

Hell Ought to Scare You!

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The young man with whom I was talking had been a Christian for several years. He had sinned a year or so before our discussion and had repented. Then about four months prior to our talk, he had again yielded to the temptation that Joseph would not (Genesis 39). This time, there was no repentance and seemingly no concern. Perhaps, no cessation of the sin either.

Before we had any discussion, one question kept coming to my mind; "Does he ever think about hell?" I wondered if he understood that if he died in this condition, he would spend eternity in hell. So I asked if he was afraid of hell. His answer: "I guess not as much as I ought to be." I suggested that he wasn't afraid at all! Why, I'm not certain. But one thing is sure; when a person can lay his head down at night, knowing that he is in sin and will go to hell if he dies, and not be afraid, there is little hope.

The above narrative could be duplicated time and time again. Perhaps it's because preachers have neglected the old hell-fire-and-brimstone preaching. Let's revisit this old subject that may be a bit new to some. It ought to scare you!

Hell is real. Statements about hell are not fictitious stories or myths. Hell is not a condition or state of mind. It is a real place. Luke 16, which speaks of the realm of departed spirits (Hades--not the eternal abode), is a foretaste of things to come. The rich man spoke of this place of torment (vv. 23, 28). He is in a real place. It is merely a foretaste of worse to come.

Hell is just as real as heaven. The Bible often speaks of them on an equal basis as far as their nature goes (cf., Matthew 25:46). If heaven is real, so is hell. If hell is a state of mind, so is heaven.

Jesus said we ought to fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28). From Jesus' statement, we learn that (1) We should fear hell. (2) Hell is beyond the grave. (3) We should want to live so as to go to heaven. All of these point to the reality of hell.

Hell is terrible. It may be that some of those who believe in hell think that the Biblical descriptions are overstated. Surely, it could not be as bad as the old-fashioned preachers used to say it would be. The following points tell us how terrible hell really is.

Gehenna. The word hell (when it refers to the eternal abode of the wicked) is from the Greek word Gehenna. When we understand how that word came to be used to describe the place of eternal damnation, we will appreciate how tragic hell is. There's nothing pretty or appealing about this place of eternal destruction that would explain why millions are choosing to go there!



Gehenna points back to the Valley of Hinnom. "Originally the Valley of Rinnom, near Jerus, Gehenna became the synonym for the place of torment in the future life" (ISBE 1371). "Gehenna is a transliteration from the Aramaic form of the Reb ge-hinnom, Valley of Rinnom" (ISBE 1183). This valley was located southwest of Jerusalem.

This valley was the seat of worship to the then idol Molech. "That the valley of Rinnom became the technical designation for the place of final punishment was due to two causes. In the first place the valley had been the seat of idolatrous worship to Molech, to whom children were immolated by fire (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6).

Secondly, on account of these practices, King Josiah defiled the place (2 Kings 23:10), and in consequence, it came to be associated in prophecy with the judgment to be visited upon the people (Jeremiah 7:32)" (ISBE 1183).

The sacrifice made to Molech was awful. Many texts tell of parents burning their sons and daughters to honor this idol (cf., Jeremiah 7:30-31; 19:56; 2 Kings 23:10). "The image of Molech was a human figure with a bull's head and outstretched arms, ready to receive the children destined for sacrifice. The image of metal was heated red hot by a fire kindled within, and the children laid on its arms rolled off into the fiery pit below" (ISBE 2075).

The valley came to be used to burn the city's trash and rubbish. It was the city incinerator. Jeremiah spoke of the valley of dead bodies and of ashes (Jeremiah 31:40). "Into this valley dead bodies were probably cast to be consumed by the dogs ... and fires were kept burning to consume the rubbish of the city. Such associations led to the Ge-Rinnom (NT Gehenna) becoming the 'type of Hell'"

Lake of Fire. Hell is described as a lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10, 14,15; 21:8). Imagine a literal lake of which you are aware. Picture every drop of water as a flammable substance (i.e., gasoline). If someone were to set it aflame, what would it be like to be thrown into the middle of it?

Brimstone is perhaps sulfur that melts and runs in streams. It spreads and is sticky. Picture that someone pours a sticky substance (i.e., honey or molasses) all over you. What if it is a flammable sticky substance that is set aflame? Can you imagine the intense pain, the agony and the suffering? Other passages portray hell as a furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42,50), a flaming fire (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), a baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11-13), and an unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43).

Weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Those who are cast into hell will be howling, crying aloud, and grinding their teeth (cf., Matthew 8:12; 13:50; 25:30). What a picture of punishment! Hell is Eternal!

Judging from the above descriptions of hell, it would be bad enough if it lasted for only a day, or even an hour. However, hell's pain and suffering is eternal. Jesus equated "hell fire" (Matthew 18:9) with "everlasting fire" (v.8). He also contrasted the "everlasting punishment" with "eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). Hell will last as long as heaven does. The smoke of torment ascends "forever and ever." (Revelation 14:10-11)

It scares me to think about Hell. It oughta scare you too!