

Article: DH190

WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE IN HELL?

This article first appeared in the Ask Hank column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 27, number 1 (2004). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2 NIV).

The horrors of hell are such that they cause us instinctively to recoil in disbelief and doubt; yet, there are compelling reasons that should cause us to erase such doubt from our minds. First, Christ, the Creator of the cosmos, clearly communicated hell’s irrevocable reality. In fact, He spent more time talking about hell than He did about heaven. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), He explicitly warned His followers more than a half-dozen times about the dangers that lead to hell. In the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25), He repeatedly told His followers of the judgment to come. In His famous story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16), He graphically portrayed the finality of eternal torment in hell.

Furthermore, the concept of choice demands that we believe in hell. Without hell, there is no choice. Without choice, heaven would not be heaven; heaven would be hell. The righteous would inherit a counterfeit heaven, and the unrighteous would be incarcerated in heaven against their wills, which would be a torture worse than hell. Imagine spending a lifetime voluntarily distanced from God only to find yourself involuntarily dragged into His loving presence for all eternity. The alternative to hell would be worse than hell itself in that humans made in the image of God would be stripped of freedom and forced to worship God against their will.

Finally, common sense regarding justice dictates that there must be a hell. Without hell, the wrongs of Hitler’s Holocaust would never be righted. Justice would be impugned if, after slaughtering six million Jews, Hitler merely died in the arms of his mistress with no eternal consequences. The ancients knew better than to think such a thing. David knew that it might seem for a time as though the wicked prosper despite their evil deeds, but in the end justice will be served. We may wish to think that no one will go to hell, but common sense regarding justice precludes that possibility.

IS ANNIHILATIONISM BIBLICAL?

If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name. (Rev. 14:9–11 NIV)

Just as universalism (i.e., everyone will be saved) is the rage in liberal Christian circles, so, too, annihilationism (i.e., God will annihilate unbelievers) is gaining momentum in conservative Christian circles. The question, of course, is whether annihilationism is biblical.

First, common sense tells us that a God of love and justice does not arbitrarily annihilate a portion of the crowning jewels of His creation. He graciously provides everyone the freedom to choose between redemption and rebellion. It would be a horrific evil to think that God would create people with freedom of choice and then annihilate them because of their choices.

Furthermore, common sense also leads us to the conclusion that nonexistence is not better than existence since nonexistence is nothing at all. It is also crucial to recognize that not all existence in hell will be equal. We may safely conclude that Hitler's torment in hell will greatly exceed the torment experienced by a garden-variety pagan. God is perfectly just, and each person who spurns His grace will suffer exactly what he or she deserves (see Luke 12:47–48; cf. Prov. 24:12; Matt. 16:27; Col. 3:25; Rev. 20:11–15).

Finally, humans are fashioned in the very image of God (Gen. 1:27); therefore, to eliminate them would do violence to His nature. The alternative to annihilation is quarantine. That is precisely what hell is.

— Hank Hanegraaff

For further study, see Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Press, 1995).

Hank answers more of your challenging questions on his nationally syndicated radio broadcast, the *Bible Answer Man*, heard daily at 6:05 p.m. Eastern Time (see www.equip.org for stations and Internet streaming) and in *The Bible Answer Book* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004).