

THE DOCTRINE OF HELL – PART 1

Introduction

- There is a fascination with the afterlife in our culture...particularly with hell itself

1. Urban Legends

Oil Drill Opens Hole Into Hell

PRUDHOE BAY, AK - Something is emerging from Hell! That is the horrifying warning of more than 60 eyewitnesses who have seen the monstrous shape roaring out of a mile-deep Alaskan oil well amid stinking clouds of sulfur. "If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not believe it," said John Merritt, a foreman with BP, which operates the oil field. "The giant demon head of Satan has already escaped and his body has been slowly coming out for weeks. "White-hot flames are billowing out of the well, the skies have been darkened by strange clouds and the area is full of an evil stench so oppressive and overpowering that most people can only stand to remain there for a few minutes."

The oil field, about 400 miles north of Fairbanks, has been ordered shut down by the government and the area has been cordoned off. Only military and clergymen who have been called in by the oil company to aid in the crisis are admitted to the area, and Alaskan officials have slapped a tight lid of secrecy over the story. Many are looking to politicians for a response; Alaska's reserves have been a source of this year's presidential debates over energy independence.

Alaskan Governor and Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin immediately downplayed the incident, stating, "This is nothing to worry about! It's just the Devil playing tricks on us! He wants to see our country run out of oil, just like the terrorists. We gotta stand up for ourselves and keep on drilling!" Delaware Senator and Vice-Presidential candidate Joe Biden was far more concerned. "I have consistently voted against exploration in the Alaskan National Wildlife Reserve, and this is the perfect example why. We don't yet know the long-term environmental effects, let alone Biblical ones."

As for the hole? "No one is allowed within 50 feet of the oil well," said foreman Merritt. "We're just waiting to see what happens next."

2. Many Books about Hell Tourism

- 23 Minutes in Hell – by Bill Wiese
- A Divine Revelation of Hell – by Mary K. Baxter
- I Went to Hell – by Kenneth Hagin
- To Hell and Back – by Maurice Rawlings

Unbiblical Views of Hell

Universalism

- Those who hold to this view reject the concept of unbelievers suffering eternal punishment in hell and believe all will be saved eventually
- They hold to this because they believe that endless punishment is incompatible with Jesus' message of love
- Some passages commonly appealed to by universalists:

Passages about God's Desire to Save All

1 Timothy 2:4 ~ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 4:10 ~ For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers

2 Peter 3:9 ~ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance

Passages about the Work of Christ

Romans 5:18-19 ~ So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Passages about the End of the Age

1 Cor 15:22, 28 ~ For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

- But none of these passages in their context teach universalism; thus, we reject universalism

Purgatory

- The Catholic Encyclopedia defines Purgatory as a “a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.”
- Thus, they believe that Purgatory is a place that a Christian's soul goes to after death to be cleansed of the sins that had not been fully satisfied during life
- The length of suffering in Purgatory is determined by the person's degree of sinfulness but this time of suffering can be shortened through the prayers and good works of the living (based on 2 Maccabees 12)
- It is understood to be a place of cleansing in preparation for heaven because they do not recognize that because of Jesus' sacrifice, we are already cleansed, declared righteous, forgiven, redeemed, reconciled, and sanctified
- The primary Scriptural passage Catholics point to for evidence of Purgatory is 1 Corinthians 3:15, which says, “If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”
- But, this passage does not say that believers pass through fire, but rather their works pass through fire and whatever remains becomes the basis for reward
- Furthermore, Purgatory is based on a misunderstanding of the nature and sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice
- His once-for-all sacrifice was absolutely and perfectly sufficient (Heb 7:27; 9:12)
- So, the very idea of Purgatory fails to recognize that Jesus' death was sufficient to pay the penalty for ALL of our sins
- If we must in any sense pay for, atone for, or suffer because of our sins – that indicates Jesus' death was not a perfect, complete, and sufficient sacrifice.
- Also, for believers to die is to be “away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:6-8; Phil 1:23) – this does not say “away from the body in Purgatory with cleansing fire”
- Thus, we must reject the concept of temporary punishment for sins in Purgatory

Annihilationism

- Advocated by Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Clark Pinnock, and even some evangelicals like John Stott
- This says that the wicked are eventually annihilated, either after a second chance, at death, or after prolonged punishment

- This says that God is too loving and kind to inflict everlasting misery on His creatures
- It teaches that their judgment will bring about the cessation of their existence
- It serves as an attempt to soften the awful thought of eternal torment of the wicked

Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain. But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it . . . my question must be — and is — not what does my heart tell me, but what does God’s word say?

John Stott

- Those who hold to annihilationism cite a number of lines of evidence:
- First, terms like “destruction” (Matt 10:28) and “perishing” (John 3:16) used in Scripture describe the extinction of a being
- Second, the main purpose of fire is not to inflict physical pain, but to destroy
- Third, the terms “eternal” and “everlasting” do not mean endless, but often mean “in the age to come”
- Rev 14:10 refers to the moment of judgment, rather than to everlasting conscious torment (i.e. the smoke, not the torment, ascends forever)
- Rev 20:10 refers to the devil and his allies, not humans
- However, the Greek words “eternal” and “everlasting” do teach endless punishment
 - They are the only words in the Greek language which can express endlessness
 - They mean “everlasting” in other places (John 14:17; Matt 19:29)
- Annihilation is not a punishment at all but something that could be quite desirable to the wicked
- Rich man in Luke 16 experienced the flame of torment – probably same torment in eternal state
- Rev 20:10 says that beast and false prophet are still tormented in lake of fire after 1000 years
- The everlasting punishment of the wicked is not inconsistent with God’s nature or justice, but is rather a revelation of that justice
- The word for “destroy” does not mean annihilation but rather “loss” or “ruin” (Matt 9:17)
- Man is immortal by nature, not by salvation (no such thing as conditional immortality)
- The rest of Scripture supports eternal punishment (Matt 13:42; 25:41, 46; Rev 14:11)

Not a Real Place

- Many deny that hell is a real place

Pope John Paul II, in a live audience address given on July 28, 1999 said: “Rather than a place, Hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy”

- Rob Bell:
- “Do I believe in a literal hell? Of course...Have you ever sat with a woman while she talked about what it was like to be raped? How does a person describe what it’s like to hear a five-year-old boy whose father has just committed suicide ask: “When is daddy coming home?” How does a person describe that unique look, that ravaged, empty stare you find in the eyes of a cocaine addict? I’ve seen what happens when people abandon all that is good and right and kind and humane...it is absolutely vital that we acknowledge that love, grace, and humanity can be rejected. From the most subtle rolling of eyes to the most violent degradation of another human, we are terrifyingly free to do as we please. God gives us what we want, and if that’s hell, we can have it.” (*Love Wins*, 71-72.)

- “What we see in Jesus’s story about the rich man and Lazarus is an affirmation that there are all kinds of hells, because there are all kinds of ways to resist and reject all that is good and true and beautiful and human now, in this life, and so we can only assume we can do the same in the next. There are individual hells, and communal, society-wide hells, and Jesus teaches us to take both seriously” (*Love Wins*, 79.)
- “[Hell is] a word to describe the very real consequences we experience when we reject the good and true and beautiful life God has for us. [It’s a word] that refers to the big, wide, terrible evil that comes from the secrets hidden deep within our hearts all the way to the massive, society-wide collapse and chaos that comes when we fail to live in God’s world God’s way.” (*Love Wins*, 93.)

- So according to Bell, hell is the stuff that bugs you and messes up the world, but not a place dead people go

Terminology Supporting Hell as a Real Place

- Hell’s location is frequently described in Scripture as a place that is “down”

Job 17:16 ~ Will it go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust?

Romans 10:7 ~ Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)

Isaiah 14:11, 15 ~ Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers...But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

Luke 10:15 ~ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

- This identification of Hell as being “down” is meant to be an unmistakable contrast with the other spiritual realm, Heaven, which is always said to be “up”

2 Corinthians 12:2 ~ I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven... caught up into paradise...

- What is interesting is that the description of Hell is consummately spatial, and even involves terminology used to designate various areas or regions within Hell

Sheol/Hades

- Sheol is an OT word translated a variety of ways including “grave, hell, pit”
- It was seen as the common receptacle of the dead and in the great many places the word appears in the OT, it is referring to the grave – i.e. simply the place of the dead (where both good and bad people go upon death)
- The dominant focus of the OT seems to be on the place where the bodies of people go, not where their souls exist; however it sometimes refers specifically to the holding place of the condemned
- It is a place and is mentioned in Genesis 37:35; Numbers 16:30, 33; Psalm 16:10
- Hades is the NT equivalent of the OT Sheol – it usually refers generically to death, but it also designates the place where condemned souls are sent
- Of the 10 occurrences of Hades in the NT, it is used as a place of punishment 3 times (Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15; 16:23) and as a state of death, which both believers and unbelievers enter, 7 times (Matt 16:18; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14)
- It was probably the subterranean abode of all the dead until the judgment

- It was divided into two departments, paradise or Abraham's bosom for the good, and Gehenna or hell for the bad.
- In particular, in the account of Lazarus and the Rich man of ([Luke 16:19-31](#)), it is the place of the conscious dead who are wicked

Gehenna



- This term occurs 12 times in the NT, taken from the Hebrew *gehinnom*, referring to the Valley of Hinnom that runs on the south and east side of Jerusalem
- The worship of Molech in which infants were sacrificed in fire to the god Molech occurred in this valley
- The valley also became the place where refuse and dead bodies of animals and criminals were burned
- As a result, Gehenna became synonymous with eternal punishment, the fire of hell
- It describes the punishment connected with the final judgment, a punishment that is eternal (Matt 23:15, 33; 25:41, 46)

Matthew 25:41 ~ Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

Matthew 25:46 ~ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

The Abyss/Tartarus

- The abyss is the prison for demons, probably those temporarily confined in the abyss who will be released by Satan to torment the earth during the Tribulation (Rev 9:1-15)
- These demons are apparently too depraved and harmful to be allowed to roam upon the earth

Luke 8:30-31 ~ And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. And they were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss.

- At the 2nd coming of Christ, Satan will be bound and confined to the abyss for 1000 years (Rev 20:1-3)
- Tartarus is mentioned only in 2 Peter 2:4 and describes the place that some demons have been permanently locked away

2 Peter 2:4 ~ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment

The Lake of Fire

- The Lake of Fire is unoccupied at present, but after Judgment Day at the Great White Throne, the condemned souls in *Gehenna*, the demons who had been in *Tartarus*, the demons who had been on earth, and Satan himself will all be cast into the Lake of Fire as the final judgment
- This is the part that lasts forever

Rev 20:14 ~ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire

Rev 21:8 ~ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Jesus's View of Hell

- Jesus spoke more about heaven and hell than any other topic....He described it in the following terms:

1) A place of eternal fire

Matthew 18:8 ~ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.

Matthew 25:41 ~ Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

- Christ distinguishes the fires of hell from those on earth, all of which die
- Even mighty forest fires, which may burn for weeks, eventually burn out when they consume all their fuel
- Hell fire, however, is indistinguishable because its work is never done
- Some want to make this fire something that consumes and destroys – namely that this fire does not continue to consume
- When combined with the idea that the soul of man is not necessarily immortal, this teaching leads to the conclusion that the torment of the unrighteous is not necessarily endless, a position otherwise known as annihilationism or conditional immortality
- But, Jesus makes it clear that the fires of hell never run out of fuel and burn out
- Jesus describes the fire as unquenchable (Mark 9:43)
- He also said that the fires of hell will act like salt, preserving rather than destroying (Mark 9:49 ~ for everyone will be salted with fire)
- Thus, it's burning will never end

Whether eternal punishment involves any physical reality corresponding to fire, one cannot tell. However, it will be something as bad as fire and doubtless worse, something earthly images are inadequate to describe. **John Broadus**

The fiery oven is ignited merely by the unbearable appearance of God and endure eternally. For the day of judgment will not last for a moment only but will stand throughout eternity and will thereafter never come to an end. Constantly the damned will be judged, constantly they will suffer pain, and constantly they will be a fiery oven, that is, they will be tortured within by supreme distress and tribulation **Martin Luther**

2) A place where the worm never dies

Mark 9:47-48 ~ If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

- This is probably not speaking of literal worms in hell but rather drawing a comparison between this life and next
- Maggots feed on their prey until it is consumed, then they die; the “worms” of hell, however, will never complete their work
- This paints a picture describing the endlessness of sinner’s torment – probably referring to a great sense of remorse and a gnawing conscience
- Imagine an eternity of a violated but re-sensitized conscience continually attacking, accusing and destroying.

3) A place of outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth

Matthew 8:12 ~ but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

- There will be weeping—an eternity of pouring out intense grief and anguish and intolerable misery
- There will be gnashing of teeth, perhaps a rage or insanity that will beset those in hell
- And, of course, there will be unimaginable physical pain such that people will no doubt cry out for even the worst pain they knew in this life

4) A place of eternal punishment

Matthew 25:46 ~ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Luke 16:19-31 The Rich Man and Lazarus

#1 The Contrast of the Two Men Before Death (vs. 19-21)

#2 The Contrast of the Two Men In Death (vs. 22)

#3 The Contrast of the Two Men After Death (vs. 23-31)

Notice Christ’s description of hell in these verses:

It’s an immediate place – vs. 23

It’s a real place – vs. 23

It’s a conscious place – vs. 23, 24, 26

It’s a separated place – vs. 23, 26

It’s an agonizing place – vs. 23-25

It’s a haunting place – vs. 25