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Hell: What is It? Where is It? How to Get There

Introduction

Why am I giving a talk like this when I don't like confrontation, etc.?

Because of an incident that occurred at the Madison, WI, Zoo in the summer of 1966:

Passed the elephant cage; some kids (with mothers nearby) were playing outside, between the 1st and 2nd barriers.

Thought this was foolish, but figured I'd better not interfere, as mothers were present who would presumably not like a stranger butting in.

A few minutes later, heard a scream. The smallest child had climbed thru the cage bars, and was being trampled to death by the elephant.

Some months afterward, I decided to take this incident as a parable: I'd better use my life helping people avoid hell, even if some might not appreciate being warned, than to let them go there without warning.

What is Hell?

There are many misconceptions due to traditional ideas, partly derived from Dante's *Inferno* and NT Apocrypha. E.g., Satan as jailer rather than prisoner, demons as tormentors, etc.

Let us look at some of the Biblical descriptions of hell:

Isa 66:22-24 (NIV) *"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. 23 From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD. 24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."*

Corpses, worms, fire, loathsome

Dan 12:1-3 (NIV) *"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."*

Shame, everlasting contempt

Matt 10:28 (NIV) *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Destruction of both body and soul

Matt 13:40-42, 49-50 (NIV) *As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.... 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Fiery furnace, weeping, gnashing of teeth

Mark 9:42-48 (NIV) *And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.... 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.... 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, 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, 48 where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." {[48] Isaiah 66:24}*

Better to lose life, hand, foot, eye (allusion to Isa 66)

Luke 16:19-31 (NIV) *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, {[23] Greek Hades} where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30 "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Torment, agony of fire, no escape

2 Thess 1:9 (NIV) *They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power...*

Eternal destruction, shut out from God's presence

Rev 14:9-11 (NIV) *A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, 10 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."*

Wrath of God, tormented w/ fire & sulfur, smoke rises forever, no rest

Rev 20:10-15 (NIV) *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Lake of fire, second death

This is not a complete listing of passages about hell, but it does include most of the major passages and pictures, except for the concept of "outer darkness" given in Matt 22:13 and 25:30.

Where is Hell?

There are also misconceptions here, based on the literal idea that the Bible teaches a three-story universe with heaven as attic and hell as basement. Dante's view is only slightly more sophisticated.

Some claim the Bible view is that hell is a physical cavern in the earth to which bodies roll after burial. This is absurd, as it doesn't fit the phenomena observed by the ancients themselves as they gathered up the bones about a year after burial to store them away in bone boxes.

We can illustrate the Bible's teaching from two passages we read earlier:

Luke 16:19-31:

What happens to the two when they die?

Lazarus died and the angels carried him away (v 22)

Rich man died and was buried... in Hades (23, unseen world)

In these two cases, we appear to have a picture of the "temporary hell" which exists between death and the final resurrection.

Notice that the resurrection hasn't occurred yet, as the rich man's brothers are still living on earth (28).

We appear to have something here that is analogous to that reported in out-of-the-body experiences.

Isaiah 66:22-24:

This passage appears to be describing the situation *after* the resurrection, so picturing the “permanent hell” most commonly referred to in the Bible. See the reference to “new heavens and new earth” in verse 22.

This passage pictures hell as located *outside* the New Jerusalem, fitting several passages we haven’t read, e.g., Rev 22:14-15: “*outside [the city] are dogs...*”; a dozen passages where “Gehenna” is used (and probably “Topheth” in Isa 30:33), referring to the place where trash was burned outside the old city of Jerusalem.

So where is hell?

Permanent hell = lake of fire, not yet ready, located near New Jerusalem on the new earth.

Temporary hell is in the unseen world. Various Biblical passages on the unseen world suggest it is in some 4th spatial dimension.

How do you get there?

Let’s look at the passages which describe hell:

Isa 66:24: they rebelled against God

Matt 10:28: they were afraid of those who kill the body (rather than God)?

Matt 13:41: all who do evil

13:49: wicked

Note Mark 9:42: better to mutilate oneself or commit suicide than to sin or cause someone else to do so

Luke 16:19-21: selfish, ignoring needs of others

2 Thess 1:8: do not know God or obey Gospel of Jesus

Rev 14:9: worship of the beast (Antichrist)

Rev 20:12, 15: judged by what they have done; name not written in book of life

Apparently most will get there just by going on as they are.

Matt 7:13 (NIV) *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

The two great commandments: do you (have you ever) obeyed them?

Matt 22:35-40 (NIV) *One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." {[37] Deut. 6:5} 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." {[39] Lev. 19:18} 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

God takes no pleasure in anyone going to hell:

Ezek 33:11 (NIV) Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

2Pet 3:9 (NIV) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

So flee to God and seek his pardon, which is freely offered on the basis of Jesus' dying for sins.