286826 - The creation of Hell and does it exist at present?

the question

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And when Hellfire is set ablaze” [at-Takweer 81:12]. I looked for the meaning of “set ablaze” and found that it means “kindled”. Does the meaning of kindled indicate that it is not yet been lit and then will be lit? Or does it have another meaning? In other words, is Hell unlit at present and will be lit on the Day of Resurrection, or is there another meaning?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah are agreed that Paradise and Hell are two created entities that exist at present. Ahl as-Sunnah always held this belief until some some of the followers of innovation came up with a different notion and denied that.

Among the texts of the Qur’an which point to this fact is the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says of Paradise (interpretation of the meaning):

“ … prepared for the righteous”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:133].

And He says:

“Race toward forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden whose width is like the width of the heavens and earth, prepared for those who believed in Allah and His messengers. That is the bounty of Allah which He gives to whom He wills, and Allah is the possessor of great bounty”

[al-Hadeed 57:21].

And He says concerning Hell:

“…prepared for the disbelievers”

[al-Baqarah 2:24 and Aal ‘Imraan 3:131].

And Allah, may He be exalted, says:

“Indeed, Hell has been lying in wait

For the transgressors, a place of return,

In which they will remain for ages [unending].

They will not taste therein [any] coolness or drink

Except scalding water and [foul] purulence –

An appropriate recompense.

Indeed, they were not expecting an account

And denied Our verses with [emphatic] denial.

But all things We have enumerated in writing.

‘So taste [the penalty], and never will We increase you except in torment’”

[an-Naba’ 78:21-30].

Sharh at-Tahhaawiyyah (2/614).

Secondly:

There are several hadiths which state that the Fire – may Allah protect us from it – exists at

present. These include the following:

It was narrated that Ibn ‘Umar said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “When one of you dies, he is shown his place morning and evening. If he is one of the people of Paradise, then (he is shown his place) among the people of Paradise, and if he is one of the people of Hell, then (he is shown his place) among the people of Hell. And it is said: This is your place, until Allah resurrects you to it on the Day of Resurrection.” Al-Bukhaari (32240) and Muslim (2866).

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said, following a prayer that he had offered: “Whilst I was standing, I saw everything that you have been promised; I even saw myself wanting to take a bunch of grapes from Paradise when you saw me stepping forward. And I saw Hell, parts of it consuming other parts, when you saw me moving backwards. And I saw therein ‘Amr ibn Luhayy, who is the one who established the custom of al-saa’ib [a custom of the Jaahiliyyah whereby a she-camel was set free for the gods and was not to be used for carrying loads or ridden].”

One of the clearest hadiths which states that Paradise and Hell have been created and exist at present was narrated from Abu Hurayrah, according to which the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “When Allah created Paradise and Hell, he sent Jibreel to Paradise and said, ‘Look at it and at what I have prepared for its people therein.’ So he went and looked at it and at what Allah had prepared for its people therein. Then he went back to Him and said, ‘By Your Glory, no one will hear of it but he will enter it.’ Then He commanded that it should be surrounded with difficult things. Then He said, ‘Go back and look at what I have prepared for its people therein.’ He went back and saw that it was surrounded with difficult things. He came back and said, ‘By Your Glory, I am afraid that no one will enter it.’

Allah said, ‘Go and look at Hell and see what I have prepared for its people therein.’ [He saw it] with parts of it consuming other parts. He came back and said, ‘By Your Glory, no one who hears of it will enter it.’ So Allah commanded that it should be surrounded with desires. Then he said, ‘Go back to it.’ So he went back, then he said, ‘By Your Glory, I am afraid that no one will be saved

from it and that all will enter it.’”

Narrated by at-Tirmidhi (2736); he said: This is a hasan saheeh hadith.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The Fire said: Lord, parts of me have consumed other parts; give me permission to breathe out. So He gave it permission to breathe out, once in the winter and once in the summer. What you experience of cold or intense cold is the breath of Hell, and what you experience of heat or intense heat is the breath of Hell.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (536) and Muslim (617).

Ibn al-Qayyim said: The Companions of the Messenger of Allah, the Taabi‘een and those who followed them, and all of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Hadith, the Fuqaha’, the people of tasawwuf and zuhd (asceticism), all continued to believe that (that is, that Paradise and Hell exist at present), and to affirm that, basing that on the texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah, and what is well-known from the reports of all the Messengers, from the first of them to the last of them, for they called the nations to believe that and spoke of it, until the Qadaris and Mu‘tazilah came along, who denied that they (Paradise and Hell) have already been created (and exist at present)…

Hence the Salaf (early generations) stated that Paradise and Hell have already been created, and those scholars who wrote about this issue confirmed that this is the view of all of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Hadith, and they did not differ concerning that.

End quote from Haadi al-Arwaah (11).

Ibn Abi’l-‘Izz said: With regard to the specious argument of those who said that they have not yet been created, which is that if they had already been created, then they would necessarily cease to exist on the Day of Resurrection, and everyone who is in them would perish and die, because Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Everything will be destroyed except His Face” [al-Qasas 28:88] and “Every soul will taste death” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:185],

The response to that is: if what you mean by your words is that it does not exist at present, like

the trumpet blast and the rising of the people from their graves, this is false and is refuted by the evidence noted above and similar evidence that we have not cited here.

If what you mean is that everything that Allah will create in it for its people has not yet been created in full, and that Allah is still gradually creating things in it, and when the believers enter it, Allah will create other things in it upon their entry, then this is true and cannot be rejected; this evidence of yours only indicates this.

With regard to your citing the verse “Everything will be destroyed except His Face” [al-Qasas 28:88] as evidence for your view, you have misunderstood the meaning of the verse, and your citing of it to prove that Paradise and Hell do not exist at present is akin to your brethren’s suggesting that they will cease to exist, be destroyed and their people will die. Neither you nor your brethren have been enabled to understand the meaning of the verse; rather the leading scholars of Islam are the ones who have been enabled to understand it. Among other things, they said that what is meant is that everything for which Allah has decreed death and destruction will be destroyed; Paradise and Hell are created to remain and not be destroyed. The same applies to the Throne, for it is the roof of Paradise.

And it was said that what is meant is everything will be destroyed except His dominion.

It was also said that what is meant is that everything will die except that by means of which His pleasure was sought. And it was said that when Allah, may He be exalted, revealed the words (interpretation of the meaning), “Everyone upon the earth will perish” [ar-Rahmaan 55:26], the angels said: The people of earth will perish, and they hoped that they would survive. Then Allah, may He be exalted, said that both the people of heaven and the people of earth would die, as He said: “Everything will be destroyed except His Face” [al-Qasas 28:88], because He is Ever-Living and will never die. At that point the angels became certain that they would die. The scholars only said that so as to reconcile between this verse and other, unambiguous texts which indicate that Paradise will last forever, and that Hell will also last forever, as we shall discuss below. And Allah knows best.

End quote from Sharh at-Tahhaawiyyah (2/620).

Thirdly:

With regard to the words, “And when Hellfire is set ablaze” [at-Takweer 81:12], what is meant is when it is kindled and heats up. What is meant by being set ablaze is that its heat will be increased on that Day – may Allah protect us from the Fire – not that it is unlit and will be set ablaze on the Day of Resurrection.

See: Tafseer at-Tabari (24/150).

Al-Qurtubi said: It was lit and set ablaze for the disbelievers, and will be increased in heat.

End quote from Tafseer at-Tabari (19/235).

As-Sa ‘di said: That is, when the fire is lit, until it begins to rage and increases until it is blazing like never before.

End quote from Tafseer as-Sa‘di (912).

What the verse means is that the Fire – may Allah protect us from it – will increase in heat on the Day of Resurrection, and be prepared for its people; what a bad fate for its people and what a bad abode.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And whoever Allah guides - he is the [rightly] guided; and whoever He sends astray - you will never find for them protectors besides Him, and We will gather them on the Day of Resurrection [fallen] on their faces - blind, dumb and deaf. Their refuge is Hell; every time it subsides We increase them in blazing fire”

[al-Israa’ 17:97].

That is, every time it calms down, its blaze will be increased – may Allah protect us from it.

And Allah knows best.