



Jesus Said What?... About Hell October 6 of 2024 Small Group Notes

Why do you think it is uncomfortable to speak publicly about hell? If there is a cultural stigmatism, what might be behind it?

Why might people find it difficult to study this topic?

Where do you think people get their ideas about hell from?

An interesting way into this is to compare the KJV (King James Version) with the NIV (New International Version).

The KJV has the word hell 54 times (Old Testament and New Testament), while the NIV only 13 times (all in the New Testament). Is this an English cultural puritanical fixation with hell, or is there more going on?

Four key words: all four can be hell in KJV, only the last two are hell in NIV

- **Sheol** – 65 times (all OT) – the grave
- **Hades** – 11 times (NT) – grave, can refer to grave as a holding place
The NIV doesn't translate Sheol or Hades as hell.
- **Tartarus** – 1 time (NT) – 2 Peter 2:4 (Greek underworld where the gods locked up their enemies) – this is specifically referring to some fallen angels awaiting judgement
- **Gehenna** – 12 times (NT) – hell, or Valley of Hinnom – this word is closest to our understanding of hell

What do you think about the differences here in translation between the KJV and NIV? When might this be a concern? How might this affect culture or denominations?

Jesus was using existing ideas about hell

It is worth noticing that John the Baptist possibly refers to hell (Mt 3:12, Lk 3:18) before Jesus started his ministry. We can also see in other books from before Jesus time that these ways of talking about hell were already present in the

culture. For example, the Book of Enoch, quoted in the New Testament, has concepts like everlasting fire, darkness, and even the use of Gehenna. Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience. How might this influence his use of hell as compared to other writers?

How do we understand Gehenna and the visual language around hell Read 2 Kings 23:10 and Jeremiah 7:30-34

Gehenna, the main word for hell, referred to the Valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem. This place had a horrifying history.

In the valley of Hinnom children were sacrificed using fire to Molech. King Josiah put an end to this practice in 2 Kings 23:10 and had the place destroyed or desecrated. In Jesus' day the bodies of criminals and animals were burned in the valley of Hinnom and it was said that a trail of smoke could always be seen rising from here.

So, when Jesus says Gehenna he's referring to an actual place, while also speaking about a greater reality of one's destination after death. Does this history encourage us to see it as a literal place, or is it some sort of metaphor?

What do the Different Biblical Writers Say?

There is an area of study called Biblical Theology. This is where we see what the different authors of the bible thought about a topic. This is different from Systematic Theology where we are looking to see what the bible says as a whole.

Read some of the references of each author. How do they sound different from each other? Who is their audience? Why might they have spoken about hell like this? Especially compare the synoptic gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) with others, as they shared notes with each other.

There may be too many references to use from Matthew. Why do you think he refers to hell so much more than others? Or why would Mark and Luke use it less?

Some passages may not be about hell. In the NIV if it says 'hell' it will be Gehenna with 2 Peter 2 being Tartarus. Notice if it says hell or hades, or simply uses imagery that might refer to hell.

- Matthew (Mt 3:12, Mt 5:22, 5:29, 5:30, 7:13, 8:12, 10:28, 11:23, 13:30, 13:40–42, 13:50, 16:18, 16:26, 18:8–9, 22:13, 23:33, 24:51, 25:30, 25:46)
- Mark (Mk 8:46, 9:43–47)
- Luke (Lk 3:18, 9:25, 12:5, 13:28, 16:23–24)
- John (John 15:6, Rev 20:10, 14, 15, 21:8)
- Peter (2 Peter 2:4–6 – using Tartarus)
- Paul (Romans 9:22, Phil 3:19, 2 Thess 1:8–9)
- Hebrews (Hebrews 6:3, 6:8, 10:27, 10:39)
- Jude (Jude 7)

None of the bible writers say, ‘here is what you should believe about hell’. Why do you think this might be?

If we pull together all we can find we get several words and phrases that get to the finality or permanence of hell: words like eternal, everlasting, unquenchable, a great chasm, and never goes out. Why are these words significant?

We also get loads of imagery around hell, that depending on your understanding, is either literal or metaphorical. This includes fire, torment, agony, weeping, gnashing of teeth, where the worm does not die, outer darkness, blazing furnace, destruction, lake of fire, and lake of burning sulphur. This imagery is hard to think about. Why do you think this is supposed to be difficult?

What do we Believe About Hell. How Do We Pull This Together?

A key thing is how we understand Gehenna, and whether this description of hell is meant to be literal or metaphorical. How you answer that I think lands a person, who is getting their view from the bible, in three possible places. Either as an annihilationist (non-believers cease to exist as they have not received the gift of eternal life), the literal /classic view (there will be a literal lake of fire with unending torment), or something in-between where hell is real, but the imagery around it is still metaphorical.

What do you think is working for or against each of these views?

Does it matter what we believe about hell? Is it important that we firmly hold to a view, or can we be indifferent?

What are the implications of what the bible says about hell?

(The Present Power of Heaven and Hell by John Piper from A Godward Life, pg. 207-209)

John Piper says, "For Jesus a profound desire for heaven and a potent fear of hell were practical, daily parts of living a glad and holy life."

Hell, John Piper says, is used to encourage people toward...

- sacrificial generosity- Lk 14:13-14
- loving your enemies- Lk 6:35
- simplicity and charity- Lk 12:33
- evangelism and missions- Lk 16:9
- enduring persecution with joy- Mt 5:11-12
- avoiding lust- Mt 5:28-29
- not fearing death in the cause of the gospel- Lk 12:4-5
- bearing good fruit- Lk 3:9
- being doers and not just hearers of Jesus- Lk 6:49
- giving our lives away for the gospel- Lk 9:24-25

Which of these do you find significant?

Hell is often used as motivation for right living. How does this fit what the bible's teaching on grace and forgiveness?

As Christians we have been forgiven. Our shame and guilt is taken away. This means the judgment can give us the courage to live for what really matters.