

Is There Really A Hell?

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This is a question that has been asked many times by many people over the ages. It is asked for many reasons. Some may ask this from the perspective of living in the flesh and not being able to see into the eternal realm. Some may ask it from the perspective of ignorance. Others from a lack of respect for God and His word. To each of these it is a reasonable question to answer.

The Question Considered From The Standpoint of Logic and Nature

From the standpoint of those who do not have a faith in God and His inspired Word consider this topic from a logical aspect. Life in and of itself teaches that there is a system of reward for good behavior and then on the other hand there is a basic system of punishment for evil or wrong doing.

- For example if one will stay away from the edge of a cliff then they will not fall off and get hurt or killed. On the other hand if an individual gets too close to the edge of the cliff, they will fall and will be hurt or killed. Certainly there are variations to this and often we can escape injury from even a serious car accident if conditions are just right. But the basic rule applies.
- The same logic is demonstrated in the area of raising children. If a child chooses to disobey their parents they will be punished. If the parent chooses to ignore and allow bad behavior, then the child will become a blight on society and suffer much from a lack of upbringing as they go through life.
- A government is put in place to make laws and protect the citizens. When a law is disobeyed the lawbreaker will receive punishment.
- In the realm of sexual immorality, when people go outside of the realm of one man and one woman for life there are great struggles. Insecurity for both partners and any children that are involved. Disease is often brought into the picture, distrust, etc. So logically there is punishment for wrong doing.

When we consider punishment from the standpoint of nature it also makes sense that hell is a most sensible conclusion.

- Consider the dog that crosses into another dogs territory. A fight ensues and the offender is run off.

- When a stream gets out of its bounds and goes wild there is destruction in its path.
- Or when the wind goes wild it causes a great amount of damage.

Consequently, Hell as a punishment for disobedience is very logical and natural even from a purely human aspect.

The Question Considered From a Biblical Standpoint

From a biblical perspective there are several things to consider. Each of these essential in understanding what God has in store for those who wait upon the Lord and for those who do not.

- In the first place we must understand that God cannot lie. Titus 1:2 states, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;" He always tells the truth. It is not logical that God would warn of an eternal, burning Hell and it not be the truth. If He lied on one point we cannot trust Him on any. God told Israel that they must obey him and plainly explained the rewards for obedience and the punishments for disobedience. See Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 for a detailed account of the system that God laid out. The proof is plain to see as Israel's history unfolds in the pages of the Old Testament. God promised punishment and it came about. Just like he said it would. When we consider the prophecies concerning Tyre and Sidon, Edom and other nations. They came about just as God said they would. God has never promised a punishment that has not come about just as He promised.
- Another thing to consider is that God speaks plain in order to be understood. I believe that most things that are misunderstood in the scriptures are done so by choice. Not because God did not reveal His will in an understandable fashion. Consider Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Or I Corinthians 6:9,10 in connection with the plain fact that homosexual behavior is sinful. Then there is the plain teaching about an everlasting Hell in Matthew 25:46 and many other places in the scriptures.

God, who cannot lie said that there is an eternal burning Hell. "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet [are], and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). Note that he says plainly "for ever and ever." In Matthew 25:41 we learn that those that were on the Lord's left side would depart from Him and be in the same place. Again in Revelation 21:8 we again see plainly that those who do not measure up to God's standard will be in this "lake which burneth with fire and brimstone".

Thayer's Greek Lexicon says of the Greek word for "eternal" and "everlasting" that it means 1) without beginning and end; 2) without end, never to cease. In Matthew 25:46 the same Greek word is used for the duration of the fate of the wicked as is used for the righteous.

This place called Hell is a place for punishment of the disobedient. 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 plainly say, "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and

from the glory of his power." Some may say that we experience our "hell" here on earth. Or that we receive punishment for our misdeeds here in this life. But note that God said in 2 Peter 2:9, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." God clearly states that the unjust will be reserved "unto the day of judgment to be punished". The punishment is yet in the future at the "day of judgment". This does not mean that we will not often suffer for evil doings here in this life. Peter mentions this plainly in 1 Peter 4:15 in reminding Christians to not do things that are evil that will bring earthly punishment.

In considering punishment, if the ungodly are simply annihilated, or cease to exist at death why would Jesus tell us to fear what is on the other side of death? (Luke 12:5) What do we fear in life. Is it not the possibility of pain. Whether physical or emotional. Fear helps to keep us from experiencing pain. Jesus warned us that we are to fear this place called Hell because of the existence of pain. Matthew 13:42 tells of this pain. "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth," Jesus teaches plainly that those in this place of punishment will experience pain.

There must be consciousness in order to experience pain. Consider our modern means of sedation. When a person is under anesthesia a doctor can cut and sew on the body and there is no sensation of pain. Upon waking, if the anesthesiologist did their job as required there will be no remembrance of pain. The reason is because there is no consciousness during the operation. Therefore no pain. In the aforementioned passage in Matthew 13:42 it is plain that the individual is conscious. Note the "wailing and gnashing of teeth."

In Luke 16:19-31 we read of the account of the rich man and Lazarus. This story shows a consciousness on both sides of the gulf.

The word destroy used in Matthew 10:28 in relation to Hell is certainly relevant to consider. Those who do not believe in Hell have used this to justify that they cannot believe that God would punish wicked people eternally, but that He would just destroy them. Thayer's says of this word used here; 1) to destroy, to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to ruin, render useless, to kill, to declare that one must be put to death, metaphorically- to devote or give over to eternal misery in hell, to perish, to be lost, ruined, destroyed. 2) to destroy, to lose. This word is used to express "not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well being."

It is so easy to see this if we look at some of the other places this word is used. In Mark 8:35 we are told that we must lose our life in order to save it. This does not mean that we cease to exist. Because we obviously go on in this life and live for Christ. In Luke 9:25 Jesus plainly compares this Greek word with being cast away. Again in Luke 15:4 the word is used in reference to one "lost" sheep. The word "lost" is the Greek word destroy. If the one lost sheep has been annihilated, why look for it?

When we consider these things about Hell and think on its reality, Jesus should be considered. He came from the eternal realm. (John 1:1-3,14) Having come from the eternal realm He testified of the reality of this place (cf. Matthew 5:22; Matthew 25:41,46, etc.). If we cannot believe what Jesus has said about Hell, (who incidentally has told us the truth (John 8:40)), we cannot believe anything else that He has told us.

Satan on the other hand is a liar. (John 8:44) this can be seen in the allure of sin and the consequences of it. He will spend an eternity in Hell and so desires all to be there with him. The old saying, "misery loves company" would certainly apply here.

Also consider that we have a just God. Nothing can be hid from God (1 Corinthians 4:5) and there will be no punishments for crimes that have not been convicted. Also there will be no punishment that is not fair and equitable. This can be seen in various passages. Matthew 10:15 teaches degrees of punishment for Sodom and Gomorrah in comparison to those who will not receive the disciples. In Luke 12:47,48 a comparison of punishment is made between those who knew and disobeyed and those who did not know and disobeyed. Hebrews 10:29 alludes to this also. We have a fair God. All that He does, even in punishment, will be equitable and righteous?

The source of the misunderstanding of Hell stems from several possibilities. One is a simple lack of knowledge. It is so easy to simply not study. Or even to study other books and not study God's Word. God's Word is truth (John 17:17). We can overcome this source of misunderstanding.

Another source can be a lack of desire to accept what has been written. This is nothing new. The Israelites did not want to accept what God had said. Note that they also suffered from that. This belief can come from a lack of proper interpretation. The context is so very important and the way that words are used in other places in the bible. Consider that Ecclesiastes is giving us a view of life from life's own perspective.

Another reason could be a desire to teach a socially acceptable gospel. One that is palatable to the hearers. One that appeals to the whims of the public. None of us want to think of the possibility of punishment. Not on our own part and not on the part of loved ones who have gone before.

Our response to those who believe this false doctrine must be considered. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:38, "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." We cannot make anyone believe the truth. That is up to each individual. But always our attitude should be one of hope and desire that all will be saved. As a servant of the Lord always be striving to help others recover themselves out of the snare of the Devil, (2 Tim.2:24-26).