

Saving My Son from “The Gates of Hell”

By Jason W. Triplett

I love the [History Channel](#). In no way is this post an appraisal of their content.

My son Joshua (9 years old) and I were watching t.v. the other day and the "The Gates of Hell" was broadcast. It is a History Channel show on cultural understandings of hell. The show's YouTube trailer will give you an idea of its content.

Joshua has been in church all of his life, professes a belief in Christ and has absorbed about every Christian "cultural" understanding of hell there is. He knows how the Christian community is thought to view hell. This documentary shows animated versions of classic artistic depictions of hell like people in a fiery pit being tortured and being condemned by demonic beings. It also shows things like lava pits, deep dark caves, satanic images all in reference to how different cultures understand hell. It was pretty intense, but I hesitantly kept watching it with him. I thought it might have some educational value for him. Consequently, it did.

Josh and I watched for a while. When the show went to commercial Josh looked up at from his position laying on the couch.

He said, "Dad, if I believe in Jesus, I won't go down there, will I?" I looked at him. His eyebrows were raised as if he was waiting for me to alleviate an anxious thought he was having. He was looking for reassurance. Initially I didn't know what to say.

Frankly, the images of hell the show depicted were mostly Biblically inaccurate. The images of fire, destruction and separation is Biblical, the understanding of hell being "down" is loosely translated from the word "Sheol" or underworld in the Old Testament. Most of the imagery the television show focused on for Christian depictions of hell were from Dante's Inferno and The Divine Comedy which were from the 12th Century, way after the Bible was written. Actually the show was pretty true to its point. It was a show on cultural understandings of hell, not Biblical understandings. But the question from Josh still lingered.

The modern "parental" thing to do was to comfort him from all fear and reassure him that God is good and would never send him to hell. But that wasn't his question. He asked if he believed in Jesus, would he be saved from hell? The answer to that question is an emphatic yes.

I told Josh that I think the hells (Egyptian, Greek, Hindu, Roman, Christian? etc.) depicted in the show were largely ideas created by people, not by the Jesus or the Bible. I told Josh that the Biblical understanding of hell was eternal separation and destruction like the scripture describes. I also reminded him that he is a believer. What happened next took me off guard.

Josh said, "Dad, why would people say something that the Bible doesn't say? I mean, don't they want people to know the truth?" Such a mature question from a nine year old.

I answered the best that I could. I told him that maybe people want to scare others into believing in Jesus. I said that people sometimes believe that fear will cause others to believe who the Bible describes Jesus to be.

"I want people to know the truth." Josh said and his eyes went back to the television.

I said I did too. Then we started looking for something else to watch.