

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

The SDA Church (Part 3 Hell)

Missionary Matthew Ude

Continuing our series on the SDA church we will take a look this week on their teaching concerning hell.

Hell

Concerning death and hell the SDA church writes the following:

There's one upside to human mortality: nobody will spend an eternity in hell, writhing in pain as flames lick their body, screaming in regret and agony forever. What would that achieve? Wouldn't that make God morally worse than brutal dictators, whose victims screamed only for hours rather than centuries? The Bible gives two options: one, "the wages of sin is death"—not eternal life in torment. The second option is "eternal life in Christ Jesus"—and that's a "gift of God," which means I don't naturally have immortality (Rom. 6:23).¹

I will begin by admitting that what they say above sounds really good. I personally would like nothing better than to believe there is no such thing as hell. However we cannot pick and choose what we want about the Bible. When it comes to the word of God we have two choices. Either it is the word of God and everything in it is absolute truth, or it is the word of man and we are free to listen only to that

which we want to believe. God's word is more than clear concerning the end of those who refuse to listen to His word.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mar 16:16 ESV)

The argument of the SDA church concerning hell fails in three parts. 1. They fail to understand the Biblical terms of life and death. According to the above quote they assume that death and life must be the same as existence. 2. They deny that hell is physical place, implying that when the Bible talks about hell and condemnation it must mean only the state of being dead, which they interpret as being nonexistent. 3. They refuse to accept the eternal nature of hell.

Hell is a real physical place

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. (Mat 5:29 ESV)

The Bible primarily views death as a question of our relationship to God. To be alive means to be joined to God, to be dead means to be separate from God.

In Matt 5:29 above Jesus talks about the whole body being thrown into hell. In Matt 10:28 below Jesus makes a distinction between death and hell. Here Jesus clearly shows that something worse than physical death exists after physical death. Further Jesus indicates in this passage that physical death effects only the body, but the death that comes after effects both the body and the soul.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Mat 10:28 ESV)

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; (2Pe 2:4 ESV)

It is true that the Greek term used here in 2 Peter is a different term than the one which Jesus often used. Jesus often used the Greek word *gehenna*, whereas Peter here uses the verb *tartarus*. However the passage makes it clear that there must be a real physical place of torment, for it specifically says that the evil angels are kept there until judgment day. In Matthew 8:12 Jesus specifically calls hell "that place" indicating it is a real place with real physical pain "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jesus uses similar words in Matthew 22:13, Matthew 24:51, Matthew 25:30 and in Luke 13:28.

"while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will

be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mat 8:12 ESV)

Hell is Eternal

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. (Mar 9:43 ESV)

In Mark 9:43 Jesus says the fire of hell is "unquenchable." Likewise in Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17 Jesus uses the same term of hell. The term in the Greek is *asbestos*. This term is often used not only in the Bible but also in the classical Greek writings of a fire that never ends, an example would be the eternal flame of Vespa. In Matthew 25:41 and 46 Jesus again refers to the eternal fire of hell. This time He uses the Greek term *aiionios* meaning eternal, without end. He also specifically calls it a place "prepared for the devil and his angels." Another interesting aspect of Matthew 25:46 is that the exact same term Jesus uses for eternal torment is used for eternal life. If you want to suggest that the torment of hell is not forever, then neither is the bliss of heaven, for the same word is used for both.

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'" (Mat 25:41,46 ESV)

The Meaning of Death in the Bible

Death, then, in the OT means ultimate separation from God due to sin.²

When the SDA church in the quote at the beginning of this section say, “the wages of sin is death”—not eternal life in torment,” they are implying that if a person is dead he cannot be conscious. In fact they imply that death is the same as non-existence. This is to view death as a matter primarily of the existence of the individual; in other words existence is the same as life and nonexistence the same as death.

The Bible however takes a very different view of death. As the above quote from the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament points out the Bible primarily views death as a question of our relationship to God. To be alive means to be joined to God, to be dead means to be separate from God. This can be seen from the fact that the Bible repeatedly and often refers to people who are currently “living” on earth as being dead. Matthew 8:22; Romans 8:10; Ephesians 2:1,5; Colossians 2:13; 1 Timothy 5:6;

On the other hand the Bible often refers to those who are physically dead as being alive. As does Jesus when he refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and again when He talks about the girl and Lazarus. With regard to both the girl and Lazarus, whom Jesus refers to as “sleeping” Jesus is not trying to imply that they are not physically dead. In both cases the story bears out that Jesus knows perfectly well

that they are dead physically. Rather Jesus is trying to teach us the true meaning of death. Matthew 22:31,32; Matthew 9:24; John 11:11; John 11:25

In Genesis 2:17 God claims that in the very day that Adam and Eve eat from the tree they will die. Yet they eat from the tree and live another 900 years. Is God a liar? Certainly not. But because of their sin they were cast out of the presence of God, and thus they died in the only way that really matters, they were separated from God.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 ESV)

In John 11:25 as well as three times in Revelations, Jesus specifically talks about at least two types of death. In John 11 talking to Mary Jesus uses the term death and life first with a physical meaning. If anyone believes then though he may physically die he will be raised again to life. Secondly Jesus uses the term death and life in a spiritual sense. “Everyone who lives” by which He means is connected to God by faith, “shall never die” by which He means will never be separated from God. In Revelation 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8 Jesus talks about a second death. The first death is the physical death of our bodies. The second is eternal separation from God.

Although the Bible makes it clear that God’s main concern is our relationship to him, not that state of our physical bodies, the bible does still often use the term death in what we might consider the normal way, that of physical death.

“Everyone who lives” by which He means is connected to God by faith, “shall never die” by which He means will never be separated from God.

This means we can summarize the Biblical meaning of death into three categories.

1. Spiritual death is when we are separated from God by our sin.
2. Physical or temporal death is when our bodies are separated from our souls.
3. Eternal death is when we are separated from God forever in hell.

In Romans 6:23 when Paul says “the wages of sin is death,” he is probably referring to all three, however the emphasis has to be on eternal death, the counterpart to “the gift of God is eternal life.”

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:4-7 ESV)

¹Kent, Grenville. (2014). *Nature of Man: Who You Are*. Available from: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/humanity/nature-of-man/article/go/0/who-are-you/>. [Accessed: 20/3/2014].

²Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody, 1980. <BibleWorks, v.8.>.