

You Mean the Jewish Scriptures Teach About Hell?

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When we read the Scriptures we discover that they don't attempt to prove God exists, rather, God is presented as a reality. Just as one never has to prove the reality of parents to a child, the child's own existence proves there must also be biological parents. So also, one need not prove the reality of the Creator to the creature. Hell is likewise presented. And yet, the absolute holiness and justice of God requires consequences for evil behavior. If a person can get a life sentence without possibility of parole for evil perpetuated against a mere man, then why should it seem so strange for one to get an eternal life sentence for evil perpetuated against the Eternal God?

The Fact of Hell: The Psalmist writes, "The wicked will return to Sheol, even all the nations who forget God" (Psalm 9:17). "Let death come deceitfully upon them; let them go down alive to Sheol, for evil is in their dwelling. in their midst" (Psalm 55:15). The Psalmist uses the common word for Hell, "Sheol." This word can also refer to the physical grave, so context helps us determine its usage. Since all people die, the writer would be not referring merely to death or the grave (no great punishment for the wicked), but to the eternal punishment of Sheol/Hell.

The Prophet writes, "Nevertheless, you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, they will ponder over you saying, 'Is this the man who made the world tremble, who shook kingdoms . . .'" (Isaiah 14:15-16). The Prophet reveals that there is consciousness and recognizability in punishment of Sheol/Hell.

The Prophet Daniel writes, "And many of those that sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Daniel reveals that the final judgment of Sheol/Hell that follows death, is "everlasting" ("olam," as is heaven or everlasting life), and is disgraceful and contemptible (literally, an abhorrence).

The New Covenant is consistent with the Older Covenant regarding these same truths about Hell/Sheol. (Matthew 25:41 "eternal fire;" v. 46 "eternal punishment;" Mark 9:43-48 "into Hell, into the unquenchable fire;" 2 Thessalonians 1:9 "pay the penalty of eternal destruction;" Hebrew 9:27 "it is appointed for man to die once and after this comes judgment;" Revelation 14:11 ". . . the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night . . ." etc..)

It's not that the Bible attempts to frighten anyone into following God, not at all. But

it does reveal the facts of the hereafter. Actually, the amount of space the Scriptures spend on Hell is comparatively very little. The Bible generally reveals Great News about God, Messiah, love, heaven, and forgiveness, etc.

The Fairness of Hell: What seems most difficult to some is what appears to be the inherent unfairness of Hell. “After all,” why would a good person have to be punished alongside of a Hitler just because he didn’t follow God’s way? Isn’t that unfair?

First, let’s understand that no one deserves heaven. This is God’s special place and no one who sins deserves to be there (see Psalm 15:1). God’s standards for heaven are high: to be with Him, you must be like Him, “Be holy as the LORD your God is holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Therefore whoever goes to heaven doesn’t earn it; entrance to heaven is not based on fairness. Whoever goes there gets there on the basis of God’s sovereign, gracious love. On the other hand, since we’ve all sinned (see Psalm 14:3; Isaiah 53:6, etc.), we all deserve Hell. We earned it.

The Scripture teaches that each one gets the punishment in Hell they individually deserve. There are differing degrees of punishment in Hell, determined completely on what you deserve (similarly, there are differing degrees of reward in heaven).

1. Judged according to their deeds: “. . . The dead, the great and the small, were standing before the throne . . . And the dead were judged . . . according to their deeds” (Revelation 20:12). This portion teaches that if Bill and Joel were doomed to judgment, and during their lifetimes Bill embezzled ten thousand dollars, but Joel only stole one thousand (or told ten lies to one lie), Bill’s punishment may be ten times greater than Joel’s punishment because his evil deeds were ten times worse. That’s fair.

2. Judged according to their knowledge: “And the servant that knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with that will, shall receive much punishment. But the one that did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of punishment, will receive little punishment. To whom much is given, much will be required” (Luke 12:47-48). Now, let’s say Bill and Joel were both doomed to hell, and during their lifetime each of them stole ten thousand dollars. This portion teaches that if Bill learned that’s it’s wrong to steal and stole anyway, but Joel was not taught this truth, Bill’s punishment would be greater than Joel’s, because Bill knew better. He will be held more accountable for the knowledge he received. Joel still gets punished, for he still did deeds worthy of punishment, but to a lesser degree. That, too, is fair.

3. Judged according to their status: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). This portion teaches that different levels responsibility can receive different levels of punishment. Bill and Joel are both guilty of embezzling ten thousand dollars each. However Bill was Joel’s teacher (or Rabbi, Pastor, President). Bill’s punishment may be greater than Joel’s, since his position demanded a higher level of responsibility. Rank may or may not have its privileges, but it certainly

demands greater accountability before God. Again, this is fair. Tragically, in Hell people finally get what they justly deserve.

The Fleeing from Hell: “The rich man also died and was buried. In Hell, where he was in torment . . . he called . . . ‘I have five brothers . . . warn them, so they will not also come to this place of torment’” (Luke 16:23-27). Many times people might foolishly say, “I want to be with my buddies in Hell,” or “I want to be with my brother and father in Hell.” But do you know what they want? They want to warn you to do whatever it takes to avoid Hell! God wants you to avoid Hell and come to heaven. He’s not willing to overlook sin, but He does love you. That’s why He sent the Messiah Yeshua. Yeshua died as atonement for sins, just as the Jewish prophets predicted (see Isaiah 53). If you will trust in God’s provision for forgiveness, you will receive new life, and heaven as a gift of God!