What Does the Bible Say About Hell (New Testament)

Introduction

1. Last week we looked at what the Old Testament says about Hell:
   a. As we'll see today, the concept of Hell isn't quite as well defined in the OT as it is in the NT, but it still presents a consistent picture to what we'll see today
   b. The primary word used in the OT is Sheol:
      1) Sometimes it's used to simply refer to the realm of the dead and where everyone goes after this earthly life
      2) However, there is a more restricted sense to the word which refers to a specific place of darkness, gloom, and despair for the unsaved

   c. While the OT doesn't refer to it specifically, Jesus appeared to confirm the common Jewish belief that Sheol consisted of two different places, one for the unsaved and another for the saved:
      1) He referred to the rich man as being in "Hades" which was the Greek equivalent of the dark, gloomy, despair filled part of Sheol
      2) He referred to Lazarus being in Abraham's bosom, which was likely where the Old Testament saints went when they died and the Bible says they were "gathered to their people/fathers"

   d. Lastly, we saw that the Old Testament saints had hope and believed that God would not abandon them to Sheol or leave them there, but would one day resurrected them to everlasting life, but the unsaved to everlasting judgment and contempt (Daniel 12:1-2)

2. Today, we're going to look at what the New Testament says about Hell:
   a. We'll begin by looking at the four different Greek words and phrases used
   b. We'll examine the two different places to which they refer
   c. And then we'll look at two different questions:
      1) Do the unsaved suffer in the Lake of Fire for all eternity?
      2) Is God just in condemning someone to an eternity of suffering?

A. The New Testament concept of Hell revolves around four different Greek words and phrases

1. Hades (used 10 times):
   a. In Greek mythology and thought Hades was the realm of the dead, the place where everyone went, both the upright and the wicked
   b. It's the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word Sheol which is why the LXX translates Sheol as Hades

c. In all but one of the NT instances, it's used in the broader sense to refer to death, the grave, or the realm of the dead, <u>but it's never used regarding the righteous</u>
d. However, in one instance it's used in a more restrictive sense to refer specifically to the place where the wicked go to suffer:
    1) Jesus used it this way when He described the rich man being in Hades (READ Luke 16:23-31)
    2) There Jesus described it as a place of "**fire**" and "**torment**" where the rich man could find no relief from his suffering

2. Gehenna (used 12 times):
    a. The word gehenna is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word ge-hinnom meaning "**Valley of Hinnom**" which was a valley south of Jerusalem where Isreal sacrificed their children to the Canaanite God Molech in what the OT refers to as "**passing them through the fire**"
    b. It's often repeated in commentaries that in Jesus's day it was the place of a perpetually burning trash heap, but there's no historical or archeological evidence for this and the earliest mention is from the 13th century
    c. This is the word normally translated as "**Hell**" in our English Bibles
    d. Jesus referred to it as both the consequence of "**guilt**" and a "**sentence**" for sin (READ Matthew 5:22; 23:33), and described it as a place to which those who do not fear God are "**cast**" (READ Luke 12:5)
    e. It's associated with fire on at least five occasions, even "**unquenchable fire**" (READ Mark 9:43)

3. Tartarus (used 1 time):
    a. In Greek mythology, Tartarus was a pit of tremendous torment and was even lower than Hades; in essence it was a place for the worst of the worst
    b. This word is used only once in the NT and translated as "**Hell**" or "**pit**"
    c. Peter uses it in 2 Peter 2:4 as a reference to where God sent the rebellious angels who sinned prior to the Flood (Genesis 6)

4. Lake of Fire:
    a. The phrase "**Lake of Fire**" is used five times in the Bible, all in the book of Revelation (READ 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15)
    b. Later in Revelation 21:8 (READ) it's referred to as the "**lake which burns with fire and brimstone**"
    c. Jesus alluded to the Lake of Fire multiple times:
        1) "**the outer darkness**" opposite the Kingdom of God and a "**furnace of fire**" (READ Matthew 13:41-42, 49-50)
        2) An "**eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels"** where there will be "**weeping and gnashing of teeth**" (Matthew 18:8; 25:41)

d. According to Revelation 19-20, the LOF is the final and eternal destiny for the end-times Beast and his prophet, the Devil and his angels, Death, Hades, and all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life

B. While these four terms might appear to be referring to four different places, they are often used interchangeably as synonyms and actually describe <u>two different places</u>

1. The first is a <u>temporary</u> or <u>intermediary</u> place of suffering for the unsaved:
   a. Many Evangelical's refer to this as "Hell", but I believe it's more appropriate to refer to it as "Hades":
      1) The word translated "Hell" in the NT is Gehenna and its usage and description seem to suggest it's the same as the Lake of Fire
      2) Hades in the NT is the more frequent word used to refer to the place where the unsaved go temporarily after death

   b. That Hades is a temporary place of suffering is found in multiple passages:
      1) In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus described the rich man suffering in Hades (the OT equivalent of Sheol), and Daniel 12:1-2 says a time will come when those in Sheol will be raised up to judgment and contempt or eternal life
      2) Revelation 20:13-14 (READ) reveals Hades will give up its dead before they are judged and case into the Lake of Fire
      3) Jesus described something similar in John 5:25-29 (READ):
         a) The "**dead**" and "**all who are in the tombs**" simply refers to those who have died, both the saved and unsaved
         b) Those who "**did good deeds**" are the saved who are described elsewhere as being in Abraham's bosom (OT) or "**asleep in Christ**" (NT believers), and they will be resurrected to life
         c) Those who "**committed the evil deeds**" are the unsaved who are currently in Hades, and they will be raised to a "**resurrection of judgment**"

      4) Finally, Peter and Jude describe something similar when it comes to the rebellious angels God imprisoned in Tartarus:
         a) 2 Peter 2:4 (NET): "**For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but threw them into hell (lit. Tartarus) and locked them up in chains in utter darkness, <u>to be kept until the judgment</u>**"
         b) Jude 1:6 says of these same angels that God "**has kept [them] in eternal bonds under darkness <u>for the judgment of the great day</u>**."

   c. So, Hades is a temporary place of torment and suffering where the unsaved go when they die

2. The second place of suffering for the unsaved is PERMANENT and ETERNAL:

a. Many simply refer to this as Hell, but more specifically the Bible calls it the "Lake of Fire":
b. As we noted earlier, this is the final, ultimate, and eternal destination for the unsaved (READ Revelation 20:14-15)

3. So, to summarize, when the unsaved die, they go to Hades temporarily until they are resurrected to face judgment and are ultimately cast into the Lake of Fire

C. This raises two questions

1. The first question is, Do the unsaved suffer for all eternity in the Lake of Fire?
   a. This debate has been rekindled as of late due to Kirk Cameron's recent videos regarding his change of beliefs in regard to Hell
   b. There are four views that have been debated since the early Church Fathers:
      1) **Eternal Conscious Torment**: this is the traditional view which teaches that the unsaved will experience conscience torment for all eternity
      2) **Annihilationism**: teaches that the unsaved only suffer temporarily (in Hades) but are ultimately annihilated (destroyed) in the Lake of Fire
      3) **Universalism**: teaches that everyone is ultimately saved (e.g. Rob Bell, "Love Wins")
      4) **Purgatorial View**: the Catholic view which teaches that some go to Purgatory to undergo a process of cleaning and holiness in order to enter heaven

   c. I'll only address the first two views because the remaining two have zero support in the Scriptures:
      1) Eternal Conscious Torment:
         a) This is the most common and traditional view
         b) It teaches that the soul was created by God as immortal and therefore is either raised up to eternal life with Christ or raised up eternal judgment and torment
         c) The Scriptural support in favor of this are the verses that use words like "**eternal**" and "**forever**":
            - Matthew 25:46: "**These will go away into <u>eternal</u> punishment, but the righteous into <u>eternal</u> life**"—if eternal life is forever, then eternal punishment must also be forever since the same word "**eternal**" is used for both
            - Mark 9:43: Jesus quoted Isaiah 66:24 describing a place where "**their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched**."
            - Revelation 14:11: "**And the smoke of their torment goes up <u>forever and ever</u>; they have <u>no rest day and night</u>**…"
            - Revelation 20:10, 14-15 say the Devil, beast, false prophet and those not found in the Book of Life will be "**tormented <u>day and night forever and ever</u>**"

2) Annihilationism:
    a) This view teaches that while the unsaved suffer temporarily in Hades, God will ultimately annihilate or destroy their soul when He casts them into the Lake of Fire
    b) They focus on verses that use words like "**destroy**" and "**destruction**":
        - Matthew 10:28: "**Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is <u>able to destroy both the soul and body in hell</u>**"
        - 2 Thessalonians 1:9: "**These will pay the penalty of <u>eternal destruction</u> away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power**"
        - Philippians 3:19: "**…whose end is <u>destruction</u>…**"

    c) This view is also called Conditional Immortality:
        - Unlike ECT proponents, they do not believe the soul is immortal by nature (e.g. God didn't create it to live forever)
        - Rather, they claim immortality is something God grants upon resurrection, but only to the saved
        - I personally find this highly inconsistent: they claim the soul is not immortal, but they also claim God destroys the soul; it can't be both

d. I find the ECT view to be the most consistent with the Scriptures:
    1) It's hard to ignore the face value reading of the passages describing the Lake of Fire as a place of everlasting torment
    2) The alternate interpretations of these verses given by proponents of Annihilationism seem strained, and even contradictory (like why God would have to destroy a soul if it's not immortal to begin with)
    3) This is not to say that annihilationism is heresy, and there are both early Church Fathers and modern Evangelical scholars who held/hold to it

2. The second question is, Is God just in condemning the unsaved to an eternity of suffering?
    a. The question isn't whether God is just in condemning sinners—He obviously is—but whether the penalty of an eternity of suffering in the LOF fits the crime
        1) There's a Latin principle behind our laws, the Principle of Lex Talionis, which dictates that the punishment for a crime should match the seriousness of the crime; the OT principle of an eye for an eye
        2) Many annihilationists argue that human sin, no matter how bad, lasts only decades, so a penalty that lasts for all eternity would be unjust

b. There are Scriptural arguments to demonstrate that eternal suffering is just, but probably the most convincing is that the unsaved in the Lake of Fire will not be experiencing remorse but rather continuing to resent God and rage against him:
    1) There were at least six times when Jesus described those in Hell or the Lake of Fire as "**weeping**" and "**gnashing their teeth**" (Matthew 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28)
        a) This is often interpreted merely as intense suffering, and while that is conveyed in the word "**weeping**" it's not what's meant by gnashing of teeth
        b) Throughout the OT, gnashing of teeth referred to clenching the jaw and griding the teeth as an expression of intense anger, resentment, rage, and even violence against one's enemies (Job 16:9; Psalm 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lamentations 2:16)
        c) We even see this in the NT when those who stoned Stephen to death gnashed their teeth at him (Acts 7:54): "**Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him**."

    2) Those in the Lake of Fire will be gnashing their teeth because they will still be enraged against God, so their sin didn't stop with their death; rather, they will continue to sin throughout all of eternity
    3) This makes the punishment of eternal suffering just; since their sin is eternal, so will their punishment be

D. Takeaways (same as last week)

1. The first takeaway is that our existence does not end with physical, earthly death:
    a. The Bible makes it clear, in both the OT and NT, that all men die and ultimately go one of two places
    b. For the unsaved, it's a place of doom, gloom, distress, and suffering; the OT calls it Sheol and the NT calls it Hades
    c. For the saved, it's a place of peace and rest; for OT saints, Jesus called it Abraham's bosom; for us, it's to be present with the Lord in Heaven

2. So, the second takeaway is, there's hope and it's found in Jesus Christ
    a. The Lake of Fire doesn't have to be anyone's ultimate destiny
    b. While it's something we all deserve because of our sin and rebellion, God provided a way through the death, burial and resurrection of His Son, Jesus
    c. By God's grace and through faith in Jesus, God forgives our sins, redeems us from the power of death, the grave, and Hell, and raises us up to everlasting life