

THE STORY OF MAN'S (DESTINY) #9

WHAT ABOUT HELL?

1. INTRODUCTION.

This is lesson # 9 in the series we have been focusing on. We have covered such topics as: In The Beginning; Holocaust Of Sin; Judgment Day; How Are We Made; and more recently lessons on the Soul and Spirit. Even with this many lessons on these subjects, there still remains much more that could be said about each of them. We have tried to follow a sequence that would gradually build a foundation, knowing that each lesson in some way is connected to all the rest. Of course, there is no end of the lessons that could be included under the umbrella of "The Story of Man's Destiny". There are many more we would like to include and will wait to see just how many and what they are to be.

The next lessons we will introduce will be on the very controversial and passionately charged subject of "HELL". There probably is no religious subject that is as grounded in such long - held traditions, and no subject about which people seem so absolutely sure of their position. For this reason, very few people ever consider changing their view about it. My hope is that we can confirm you in the truth and enhance your understanding and clarify some of the many scriptures and applications as they relate to this subject. In so doing, with your careful attention and study, we hope that you will be convinced of the position we will advance. Your careful inquiry and participation is invited.

2. A BASIC STATEMENT OF BELIEF.

The position we hold on the subject is a minority position. We say that, even though a survey several years ago revealed that more than half of the population did not believe in the orthodox teaching about hell. Notwithstanding this, we are reasonably sure that the predominant theology does agree with the traditional view.

In our studies thus far, we have advocated a position that generally runs completely against a traditional hell. For example, we have taught that the full and complete wages of sin is death; that there is no such thing as an immortal soul, and that our judgment day is already past. You will readily recognize that these teachings are very different from the traditional view of hell.

However, I might surprise you by stating that we most definitely do believe there is a hell. The difference is in what we believe that hell really is and what its purpose is. Basically, we do not teach that hell is a place of literal torment and torture for our sins in a literal fire for as long as God lives. We shall find that there is more than one use and meaning of the word hell in the Bible and it will be necessary to look into each one of them. I am very much acquainted with every passage of scripture using the word hell and also those that are otherwise related to the subject. It will be our purpose to look into all of them, not just those that we feel best support our position. We are fully convinced that a fair and thorough analysis of them will not support the theory of eternal torture in a literal fire. I am equally convinced that of all the passionate preaching ever done on the subject of eternal torture and torment in a literal fire, that it is woefully incomplete and has failed to fully investigate, consider and explain the necessary relevant scriptures on the subject and it has been guilty of "selective" reading. The position we hold and will present during the several lessons on this subject, and the position we believe we can fairly support with a comprehensive scriptural analysis, will completely disavow the idea that sinners will burn in a literal fire for as long as God exists. The volume of questions that must be answered by the eternal torture theorists, are so overwhelming as to demand a conclusion of the utter fallacy and scriptural impossibility of such a theory. We are not so naive, however, as to think that a doctrine so embedded in the religious psyche of the world's population is suddenly going to disappear. More than likely, the fact that we would even dare to raise a negative position about the eternal torture theory will only serve to rally the centuries of hate - filled hostilities toward it. Notwithstanding this possibility, we proceed with absolute confidence

and convictions. We are sure that the theory of hell being a place of eternal torture in a literal fire for the ages of eternity is totally and completely untrue and unscriptural. That is the magnitude of our task in these lessons on hell.

3. SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE STUDY.

We have acknowledged that the majority of people of the entire world believe in some form of the eternal torture of the wicked and in a place where (they believe) departed souls go at death. The “Christian” part of that world also believes that these “departed souls” will be brought out of the torture chambers long enough to be re-united with a resurrected body, judged (as to where they belong) and then re-assigned to their torture chamber again, this time with “bodies” for their departed souls. The apparent reason for this grossly illogical and unscriptural inconsistency is to accommodate their version of a resurrection for the wicked.

Over the centuries of the church, especially since about the 4th century onward, when neo-Platonist teachings gained an influence in church doctrine, there have been countless messages, volumes and studies, in support of the theory of eternal torture. In my own life time of ministry, I have encountered the subject on a regular basis. I have collected and read behind a vast company of preachers and theologians who have promoted the concept of torture chambers for the unsaved. Almost without exception, when preachers set out to preach about “hell”, they will follow the same, narrowly confined pattern and in a majority of the times, they will use the same limited scripture text. Another thing you will invariably find from the expositors of “hell as a torture chamber” is that they will never address the vast amount of scriptures which pose legitimate questions to their torture theory. In fact, their pet passage of scripture (Lk. 16:19-31) is never thoroughly explained with many of these scriptures and pertinent points being ignored completely. This practice at the least, casts doubts on the explanation they give to their selected verses. In addition to this, it has always been my experience that when “torture chamber” advocates encounter opposition to their view, they invariably demonstrate an attitude that ranges from very condescending, to mockery and even hostility. This can only suggest a less than sure foundation along with an inability to fairly deal with questions and scriptures that demand an explanation. For example, consider just two questions. (1) Where is the proof that the soul is inherently immortal? (Without this proof, the entire theory disintegrates). (2) If torture in an eternal fire is the penalty for sin, who has paid that price for our salvation. (If no one is paying that price, there is no plan of salvation). Jesus only died for our sins; he is not enduring eternal torture for those sins now. I think that in the absence of a sufficient answer to these two questions alone, the theory of eternal torture is over; not to even mention the countless scriptures that must be dealt with on the subject.

For the rest of this lesson, we are going to provide you with information that shows the arena where eternal torture is believed and taught, along with exact quotes from several advocates who have proclaimed it. While doing this will reveal how almost universal the belief is and how prominent it’s advocates and theologians are, I think it will also reveal how incomplete and incomprehensive the vast majority of the teaching on the subject has been.

4. WHAT THE ETERNAL TORTURE THEOLOGY HAS TO SAY.

Before we set forth what is taught by theologians on this subject, let us first briefly identify at least some of the organizational sources that advocate it. You can begin with the majority of Christian denominations: Roman Catholic, Baptists, Methodist, Presbyterian, Assembly of God, Lutheran, Church Of God, Pentecostal Holiness, United Pentecostal Churches, Greek Orthodox, Mormon, Independents, and a multitude of others.

Also, in support of eternal torture, you can add a large host of well known religious leaders including names such as: John McArthur, David Jeremiah, John Hagee, Chuck Swindoll, James Kennedy, Tommy Bartlett, Jerry Falwell, Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Tim Lahaye, T.D. Jakes, Paul Crouch, Pat Robertson, Joyce Meyer, Billy Graham**, Don Wildmon, and countless others.

**** Billy Graham recently made some statements that, in effect, either modified or changed his long held view of torture. Since I know of no proof that he has renounced it and since he has a book out in which he supports it, we will leave it at that.**

Then you can add to this list: Non-Christian religions; ancient pagans; Egyptians, Babylonians, Muslims and even the man on the street who claims no religion.

My point in naming organizations and advocates of eternal torture is neither to impugn their Christianity (only God can do that) nor to add to or take from the subject. I am merely saying they believe it. In all fairness though, I think you would find that they would totally reject my Christian qualifications because I don't believe in a hell as a place for the eternal torture of the wicked.

Next, we will provide excerpts and quotes from sermons, books, etc., by those who have, over the years, advocated a torture chamber for the ungodly.

A. We will first quote from a book written by Mary K. Baxter, entitled: A Divine Revelation Of Hell. In this book, Ms. Baxter claims that she had a vision from the Lord, wherein he took her on a personal guided tour of hell. This is part of her report. *In March of 1976 while I was praying at home, I had a visit from the Lord Jesus Christ. I had been praying in the Spirit for days when all at once I felt the very presence of God. His power and his glory filled the house. A brilliant light illuminated the room where I was praying, and a sweet and wonderful feeling came over me. Lights flowed in billows, rolling and folding into one another and rolling over and out of each other. It was a spectacular sight! And then the voice of the Lord began to speak to me. My child, I will take you into hell by my Spirit, and I will show you many things which I want the world to know. I will appear to you many times; I will take your spirit out of your body and will actually take you into hell. Behold, my child, Jesus said, I am going to take you by my Spirit into hell so that you may be able to make a record of the reality of it, to tell the whole earth that hell is real. Instantly, my soul was taken out of my body. I went with Jesus up out of my room and into the sky. Soon we were high into the heavens. We began to go even higher into the sky, and now I could see the earth below. Protruding out of the earth and scattered about in many places were funnels spinning around to a center point and then turning back again. What are these? These are the gateways to hell, He said. We entered one of the funnels. A deep darkness descended on us, and with the darkness came a smell so horrible it took my breath away. Along the sides of the tunnel were living forms embedded in the walls. The forms moved and cried out. They screeched at us with the most awful cries. These are evil spirits ready to be spewed out on the earth when Satan gives the orders. Oh, yes, I had all my senses --- I could hear, smell, see, feel and even taste....Screams filled the air....The worst odor filled the air. It was the smell of decaying flesh. (Remember now, this is supposed to only be the departed souls of sinners while their flesh is in their respective graves, turned to dust). I could barely make out the form of something in front of me. I recoiled in shock when I realized that it was a large snake. I saw ugly snakes slithering about everywhere. Jesus said to me, we will soon enter the left leg of hell. At long last, the Lord Jesus and I were at the bottom of the tunnel. We stepped into hell. Groaning sounds and pitiful cries filled the air. The fear of hell could be tasted. Let me warn you --- don't go to that place. It is a horrid place of torments, excruciating pain and eternal sorrow. Your soul will always be alive. I was in spirit form, and my form was in the shape of myself. Brimstone was embedded in the side of the pit and glowed red like hot coals of fire. In the center of the pit was a lost soul who had died and gone to hell. Fire began at the bottom of the pit, swept upward and clothed the lost soul in flames. The skeleton of a woman with a dirty gray mist inside was talking to Jesus. In shock, I listened to her. Decayed flesh hung by shreds from her bones, and, as it burned, it fell off into the bottom of the pit. (Don't forget that, according to this theory, the flesh and bones are not in hell but in the grave). Where her eyes had once been were now only empty sockets. She had no hair.*

This is just a short excerpt from her book. The rest of it is a repetition of the same. I have quoted more from this book than I will from the rest, it was so bizarre. Unfortunately, her description and view will be repeated by the whole theology of the torture chamber theory. Gross! Despicable! Unscriptural!

B. The next quotes will come from Dr. John R. Rice, 1895 -1981. The quotes from him are taken

from a message he preached from Lk. 19-31. *Jesus was the greatest preacher on hell of all Bible preachers. Jesus was a "hell-fire preacher". The Bible does not call this a parable. This is not an illustration. If I could not believe what the Bible says about hell, I could not believe what it says about heaven, about God, about salvation. We dare not take away one word concerning the torments of a doomed soul in hell. The scriptures about hell are so definite that anyone who says hell is the grave is either an ignoramus or a deliberate deceiver. Hell is literally a place of torment. Though his body at that time was in the grave, it would not prevent his having all the senses or asking for a drop of water to cool his tongue. But the time is coming when that rich man will have his physical body in hell. God gives us a picture when the unsaved dead will come out of hell, get their resurrection bodies from the graves on earth, will stand before God for condemnation, then be cast forever into the lake of fire. The hell where men are now is a hell of lost souls where people are conscious and suffer while their bodies remain in the graves on earth. The hell into which these two men will be cast alive is a physical hell, the lake of fire. They will be both soul and body in hell.....Anyone who cannot believe in hell is not intelligent. Some people are more wicked than others so they deserve more punishment. Those who had greater opportunities and turned them down ought to be held more strictly accountable, and the Bible teaches that they will be. Hell will certainly be hotter for some people than for others* Dr. Rice was one of the strongest advocates of an eternal torture chamber in recent centuries. After choosing his scripture from Lk. 16:19-31, and preaching this message, he did not even attempt to explain the major portion of the lesson and how it fits into his theology. And he has the nerve to refer to his opponents as ignoramuses.

C. We will now provide you with quotes from a message preached by H. A. IRONSIDE, in 1943, at Moody Memorial Church, in Chicago, Ill. on the subject of hell. We will only provide excerpts of this message for you to get a glimpse of his views on hell. His message on the subject, like so many of them are, is taken from the story of the rich man and Lazarus, in the 16th chapter of Luke. (A very high percentage of the messages ever preached about hell as a place of torment is taken from this story. Never do you hear tell of an advocate of torment making an exhaustive study of the subject, using all of the instances of the use of hell in the Bible as well as passages of scripture which point in another direction altogether). Here are some comments from H.A. Ironside.

"I read from the 16th chapter of Luke. I am willing to admit that, in a certain sense it is a parable. There are a group of people today who tell us that this could not reveal unto us life after death because, they say, when people die, they become absolutely unconscious until the judgment day. These who call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses tell you that. Sometimes very well meaning but misguided people called Seventh-Day Adventists will tell you that. (What they always fail to say, when they are casting a condescending stone towards those who don't believe in torture for the wicked, is that they who do believe in torture for the wicked have plenty of spurious company on their side of the issue: Islam, Mormon, the drunk in the gutter and more). Here is one of Jehovah's witnesses. What is it he wants to tell me? Oh, I see, the word hell there should be hades. It does not mean hell at all. They tell us hades is simply the grave. For the unsaved man, hades refers to a place of suffering between death and resurrection. It refers here to the departed spirits of the lost. I do not know what torment there will be there. He is referring here, of course, to one between death and the resurrection when he will have a real body. He is referring to one out of the body, though he uses physical terms so we can understand it. Between death and resurrection this man is now suffering in hades.

H.A. Ironside was a famous preacher. He believed in and taught that a sinner will go to a place of literal fire and burn there until Christ comes back. Then he will be resurrected, given a physical body and judged and then sent back to his torment.

D. Our next quote comes from Billy Sunday. (Note: when Billy Sunday died, it was H.A. Ironside that preached his funeral). Billy Sunday statements are as follows: *Hell is necessary if there be wicked men and a righteous God. But if men persist in living in sin, then it is right and proper that there should be a hell in which they be confined. No man on God's earth can go to the Bible to find out what it teaches about eternal damnation and not stand up and preach that man will be eternally damned if he doesn't repent of his sins. The next time you listen to a sermon and that sermon says there is no hell, then that preacher is a liar. Perdition is a place of torment in the lake of fire. The second death is a place of eternal torment for the unsaved. Perdition is a PLACE in the lake of fire and brimstone forever.*

Death is a PLACE in the lake of fire and brimstone. (By the way, Billy Sunday took his comments from LK. 19:23).

E. Our next quote comes from R. A. Torrey, 1856 - 1928. Rev. Torrey states: *We saw last night and the night before the certainty that there is a hell and what an awful place hell is. We saw that hell is a place of extreme and unceasing bodily suffering; that it is a place of anguish because of haunting, tormenting memories and of unceasing remorse.*

F. Our next quote comes from Elbert Munsey, 1833 -- 1877. He says: *The existence of the atonement is evidence of a state of future punishment. Man's body is mortal. Man's soul is immortal. Sin produced the mortality of the body but cannot destroy the immortality of the soul. If there is no state of future punishment, the atonement is at once perceived to be a supererogation (something imposed upon God's government). Man is under infinite obligations to obey God. If man's obligation to obey God is infinite, the guilt of disobeying him is infinite. And if the guilt of disobeying him is infinite, the penalty, as a matter of right, is infinite. The penalty must be in proportion to the amount of guilt. (This is a lot of theological reasoning without any scriptural basis).*

G. Our next quote is from Jonathan Edwards, 1703 - 1758. You will often hear "hell - fire" preachers refer to Jonathan Edwards. They have immortalized one of his messages entitled: "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God". We are quoting from that message *There is nothing which keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell but the mere pleasure of God. They deserve to be cast into hell, so that divine justice never stands in the way; it makes no objection against God's using his power at any moment to destroy them. The reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment is not because God is not at present very angry with them, as he is with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell who there feel and bear the fierceness of his wrath. God has laid himself under no obligation, by any promise, to keep any natural man out of hell one moment. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment, for you are a burden to it. The God who holds you over the pit of hell much in the same way as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire abhors you and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath towards you burns like fire. He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire. It is, perhaps, impossible to conceive of words that carry in them greater manifestations of these three things, namely: contempt, hatred and fierceness of indignation. If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case, or showing you the least reward or favor, that instead of that, he will only tread you under foot. And though he will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading upon you, yet he will not regard that; but he will crush you under his feet without mercy. He will crush out your blood and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his garments so as to stain all his raiment. He will not only hate you, but he will have you in utmost contempt. No place shall be thought fit for you but under his feet, to be trodden down as the mire of the streets. And when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is. And when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty. There will be no end to this exquisite, horrible misery. How's that for belching forth fury and venom out of a so-called minister of the gospel's heart.*

H. Now a quote from Billy Graham. *The Bible teaches that there is a hell for a person who willingly and knowingly rejects Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. (He quotes from John Milton's Paradise Lost). A dungeon horrible on all sides round, As one great furnace, flamed; yet from that flames no light, but rather darkness visible served only to discover sights of woe, regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace and rest can never dwell, hope never comes that comes to all; but torture without end.*

I. Stan Jenkins, pastor of Wells Chapel Baptist Church, 9-3-06. *"Hell Is Real". From Lk., 16. If there is no hell, there is no heaven. Some believe that hell is eternal torment, and that is the Biblical truth. Hell is real and is torment.*

J. This is the final quote we are providing. There are many more, but time and space don't allow it. This last quote comes from Dr. Don Wildmon, of the American Family Association. This organization does a lot of research and publications on the corruption spreading everywhere like a

cancer. This is a good thing and I have told him so as well as provided some contributions. The following statements appeared in his monthly publication. *A fear of hell is like getting caught speeding. The fear of hell is a beginning point for a deeper walk with the Lord. Is there a hell? Is there a heaven? Can there be a heaven without a hell? If hell doesn't exist but heaven does, then Jesus was crazy. If there is a heaven there has to be a hell. If there is no hell, then the death of Jesus was unnecessary. Without hell, everyone is going to heaven. Without hell there is an absence of morality. If there isn't a hell, nothing matters.*

5. RANDOM THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION.

I let the above quotes speak for themselves. From the delusional statements of Baxter's book to the expressions of rabid anger by Jonathan Edwards, you have to wonder what motives people have in being so dogmatic and condescending about the existence of a place of eternal torture. I find it very troubling and also very evasive, that of all the preachers who have so dogmatically expressed their views about this torture, none of them that I have ever heard or read behind in over 50 years, has ever done anything near to an exhaustive study of the subject. Not even of the word hell itself, not to mention the simply overwhelming amount of scripture that certainly can be interpreted (and in my opinion should be) to oppose this torture idea. You would think that somewhere they would feel compelled to deal with more than just a very select few scriptures. It is our plan to deal with all of the scriptures on the subject of hell.

Another thing that I find very disconcerting is the usual condescending attitude and also the attempt to marginalize those of us who do not believe in torture. Such comments as: "are you a Jehovah's Witness"?, or, don't you believe the Bible?, or you are a cult, etc. Don't they realize that the terrorist Muslims believe as they do, as did those in Uganda who believed the same. What about the Mormons, pagan religions, and the drunk on the street. The idea of torture for your sins has some really unsavory company if you want to just throw accusations instead of intelligently discussing the entire gamut of the subject. And speaking of intelligence, those who said that you were either ignorant, crazy or without intelligence, or that Jesus was crazy if there was not a burning hell, really could stand a little psychological evaluation on their own level.

In 1984, 4 precious black children, so neatly dressed, lost their lives when their home burned down on them. I keep that picture to remind me to ask: would God do even worse to his enemies than the accidental fate that these poor children met?

Maybe an interesting way to end this message would be this. In the city of Tallinn, Estonia, in the old town, there is a restaurant that goes by the name of: "HELL HUNT". I was told by an Estonian that this meant: "GENTLE FOX". How about that for an interpretation of the word hell?