

The Infernal Regions

A study of Hell

Opening discussions:

1) Concordia, Bronxville 1991 debate: “Is Hell exothermic or endothermic”?

- exothermal; heat is exiting, growing colder (Hell freezes over)
- endothermic; growing heat from within (all Hell breaks loose)

2) Is Hell a place, a condition / state of being, or something else?

3) Why is Hell universally located in the center of the earth?

A) Common “Hellish” sayings - what do these mean?

1) Soldier 1: “See you in ____ (insert city) ____”
Soldier 2: “or in Hell”

2) The road to Hell (perdition) is paved with good intentions.

3) Goest thou to Hell (Merchant of Venice 1598)

4) You can make hell out of heaven or a heaven out of hell. It’s all in the mind. - John Milton

5) The doors of hell are locked from the inside - C.S. Lewis

6) You have a snowball’s chance in hell (1931)

7) “_____ is Hell” (insert; war, marriage, work, etc.)

8) What is hell? I maintain it is the suffering of being unable to love.
- Fyodor Dostoyevsky

9) The torture of a bad conscience is the hell of a living soul. - J Calvin

10) To suffer terribly and to know yourself as the cause; that is hell.
- Jordan B. Peterson

11) Hell is Truth known too late. - JC Ryle

12) Hell is not evil; Hell is where evil gets punished. Hell is morally good, because a good God must have a means to punish evil. - Randy Alcorn

Excuse me, which level of Hell is this? - 21st Cent. American

B) A hell by any other name... (metonyms / synonyms)

- 1) **“The outer darkness”** (where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth) - most common reference to hell in the New Testament
- 2) **Gehenna** - refers to the valley of BenHinnom (Jer. 7:31) in which the residents of Jerusalem routinely offered their children as burnt offerings to Baal Hinnom (Canaanite god of fertility)
- 3) **Abaddon / Apollyon** - place / deity of destruction (Rev. 9:11)
- 4) **Sheol** - Old Testament place name for the realm of the dead
- 5) **Tartarus** - the lowest level of hell in Greek mythology; where Cronus and the titans were imprisoned after the war with the gods.
- 6) **Hades** - Greek god of the dead (eldest son of Cronus) and place of the dead. Originally just a shadow world, but regions developed by time of Alexander the Great (Plato) such as Elysium (good) and Tartarus (bad) and 5 more levels in between each bounded by a river (Styx, Lethe, Acheron, Phlegethon, etc.) and many gates - each gate had its own demonic guard (Cerberus, Dis, Asmodeus)
- 7) **Pandemonium** (lit. “all demons”) - chief city of Lucifer’s realm
- 8) **Perdition**
 - modern; a state of damnation
 - archaic; utter destruction (even the memory of ___ destroyed)
- 9) **Inferno** - part 1 of Dante’s “Divine Comedy”; now a synonym
- 10) **The Abyss**; a bottomless pit or excessively deep and dark place
- 11) **“the pit”** - possibly derived from ignominious burial practices
- 12) **Underworld / netherworld** - used in mythology, not Bible

NB - many of these terms are simply translated “hell” depending on the translation of the Bible one is using.

C) The evolution of Hell in the Bible

- 1) In the beginning ... time of the 3 Kings (Saul, David, Solomon)
 - VERY little about the soul after death, almost no record
 - “Enoch walked with God, and was no more” (Gen. 5:24)
 - seems to be very annihilistic; simply cease to be at death
- 2) The united monarchy
 - the soul would depart to Sheol at the moment of death
 - Sheol and “the pit” as well as “going down” used in Psalms
 - ALL go to Sheol, no sense of punishment / reward
 - the soul seems to be oblivious to its own state or state of surroundings (I Samuel 28:7-19); almost sleepy or unthinking

- No sense of a resurrection or restoration of life yet

3) The Babylonian Captivity and beyond

- The Chaldeo-Persian empire was primarily Zoroastrian
- Duality of a god who is good and a god who is evil emerges
- the “Satan” of Zoroastrianism was called Angra Mainyu and wreaked Havoc both on earth and in his subterranean domains
- At the moment of death, angels (messengers of the gods) carry the soul to the bridge of judgement (much like the bifrost of Norse myth)
- Angeology (and demonology) develops - see **Luke 16:19-31**
- See **Hebrews 9:27**
- The soul that did good in life, can traverse the bridge (cross the chasm) and enter paradise, the wicked fall off the bridge into darkness and the Abyss which is Angra Mainyu’s realm
- The soul is apparently self-aware in its new place
- first mention of a bodily resurrection; see **Daniel 12:2, 13**

4) The Intertestamental period (400 BC - 30 AD)

- No canonical writings from this period
- Alexander the Great annexed Palestine from Egypt in 326 BC
- Most of the Apocrypha written this period (esp. Enoch 1 & 2)
- The Essenes settled by the Dead Sea around 100 BC (war scroll)
- Basic concepts of heaven and hell undergo maturation and take on Greek names (Hades, Tartarus, etc.) and some Greek attributes

5) The New Testament period (30-100 AD)

- Not much talk of Hell in the New Testament
- Jesus mentions it a few times, but doesn’t really develop it
- It would seem that thoughts about hell (place, who goes, ruler, etc.) were “common knowledge” in Jesus’ day
- Paul only mentions hell once in all his letters (II Thess. 1:9)
- Peter speaks of it in his second letter (harrowing of hell)
 - II Peter 2:4
 - II Peter 3:9
- Most of what would form the early Christians’ concept of hell comes from a few passages in John’s Revelation
 - Rev. 14:11
 - Rev. 19:20
 - Rev. 21:8

6) The early and middle church eras (100 - 1300 AD)

- Hell was considered a “minor” doctrine (salvation not affected)
- Some church fathers wrote on it (Agustine, Jerome, Origen), and others don’t talk about it at all
- Purgatory and Limbo came into existence around 1,000 AD (formalized as Roman Catholic doctrine in 1303)
- Given the lack of source material, we can conclude that some of the concepts of the afterlife of various pagan groups evangelized would make their way into the “unofficial” teachings about heaven and hell
- The rise and role of Mary and the saints (esp. Beatrice) in this time

7) Dante Alligheri and “The Divine Comedy”

- Part 1 is “the Inferno” and shaped our concept of Hell to this day

- 666 different “regions” made up of 9 “circles” each with gates
 - the punishments for the wicked would match the sins committed
- 8) Reformation thought (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc.)
 - purgatory became hellish (a temporary hell), place of punishment
 - All the horrors of hell are manifested in purgatory
 - Hell was a recurrent theme of the late medieval church
 - EVERYONE was going to hell, or at least a few centuries in purgatory
 - Luther was the first to propose Hell as separation from God (Ps. 22:1)
 - Calvin thought hell could start to be experienced in this life
 - 9) Faust, Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe 1775
 - more a play about Metastopheles (Satan) than hell
 - Has some late medieval descriptions of hell (very Dante-esque)
 - deals with the dangers of knowledge, magic, and metaphysics
 - 10) Paradise Lost, John Milton 1667
 - Just about all modern thought on Satan and hell come from this
 - really about Satan and his fall, the war in heaven, Adam & Eve
 - there are many poetic descriptions of hell, but these are a poetic device to “flesh out” the storyline(s)
 - Milton drew on much of the imagery of Dante and renaissance
 - Maybe we’ll take up this book as one of our Lenten studies
 - 11) Enlightenment thought (1700 - 1850’s)
 - Denial of hell, Satan, even sin as anachronistic
 - good and evil became subjective or situational
 - Hell didn’t “vanish”, but was not common subject matter
 - Science (and psychology) pushed religious authority aside
 - 12) The modern era (1850 - 2000)
 - Hell is subject matter for movies and TV specials at Halloween
 - * Hellboy movies
 - * “Into the Abyss” video games
 - Very much present in modern thought, but as spectacle
 - Few today believe in Hell as a real place or one’s afterlife
- D) So what does the Bible say about Hell (not an awful lot!) -used 13 times
- 1) Proverbs 15:24 and Psalm 16:10
 - 2) Revelation 14:9-12
 - 3) Matthew 25:41-46
 - 4) Matthew 13:49-50
 - 5) Matthew 10:28
 - 6) Mark 9:42-48
 - 7) Revelation 21:8

Next week: What happens to those who die without having had a chance to

hear about Jesus? Do they get a chance after death but before a final judgement is rendered?