

What is 'Hell'? Is there a Soul?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 02 March 2010 15:17

Some say hell does not really exist, and is certainly not a place for eternal torment. This is claimed even though scripture proves what hell is. Is hell a place of eternal torment, or not? Does it exist, or not?

A critic said that "Hell... is an old Saxon word to mean 'to cover', e.g. grave. It does not mean hell as a place of eternal torment." The same critic also said "In Revelation, it says that death and Hell (grave) were thrown into the lake of fire... how, if hell is a fiery place, can it be cast into itself?" The same person claims that man has no soul and that it is not immortal. Both beliefs are classic heresies.

Hell

We are told that 'hell' is an old Saxon word meaning to cover, e.g. grave. To leave it at that is improper reasoning, for the original argument mainly comes from people who are unbelievers, so it is in their interest for the word to mean simply 'grave'. They read that such a place usually means 'forever', and so lump it together with religions that teach an afterlife, and eternal punishment. In this way, they manage to denigrate the Christian position. Thus, those who claim to be Christians, but who adopt this unbelieving stance, side with unbelievers and not with truth; it is certainly not from scripture!

Try looking at a simplistic Wikipedia entry for 'hell', and the astute Christian will see that it is not correct, but the kind of entry found in any unbeliever's list of stock answers. The purpose for the belief is to reject God's word.

It is true that the word we have in our AV Bibles is 'hell'. It is indeed a word from the Anglo-Saxon. Even today, many English words are derived from the same early language source. But this means nothing, except that the nearest English equivalent when the AV was published was the Anglo-Saxon word 'hell'! Nothing more. Yet, critics will use this fact to say that the word "was used to transfer a pagan concept to Christian theology. However, for the Judeo-Christian concept see 'gehenna'."

Now, that comes direct from Wikipedia, but, anyone who bases his or her beliefs on these often unbelieving bits of information are bound to go off on a wrong path. Such sources are fine as starting points, or for vague or general views. But, if Christians use them as legitimate and

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proper sources with which to scorn the truth, they are already thinking as heretics.

In the same (and similar types of) source, we find that the Swedish version of 'hell', though pagan, means 'punishment'... so why do critics ignore that particular version and retain the Anglo-Saxon one? The reason is simple – it does not fit their idea of what 'hell' is. And, look in the section of Wikipedia under 'Christianity' and you will find reference to the classic Christian teaching.

It also refers to detractions, such as annihilationism (when we die that is the end) or universal reconciliation (everyone will be saved). Two references are to a dictionary. Another refers to a production of the Evangelical Alliance, a body that unites without truth. The three sources are not adequate authorities, because they give opinions and not scripture, quoting heresies and not truth.

Annihilationism defies God's warning that evil and dying in an unsaved state will result in an eternity in hell. Universal salvation is very closely tied to this heresy, because it says that no man will be punished for his unsaved condition. (Note: universal reconciliation is known under several names, such as Apokatastasis, Christian universalism, etc).

We have to go back to scripture for a true meaning. The Old Testament source is correct, but critics wave it aside, saying it is Judaistic and mystical. In reality all of scripture is given by God, and it is all correct! To divide it from the New Testament on this basis is wrong, and is the activity of unbelievers who wish to detract from truth. So, we will see what the New Testament actually says.

Shě'owl

Critics would have us think that 'hell' has only one meaning: the grave, based on gehenna. But this is to ignore the scriptural facts. Another word used often is sheol (English transliteration). It *can*

mean the grave. But its main meaning is a place of exile. Exile is a condition of perpetuity, not a sudden death; to be in exile one has to be in existence! It is the abode of the dead or underworld, from which one may never return. There is no praise of God in the place; the righteous will never go there; the wicked are sent there for punishment. The word also means hell or a pit. This all means that sheol is not just dark, or where all existence is ended. It speaks of perpetuity and activity.

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Sheol is also known as orcus or hades. Intriguingly, the root of sheol is sha'al, meaning to ask... a favour, a question, to consult deity, to seek, to want leave of absence, to beg. None of this implies a place of utter annihilation, but a place of action and personal awareness.

It also fits the picture in the New Testament of someone calling out of hell to one who yet lives, to go and warn his family of the consequences of not obeying the Lord (Luke 16:23, where the man is "in torments"; a man cannot be 'in torments' if he has been annihilated).

In Psalm 18:5 we see that there are 'sorrows' in hell. These are effects that continue, and do not support the idea of annihilation! And in Psalm 116:3 we find that the "sorrows of hell compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold of me." This tells us hell is not the end, but only the start of eternal misery, and that hell is not just the grave, but a place of torment.

Hellfire

In Matthew 5:23 we read that some are in "danger of hell fire". In this text the word for hell is geenna, from the Hebrew, Gehenna. Gehenna is also given as 'Gehenna of fire', because it was a steep valley (Hinnom: 'lamentation') where bodies were thrown and burned. In the time of Christ, the term was meant to describe the lot of the wicked and their final destruction. There is a great deal more on this.

The allusion to 'fire' is literal: pyr, meaning fiery or fire. A fire can be used to purify, and the word has this meaning in limited cases where purification is described. But, not when it is connected to 'hell'. Then, it means fiery flame. In Revelation the flames appear to be literal. In other texts it may simply be a way of describing eternal torments of some kind or another. Whatever it means in any particular case, it is clear that hell is not a place of annihilation, but a place of punishment and torment.

Texts that refer to eternal punishment are abundant, so it is unfathomable why anyone should not admit to it. I have noted that critics can resist the idea simply by not looking at other meanings and by rejecting anything that speaks of eternal punishment – which places them in the camp of unbelievers such as Arminians.

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The meanings I have given above are from the actual texts themselves, in their languages, which alone give the correct possible meanings and interpretations. The only way critics can say otherwise, is if they do not have access to, or ignore, all other possible meanings, and if they tend towards heretical interpretations in support of their particular heresy.

Soul and Body

The argument for 'soul' is separate, but we can say with certainty that soul and body are recognised as somehow separate. Christ Himself said so in Matthew 10:28, "...able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Also, way back in Genesis, God had to give Adam's body a soul in order for him to live. Therefore, to suggest that man has no soul, or that the soul does not suffer in hell, is absurd and unbelieving. (For more on 'soul' see my article on that topic).

My extensive study of soul and spirit show that both are used interchangeably in scripture, both old and new, about half the time. The rest of the time they are viewed as separate from each other. One way to see it is like this: soul seems to refer to the human aspect of mind, emotions, 'heart', etc., whilst spirit seems mainly to refer to that part of a regenerated man that communes with God and understands spiritual things. We are also told that until a man is regenerated, his spirit is dead. By saying there is both a soma and a psyche, we get the impression that soul is different from body. Also, the soul or spirit is immortal and will never be annihilated.

It is true that in the above text, to 'destroy' can mean to end. But, it can also mean to render useless, or, metaphorically, to give over to the miseries of hell. So, to deliberately choose a meaning of 'to end' is superficial and takes no note of the context. The word, used in the middle voice, means to perish... which does not always mean to destroy utterly. In several texts it means the loss of well-being for the unsaved in hell.

In Matthew 16:18 Christ speaks of the "gates of hell". This is quite consistent with the Hebrew meaning of a deep pit with gates to stop people leaving, or opening to receive the damned. If Christ used it this way, who may argue? Christ infers the justice of hell, in Matthew 23:23; if hell is a place of justice, i.e. punishment, then it is not a place of annihilation!

Eternal or Not?

Mark 9:43 says, "... cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." Now, how can any believer think that hell is annihilation or just the grave? We are told plainly that the fire in hell will never be quenched! The word for 'never shall be quenched' is one – asbestos. It means 'eternal

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fire to punish the damned'. It is used to refer also to the people called 'chaff'.

Reference to death and hell in Revelation 20:14 is to the miserable existence of the wicked in hell. The word 'hell' in verse 15 refers to death, too, because it is connected as one thought, and so death and hell can be considered as one entity in this text. In earlier texts it meant Orcus or the nether world of the dead, but in later texts such as this it means hell. "Lake of fire" literally means a lake consisting of fire (or, place of indescribable torments).

In New Testament usage, 'grave', hadēs, is the word used, and it means simply the grave, as the texts tell us. Very clearly it does not refer to the miseries of hell in this text. And, concerning soul, thanatos – the word for death – means the separation of soul and body, when human life ends on earth. For the wicked this implies future misery in hell.

Note that 'lake of fire' is a place of torment and punishment, with no release forever, and 'death and hell' (referring to the same thing – death) will be thrown into the lake of fire. Whether this is a description of severest torment or actual fire, we cannot tell, but the end result is misery and punishment.

In Revelation 19:20, both the beast and the false prophet "were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." This is not the 'annihilation' spoken of by unbelievers! In Revelation 20:10 we see that this lake of fire is forever: "(the devil, beast and the false prophet) shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Now, how can critics possibly 'interpret' that as annihilation? It is not possible!

The words "shall be tormented" are one word in Greek – basanizō. It means to torture; to vex with grievous pains (of mind or body, or both); to be harassed or distressed. This will go on forever and ever... 'ever' being aiōn, meaning perpetuity of time, eternity.

There is, then, no way that critics can say hell is a place of annihilation, when scripture itself says otherwise. The texts cannot be more plain than they are! And so is the idea of soul and body being separate. One can only maintain a critical stance by ignoring the facts of God's word. The conclusion is that hell is a place of eternal torment, where the devil and all who reject God, will end up. It takes a great deal of manipulation and selective ignorance to make the texts say anything different.

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