

What God says about... HELL

Problems with hell?

1. Would most people think it good that evil is punished? What problems do people have with the idea of “hell”?

What hell is...

The modern English word *hell* is probably from pagan origins, used to denote the place of the dead. Similar to the Greek concept of *Hades* (ΑΔΗΣ; also used in the Bible). The Greek word usually translated as *hell* in the words of Jesus is *Gehenna* (ΓΕΕΝΝΑ), which is derived from the place called *the valley of Hinnom*. One other word, from the Greek *Tartarus* (ΤΑΡΤΑΡΟΣ), is used in 2 Peter 2:4. While a specific word is not always used to name it, the concept of what we call *hell* is evident throughout the Scriptures (and in a more defined way in the NT).

2. Consider each the following texts, and note what they teach us about the concept of *hell*:
 - a. Isaiah 66:22-24
 - b. Matthew 10:28
 - c. Matthew 25:31-46
 - d. 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10
 - e. Revelation 20:10-15

Implications and Applications...

3. What is the problem with *annihilationism* (the idea that ultimately the wicked will no longer exist at all)?
4. Does there need to be any sense of accountability and punishment?
5. What do you think about these comments by conservative Evangelical theologian, J I Packer:

“modern thought is sceptical as to whether punishment that does not serve the purpose of reforming the offender and safeguarding others can ever be justified; and talk about God’s punitive role on the last day, when neither of these further goals can enter in to the reckoning, is bound to feed the suspicion that God is in truth arbitrary and vindictive in a way that is not quite admirable, because it is not quite moral. Indeed, the widespread revolt against the idea of eternal punishment during the past century has sprung from this suspicion, and from a desire for doctrine that does not thus impugn God’s character, rather than from any other source.”

“[Considering the word “torment”:] Its vibrations, too, are bad: to the modern mind, it suggests sadism and cruelty and torture, and what we are talking about is none of these things, but the adorable justice of a holy Creator who deals righteously with people according to their works.”

“But when the European Enlightenment, with the Romantic movement riding on its shoulders, invaded the Protestant churches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it elbowed biblical authority aside, reconceived God’s moral character in terms of benevolence without judgement, exalted man against the Bible as the real measure of all things – and, with increasing emphasis, rejected any thought of endless existence for anyone in hell... Nothing less than a doctrine of universal salvation, so they claim, can do justice to the reality of God’s love, and the magnitude of Christ’s victory, and the wisdom of God in making a world into which sin could enter.”

6. How does a belief in hell affect our attitude to God and others?

[After the discussion, take some time to pray together, about what you studied, and also sharing any other personal prayer requests.]

Recommended Reading:

- J I Packer, *“Concise Theology: A guide to historic Christian beliefs”* (“Hell”, pp261ff)
- J I Packer, *“The Problem of Eternal Punishment”*
- John Blanchard, *“Whatever happened to Hell?”* (1993)