

The Nature of Hell

**When was the last time hell
was taught at BRGH?**

Why study hell now?

Reason 1

- More and more people don't believe in hell
 - 2003: 71% believed in hell
 - 2025: 55% believe in hell

Reason 2

- Unbiblical ideas about hell have crept into the church
 - Universalism: Everyone will eventually be saved
 - Annihilationism: The unsaved will cease to exist

Two preliminary statements

The two statements

- **Statement #1: Hell is real**

- The Lord believes that hell exists and teaches it (e.g. Mark 9:47-48; Luke 12:5)
- Since He is God and God cannot lie, hell *must* be real

- **Statement #2: Hell is terrible**

- The Lord also teaches us that hell is a terrible place (e.g. Matthew 25:41)

The fact that *the most loving
Person in the universe* is teaching
us these things should make us
sit up and pay attention!

What is hell?

A language problem

- “Hell”: An English word with Germanic roots
- Problem: The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, and *neither Hebrew nor Greek is Germanic*
- Implication: “Hell” may not always be the right/best word to use in Bible translation work
- So, what do translators do when they think “hell” is not the right/best word to use?
- They transliterate (instead of translate)

Transliteration vs. translation (1/2)

- ᾍδης (Greek); occurs 11x
- ᾍδης (Greek) → hades (transliteration)
- ᾍδης (Greek) → hell (translation; e.g. KJV)
- Question: Is “hell” the right word to use to translate hades?
- The answer depends on when the question is asked

Transliteration vs. translation (2/2)

Time	Translation	Occurrences
17th century	KJV	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Hades”: 0x (0% transliteration)• “Hell”: 10x; “grave”: 1x (100% translation)
20th century	NKJV	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Hades”: 11x (100% transliteration)

**As you can see, “hell” is
a problematic word**

Hell: A working definition

- How do we study “hell” in the face of said language problem?
- We first need a working definition for the word “hell”
 - “Hell”: the final destination for unbelievers
- The next step is to look at the final things in the Bible—because “hell” is one of the final things
 - The final resurrection & the final judgment (Revelation 20)
- To better understand the final things, we need to understand one of the “first” things: “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6)

The 2 resurrections: a brief intro

- Everyone will one day be resurrected (Acts 24:15)
- There will be 2 resurrections (John 5:29)
 - The “resurrection of life”
 - The “resurrection of condemnation”
- Both resurrections are mentioned in Revelation 20
 - Revelation 20:4-6
 - Revelation 20:11-15

Revelation 20:4 (NKJV)

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:5-6 (NKJV)

5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is **the first resurrection**. 6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in **the first resurrection**. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

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The “first resurrection”

- The “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6) = the “resurrection of life” (John 5:29)
- “First”: It’ll happen *before* the (final) resurrection (Rev. 20:5)
- When: At the *start* of the Lord’s 1,000-year reign (vv. 4-6)
- The resurrected will be “the just” (Acts 24:15), “those who have done good” (John 5:29)
- “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power...” (Rev. 20:6)

Revelation 20:11-12 (NKJV)

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. **12** And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Revelation 20:13-15 (NKJV)

13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. **14** Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. **15** And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

The (final) resurrection ^(1/2)

- The (final) resurrection (Rev. 20:11-15)
 - The word “resurrection” is absent; but we know that there will be one. Why?
 - Because “the *rest* of the dead [will] live again” (v. 5)
- When: *After* the Lord’s 1,000-year reign (v. 5; cf. v. 7)
- Who are “the *rest* of the dead” (v. 5)?

The (final) resurrection (2/2)

- They are those whose names are “not found written in the Book of Life” (Rev. 20:15)
 - The “unjust” (Acts 24:15), “those who have done evil” (John 5:29)
 - “The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars” (Rev. 21:8)

The final (or GWT) judgment

- Those resurrected in the (final) resurrection will stand before the “great white throne” (Rev. 20:11) and be “judged” (vv. 12, 13)
- Everyone who appears in this judgment will be cast into the “lake of fire” (v. 15)
- This is why the (final) resurrection is known as the “resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29)

“Lake of fire”

- The “lake of fire” is the final destination for unbelievers (Rev. 20:15)
- Therefore, the “lake of fire” is hell

“Lake of fire”: other synonymous terms

- “The lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:20)
 - “Brimstone” = “Sulphur” (ESV; NIV)
- “The lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 20:10)
- “The lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the **second death**” (Rev. 21:8)

“Hell” in the Gospels

- “Hell ... the fire that shall *never* be quenched” (Mark 9:45*)
- “Hell fire” (Matthew 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:47)
- All are translations of the Greek word *Gehenna* [S#1067]

Gehenna

- Occurs 12x in the New Testament
 - 11x in the Gospels (all said by the Lord)
 - 1x outside the Gospels (i.e. James 3:6)
- Bible translators are OK with translating *Gehenna* as “hell” because they believe *Gehenna* is equivalent to the lake of fire
- *Gehenna* comes from the Hebrew place name, *Ge Hinnom*, which means Valley of (the Son of) Hinnom
- How did a valley become synonymous with hell?

Gehenna: historical background

- First mentioned in Joshua (15:8; 18:16); nothing remarkable about it then
- During the Divided Kingdom period, it became infamous for human sacrifice by fire (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6)
- King Josiah put a stop to the practice (2 Kings 23:10)
- Historians: The valley later became a burning ground for refuse and the dead bodies of criminals and animals
- Perpetual fire & burning → A synonym for Hell

So, what is hell?

- It is the “lake of fire”, *Gehenna*, the “second death”
- Additionally, terms such as “everlasting fire” (Matthew 18:8; 25:41) and “eternal fire” (Jude 1:7) are allusions to hell

The nature of hell

- Now that we know what hell is, we can move on to the *main* part of today's message, which is **the nature of hell**
- Two helpful questions:
 - What is hell like?
 - What is hell for?

The relevant verses

- To answer them, we'll look at some verses about hell & Hades
- Important: Hades is *not* hell. Why?
- Because Hades is *ultimately* temporary (cf. Rev. 20:14)
- Nevertheless, Hades is hell-like, so we can learn something about hell by studying Hades
- Key passage about Hades: The rich man & Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

What is hell like?

Hell: a literal place

- Hell is a literal (and *not* a metaphorical) place
- God is “able to destroy both soul & body in hell” (Matt. 10:28)
 - Example: The beast & the false prophet will be “cast alive into the lake of fire” (Rev. 19:20)
 - Note: The two will be the 1st people in hell
- This requires that hell be a literal place, for *a literal body cannot be cast into anything metaphorical*

Hell: a place of torment

- Hell is a place of torment (cf. Luke 16:28)
 - “The devil ... was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be *tormented* day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10)
- Furthermore, it is a place of everlasting torment
 - “They will be tormented *day and night forever and ever*” (Rev. 20:10)

Hell does *not* annihilate

- Annihilationism: The unsaved will cease to exist
- Truth: Annihilationism is *not* taught in the Bible
 - **Revelation 19:20:** The beast & the false prophet are “cast alive into the lake of fire”
 - **Revelation 20:10:** 1,000 years later, they are still there, and they will continue to be there and be “tormented *day and night forever and ever*”

“Lake of fire”

- The “fire” is the source of torment
 - RM: “I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24 NKJV)
 - RM: “I am in agony in this fire” (Luke 16:24 NIV)
- “Lake of fire”
 - “Lake”: connotes a body of matter having liquid form
 - Hence, the eternal fire is probably in liquid form



The bodies

- How can the bodies of the people in hell withstand hell fire?
- Their (resurrection) bodies are bodies that are suited for eternal punishment
 - Indestructible...
 - ...but can feel pain and anguish
- In the case of the beast & the false prophet, their bodies will also be changed (think along the lines of 1 Cor. 15:51-52)

What is hell for?

“Punishment”

- Hell is a place of “punishment” (Matthew 25:46)
- Punishment for what?
- Mainly, for the sin of unbelief
- “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God abides on him*” (John 3:36)

“Everlasting punishment”

- Hell is a place of “*everlasting* punishment” (Matt. 25:46)
 - Contrast: “Eternal life” (Matt. 25:46)
- Since there is everlasting punishment, there is then *no* universalism
 - Universalism: Everyone will eventually be saved
- Hell is implicitly a fearsome thing (cf. Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:5)
 - If hell is not everlasting punishment, then it is not fearsome

“Everlasting destruction”

- The nature of the punishment is “everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9)
- “Destruction” ≠ annihilation; annihilation only takes an instant, but the destruction here is “everlasting”
- If “destruction” ≠ annihilation, then what is it?
 - “Destruction” = Loss of well-being
 - “Everlasting destruction” = Eternal loss of well-being

Banishment

- The everlasting destruction is due to banishment “from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9)
- In other words, **eternal separation from God**

The opposite of banishment

- The believer's hope: "We shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
- In God's presence is "fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11)
 - "God will wipe away every tear from [His people's] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain..." (Revelation 21:4)
- Implication: Hell is a place of absolute joylessness

Closing remarks

To our seeking friends (1/4)

- Everyone in this world is a sinner (Romans 3:23)
- And every sin is a sin against God (Psalm 51:4)
- God is a holy God (1 Peter 1:15-16)
- And He *must* punish sin (Exodus 34:7 NASB)
- Hell is the place where He punishes sin

To our seeking friends (2/4)

- God did *not* prepare hell for humans
 - Hell was “*prepared* for the devil & his angels” (Matt. 25:41)
 - Contrast: “In My Father’s house are many mansions ... I go to *prepare* a place for you” (John 14:6)
- Sadly, some humans have decided to join the devil & his angels in their rebellion against God
- Any rebellion against God is sin, so God will not hesitate to punish the human rebels in hell

To our seeking friends (3/4)

- God does *not* enjoy punishing sinners
- God: “I take no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11 NASB 2020)

To our seeking friends (4/4)

- God loves us (John 3:16)
- And He “wants all people to be saved” from their sins (1 Tim. 2:4 NASB 2020)
- So, God sent His Son, Jesus, *the* Saviour (Luke 2:11)
- Jesus can save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21)
- All we need to do is believe in Him (Acts 16:31)

To fellow believers

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

Matthew 28:19-20

Thank You