



## **Myths About Hell**

For most people, hell is simply one of a few four letter words, which they hear on a daily basis in the rage of rush hour traffic or the heated scenes of a Hollywood movie. To others though, the word hell brings back vivid childhood imaginations of an eternal roasting pit for humans which they heard about from Sunday school or from a fiery televangelist. No matter which category of people you fall into, it seems as though many, if not all of us would be better off if the concept of hell just didn't exist at all. In fact some, in an attempt to divest their minds of such a fearful idea, make the choice to disbelieve in the idea of hell altogether, which often leads to the next step of choosing to disbelieve in a God who would create such a place.

So what do we do with this terrifying idea of hell? Do we throw it and God out altogether? Do we try to ignore it and its implications about who God is? Do we hope against all hope that our Sunday school teachers were somehow mistaken? In this Bible tract, we will choose another option which is to simply study what the Bible really has to say about hell, and in so doing you'll find that the truth will set you free from the various myths about this fearful teaching.

Interestingly, the Bible gives us explicit information on when hell would begin and where it would be located. As you might have guessed, misconceptions abound on these two points. In Matthew 13:49 Jesus speaks plainly saying, "So shall it be at the end of this world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."\* According to this text and many others like it,(1) the flames of hell will not exist until the end of the world. That's right! Your loved ones are not being burned alive as you read this tract.

Next, we see that the apostle Peter gives us clear information on where hell will be located. Speaking of the end of the world he says, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the

heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”(2) The prophet Zephaniah also speaks of, “the whole land,” being “devoured by the fire of His jealousy.”(3) Here we see that hell is not some giant chasm of flames in the center of the earth; rather, it will be located right here on earth at the end of the world devouring “the whole land.”

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about hell can be found in the famous text John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Here Jesus clearly states that it is the believers who are the ones that live eternally, not the wicked. What!? The wicked don’t live eternally writhing in flames? Correct!

The wicked are to burn only until there is nothing left to burn. Malachi brings this point out well: “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,”(4) In fact, just so we could be sure that he was speaking literally about the utter destruction of the wicked he goes on to say, “‘You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,’ says the Lord of hosts.”(4) Also, not only will the wicked be destroyed completely in the flames of hell but so will Satan and his wicked angels according to Matt. 25:41 and Rev. 20:10. Contrary to popular belief, God plans to destroy the forces of darkness, not put them in charge of an eternal fire pit in the center of the earth!

But some might say that there are other texts like Rev. 14:11 and 20:10 which point out that the wicked burn eternally. Well, the Bible also says that the prophet Samuel would abide before the Lord in the sanctuary forever,(5) and that the bars of the earth closed about Jonah forever(6) when he was thrown into the sea. Now it is clear from scripture itself that neither of these events lasted forever. What we see here are two examples of the Bible using the term, “forever” to mean a time of indefinite duration where the beginning and ending of that time depend on the nature of the person, circumstance, or thing to which it is applied. An example in our day which is similar is when a man and woman commit to their marriage vow forever. When they do so, the term “forever” simply means as “long as they live.” So how do we know how long “forever” is for those burning in hell? Simple: other passages on the topic explain that “forever” in this instance means until the wicked are utterly consumed. Context is key!

In light of this simple Bible study, one might ask, “How is it that these myths about hell could even exist?” The truth is that this false teaching has permeated Christianity not just because it is a good scare tactic for church attendance, but because our adversary the devil loves to teach lies about God. In Revelation 12:9 Satan is described as one who “deceives the whole world.” He deceives them about what? About God and His character. Yes, there are true and false teachings about God in this world. Truth is not a choice, as many would like to believe. Truth is a reality waiting to be discovered in the pages of Scripture. And the reality is that yes, “our God is a consuming fire,”(7) to sin and sinners. But the Bible teaches that, rather than the wicked, it is the saint, “who walks righteously and speaks uprightly,” who will “dwell with the devouring fire” and “everlasting burnings.”(8)

That’s right! According to Matthew 25:31-46, all humanity will one day encounter God, in whose presence “the hills melt, and the earth burns,”(9) But only those who have repented of their sins and sought after God will be able to be protected in His fiery presence where they will dwell through all eternity. The wicked, on the other hand, will cease to exist and “be as though they had never been,”(10) after they are “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”(11)

Friends, “God is love,”(12) a love which is symbolized by fire. Solomon said God’s “love... hath a most vehement flame.”(13) As fire hardens clay but melts ice, so His fiery love will comfort the saint but consume the sinner. Today you have the choice to harden your heart toward God, or let His flames melt

it. Whichever route we choose determines our eternal destiny, but God remains the same. Seek Him today, and His love will warm your heart through all eternity!

1) Examples: Matt. 25:31-41; 2 Pet. 3:3-7, 12

2) 2 Pet. 3:10

3) Zeph. 1:18

4) Mal. 4:1, 3

5) 1 Sam. 1:22

6) Jonah 2:6

7) Heb. 12:29

8) Isa. 33:14, 15

9) Nah. 1:5

10) Obadiah 1:16

11) 2 Thess. 1:9

12) 1 Jn. 4:8

13) Song of Solomon 8:6 KJV