

7:13; Gal 6:8; Phil 3:19; Heb 10:39; see also Jn 17:12, as eternal destruction (2 Thess 1:9) or as exclusion from the kingdom of God (Lk 13:28; 1 Cor 6:9f; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; see also Mt 8:12; Lk 14:24; Col 3:5f). The wicked too will be resurrected (Jn 5:29; Acts 24:15; see also Mt 25:31-46, but to the resurrection of judgment (Jn 5:29; see also Mt 25:31-46).

The New Testament also recognizes a temporary state of punishment, which corresponds to the ideas current in later Judaism (Jub 5:6, 10; Hen [eth] 10:4-6, 22-14). Thus, the sinful angels are kept in chains and in darkness until the last judgment (Jude 6), or in Tartarus, or the lowest part of hell (2 Pet 2:4). What is more, Hades is also regarded as a temporary place of punishment—hell will not only have to give up its dead for judgment at the resurrection (Rev 20:13), but will also be replaced by the everlasting Gehenna (Rev 20:14; hell, together with death will be cast into the pool of fire). In Hades, the sinner's soul is separated from his body. In Gehenna, on the other hand, he will be punished, after the resurrection, both in his body and his soul (Mk 9:43, 45, 47; Mt 5:29f; 18:8f).

The theological importance of the biblical references to hell. The bible uses words such as fire, worm, and darkness, which, in their literal sense, are irreconcilable. Used figuratively, however, such words aim to express, by their associations with terrible experiences undergone in this life, the inexpressible torments of the damned. 'Weeping', for example, is used to express the pain, which the damned suffer, 'gnashing of teeth', their

anger and despair. Language of this kind, wherever it is found in the NT, however, is always extremely restrained and sober, compared with the cruel and fantastic descriptions of hell in the apocryphal books. Its main purpose is, of course, to stir the conscience and to instill a healthy fear of God as heavenly judge. God's anger, which strikes the sinner and, excluding him from the kingdom of heaven, sentences him to eternal perdition, is expressed in the New Testament without recourse to imagery. It is true that certain words—fire, darkness, weeping and so on—are used in an attempt to convey something of the terrible nature of the punishment of the damned, but exactly what this punishment is really like remains a mystery which is not revealed anywhere in the bible. However, any attempt to mitigate the grave and terrible implications of the reality of hell, by appealing, for example, to 1 Cor 15:29, or to some other similar passage, is bound to fail, in view of the absolute clarity of scripture on this subject.

Reference: *Sacramentum Verbi: An Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, J.B. Bauer, ed, Herder and Herder, 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 369-371.

The Evangelization Station

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: evangelization@earthlink.net

www.evangelizationstation.com

Pamphlet 584

Jehovah's Witnesses and Hell

The Watchtower Society was founded by Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). Russell called himself God's mouthpiece. He made his living at the time as a haberdasher. He had been raised as a Presbyterian and then became a Congregationalist. The false doctrine of pre-destination and the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell troubled him.

In 1870 he found Second Adventism in a basement church in Allegheny, PA. He was 18 years old at the time.

In 1879, at the age of 27, Russell started publishing "Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence".

Official teaching of the Watchtower Society concerning the afterlife and hell:

"What, then, is the condition of the dead? When pronouncing sentence upon Adam, Jehovah stated: "Dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:19) Where was Adam before God formed him from the dust of the ground and gave him life? Why, he simply did not exist! When he died, Adam returned to that state of complete absence of life. The condition of the dead is made clear at Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10, where we read: "The dead know nothing . . . In the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." (*New International Version*) Scripturally, death is a state of nonexistence. The dead have no awareness, no feelings, no thoughts."

Unending Torment or Common Grave?

“Since the dead have no conscious existence, hell cannot be a fiery place of torment where the wicked suffer after death. (Taken from the Official website of the Jehovah’s Witnesses:

http://www.watchtower.org/e/20020715/article_02.htm).

Hell in Scripture

Hell is the name used in scripture, with various shades of meaning, to denote the place of punishment of the damned after death.

In the Old Testament, Sheol is the place, believed to be located under the earth, to which both good and bad go after death (Gen 37:35; Deut 32:22; I Kings 2:6; Prov 9:18; 15:11; Job 10:12f; Ps 9:17; 31:17; 49:15; 55:15; 88:3-6; 11-13; 94:17; 115:17; Is 38:10, 18; Wis 1:14). The fate of the dead is, however, gradually seen in a different light in the Old Testament, and good and bad are judged according to their merits. The good are awakened after death to a new, eternal life (Dan 12:2; 2 Macc 7:9, 11, 14, 23; see also Is 26:19) and are received by God (Ps 49:15; Wis 5:15f; 6:18f; see also 3:1-9). The wicked and godless, however, will be punished (Is 50:11; 66:24; Judith 16:17; Wis 4:19; Sir 7:17f; see also Wis 3:10, 18) and will rise again to reproach and dishonor (Dan 12:2; see also 2 Macc 7:14). Their punishment will be by fire (Is 50:11; 66:24; Judith 16:21; Sir 7:17f) and worms (Is 66:24; Judith 16:17f); Sir 7:17f). In this context, it is important not to overlook the element of imagery contained in these ideas—fire representing destruction and the

worm corruption—although in themselves these two elements are scarcely reconcilable. (Note: Admittedly, many of these biblical references are from the deuterocanonical books, which SDA’s reject as non-biblical or apocryphal, however, they can be cited to validate the general belief concerning hell in the Old Testament era.)

In the New Testament, hell is conceived according to the prevalent in later Judaism (with the exception of the canonical books, and especially Enoch [Eth] 22. etc.). After death the sinner is taken to Hades is the usual translation of Sheol in LXX [Septuagint translation], where he is tormented by fire (Lk 16:23f). This place of punishment is often called Gehenna (Mk 9:24f; Mt 5:29f; 10:28; 23:15, 33; Lk 12:5; Jas 3:6, or Gehenna of fire—‘hell fire’ (Mt 5:22; 18:9). Sometimes it is described as an everlasting or inextinguishable fire (Mk 9:42f; see also Mt 18:8, where the worms and fire torment the damned (Mk 9:27f; cf Is 66:24). The word *Gehenna* (used thus in the Vulgate; in Greek *geena*) is derived from the Hebrew *gê-hinnôm*, the ‘Valley of Hinnom’ (Joshua 15:8a; 18:16a; 2 Chron 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31f; 19:2, 6). This was the valley or ravine to the south of Jerusalem where children were burnt as sacrifices during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chron 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31). It was in this valley too, that the Israelites would be punished (Jer 7:32; 19:6). It is in the New Testament and in the texts of later Judaism (4 Esdras 7:36; Bar [Syr] 59:10; 85:13) that the name first occurs with the meaning of a place of punishment after death. This place of punishment is already in existence, and the

human body is corrupted by its influence (Jas 3:6). Other passages refer to various aspects of hell as a place of punishment—eternal fire (Mt 18:8; 25:41; see also Mt 3:12; Lk 3:17; Jude 7), the ‘fury of fire’ (Heb 10:27), the ‘furnace of fire’ (Mt 13:42, 50), the outer darkness (Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; see also 2 Pet 2:17), where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth—thus signifying the most extreme agony and the greatest anger (Mt 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk 13:28) by which hypocrites are punished (Mt 24:51; see also Lk 12:46) This fire is prepared for the devil and his angels, and those who do not show mercy towards others will be punished in it (Mt 25:41). In the Apocalypse, it is characterized as the ‘lake of fire that burns with brimstone’ (Rev 19:20; see also 14:10; 20:9, 14). Into this pool of fire are cast first of all the two beasts, representing the Antichrist (19:20; 20:9f), then the devil (20:9), the kingdom of Death (hades) Death itself (*Thanatos*: 20:14) and finally all sinners (21:8). The punishment in this place of fire is final and everlasting (Mt 18:8; 25:41, 46; Rev 19:20; 20:9f; 21:8), but it varies according to the guilt of each individual sinner (Lk 12:47f; see also Mt 10:15; 11:22; Lk 10:12, 14).

In other passages of the NT, the ultimate punishment of sinners is not characterized in figurative language or in imagery, but simply as God’s wrath and anger (Rom 2:8; see also 2 Thess 1:8; Rev 16:19), as evil (2 Cor 5:10), as death (Jn 8:51f; Rom 6:21, 23; see also 5:21), as the second death (Rev 2:11; 20:6; 14; 21:8) as judgment (Jn 5:24, 29; see also 1 Cor 11:29), as destruction (Mt