

Introduction

Our Bible makes it plain that a time of final judgment will come when men and angels will receive what they deserve. The good news of the Gospel is that mankind has a way of escape. That a way of escape had to be provided is proof that, without that way, we would not avoid the guilty verdict. In this paper we will consider what the fate of the lost is now, and what it will be in eternity. We will define the two locations that are set aside for the unrighteous, referred to as Hell and the Lake of Fire. The study of these two would be incomplete without understanding the event that leads from one to the other, that being the Day of Judgment or the Great White Throne Judgment, as John calls it in Revelation 20. Our study will be organized by first considering what each of these terms mean and the purpose of each, then the conditions under which each are arrived at, followed naturally by a look at the defendants or prisoners of each. Lastly, we will look at some of the false views of each, either by ignorance or heresy.

Purpose

In both the Old and New Testaments we find the word "hell" mentioned from time to time. In the old the Hebrew word Sheol is usually translated as either hell or grave, depending on usage, and refers to the location of dead persons, either physically or spiritually. It was then the destination of all who died and it was known to have two compartments. The first compartment, called "Abraham's bosom" in Luke 16:22, was for the righteous dead as they waited for Christ to defeat death and become the first fruits of them that slept (I Cor. 15:20). That compartment, also called paradise (Lk. 23:43) is most likely in the presence of God since the ascension of Christ (Eph. 4:8-10).

The second compartment of hell is a place of continual torment (Lk. 16:24) and flame. It will not yield up its dead until the Day of Judgment (Rev. 20:13) when they are resurrected into the presence of the Lord.

In the New Testament this place is referred to by the Greek word "Hades" which means the underworld. The meaning is the same as the spiritual context of Sheol. Today it is the destination of the unsaved (Heb. 9:27) where they are held until the Day of Judgment (2 Pet. 2:9). Those held in hell for judgment are waiting for that judgment day, which is predicted throughout scripture but nowhere more vividly than by Christ himself in John 5:29 where He says that the evil dead will come to the resurrection of damnation. In Matt. 10:15 he calls it simply the Day of Judgment. We finally catch a glimpse of it in Rev. 20:11 and see that a Great White Throne appears where all of the unrighteous dead will be judged (Rev. 20:12-15).

Here is where the Lake of Fire figures prominently and at last we understand what the eternal state of all evil will be. Rev. 20:10 cannot be misunderstood. The Lake of Fire is an eternal punishment. It was prepared especially for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41) and it is what the Lord was speaking of when He used the term Gehenna in Matt. 23:15 & 33. Although, it is translated "hell" it is the place where the fire is never quenched and the worm doesn't die (Mk. 9:43,44). The only fire that is never quenched is the Lake of Fire, into which hell itself is cast.

Conditions

Our picture of hell in Scripture is that, it is downward (Num. 16:30, Matt.11: 23) and it is a place of torment (Lk. 16:24). In the account of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16 it is full of flame continually. Yet the recognizable person is not burned up nor do they forget their lives.

When the unrighteous dead are resurrected to stand before the Great White Throne they will have full knowledge of their thoughts and actions in life from which to offer defense for their misdeeds, but they will find no defense. The shame and bitter regret will be worse for some than for others as we see by the account of those who heard the Gospel of Christ and rejected it in Matt. 11: 20-24 where Christ Himself predicts a greater measure of woe on the cities that rejected the Savior than on those that were terribly wicked.

Yet all will wind up in the eternal torment of the Lake of Fire, worse than hell by its eternal measure and by the fact that Christ will be close at hand but totally beyond reach (Rev. 14:10,11). After a thousand years of torment the beast and false prophet are still burning (Rev. 20:10).

Inhabitants

The original denizens of Sheol/Hades were all who died, “The congregation of the dead” (Prov. 21:16) with the righteous in Abraham’s bosom (Lk. 16:22) and the sinful in torment (Lk. 16:24). When Christ led captivity captive (Eph. 4:8) only the torments remained, reserved unto judgment (2 Pet. 2:4).

All of these dead, as well as those unrighteous remaining at end of the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 20:5,12) will stand at the throne in the vain hope that their names might found in the book of life, but none having any reason to offer.

So, the Lake of fire, made for Satan and the fallen angels (Matt. 25:41) has become the final habitation of the Anti-Christ and False Prophet (Rev. 19:20), the devil and his angels (Rev. 20:10) and finally all unbelievers (Rev. 21:8). It is called the second death.

False Views

In the time of Christ, the Sadducees made a doctrine out of the false view that there is no resurrection (Matt. 22:23) and therefore that the grave is the only Sheol. I have met with many opinions and my own understanding in the first few years that I was a Christian was that hell is an eternal place and that it was made for sinners and only sinners have ever been there. I’m sure that many people, both inside and outside of the church, misunderstand or are ignorant of the complexity of the reality.

The Universalists have created many fictional accounts of what will happen on the Day of Judgment. They teach that the Lamb's book will have the names of all humanity, or at least most, written in it. Some Universalists go so far as to say that, though the beast and the false prophet will spend some hard time in the lake of fire, even Satan and his minions will somehow be redeemed in the end.

Conclusion

The Bible is adamant about the final state of all those who do not believe on the Son of God. The only ones written in the Lamb's book are those who have been born into newness of life and been cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12: 10-11). Knowing the torment that exists today, and understanding the finality of the judgment at the Great White Throne, and the revelation of the eternal separation into the unquenchable Lake of Fire, what shall we say is our duty to our fellow men in this generation? "Go ye Therefore..."

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