

“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”

My wife says that if you go to hell, you will be alone and not able to talk to anyone else. We tried to find an answer in the Bible, but we could not find a scripture that said that. I have also heard this from different people. Where is the proof?

Thanks for your question. I have also heard this many times myself. It’s interesting to note that C.S. Lewis, the famous Christian apologist, once wrote something to the effect that “Hell is no one but yourself, forever and ever.” On the other hand, Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French atheistic existentialist philosopher, once wrote that “Hell is other people.” But what does the Bible actually say?

Here are just a few passages to consider:

1. Isaiah 14:3-21: This passage is a taunt against the king of Babylon. What’s interesting is the description of the king’s reception in Sheol, the place of the dead. Notice such verses as 9-10: “Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; it arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; it raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones. They will all respond and say to you, ‘Even you have been made weak as we, you have become like us.’” Thus, this passage seems to indicate some sort of communication between departed spirits in Sheol. How literally this should be taken is, of course, quite difficult to say. Additionally, it must be remembered that, strictly speaking, Sheol is not the same as Hell. In the Old Testament all the dead were believed to reside in Sheol, both the righteous and the wicked. Hell, on the other hand, is a place of eternal punishment only for the wicked. God could redeem a righteous man from the power of Sheol (Ps. 49:15), but there is “No Exit” from Hell.

2. Luke 16:19-31: In this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we learn that Lazarus is received into “Abraham’s bosom” at death whereas the rich man goes to Hades. “Abraham’s bosom” is pictured as a place of both comfort and honor; Hades is pictured as a place of fire and torment. Strictly speaking, “Abraham’s bosom” is not Heaven and Hades is not Hell, but each does seem to be a precursor of the other (i.e. Hades is a sort of pre-hell Hell-see Rev. 20:14). Although the rich man is not said to converse with anyone else in Hades, he does converse with Abraham! In the parable, the two men are able to speak with one another even though a great chasm prevents them from crossing over to one another. Again, it is difficult to know how literally such a parable should be read. Is it an actual description of the afterlife prior to one’s final judgment? I’ll let you come to your own conclusion on that one!

3. Revelation 20:10-15: This passage does actually deal with the eternal destiny of the unsaved in Hell. In v. 10, we see that Satan, the beast and the false prophet will all be there. In vv. 14-15 we learn that “death” and “Hades” (and presumably all their inhabitants), along with everyone whose name is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into “the lake of fire” (i.e. Hell). Thus, all the unsaved, along with Satan and his demons, appear to be ultimately consigned to the same place of punishment (see Matt. 25:41). But nothing is said about whether these lost souls will have any communication with one another, or even whether they will be able to see one another. In other words, just because they are consigned to the same place of punishment, it does not necessarily follow that they will have any opportunity to communicate with one another. It could be that Hell is analogous to a large number of prisoners, all at the same prison, but all separated from one another in something like solitary confinement! But I honestly don’t know.

Thus, to answer your question (which is a good one!), I do not personally think there is enough

scriptural evidence to reach a firm conclusion concerning whether or not those in Hell will be utterly alone and unable to communicate or not. I'm sorry I can't answer your question any better, but at least my answer is an honest one!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

©2001 Probe Ministries