

## Mark 9:47-48

Read Mark 9:47-48.

That passage speaks of hell. Hell is not a subject Christians want to talk about and definitely not a subject non-Christians want to think about. But it is an important subject in the Bible and while we might wish to ignore it, Jesus said more about hell than anyone else in the Bible, even though we think of Him talking about love and heaven.

Note that the word translated “hell” in most translations is technically not that word in the Greek, although that is the meaning the word actually had. In the Greek the word is “Gehanna.” That word comes from the Hebrew “ge-hinnom” which was the name of a valley that was south of Jerusalem. The background to how that place became a synonym for hell is interesting. In II Chronicles we read that two Jewish kings, Ahaz (II Chronicles 38:3) and Manasseh (II Kings 33:6) offered child sacrifices to the pagan god Molech. Such sacrifices were strictly forbidden by God so, according to II Kings 23:10, King Josiah declared that valley was “unclean” and was to be used only as a city dump where trash was dumped, along with the carcasses of dead animal and some criminals. There was a continual fire burning there so that the trash would not overrun it while worms and some rodents feasted on the dead carcasses. Isaiah and Jeremiah used the imagery of that valley to describe the judgment that would come on those who refused to follow God. Read Isaiah 66:24.

When Jesus said to the disciples, “**It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into Gehanna**” they automatically substituted in their thinking “hell” because that is what the valley represented.

What do we know about hell? There are various references to this eternal place and all are designed to depict the place no one would ever want to be. Luke 16:28 calls it a place of “**torment.**” It is described in Matthew 25:41 as one of “**everlasting fire.**” Luke calls it a place “**without hope**” (Luke 16:26) and Isaiah calls it a place “**without rest or peace**” (Isaiah 57:20, 21). Mark calls it a place where the “**fire is not quenched.**” Revelation 21 will describe it as “**a lake that burns with fire and brimstone.**” Revelation 9:2 calls it a “**bottomless pit**” and Matthew 8:12 says it is a place of “**outer darkness**” where there will be “**weeping and gnashing of teeth**”. Jude 13 calls it “**blackness of darkness.**”

Overall the description of hell is that of being apart from God. God is “up there” and hell is “down there”, God is “inside”, and hell is “outside” or as Luke writes, there is a great gulf fixed between heaven and hell.

The **Bible uses figurative language to describe hell** even as it does in its description of heaven. Both heaven and hell are beyond the ability of us to understand. All of the descriptions are designed to show the ugliness of it and if the symbolism of it is terrible then it all probability it is much, much worse. While figurative there is no doubt that it is a place no one will ever want to

be. Read I Corinthians 2:9, for what Paul said about heaven and remember that it is also true of any attempt to describe hell.

Even if there will be no punishment, hell is separation from the loving God who has designed heaven as a perfect place for those who belong to Him. For example, Matthew 25:31-46 records some of the teaching of Jesus on the final judgment. Read Matthew 25:41 on what God will have to say to some.

**God's justice demands a hell,** God is just and pure and as such He not only cannot look upon sin but must also judge it. Non-Christians often ask, and Christians sometime wonder, "how a good God can punish those who disagree with Him?" The reality is that one of the reasons God is good is because He is holy and because of His holiness He cannot ignore sin. If there is no punishment for sin, then sinners will have gotten away with rebellion against God.

**God's love demands a hell.** God's love invites us into fellowship and a love relationship with Him, but real love cannot be coerced. Forced love is not love and if a man chooses to reject love all that love can do is let it go. Men must be allowed not to love him even though there are consequences to that.

Not only does God's justice and love demand judgment on those who sin against Him and refuse to accept His love, but **God's sovereignty demands it.** Evil must be defeated. In Matthew 13:24-30 we have a parable about the kingdom. Good seed was planted and then someone (Satan) came and sowed evil seed. The wheat and the evil seeds grew side by side. Read what Jesus said in Matthew 13:22-30. The wheat and tares cannot grow together forever. If God is not ultimately in control, then all is lost and if He is, then sin/evil must be judged.

A big question is about the length of hell. Is it a place of everlasting punishment? First note that while one might debate the length of hell, there is no way one can find any evidence for a second chance in which, after a period of punishment, the sinner can accept Jesus. One decides now or never.

There is significant biblical evidence that just as there will be no end to the blessings of heaven, there will be no end to the separation from God called hell. There are no second chances.

There is overwhelming evidence for the punishment of hell going on forever just as the blessings of heaven go on forever. Jesus said in the Mark passage before us today that the "**the worms that eat them will not die.**" The Jewish listeners understood that to be a symbolism that meant that the punishment will never cease because the flesh of the condemned will always be there.

There are multiple additional verses in the Bible that clearly depict that the punishment of the condemned will be everlasting. Read Revelation 14:11.

Read Revelation 20:10 that speaks of Satan for whom hell was designed and where all who follow him will spend the rest of eternity.

Matthew 25:46 is an interesting verse on judgment. It reads, **“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”** If one wants to believe that **“eternal judgment”** does not mean that then one must also assume that **“eternal life”** does not mean that.

There is one other fact about hell that we should be aware of. There are several verses that indicate that the degree of punishment in hell will vary from individual to individual. For example, Revelation 20:12 reads, **“The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”** Matthew 10:15 and again in Matthew 11:24 Jesus speaking of the coming judgment and He said, **“Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.”**

In the end the idea of less punishment is probably not all that helpful since separation from God is the real issue.

I believe it was the great evangelist Dwight L. Moody who once said that if you can preach on Hell and not have tears in your eyes you ought not to preach on it. We need to remember that we cannot really consider hell without being reminded of two things. **First** as we contemplate how horrible hell is we must shout praise to God for providing a way to escape it. **Second**, when we consider the seriousness of hell, we must want to tell all who have not accepted the Jesus as Savior that they must, for their sakes, trust Him before it is too late.

Hell is not a nice subject to think about, but then neither is sin against a loving and holy God.