me.
 - d. You may wonder: Aren’t we supposed to do good? Absolutely! However, good deeds won’t

save you from the penalty of sin. Good deeds are an expression of genuine faith in Christ. If you live a sinful life (anyway you want without taking God's Word or His commands) into account, that is evidence that you have not truly believed on Jesus. Those who belong to Him want to do His will His way—even though none of us is perfect at it yet (lessons for another night).

4. People tend to think of Hell in terms of an angry God who delights in casting people into eternal punishment. Consigning people or giving them over to Hell and the lake of fire and the second death is not an emotional action. It is an administration (a carrying out) of justice, or doing what is right.

a. Matt 23:33—Jesus referred to Hell (Gehenna) as a place of damnation (*krisis*). The same Greek word is used in John 5:29 when Jesus talked about a resurrection to damnation.

1. As we said, the word can be translated as condemnation. It means to pronounce guilty, to sentence or formally pronounce punishment—How can you escape the penalty to be suffered in hell (Amp); being sentenced to hell (ESV)?

2. All human beings have a moral obligation to obey their Creator and all have failed in this duty. It is more than a failure due to ignorance. It is willful rebellion, because God makes Himself known to every man and woman (lessons for another day). Eccl 12:13-14; Isa 53:6; Rom

1:19-25; Rom 3:23

b. However God, motivated by love, devised a way to carry out justice in regard to our sin and make it possible for sinners to be declared not guilty. The punishment (penalty) due us for our sin went to Jesus on the Cross. Isa 53:4-6

1. We were judged for our sin at the Cross when Jesus took our place. But, we must accept Jesus and His work in order for the penalty of sin to be removed from us. If we don't, we will face the penalty for our sin in the life after this life. John 3:36

2. Rom 8:1—Therefore [there is] now no condemnation—no adjudging guilty of wrong—for those who are in Christ Jesus (Amp). The Greek word translated condemnation is a form of the word used in Matt 23:33 and John 5:29. There is no punishment due to those who know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

A. The word punish is 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

B. All four of those verses refer to punishing people who have rejected Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross, and three of them are directly connected with the second coming.

c. Remember, both Heaven and Hell (Hades), as they are now, are temporary—filled with people who are separated from their body. Resurrection of the dead (the reuniting of the inward and outward man) will occur in connection with the second coming of Jesus.

1. Those who belong to God will then come from Heaven to live forever on this earth after it has been renewed and restored. Heaven (God's home) will be on earth with His family.

2. Those who don't belong to God will be brought out of Hell, reunited with their bodies, and forever consigned to the Lake of Fire and the second death (more on this next week).

D. Conclusion: The existence of a place of eternal punishment raises a question that needs to be answered. How can a loving God consent to a place of eternal punishment, let alone send anyone there? God doesn't "send" anyone to go to Hell. People choose the penalty through rejection of Jesus and His sacrifice.

1. Part of the process of cleansing and restoring the earth involves removing everything and everyone that is not of God. There will never be peace in the universe without this separation. Chaos and corruption will continue throughout eternity if those who refuse God are permitted to return to earth.

2. The question is not: How could a loving God consign anyone to Hell. The question is: How can a loving God not remove all that hurts and harms, for the good of His family? Much more next week!!