

THE BIBLE AND HELL

Sharing

1. Have you grown up hearing about hell as a place of torment where people will burn forever and ever?
 - Explain: _____
2. Do you know someone who believes that God is a cruel tyrant who tortures people forever in hell?
 - Discuss why some believe this: _____
3. Do you think that the threat of hell is an incentive to refrain from evil? ____ Yes ____ No
 - Explain: _____

Studying

4. The Word of God has a lot to say about the important subject of hell. There are four important facts to know at the beginning of this lesson: 1) Satan is an evil destroyer. 2) All sin and suffering is Satan's fault. 3) God will not burn people in a fire forever and ever. 4) God's character is the very opposite of Satan's character.
 - Read 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not willing that _____ should perish, but that _____ should come to repentance. . . ." Does this sound like God wants to burn people forever in a fire?
 - Either Satan is a liar or God is a liar. Which is most likely to be the liar? Answer: _____
5. At no place in the original Old Testament Hebrew language or the original New Testament Greek language is there the word 'hell.' When the translators of the King James Bible came upon the Hebrew word, 'sheol,' and the Greek words, "hades," 'ghenna,' and 'tartarus' they translated it using a familiar English word, 'hell.' This mistranslation has led casual readers of the Bible to believe in the medieval, pagan concept of eternal torture by hell fire for those who 'miss' paradise.
6. The word 'hell' is used in the English King James Version of the Bible 54 times. In only 12 of those places, using the word 'ghenna' does it mean a place of burning. Otherwise, the words mean the grave or a place of darkness.
 - Sin is a problem. We can liken sin to cancer. When Adam and Eve sinned, the cancer of sin was passed to their posterity. At some point, God must cut the cancer of sin from the universe so that, in His love, the saints will eternally be secure. Destroying sin, Satan and his evil angels is the *only* way to rid the world of pain, suffering, evil and death.
7. A loving God would never torment people in a fire—burning and screaming—for millions and millions of years.
 - The concept of a soul within us that cannot die first became a 'Christian' doctrine at the end of the second century AD. Hell had been taught in Greek philosophy long before the time of Jesus, with Plato (427-347 BC) as the important leader in this thinking.
 - The teaching of an everlasting place of punishment for the wicked is the natural consequence of a belief in an immortal soul. By the year AD 187, it was believed that life, once we have it, is compulsory; there is no end to it, either now or in a world to come. We have no choice as to its continuance, even if we were to commit suicide to end it.

- It was Athenagorus, (133-198) a Greek philosopher, who later became a Christian, who introduced Plato's idea of an immortal soul into Christianity. This paved the way for the logical introduction of eternal torment for immortal, but sinful, souls.
 - This was a hundred years after the time of the apostles, and came straight from popular paganism. The apostles, as did Jesus Christ, taught that death was a sleep, to be followed by resurrection. The early church leaders – Clement, Ignatius, Hermas, Polycarp, and others who also believed that death is a sleep, taught that the wicked are destroyed forever by fire – their punishment was to be annihilation. These leaders did not teach of an immortal soul to be tortured by fire in hell for eternity.
 - About AD 240 Tertullian of Carthage took up the teaching of an immortal soul. It was he who taught that the endless torment of the immortal soul of the wicked was parallel to the eternal blessedness of the saved, with no sleep of death after this life.
 - Tertullian's teaching came at a time when many Christians were being burned for their faith and it was natural for them to accept that their persecutors would, at death, be consigned to an ever-burning hell for the persecution they had inflicted on others while they went straight to eternal bliss. This was the origin of the belief that many Christians hold today.
 - Eventually, under the influence of Augustine, AD 430, the concept of immortality of the soul (endless consciousness) became an accepted doctrine of the Catholic Church. Augustine taught that all souls were "eternally deathless" and that consequently, upon death, the lost would experience endless fires of punishment while the saved would experience endless paradise.
8. The belief that man has an immortal soul is contrary to all Biblical teaching. God alone is immortal. However, when Jesus comes and the dead are raised, the righteous will then receive immortality (and the wicked will be destroyed by fire.)
- Read 1 Timothy 6:16 "Who only hath _____, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting."
 - Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 "I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be _____ in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with _____. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."
9. Hell is not going on right now. The destruction of the wicked will take place at the end of the world following judgment of all people. God would not destroy sinners without each person's case being tried fairly by God. After a fair judgment, at the end of the world, sinners will be destroyed.
- Read 2 Peter 3:7 "But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are _____ for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."
 - Read 2 Peter 2:9 "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the _____ of _____ to be punished."
 - Read Matthew 13:40-42 "So shall it be in the _____ of this _____. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of _____."
 - Read Job 21:30 "That the wicked are _____ to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath."

10. All people, both sinners and righteous who have died, are now sleeping in their graves, awaiting the voice of God to resurrect them.
 - Read John 5:28,29 “The hour is coming in which all that are in the _____ shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of _____; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of _____. So, we learn that the dead, both good and bad, are in the grave awaiting the voice of God in the resurrection.
11. God is in charge of hell fire, not the devil as many people assume. It is God who will ignite the fire of ‘hell’ at the end of the world. And the primary purpose of the cleansing fire is to rid the universe of Satan and his evil angels. Satan, sin and all evil will be forever destroyed.
 - Read Revelation 20:10 “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire.”
 - Read Revelation 20:13,14 “And the sea gave up the _____ which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And _____ and _____ were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”
 - Read Matthew 25:41 “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the _____ and his _____.” In order to understand what the Bible means by everlasting fire, we let the Bible explain itself. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with everlasting (or eternal) fire Jude 7. (See 2 Peter 2:6).
 - Read Revelation 14:11 “And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and _____. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.” Note that it is the smoke that ascends which is another way of saying that sinners will not live again after they are destroyed.
12. This cleansing fire will not burn forever but will completely consume the devil, his angels and wicked people. When they are consumed the fire will go out and nothing will be left but stubble and ashes.
 - Read Ezekiel 28:18,19 “I will bring thee to _____ upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. . . Never shalt thou be any more.”
 - Read Psalm 37:10,20 “The enemies of the Lord...shall consume; into _____ shall they consume away.”
 - Read Malachi 4:1 “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be _____: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither _____ nor _____ branch.”
13. We can be assured that sin will never again arise—after the cleansing fire, the universe will be completely free of all evil.
 - Read Nahum 1:9 “He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the _____ time.”
14. Cleansing the earth of all evil will be a very difficult, emotional act of our loving God.
 - Read Isaiah 28:21 “For the LORD shall rise up...he shall be wroth...that he may do his work, his _____ work; and bring to pass his act, his _____ act.”
 - Finally destroying Satan, his angels and all sin and sinners is a very strange act because our loving God long for every sinner to repent and be saved. He sent His Son to pay the price for sin, so that could be redeemed. All we have to do is accept His sacrifice on the cross and follow Him.
 - Read Jeremiah 31:3 “. . . I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I _____ thee.”

15. God has plans for our earth after the eradication of sin by a cleansing fire

- Read 2 Peter 3:13 “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a _____ heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” NIV
- Read Isaiah 65:17 “Behold, I will create new _____ and a new _____. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”
- Read Revelation 21:1-4 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed _____, and there was no longer any _____. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live _____ them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every _____ from their eyes. There will be no more _____ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed _____.”

16. Some find the story of ‘The Rich Man and Lazarus’ that Jesus told in Luke 16:19-31 troubling. Many facts in the story make it clear that it is an illustrative parable to get a point across to His listening audience. Please read Luke 16:19-31 and then consider the following points:

- There was a common story in Jesus’ time describing death as either going to hell and writhing in continuous flames or as fleeing to the security of Abraham’s bosom. Jesus used this popular story to illustrate powerful lessons.
- The Jews believed riches were a sign of God’s favor and poverty as a sign of His displeasure. In the story, the rich man who the Jews thought was blessed of God ends up in hell and the poor man in heaven. Jesus reversed the expected outcome.
- Jesus used the story to teach that there is no second chance after death.
- Jesus pointed out that if the Pharisees rejected the clear teachings of God’s word regarding salvation, they would also reject such a mighty, supernatural spectacular miracle as one rising from the dead.
- A short time later, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:11-14, 43,44). As a result the Jews wanted to kill both Lazarus and Jesus (John 5:39).
- When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jews did not believe. His words in Luke 16:31 were therefore prophetic.

Applying this lesson

17. Jesus is the only way to eternal life and the only escape from eternal destruction.

- This lesson clearly shows that the wicked will be totally annihilated by fire at the end of the world.
- ____ A check mark at left indicates that I understand that salvation is a choice and that I may be part of those who are saved unto everlasting life.

18. God is loving and good. It is not His desire to destroy the wicked but it is a necessity to rid the universe of sin.

- I have learned that destroying Satan, his angels and all sinners at the end of the world is called God’s strange act.
- ____ A check mark at left indicates that I have a better understanding of God’s character and His loving kindness and longsuffering towards sinful man.

19. The Biblical evidence is clear that 'hell' will occur on this earth when God, Himself, decrees at the end of the world. After the fire had finished its cleansing work, the earth will be made anew by God.
- After the fire goes out, I understand that God will create a perfect new earth where sin will never rise again, and give it to His people.
 - _____A check mark at left indicates that I plan to follow Jesus Christ and live in the new earth.
20. Jesus told many parables to illustrate profound truths.
- The parable of the rich man and Lazarus was a story that should not be taken literally.
 - _____A check mark at left indicates that I have read and understand the meaning of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16:19-31.
21. The doctrine of an ever-burning hell came into the Christian church in medieval times. Some of the early church leaders, who converted to Christianity from paganism, retained their belief in Plato's theories of an immortal soul.
- I have read #7 on pages 1 and 2 of this lesson.
 - _____A check mark at left indicates that I understand the origin of the pagan doctrine of immortality of the soul and an ever-burning hell and how it came to be part of medieval church doctrine. I therefore reject this doctrine as inconsistent with the Word of God.