

Dear Judy,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You told us that you and your sister no longer speak due to your differing views on hell. You said that you do not believe in a burning hell, as does your sister, however you also thought that the scriptures said that hell was a place of torment for Satan and his angels. You told us that you loved your sister and wondered how you could explain to her that your love for Christ is real.

Let us first start out by saying that we agree that there is no burning hell. Additionally, we believe that there will be no hell of torment for Satan and his “angels.” Instead they will be destroyed in the “second death.”

The word “hell” as it is translated in the Bible actually refers to both “the grave” and to “second death.” The word for “hell,” is the Hebrew word “sheol,” meaning “grave” or “pit.” We note that it is translated 31 times as “grave” and 31 times as “hell.” To the Jews of the Old Testament, “sheol” was the end result for everyone. No distinction was made between the good and the bad. But, we find when reading scriptures that pertain to evil, translators have imposed the word “hell.” For example, “The wicked shall be turned into **hell**, and all the nations that forget God.” (Psalms 9:17 KJV) Conversely, translators have used the word “grave” to describe the ending that awaits the good. Such an example is found in Job 14:13 KJV. “O that thou wouldest hide me in the **grave**, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!” We ask, “Can the same word **sheol** have two different meanings?” No. The answer is that Job is talking about being hidden in death until the wrath of God is past and he is again remembered in resurrection. If the word “oblivion” were substituted for both “hell” in the first scripture and “grave” in the second scripture, it would impart the correct meaning. Therefore, based on the definition of the word “sheol” and on its uses applying to both good and bad people, the conclusion is reached that there is no fire attached to its meaning, only death and destruction.

The next question asked is, “Was a hell of torment taught in the New Testament?” The answer is no. In the New Testament the Greek word “hades” is used for “sheol.” This can be proven by an example found in I Corinthians 15: 54-55, “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that it is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O **death**, is your sting?’” Paul is referring to Isaiah 25: 8, “he will swallow up death forever” and to Hosea 13:14, “I will ransom them from the power of **the grave**; ... Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O **grave**, is your destruction?” We can see from these scriptures that there is a very clear transition from “hell” in the Old Testament to “hades” in the New. Neither word represents a place of burning.

We must then ask if there is a difference between hell and the lake of fire? Revelation 20:14 NIV states, "Then death and **Hades** (KJV - **Hell**) were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death." What is this lake of fire that is the second death, and how is it different from Hades? The word for the lake of fire is "gehenna." It is of Hebrew origin and pertains to the Valley of Ge-Hinnon. In Jesus' time this valley was the garbage dump of Jerusalem. Into it were thrown the dead bodies of animals and executed criminals. Fires were kept burning continuously so that all would be consumed. No living thing was ever thrown into it. This valley stood as an ominous symbol of everlasting and total destruction and that is why Jesus used it as an unmistakable symbol of the second death. Three examples where Jesus used "gehenna" appear in Mark 9:43, 45, and 47. "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into **hell**, where the fire never goes out." (Mark 9:43) Jesus is symbolically saying control your body so you will not be unfaithful, or you will be destroyed. The difference, then, between "Hell" (Hades) and "The Lake of Fire" (Gehenna) is that "hell" is the death that everyone goes to, and "Gehenna" is the second death from which there is no resurrection.

A challenging text found in Luke 16: 19-31 is the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. It concerns the fate of the rich man, who died, was buried and then found himself in the flames of torment. Verse 24, "And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am **tormented in this flame.**" After reading this verse it is important not to arrive at the hasty conclusion that hell is indeed a place of torment before looking at the context of this story. Jesus is at the home of a Pharisee, eating a meal with his disciples. Luke 15:1 begins the first of five parables spoken by Jesus, the Rich Man and Lazarus being the fifth. In this parable Jesus speaks to his disciples, but his message is meant for the Pharisees' ears. It is important to remember that Jesus related a **parable**, which is a fictitious story illustrative of a moral or religious principle. Therefore, the story is not literal, but representative. The word "tormented" from the Greek "odunao" means to grieve or sorrow. (See use of this same word in Luke 2:48 and Acts 20:38) The word "flame" from the Greek word "phlox" means "to flash or flame" or "a blaze." (See use of this same word in Acts 7:30, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, and Hebrews 1:7.) In all the examples mentioned, the flame is a light to see previous indiscretions. It is not a fire to torture. Therefore, we can interpret Jesus' meaning of the rich man's statement "for I am tormented in this flame" in Luke 16:24 to signify "for I grieve and anguish at my sin and transgression."

We should all be encouraged in our Bible study to look up word meanings and challenge what is said. Weigh the evidence. Is torment taught in the Old Testament or not? Is it taught in the New Testament?

When we look into the Scriptures to discover the character of God, we not only find a God of love, justice, wisdom and power, but we encounter a God who has an incredible plan for the redemption of all mankind and where eternal torture has no part in that plan.

“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:22) Through Adam’s sin all men died. Jesus gave all men a chance for life by sacrificing his in a perfect exchange for the perfect life of Adam. Jesus died as a ransom fulfilling God’s perfect justice. God has a plan and His plan is for the redemption of mankind through the incredible edifying sacrifice of Jesus. He gave everyone an opportunity for life that cannot be denied. Who lit the fire in hell? Man did and Satan fueled it. GOD HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. God has a wonderful plan...and you are in it!

We hope we have answered your question and have provided you with some information that you may impart to your sister. For more information on hell, go to our Christian Questions web site www.christianquestions.net and click on Archived Programs 2010, #621 “What About Hell?” (August 22, 2010). While on the CQ web site, be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio