

RETHINKING ETERNITY, WEEK FOUR WHAT, IN HELL, DO YOU WANT?

RISE CHURCH / WE ARE IN OUR 4TH WEEK OF OUR SERIES, RETHINKING ETERNITY... TO REVIEW **Biblical Eschatology** /

Life - Rebirth - Death - Hades - 2nd Coming - Day of Judgment - Heaven / Gehenna / what we are talking about is what will happen after the Day of Judgement... And at the end, we'll ask the question, "What, in hell, do you want?"

Today is not for the faint of heart... Hell is a sobering subject, and a difficult teaching. It is not politically correct. It flies in the face of humanism, which I believe is the leading religion of our day.

Through the use of scripture and video clips, we're going to try to paint an accurate picture of what the Bible teaches. If we believe in Jesus, then we must grapple with the difficult truths that he laid out.

I want to start by discussing the origins of hell... **Matthew 25:41-46**—Jesus is in the midst of a long discourse about eschatology that began in chapter 24. He talks about the destruction of the temple and tells a number of very challenging parables. We begin in vs 41

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42** For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Notes:

- So many things we could discuss in this passage... our need for compassion and outreach. Jesus teaches here that what we do for people in the name of Jesus, we do for people... but given our topic, I **want to note two things:**
 - Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. God did not prepare this as a final destination for any human, because He wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, and has taken every step to make that option open. He's going to give us free will, the opportunity to choose for ourselves, because love can't exist apart from that.
 - **Eternal Punishment** is not the same thing as eternal punishing. Hell is eternal in its *consequences*, not in its *duration*.

Let's dig a little deeper: The Greek Word for 'Hell' is "Gehenna." Its imagery comes from an area outside of Jerusalem known as the Hinnom Valley.

The worst of Judah's kings practiced pagan worship in the Hinnom Valley, with **child sacrifice** to the vile Moabite god Chemosh being a particularly offensive aspect of this "worship" (2 Kings 16:3 & 21:6). The valley became a fiery disposal dump for 185,000 Assyrian warriors slain by an angel of the Lord (see 2 Kings 19:35, Isaiah 30:33 and 37:36), and later, it would overflow with Israelite corpses when God judged Judah for its sins. Consequently Gehenna became known as "the Valley of Slaughter" (Jeremiah 7:30-34 & 19:2-13). Note that Gehenna was known as "the Valley of **Slaughter**" and not "the Valley of Eternal Torture," an important difference. Needless to say, long before Jesus' earthly ministry Gehenna had a negative image of sinful rebellion, fire and death.

After righteous King Josiah desecrated Gehenna as part of his godly reforms (2 King 23:10), the valley became the constantly **smoking trash dump of Jerusalem**, which is what it was at the time of Christ. As a hygienic incinerator, Gehenna's fires were kept burning in order to **burn up** the refuse thrown in—trash, garbage, animal carcasses, corpses of despised criminals and vanquished enemies. As would be natural in such a climate, worms or maggots bred freely and preyed upon the filth. As such, whatever was not burned up in the fires would be devoured by maggots.

The Roman historian Josephus tells us that it was later heaped with the corpses of unrighteous Jews following the Roman Siege of A.D. 69-70

Isaiah 66:24 tells us that it was where the wicked would lay slain at the end of days, and
Jesus quoted this verse in **Mark 9:42-49**.

"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where

"the worms that eat them do not die,
and the fire is not quenched.'

Everyone will be salted with fire."

This, by the way, is a favorite verse among those who believe in the doctrine of Eternal Torment... but we should note that the only 'eternal' things mentioned are the fire and the worms.

Before we start uncovering the Biblical pictures of Gehenna, let's briefly revisit the vision of heaven that we covered in week two...

- Streets of Gold
- Gates of Pearl
- Walls of Precious Gemstones
- A new body
- No sin, etc.

Pictures of Gehenna - Most of what Christendom believes about hell comes not from the Bible, but from the first portion of a 14th Century Italian Poem written by Dante Alighieri. "Dante's Inferno," which is the opening section of **The Divine Comedy**, is not essentially a religious poem, but a political satire, and Dante uses his poetry to insult people he considers his political enemies. So we're going to skip Dante and go to Scripture. The Bible describes hell in at least 3 different ways:

1. Gehenna as a Place of Fire—

Fire is the most common metaphor for judgment and punishment in the Bible, seen in both the OT and the NT. Earlier, we read a fiery description of Gehenna in Matthew 25 and Mark 9. We will try to envision it further with a clip from the movie "Constantine" - Video -Clip... I think we can all agree - we don't want the fire.

2. Gehenna as a Place of Darkness - Jude 3-6, 13

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. **4** For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

5 Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. **6** And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. So, here we have a picture of darkness.

V13 - They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Back in Matthew 8, when Jesus was teaching about expansion of the borders of His new Kingdom, he said this: "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. **11** I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. **12** But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

- This is a prophecy about the inclusion of the Gentiles and of people from every tribe, language, nation and people—the whole world is invited to God’s party!
- In this passage, he paints a picture of Gehenna not as a blazing fire, but a place of deepest darkness. The two Greek words used to describe it are **zophos skotous**, which carry the idea of “darkest darkness.” (Steve’s spelunking story) What is it about the dark that is so terrifying? I’m not a fan of horror movies... but I’ve seen enough to know that the bad stuff doesn’t happen when the sun is shining; it is during darkness.
- To illustrate we’ll watch this clip from a movie entitled, “Pitch Black.” VIDEO... Again, I think we agree that we don’t want the darkness.

3. Gehenna as a Place of Bitter Regret - Matthew 24:48-51

But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ **49** and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. **50** The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. **51** He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- In this picture, the weeping does not come from the pain of torment, but rather from the pain of regret.
- We've been conditioned to think of gnashing of teeth as the involuntary response of souls in torment, whereas actually it is the proud and angry response of those who refuse to humble themselves before God.

We’ll illustrate with this clip from ‘what dreams my come’... VIDEO... Again, I think we agree that we don’t want the darkness. **CONCLUSIONS**

Why is this an important topic? Imagine that this rope stretches on through all eternity... our life span is represented by this little piece of tape at the end.

At the end of this discussion, when we’ve evaluated the scriptural images of Gehenna, we’ve got to ask ourselves, “**What, in hell, do we want?**” We don’t want the fire; we don’t want the darkness; and we don’t want the bitter regret... We don’t want to trade endless joy of heaven for the fleeting pleasures of sin, punishment that fits our crimes, and ultimate extinction.

What we should want is described in **2 Timothy 1:8**... This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

The glories of heaven are an option—with immortality as a great reward for a life of faith and obedience. Why would we choose otherwise?

The Apostle Peter will close us out today... we read in 2 Peter 3, beginning in verse 8:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.[a]

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives **12** as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.[b] That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. **13** But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Prayer...