

The spirit of Man, Annihilation, Resurrection, and Hell

Jehovah's Witnesses on What Happens after Death

The author of Hebrews states, “*inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes the judgment*” (Heb. 9:27). Life after death fascinates peoples of all faiths. Hindus and Buddhist believe that man is reincarnated after death. Many Catholics believe in a purgatory for those who died needing further refining through punishment. The Seventh Day Adventists believe death is a state of unconsciousness. Regardless of one's personal beliefs on death the word of God is clear as to how one will spend eternity after death. This study shall compare the Word of God with the Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs on the spirit of man, annihilation, resurrection, and hell.

Jehovah's Witnesses on the spirit of Man

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the soul or spirit of man is to be “compared to the electric current that activates a machine or an appliance and enables it to perform its function. Just as the current never takes on the features of the equipment it activates, the life-force does not take on any of the characteristics of the creatures it animates. It has no personality and no thinking ability” (*The Watchtower* / July 15, 2002). “When a person dies, therefore, his spirit does not go on existing in another realm as a spirit creature” (*The Watchtower* / July 15, 2001). The dead individual is either annihilated or in a state of nonexistence in the mind of God awaiting the resurrection depending upon how he or she lived their lives.

Jehovah's Witnesses on existence after death

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that “death is a state of nonexistence” for both faithful and unfaithful (*The Watchtower* / July 15, 2002). Those who lived faithfully will remain in “God's memory” and be resurrected to live either on earth or in heaven. “Willful, unrepentant sinners will also have their ‘portion’ in that lake. (Revelation 21:8) They too will be annihilated forever” (ibid.).

Jehovah's Witnesses on the Resurrection

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that those who remained in “God's memory” as righteous people will be resurrected while the wicked will be annihilated (cf. above study). When faced with the Bible's teaching that both the just and unjust will be raised (Jn. 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), the Jehovah's Witnesses state, “But millions of other people have died without showing whether they would comply with God's righteous standards. Either they did not know about Jehovah's requirements or they lacked sufficient time to make needed changes. Individuals of this sort are also in God's memory and will be resurrected (Acts 24:15)” (*The Watchtower* / July 15, 2001) (i.e., given a 2nd chance).

Jehovah's Witnesses on Hell

“Since the dead have no conscious existence, hell cannot be a fiery place of torment where the wicked suffer after death” (*The Watchtower* / July 15, 2002). Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Bible's references to hell and the lake of fire to be figurative language. They confuse the Bible's use of Sheol and Hades with Hell and thereby conclude, “The Bible hell, then, is the common grave of mankind where good people as well as bad ones go” (ibid.).

The Word of God on the spirit of Man, Annihilation, Resurrection, and Hell

Note that at James 2:26 it is not the spirit that dies at death but the body when apart from the spirit. The body returns to the dust (Gen. 3:19). If the spirit ceases to exist at death then why did Jesus give the parable

of the rich man and Lazarus at Luke 16:19ff. The rich man and Lazarus had the ability to both remember and reason. When the woman with a “*familiar spirit*” at Endor called Samuel up from the dead they were able to communicate intelligently (cf. I Sam. 28:13ff).

The Bible tells us that when one dies they go to Sheol or Hades (the two terms are the same in meaning / cf. Ps. 16:10 and Acts 2:27). There is a side of torments (cf. Ps. 9:17; 55:15; Lk. 16:23) and a paradise side of Hades (cf. Lk. 23:43). If man ceases to exist how does he or she suffer torments or comfort (Lk. 16:22)? Furthermore, those who live in wickedness in this life will not be annihilated but rather “*be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone... and be tormented day and night for ever and ever*” with the devil and his angels (Rev. 20:10).

All people who ever lived upon the face of the earth will one day be resurrected (Acts 24:15). Jesus explains the eternal existence after death of both just and wicked at John 5:27-29. All dead will be judged by Christ (Rev. 20:12). Those not found in the book of life shall be cast into hell to be tormented for ever (cf. Rev. 20:10-15). **Hell and Hades are two different places according to Rev. 20:10-15.** Hell is eternal (Matt. 25:46; Mk. 9:47-48) and Hades a temporary holding place for the dead (Rev. 20:13-14).

Dear friend, the spirit of every man will live on into eternity. Where you and I spend eternity is dependant upon how we lived our lives here on this earth (II Jn. 9-10). To say that hell is not a place of physical torments is to take away the fear of God from man. If all I face is annihilation, as opposed to eternal torment, then many will certainly choose to opt out of spirituality in this life. God is the just God of all flesh and all will stand before him and give account (cf. Jer. 32:27; Phil. 2:10-11).