

Christ in Prophecy

Prophecy 33: The Reality of Hell

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: What do you believe about Hell? Do you think it's a real place or a fairy tale? Do you believe people will be tormented there eternally, or do you believe the torment will someday come to an end? Could it be a place of purging that is designed to prepare everyone to go to Heaven? For the answers to these and other questions about Hell, stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope, and welcome to Christ in Prophecy! My topic for this program is Hell. Now folks, I realize that's not a popular topic, so I want to urge you not to pick up your remote and change channels. Stay with me for a few minutes, and I think you will be glad you did. I think you are about to discover some new information concerning what the Bible says about Hell.

Now, this is a touchy topic, and I don't want to be misunderstood. So, I'm going to follow a pattern that was introduced to me many years ago when I first started preaching. I was told that I should divide my sermons into three parts: First, tell them what you are going to tell them. Second, tell them. Third, tell them what you've told them. So, let's begin with a summary of what I'm going to tell you.

I believe in the reality of Hell. Second, I believe that when an unsaved person dies, their spirit goes to a place called Sheol or Hades. And let's just pause there for a moment and let me explain those words. Sheol and Hades refer to the same place; it's a place where the spirits of the dead are temporarily confined. In the Old Testament it's called Sheol that's the Hebrew word. In the New Testament it is called Hades, that's the New Testament word; the Greek word. I am going to refer to it as Hades from now on. So what I'm saying is this: I believe in the reality of Hell. I believe that when an unsaved person dies their spirit goes to this place called Hades which is a temporary holding place. Hades is not the same place, it is not the same place as Hell. Now when their spirit gets to Hades, it is put into a compartment called Torments, which I think pretty well speaks for itself. And the spirits of the unsaved remain in Hades until the end of the Millennial reign of Jesus. At that time, their bodies are resurrected, they're reunited with their spirits, they are judged by Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment pictured in Revelation 20. They are judged of their works to determine their eternal destiny, and since no person can be justified by works before God, they are all consigned to Hell. In Hell they are tormented for a period of time in proportion to their sins. And then they suffer destruction and cease to exist. So,

the only way in which my viewpoint differs from the traditional view is that I do not believe the Bible teaches eternal torment.

Let me hasten to point out that my view is not what is called Annihilationism. According to that view, the unbeliever simply ceases to exist at death. That view is very unbiblical. Another very unbiblical view is that it is a place of purification, and that after a period of torment, each person will be cleansed of their sins and saved. This is called universalism. It's also a very unbiblical view.

The Bible teaches that God does not wish that any should perish, but it also teaches that most will be lost because of their unwillingness to repent and to relate to God in faith.

My viewpoint, which is held by many Evangelicals, is called Conditionalism. It is called that because those of us who hold the viewpoint do not believe in the inherent immortality of the soul. Many Christians are surprised to discover that the Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul. In fact, the whole idea originated with Greek philosophers like Plato. The Bible says point blank that God alone is immortal. You will find that passage in 1 Timothy 6:16 where it says and I quote "God alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light . . ." Concerning believers, the Bible says we will become immortal at the time of our resurrection. You will find that truth expressed in 1 Corinthians 15 in verse 42 where it says that when a believer dies, the body is "sown as a perishable body, but is raised an imperishable body." This truth is repeated in verse 53 where it says: For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So, we believers will become immortal at the time of our resurrection. But the Bible never says a word about unbelievers ever becoming immortal. So the Conditional viewpoint contends that immortality is conditional on putting your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Now the reason the debate over immortality of the soul is so important is because throughout Christian history, theologians have argued that since the soul is immortal, it must exist eternally either in Heaven or in Hell. But the Bible clearly teaches that the soul is not inherently immortal. Only God is inherently immortal. Again, believers become immortal at the time of the resurrection when they receive their glorified bodies. And again, there is no mention anywhere in the Bible about unbelievers ever becoming immortal.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our discussion of the reality of Hell. I have discovered that Hell is one of the most unpopular of all topics in Christendom. Preachers rarely talk about it, and I think this is primarily because they are uncomfortable with what they think the Bible teaches about Hell.

Let me illustrate my point: Let's say that the age of accountability is 13, by that I mean the age at which a person becomes responsible for their sins. And that is the age that the Jews have always taught. Now, let's say that a 16 year old unsaved boy gets his driver's license and he

goes out and starts driving recklessly as most 16 year olds do. And immediately he's killed in an automobile accident, something that commonly happens. It is very difficult for a pastor to express the traditional view that this boy is going to be tormented eternally for 3 years of unrepented sins that he committed between the ages of 13 and 16. Think about it: the Bible states over and over and over again that God is a God of Justice. Is it justice to torment a boy eternally for 3 years of sins? Doesn't this convert God from a God of Justice into a Cosmic Sadist?

Now, I want to emphasize that the traditional view of eternal torment is not an unbiblical view, in the sense that it is not based upon the Scriptures. It is based upon Scriptures that, at first glance, seem to indicate eternal torment, especially if you believe in the immortality of the soul. It is also based on the spiritualization of many, many scriptures.

Let me illustrate this point about spiritualization. Let's begin with the most famous verse in the Bible John 3:16. Have you ever stopped to think what Jesus says in that verse about what will happen to those who are lost? The verse says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Jesus says that they will perish. Now folks, you either perish or you don't. In fact what verse got me thinking about Hell and about what happens in Hell is I was reading a book by C.S. Lewis called, "The Problem of Pain" and in that book he quoted this and he said, "What does perish mean?" He says, "Perish means you cease to exist." He says, "How in the world can you be in a state of eternally perishing? Sooner or later you perish." So Jesus said that the unsaved would perish.

Now, Jesus made another comment about the unsaved in Matthew 7:13 there He said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it." So in that particular passage Jesus says that the unsaved will be destroyed. First He says they will perish, then He says they will be destroyed.

Now let's go to a third verse Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 picks up the very concept that Jesus had expressed and he says, "These, the unsaved, will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." So Paul also says that the lost will be destroyed.

Let's look at the book of Hebrews for a moment, we don't know for sure who the author of Hebrews was but in Hebrews 10:27 he mentions that the lost will be consumed by fire. Here is what he said, "The unrighteous will experience a terrifying judgment, namely, the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." Sounds pretty terminal, doesn't it?

And then the last passage from the New Testament I'd like to mention comes from the Apostle John in the book of Revelation in chapter 20 verse 14, he says, "The unsaved will be thrown into the Lake of Fire," which is Hell, "where they will experience the Second Death." So, we have words like perish, destroyed, consumed by fire, second death. I don't know about you but it all sounds very terminal to me.

And, the Old Testament presents the same image of ultimate destruction: In Psalm 22, written by King David, it says that unbelievers will ultimately die because they “will not be able to keep their souls alive.” Here’s how the passage reads: verse 28, “All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship,” that is the beginning of the Millennium, “and all those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, even he who cannot keep his soul alive.”

And Isaiah, in chapter 66, verse 24 says that unbelievers in Hell will become “corpses,” that’s dead people folks. Here’s how the passage reads: Then they the saved will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind.” Now, since we are talking here about dead people, the phraseology about the worm and the fire appears to be figurative language that emphasizes the fact that the testimony of what happens to unrepentant sinners will never die.

And, to sum it all up, I want you to consider a verse from Matthew 10:28 where Jesus Himself says, “Do not fear those who can kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.”

Let’s review again: Jesus said the unsaved will perish. Jesus said the unsaved will be destroyed. Paul said they would suffer destruction. The author of Hebrews said they will be consumed by fire. John said they would experience the second death. David said their souls will die. Isaiah said they will become corpses. The only way to get around these descriptions is to spiritualize them by contending that they do not mean what they say.

Now, the Traditionalists respond in several ways. First, they point to verses like Matthew 23:4 which says and I quote: “The wicked will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” But folks, “eternal punishment” does not necessarily mean “eternal punishing.” It can mean that, but it doesn’t have to mean that. It can mean, instead, a punishment with eternal consequences like destruction. The Bible speaks of “eternal judgment” in Hebrews 6:2. That does not mean a judgment that continues eternally. Rather, it is a judgment with eternal consequences. Likewise, the Bible speaks of “eternal redemption” in Hebrews 9:12. This does not mean Christ will continue the act of redemption eternally. Rather, it means that Jesus’ death on the Cross produced a redemption with eternal consequences.

A second traditionalist response is to point to the fact that the book of Revelation says the Antichrist and his False Prophet will be tormented forever. And so the traditionalist asks, “If these two men can be tormented forever, why not other people who are lost?” Well, my response is that the Antichrist and the False Prophet are two very special cases. There could be two reasons why they are singled out for eternal torment: First, they will be responsible for killing one-half of humanity and two-thirds of the Jews. If ever there was a crime that deserves eternal torment that would be it. Second, they may well be demons in human form. Both are referred to as “beasts,” and the Antichrist is described as a beast “who comes up out of the Abyss.” That happens to be the place where certain demon spirits are imprisoned. If they are demons, then

eternal punishment in Hell would be appropriate, for the Bible says that Hell was created for the Devil and his angels, and the implication of the Scriptures is that they will be tormented there forever.

A third traditionalist response is to point to Revelation 14:9-11 where it says that those who take the mark of the beast during the Tribulation will be consigned to Hell where quote “the smoke of their torment will go up forever.” But folks, the problem with this argument is that the reference to “the smoke of their torment” is a phrase that is used elsewhere in the scriptures in a symbolic sense. Thus, in Isaiah 34:10 there is a reference to the smoke of Edom’s destruction going up forever. The passage reads as follows: For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion. And its, Edom’s streams shall be turned into pitch, and its loose earth into brimstone, and its land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched day or night; its smoke shall go up forever. Notice that it says the smoke of Edom’s destruction will “go up forever.” Now folks, I have been to Edom several times. It is located in the southern portion of modern day Jordan in the area around Petra. I have seen the destruction of Edom first hand. But there was no smoke ascending to heaven. The reference to eternal smoke is obviously symbolic, indicating that Edom’s destruction will give eternal testimony to how God deals with a sinful society. The same is true of Jude 7 when it says that: “Sodom and Gomorrah are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.” Notice, this passage says point blank that what Sodom and Gomorrah experienced is an example of eternal fire! Again, I have been to the area at the southern tip of the Dead Sea where these twin cities existed. The area is one of utter destruction, but there is no smoke going up to heaven. These cities are not burning eternally. They simply suffered a fiery destruction that had eternal consequences. So, what does these expressions mean? I would argue that they are symbolic expressions that mean that the fate of Edom and the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah is an eternal testimony to the consequence of unrepentant sin. Neither one is burning eternally. Rather, they suffered a fiery destruction that had eternal consequences.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our discussion of the reality and nature of Hell. Well, folks, I have told you what I was going to tell you. Then I told you in detail. And now, I want to conclude by telling you what I told you. In defining any doctrine, everything the Bible has to say about the issue must be considered. Concerning the issue of Hell, the only way I have been able to incorporate all that the Bible has to say is to make the following conclusions: Number one, those who die outside a faith relationship with Jesus are initially confined to a compartment in Hades called Torments. Second, at the end of the Millennium, they will be resurrected and judged of their works by Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment. Third, all of them will be condemned to Hell because no one can be justified before God by their works. Fourth, they will be cast into the lake of fire which is Hell where they will suffer a time of torment in proportion to their sins. Number five, they will then experience the “second death” the death of body, soul and spirit. This view, once again, is called Conditionalism, and it differs from the Traditional view in only one respect, it believes in ultimate destruction for the unsaved rather than eternal torment. I want to conclude with one last argument in behalf of the Conditionalist

viewpoint. It has to do with the debt that Jesus paid for our sin. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus paid that debt for us.

Now how did he do it? Through severe suffering followed by death. He did not experience eternal torment, and therefore, eternal torment must not be a part of the debt we owe. The Bible says that “the wages of sin is death.” Accordingly, we experience bodily death because of our sins. And if we are never saved, we will experience the Second Death, which will constitute the death of body and soul.

If you are saved, you die once. If you are unsaved, you die twice; first you experience bodily death and then you experience the death of body and soul in Hell, after a period of torment that is in proportion to your sins.

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our discussion of the reality of Hell. Now I'd like to share with you two stories about Hell that I think are very insightful. The first is taken from the life of one of the foremost Christian scholars of the 20th Century, an Englishman named C. S. Lewis. He went to hear a young preacher present a sermon on the subject of God's judgment on sin. At the end of his message, the young man said, “If you do not receive Christ as Savior, you will suffer grave eschatological ramifications!” After the service, Lewis went up to the young preacher and said, “Did you mean that the person who doesn't believe in Christ will go to Hell?” “Precisely,” the young preacher responded. “Well then say so,” Lewis replied. Folks, the stakes are just too great to beat around the bush.

And that reminds me of one of my favorite sermons of all time, a sermon by the great Scottish-American preacher, Peter Marshall who died at the early age of 46 while he was serving as the pastor of the New York Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C, and while he was also serving as the Chaplain of the United States Senate. The sermon of his that impressed me so greatly was one about the message of the Prophet Elijah for America today. Marshall told the story of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal, constantly emphasizing the prophet's call for a decision which is recorded in 1 Kings 18:21 which reads, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” As Marshall progressed through this sermon, he repeated this challenge over and over again, applying it to Americans. He ended his sermon with these words: We need a prophet who will have the ear of America and say to her now, “How long will you halt and stand between two opinions? If Yahweh be God, follow him, but if Baal be God, follow him, and go to Hell!”

Well, I was driving my car while I was listening to that sermon, and when I heard his powerful ending, it caught me by such surprise that I nearly drove off the road! That's the kind of preaching we need today, People need to be confronted with their sins, they need to be pointed to Jesus as their only hope, and they need to be warned emphatically about the danger of Hell.

I hope and pray that you are ready to meet your Maker, that you have repented of your sins and received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, that you are a candidate for Heaven and not Hell.

If you are uncertain of your eternal destiny, I urge you to reach out in faith to Jesus, tell Him you are sorry for your sins, and receive Him as your Lord and Savior. Salvation is a free gift of God. There is nothing that you can do to earn it. Receive the gift in faith through Jesus, and rejoice over your salvation.

Part 5

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our discussion of the reality of Hell. As we bring this program to an end, I want to share some thoughts with you about the nature of God. Modern day preaching tends to focus on the love, mercy, and grace of God. But there is another side of God that all of us need to be aware of. He is also a God of holiness, righteousness and justice. The balanced view of God's nature can be found in the Old Testament in the book of Nahum. In Nahum 1:7 the prophet speaks of God's grace, love and mercy, he writes: "The LORD is good. He is a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him."

But in verses 2 and 3, Nahum speaks of the righteousness, the holiness and the justice of God, he writes: "A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; the LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

People tend to think that God is a Cosmic Teddy Bear who will wink at their sins. But as these passages from Nahum clearly reveal, God takes sin very seriously. His love and His justice both require Him to deal with sin. A loving God could never ignore the sins of a pedophile. Nor could a God of justice simply overlook the sins of a murderer. God must deal with sin, and He does so in one of two ways grace or wrath. This truth is revealed in a sermon delivered by John the Baptist which is recorded in the Gospel of John. Everyone seems to know John 3:16, but hardly anyone seems to be aware of John 3:36 which reads as follows: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." This verse clearly states that every person on planet earth this very moment is under either the grace of God or the wrath of God. Those are the only two ways in which God deals with sin; grace or wrath. It is a glorious thing, a glorious thing to be living under the grace of God. It is a terrible thing to be living under His wrath.

The Bible says that Jesus is returning in wrath. He is returning to pour out the wrath of God on those who have rejected God's love, grace and mercy. The first time Jesus came, He came as a suffering lamb to die for our sins. He is returning as a roaring lion to pour out God's wrath. The Bible says that when He returns, those who have put their faith in Him will rejoice like a calf released from a stall, whereas those who have rejected Him will crawl into holes in the ground and cry out for the mountains to fall upon them.

You know I wrote a book about the book of Revelation and I titled it "Wrath and Glory" and the reason I titled it wrath and glory is because when Jesus returns He's coming in great wrath as I said to pour out the wrath of God upon those who have rejected the grace, mercy, and love of God. But then He is going to reign in glory, and majesty from Mount Zion. And He is going to illustrate His majesty before all the nations of the earth. So He is coming in wrath, and He's coming in glory. Are you ready for His return? Will you go forth like a calf released from a stall rejoicing that your Savior has broken from the heavens? Or will you crawl into a hole in the ground and pray for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon you? The decision is yours. It's a free decision. You are offered a free gift from God. What you have to do is reach out and receive it in faith. And I pray you will do that.

Well, that's our program for this week. I hope it has been a blessing to you. Until next week Lord willing this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries' saying, "Look up, be watchful, for your Redemption is drawing near."