



Churches Of God Outreach Ministries
People working together to proclaim the Gospel

"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"

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Is HELL Real?

It's the butt of music hall jokes. Every day we send millions there ("go to...").

The devil, it is said, presides over hell.

And, said an editorial in Independent on Sunday - the source of our title:

"...it was paved over as a fact and buried as a question early this century".

Further, Britain's former Secretary of State for Education said we need to revive it - presumably to scare school bullies and other thugs into more peaceful ways!

by James McBride

And - perhaps surprisingly - some Anglican theologians now claim it is "a place of non-existence"! What is the Biblical truth?

A Fact of Death "Hell" certainly is no laughing matter. It has, however, been all but discarded in the mainstream churches as outmoded. Have you, for example, heard the vicar at a funeral service assert, however sadly, that "the dearly beloved departed" has "gone to hell"? Most unlikely! No - the Church, apart from some fundamentalists, generally keeps quiet about it. It is not a topic of discussion in polite religious circles.

But "hell" remains a fact of death. The image of the homed demon in red body-sock, with pitchfork, presiding over a fiery furnace (as hilariously portrayed by Rowan Atkinson!) does - however much it's laughed at - still haunt us to some degree. Is that how you think of hell? When you or a loved one had a close encounter with "the grim reaper" did you sense the licking flames, feel a little apprehensive?

The idea of a burning fiery hell is a powerful image, instilled in us from earliest memories. And it contributes to the awesome fear of death most of us have! Nor is the concept of a fiery eternity

limited to the Christian faith. It has its place in Islam - the wicked go there to be tormented "in perpetuity".

Gross Distortion

But what says the Bible? For Christians this has to be the source of our faith. Does *God's Word* support this widespread concept of hell? Does hell really exist? Is that where the wicked go at the moment of death? Are they forever burning to a crisp - yet never burning up? Do righteous mothers in heaven look down on the agonies of their wayward children in hell's torturing fires?

In fact, like most Christian teachings, the notion of "hell" is a gross distortion of what the Bible really teaches! There is indeed a "hell". But would you be surprised to learn that *everyone* goes there? That your deceased sainted aunt is there now? That Jesus spent time there - for three days and three nights? And didn't burn? That all the apostles are *still* there? And that the Devil and his demons are *not* there?

But to claim hell merely is "a state of mind" or a "state of non-existence" shows a woeful ignorance of fundamental Bible teaching on the nature of man, on the state of the dead, on the

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very purpose of human existence. And an awesome disregard for the *very real* “hell fire” that is the ultimate destiny of all who in the end refuse God’s gracious offer of living for ever through Jesus Christ. The widespread misconceptions about hell cast a loving and merciful God as some form of grotesque monster incapable of devising a humane punishment for evil doers!

Does God’s righteousness, His holiness, His justice require that He tortures in a flame - for endless ages? That He consigns the ignorant to endless agony -just because the missionary didn’t reach them to tell them about the one and only way to salvation, through Jesus Christ? And does God’s love for all mankind rule out what the Bible terms “eternal punishment”? The Bible’s teachings on these basic questions are clear! There is a place where all the dead go - the righteous and the wicked. In the English Bible it is called *hell* [Gk. *hades*]. Hades, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew sheol, is simply any place where the dead are buried or repose. It is a place of temporary non-existence, awaiting your resurrection to judgement: “it is given unto all men once to die, and, after that, the judgement.”

There is also a place where the wicked will ultimately be burnt up - destroyed - gone for ever. In the English Bible it, too, is called *hell* [Gk. *gehenna*]. The term *gehenna* - hell - uses the imagery of the Valley of Hinnom at Jerusalem. It was the city rubbish dump, a place of continual fires. The same imagery is seen in the expression “their worm dies not”. The decaying rubbish bred worms which consumed the rotting matter. The worms laid their eggs - thus perpetuating their life. There are no immortal worms!

Die before the return of Christ and you will go to hell - hades, the grave. Resist the claims of Jesus Christ and refuse to turn from sin and ultimately, after a resurrection, you reap the consequence of final destruction in hell-fire - *gehenna*.

If you want to understand the true Bible view of these concepts you are invited to write for the clear and concise - and free - booklet ***Lazarus and the Rich Man***. The surprising truth is both comforting - and challenging!

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