

Where We Stand on the Reality of Hell (Part 1)

One of the many ways Hell is trivialized is to use it as a description of hard times or even as a curse word. That desensitizes us to the real and awful and literal place of Hell.

We see how God views the judgment of the wicked in **Ezekiel 33:11a** “*As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.’*”

The Names for Hell in the Scripture

Wayne Grudem, in his theology text book, defines Hell like this – “*Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.*” Each of the names for Hell in the Bible refers to literal places. They are not a symbolic place or a state of mind.

Sheol:

We see this word in **Psalms 9:17** “*The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God.*” It is also in **Isaiah 5:14a** “*Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure.*”

Sheol includes the grave, but it is more than the grave. Based on Scripture, Sheol is the place where the dead go to be either in torment or bliss.

For the wicked Sheol was a dark and foreboding place. We see the contrast in **Daniel 12:2** between eternity of a believer and a non-believer, “*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.*”

Hades:

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek two centuries before Christ, the scholars translated Sheol as “Hades.” Hades, or Sheol in the Old Testament, had two compartments. In the New Testament, those compartments are called *Abraham’s Bosom* and *torments*. **Luke 16:22-23** “*So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*”

“Abraham’s bosom” no longer exists as a compartment of Hades. Evidence of this is in **Ephesians 4:8** “*When He ascended on high, He led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.*” We read in **1 Peter 3:18-19** “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison.*” In **Colossians 2:14-15** Paul writes how Jesus took our debt away nailing them to the cross. Then in verse 15 Paul gives us the following description, “*When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.*”

I believe that when His body was in the grave Jesus went to those Old Testament saints and *preached* or proclaimed to them that all the sacrifices were fulfilled in Him and the price has now been paid. He would have pronounced that the blood of the Holy One had been shed. (**1 Peter 3:18-19**)

In the Bible, it does not say of New Testament saints who die that they go to Abraham’s bosom, **2 Corinthians 5:8** (NKJV) “*We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*”

Tartaros:

Tartaros is the Greek word that is translated “Hell” in **2 Peter 2:4** “*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to Hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.*” It is a place of incarceration for a special class of especially wicked demons who committed sin that is described in **Jude 1:6** “*And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.*”

Tartaros was a term for Hell used that described the lowest Hell of Hells. A second Greek word of importance that aids our understanding of this place called Hell or Tartaros is the word “chained.” The plural Greek word for chain is “seirai.”

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Tartaros (Continued):

The Greek word for pits is “seiroi” which is the word used in **2 Peter 2:4**. This would imply that deeper pits in this lower Hell are the chains that bind the demons. This is consistent with the phrase “*chains under darkness*” used in **Jude 1:6**.

The judgment indicated in these two verses are two-fold. The obvious is that one day those in Tartaros will be judged by God for their evil deeds. The second implied judgment comes from the Greek word “darkness” chosen to be used here in correlation to their judgment. The Greek word darkness means utter absence of light, but it also means a condition associated with feelings of despair, foreboding, and ultimate gloom.

So what is the significance of all of these Greek words phrased together in this manner? Since Tartaros is a special type of Hell, lower than Hades, it is reserved for the vilest and wicked. The first significance is this indicates the various types of judgments dispensed by a Righteous and Holy God in which some will receive more severe judgments.

Second, it indicates the providence of God in that God has condemned those who can harm His children the most to a place that will incapacitate the demons from harming God’s chosen ones.

Gehenna:

This is the most commonly used word for Hell in the New Testament. It was used twelve times in the New Testament and eleven of those times was used by Jesus. Gehenna referred to the *Valley of Hinnon* which was located south of Jerusalem. It was in that valley that the people of Judah stooped to new evil lows under the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh. Under these kings the Jews sacrificed their own children to the pagan god Molech. **2 Kings 21:16** tells us that “*Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he filled Jerusalem from one end to the other.*” Later this valley was turned into the garbage dump where refuse and the bodies of executed criminals were burned. The fire was kept going to hold down the stench.

Jesus and His disciples were passing through the valley of Hinnon and Jesus used this occasion to teach His disciples about Hell. We read in **Mark 9:44-48** Jesus said that Gehenna was a place where “*the worm never died and the fire is never quenched.*”

There are two significant facts about Hell in these verses in **Mark 9: 44-48**. Jesus was literally speaking of maggots that never died. It is believed by many theologians that in Hell there will literally be worms in people that never die, that will torment those cast into Hell for all eternity. Second, Jesus is clearly teaching in these verses that Gehenna or Hell is a place where there is fire for torment that is never quenched.

The Lake of Fire:

As this phrase is used in the Scripture it is a description of the final abode of the unsaved. At the final judgment, all those in Hades will be brought up to stand before “The Great White Throne of Judgment.” We read about it in **Revelation 20:10-14** (NKJV): “*The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*”

Notice in verse 13b, “*And they were judged, each one according to his works.*” This is not referring to their works being good enough that some will escape the Lake of Fire. Many theologians believe this judgment of works speaks of the fact that there are degrees of punishment in Hell. This interpretation of degrees of punishment in Hell is supported by a parable that Jesus used when speaking of punishment in **Luke 12:47-48a** (NKJV) “*And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.*” The phrases, “*he who did not know*” references those who not know the gospel message.