

Is Hell-fire something to fear?

Is there any reason to fear the prospect of eternal torture in Hell? The Bible teaches no such thing.

What sort of a God would punish unbelievers with eternal pain? It's certainly not the God of the Bible, who has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33: 11).

Endless torture is not a just punishment for the sins of a few years of mortal life. Nor can it be reconciled with the character of a righteous and loving God.

Idolaters cast children into the fire, in sacrifice to Moloch. God condemned this as "something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind" (Jeremiah 7: 31). God would not do what is far worse, for eternity.

The Bible does not teach many of the things that it is commonly believed to contain, and Hell-fire is one of them. Attention to the real meaning of Bible words and recognising use of figurative language would avoid much misunderstanding.

The tragedy is that Hell-fire doctrine, which puts people off religion, need never have arisen if men

had confined their ideas to what the Bible teaches about hell.

In the Bible there is a place known as hell, but there is no place of eternal torment for people who have died.

The Old Testament word translated 'hell' is from the Hebrew '*sheol*' meaning 'the place of the dead' or 'the grave'; and the same meaning applies to the Greek word '*hades*' in the New Testament and Greek Old Testament.

Hell in the Bible is none other than the grave, the place where men and women are laid out of sight in the unconsciousness of death. The English word 'hell' means a hidden, covered place.

Both good and bad people go to hell (the grave). Jesus "made his grave with the wicked" (Isaiah 53: 9). Of the wicked it is said, "Let them be silent in the grave" (Psalm 31: 17).

In death the body returns to dust, the spirit returns to God who gave it, and no thinking part remains to feel anything. "The dead know not anything" "In that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146: 4; Ecclesiastes 9: 5, 12: 7).

The righteous can go to hell (the grave) and come out again. God says, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave (*sheol*); I will redeem them from death” (Hosea 13: 14).

The righteous will be saved from the grave by Resurrection, as Jesus was. His lifeless body was in hell for three days. “His soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2: 31).

Until the Resurrection, both righteous and wicked remain in the same place: the grave. “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12: 2).

Bible teaching is that our mortal lives end in death. Both righteous and wicked remain dead until Resurrection and Judgment occur at the Return of Christ. The outcome will be eternal life for some, and a shameful end for others, but no endless suffering.

Another word translated ‘hell’ is ‘*Gehenna*’ - meaning ‘Gai (valley) of Hinnom’ – a place near Jerusalem in which fires kept burning to consume rubbish; this word indicates total destruction.

Jesus taught that God is the only one to fear. “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell (*Gehenna*)” (Matthew 10: 28).

Sodom suffered the punishment of “eternal fire” (Jude 7) when it was turned to ashes, but it is not still burning!

Fire is used in Scripture for utter destruction, not for preservation in torment. God punishes sin with death, in which there is no consciousness.

Scripture examples of divine judgment show that the punishment is irresistible, swift and decisive, but never cruelly prolonged. Destruction is sudden and its effects last forever.