# *Hell*

## *Announcing Biblical Truths of our Lord*

## Articles

**Is hell eternal?**
**The State of the Dead**
**The Doctrine of Hell: What exactly is hell?**
**Hell**
**Is There Really a Hell?**







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# Is Hell Eternal?

The teaching that there is an eternal hell in which hordes of mankind will suffer eternal punishment can be a difficult doctrine to accept. We hear so much about God's infinite love and how He desires that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). However, those who develop their theologies based upon the "gentle" side of God do so with an incomplete picture. Not only is God loving (1 John 4:8-10), gracious (Exo. 33:19; 1 Pet. 2:3), and merciful (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 67:1; James 5:11), but He is also holy (Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8), just ( Neh. 9:32-33; 2 Thess. 1:6), and hates sin (Psalm 5:5-6; Hab. 1:13). God punishes the sinner (Jer. 50:31; Ez. 44:12; Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 10:29).

The Bible teaches that there is a fiery hell, a place that Jesus warned people about.

> *"And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire,"* (Matt. 18:8).

Eternal fire is real. Jesus said it was. In fact, Jesus spoke a great deal about hell. It is what Jesus came here to save us from.

There will be a Day of Judgment when all people will face God. Those who are not covered by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross will be cast out into hell where they will undergo eternal punishment. *"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"* (Matt. 25:46). In this verse, the same word "eternal" is used to describe the punishment of the wicked as well as the eternal life of the believer. The punishment is endless as is the eternal life of the believer. That is why the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4) is so important, because it saves people from eternal damnation:

> *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, [2] by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. [3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,*
>
> *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life,* (John 5:24).

Following are a few verses that show the eternality of the hell and punishment. God uses different phrases to describe the same thing.

- *"And these will pay the penalty of **eternal destruction,** away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"* (2 Thess. 1:9).
- *"Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of **eternal fire**"* (Jude 7).

- *These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; [13] wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved* ***forever****,"* (Jude12-13).

**Is "forever and ever" without end?**

The phrase "forever and ever" is used both of describing God's eternal worth and the duration of eternal damnation. The exact same Greek phrase is used in each of the verses in the table below.

| **forever and ever**<br><br>aionas ton aionon<br>"ages of the ages" | |
|---|---|
| **Eternal - without end** | **Eternal Damnation** |
| "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory **forever and ever.** Amen," (1 Tim. 1:17).<br><br>". . . To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion **forever and ever"** (Rev. 5:13). | "And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up **forever and ever**" (Rev. 19:3).<br><br>"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night **forever and ever,"** (Rev. 20:10). |

The Greek phrase "aionas ton aionon," which is translated "forever and ever," occurs 18 times in the Greek New Testament. In 17 of them, the phrase means without end, extending into infinity. In Rev. 19:3, the phrase is used to describe the destruction of the great whore of Babylon (Rev. 17:1,4) whose smoke ascends forever and ever. It too is eternal and it signifies the beginning of the eternal judgment that comes upon her.

Also worth examining is Rev. 14:11: *"And the smoke of their torment goes up* ***forever and ever****; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."*

The Greek in Rev. 14:11 is only slightly different. In the table above, "forever and ever" is translated from the Greek, "aionas ton aionon," which is literally "ages of the of ages." In Rev. 14:11, the Greek is "aionas aionon" which is literally, "ages of ages." In the latter, the single Greek word "of the" is missing. But it is not necessary and does not change the meaning of the text. Therefore, the scripture teaches the smoke of their torment goes up forever, without end.

**Unquenchable Fire**

Some believe that the fires of hell are symbolic and/or temporal. But the following verses show that they are not.

Matt. 3:12 says, *"And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn*

*up the chaff with **unquenchable** fire."* (See also Luke 3:17.)

Mark 9:43 says, *"And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the **unquenchable** fire."* The word "unquenchable" is "asbestos" in the Greek. According to the enhanced Strong's lexicon, it means "unquenchable, the eternal hell fire to punish the damned."

The following citations are from Greek dictionaries and Lexicons. They show that the word "unquenchable," which is "asbestos" in the Greek, (which occurs only in Matt. 3:12, Luke 3:17, and Mark 9:43) means unquenchable, without end.

- *"unquenchable, inextinguishable"* - Liddell, H. G., and Scott, *Abridged Greek-English Lexicon*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1992, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.
- *"not quenched"* - Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.
- *"pertaining to a fire that cannot be put out"* - *"unquenchable."* - Louw, Johannes P. and Nida, Eugene A., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, (New York: United Bible Societies) 1988, 1989, [Online] Available: Logos Library System
- *"unquenched, unquenchable"* - *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.
- *"that cannot be put out"* - Wigram-Green, *The New Englishman's Greek Concordance and Lexicon,* (Peabody Mass: Hendrikson Publishers, 1982, p. 771.
- *"inextinguishable"* - William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed.* (Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press), 1979, p. 114.

Is hell eternal? Yes it is. Are its fires without end? Yes they are. Is it a pleasant doctrine to discuss? Not really. But, hell is real. This is all the more reason to preach the gospel. Jesus said,

> *"And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire,"* (Matt. 18:8).

All scripture quotes are from the NASB.

Written by CARM

# The State of the Dead

Death is a fascinating subject. We are born to die. We will die, early, mid, or late life or any day in-between, expected or unexpected. All of us are a heartbeat away from eternity. Unless the Lord comes and takes us away while we are still living, we will face death. Death is the last enemy we will face. No wonder 1 Corinthians 15:26 says, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death".

Lest I sound too gloomy, let me state that all this pessimism on the subject of death is for unbelievers or the uninformed only. The Christian has a different attitude, which is stated in Philiipians 1:21,

*"For me to live is Christ, and to - die is gain". We as Christians know that "..to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord"* as 2 Corinthians 5:8 says.

It is not so in the world in general, nor in the world of the cults. Let's look at the variations on the teaching of annihilationism taught in concert with "soul sleep".

Annihilation comes from the Latin word "nihil" meaning "Nothing". In other words, the human soul ceases to exist at death. There are even three variations on this teaching.

1. Materialism: Gone, done, nothing further,,, annihilated.

2. Conditional immortality: Teaches that although humans are naturally mortal, God imparts to the redeemed immortality, but the rest of humanity is annihilated completely.

3. Annihilationism proper: Man is created immortal, fulfills his destiny in salvation (except for the reprobates who fall into nonexistence either through a direct act of God or through the corrosive effect of evil ..... either way they cease to exist.)

There is another view, Universalism, which teaches that God will finally redeem everybody.

The cults usually fall into condition 2, "conditional immortality" or 3, "Annihilationsim proper, or some condition similar to the two.... some can be saved after death, the rest are annihilated. Any view encompassing annihilationism involves the denial of the immortality of the soul. Therefore at death, the soul either "sleeps" or is out of existence, since the soul is only the person, nothing more, in their view.

Jehovah's Witnesses have this to say under the heading "Condition of Human Dead" in their Aid to Bible Understanding page 431.

*"The dead are shown to be "conscious of nothing at all" and the death state to be one of complete inactivity.*

(Eccl. 9"5, 10; Ps. 146:4). In both the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures death is likened to sleep, a fitting comparison, not only due to the unconscious condition of the dead, but also because of the hope of an awakening through the resurrection...".

So, according to the JW's, and also the Seventh-day Adventists, who have common roots, the dead are sleeping, the soul also is dead, until such time that God "awakens" them through "resurrection". Realize that by "resurrection", they really mean "re-creation" since the person is, in reality, in their doctrine, cloned from God's memory.

To the JW's, and groups like them, the soul is just the person (You say "poor soul" you mean the person) and the spirit is just their breath, nothing more. Let's turn to the Bible to get at the truth about the definition of the Soul and the Spirit.

**The Soul and the Spirit**

Are the soul and the spirit the same? If not, what makes them different? Many believe that the terms "soul" and "spirit" are interchangeable terms, when, in fact, the Bible shows a difference.

We are created in the image of God according to the Bible. Just as our God is a Triune Being, so are we. We are composed of Body, Soul, and Spirit. Let's confirm this fact by considering 1 Thessalonians 5:23,

*"Now may the God of Peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

So, to be sanctified ENTIRELY and preserved COMPLETE, our total self is involved.... body, soul, and spirit.

**Dividing the Soul and the Spirit**

The soul and the spirit are not the same, as the Bible speaks of a division between the two. Hebrews 4:12 says,

*"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*

Not only is this Scripture a marvelous revelation of the power of the word of God to change lives, but it shows that the piercing power of the word can divide between the soul and spirit. Thus, they are not synonymous terms, they are different.

**The Body**

We all know what the body is, namely our flesh and bones, circulation and nervous systems, governed by our brain, and dependent on the good functioning of our heart and lungs. It is the physical us.

**The Soul**

What, then is the Soul? The soul is NOT the body, nor the spirit, but is everything else these two are not. We will define the spirit next, but in brief, the soul is our intellect, our personality, in fact, our identity.

The first mention of the soul in the Bible is in Genesis 2:7, where is is recorded that Adam BECAME a living soul. Notice that Adam did not RECEIVE a soul, Adam became a soul. Many Bible translations interchange the words "soul", "person", and "life", and this is correct, since a soul can touch, according to Leviticus 5:2, a soul can commit a sin, according to Leviticus 5:15, and a soul can also eat according to Leviticus 7:18. Psalms 42:2 records that our soul can "thirst for God".

**The Soul Departing**

Genesis 35:18 records concerning Rachel in childbirth that,

*"it came about as her soul was departing, for she died, that she called him..."Benjamin".*

So, the soul goes out at death. We would reasonably expect that if the soul goes out at death as the Bible teaches, then if it returns, the person would live. In 1 Kings 17:21,22 Elijah the prophet entreats the Lord to raise a boy from the dead.

*"Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let the child's life (or Soul) return to him" and the Lord heard the voice of Elijah and the life (soul) of the child returned to him and he revived".*

Isaiah 53:12 records that Christ *"poured out His soul unto death."* The soul goes out at death according to the Bible.

**Where Does the Soul Go?**

Some have attempted to prove from scripture that the soul goes out to annihilation. This is false. They use for their so-called Scriptural proof the scripture in Ezekiel 18:4, which reads, "The soul who sins will die". The word "die" in the Bible does not signify annihilation as the cults teach, or so-called "soul sleep" in an unconscious state.

Following our fleshly death and the going out of our soul, we will spend a conscious eternity in one of two places, just as Jesus taught. We go to the grave. Proverbs 23:14

tells us if we discipline our children properly, we will deliver their soul from Sheol or the grave. Prophetically it was said of Jesus in Psalms 16:10

*"For Thou will not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither wilt Thou allow thy Holy One to undergo decay".*

So, the grave is not the end, there is yet a deliverance out of it.

**Two Destinations for the Soul**

The soul departing for Sheol (Hades) could end up finally in the dreadful Gehenna, the Lake of Fire.

*"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades (Sheol, grave), gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every one of them according to their deeds."(Revelation 20:13)*

The other, much better alternative destination is in heaven. Revelation 6:9 records this scene in heaven.

*"And when He broke the fifth seal I saw underneath the altar the SOULS of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained."*

Notice, please, that here were persons who had been SLAIN, that is, their bodies had been killed, and yet their souls were safe in heaven. Some cult groups teach that the soul is the body and suffers death. Not so, and not true. Matthew 10:28 reads,

*"And do not fear ..... those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell".*

**Eternal Destinations**

It is just as Jesus said of the two classes, first of the goats or the unbelieving wicked, "*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"*. (Matthew 25:46).

Our soul will spend eternity somewhere. Have you decided where yours will reside?

**What is the spirit of man?**

What now is the SPIRIT that the Bible talks about, and in fact gives prominence to over the soul and body? We should be spirit, soul, and body in that order according to 1 Thessalonians 5:23:

*"Now may the Lord of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the comin g of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

First off, the teaching of the cult groups that our spirit is merely our breath is ridiculous, and not borne out by a careful examination of Scriptures. What does the Bible teach concerning the spirit of man?

Zechariah 12:1 says this:

*"Thus declares the Lord who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him..."*

So, man does not BECOME a spirit, but HAS a spirit within him. Isaiah 26:9 says this:

*"...at night my soul longs for Thee, indeed my spirit within me seeks Thee diligently".*

Our spirit is NOT breath, for the spirit of man is capable of thought. 1 Corinthians 2:11 says,

*"For who among men knows the thoughts of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him?"*

Our spirit can also "perceive" just as Mark 2:8 says of Jesus,

*"and immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?"*

Ephesians suggests that we renew not only our minds, but our spirits. Clearly, our spirit within us is NOT our breath.

**Are "spirit" & "soul" the same?**

The spirit of man is the same as the soul in some respects. We are taught in James 2:26 that our body is dead without the spirit. Furthermore, when our spirit returns, our bodies come alive again. (Luke 8:54,55). Nowhere in Scripture does it speak of the spirit being destroyed or dying as it does the soul. What then happens to the spirit within us at our death?

**The Spirit at Death**

Ecclesiastics 12:7 teaches that the spirit returns to God on death. For this reason we find that David committed his spirit to the Lord in Psalms 31:5. Upon His death, Jesus cried out, "Father into Thy hands I commit My spirit". (Luke 23:46). The Christian martyr Stephen also committed his spirit to the Lord when he died. (Acts 7:59).

What a good pattern for us all to follow! We can commit our spirits to the Lord upon our death in full confidence, provided we have been dealt with spiritually by the Lord prior to our death. We need to experience personally Romans 8:16,

*"The Spirit, Himself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God".*

We have all been born once physically, but we all need to be born again spiritually. (John 3:3-7). We need the Holy Spirit to inhabit our spirit, and this is what happens when we invite Jesus Christ into our lives, hearts, and spirits. No wonder Paul said to the godly man Timothy,

*"The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you". (2 Tim. 4:22).*

**The Complete Man**

In conclusion, we state again that we are a triune being of spirit, soul, and body. We are born in the reverse order, but when we are born again through the Spirit of God, we can become as God intended us to be, spirit, soul, and body.

In Scripture, remember, that as the spirit goes, so goes the soul. Even our rebellious body of flesh can be brought into line through the power of the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says,

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

We are not complete unless our spirits are renewed. We will not live abundantly if our spirits are unsatisfied. Come to Jesus today, and be satisfied, spirit, soul, and body.

# THE DOCTRINE OF HELL: WHAT EXACTLY IS HELL?

The subject of "Hell" is usually a hot one. Years ago it was common to hear of sermons scaring people with a fiery hell. Then, in the early 1800's, groups began arising that taught that hell was not a place of eternal torment, nor was it hot!

In place of eternal torment, groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists began teaching "soul sleep", or a state of unconsciousness, but certainly no torment! Mormons changed their earlier views of hellfire to make hell just a place where a person needing it is taught a good lesson on his way to a degree of heavenly glory. What is the truth of the matter concerning the subject of hell? We need to let the Bible be our guide.

## Three Words For "Hell"

Most of the confusion surrounding the topic of hell, is because the King James version of the Bible translated three distinct Greek words by the one word "hell". The three Greek words are, "tartaros", "hades" and "gehenna". Only one of these three words refers to the place of eternal torment commonly called "hell", and the other words are often given mistaken meanings. Let's consider these three words and their meanings.

## Tartaros

"Tartaros" need not concern us too much since this is a special abode for angels who are confined to this special pit of darkness. The word "tartatos occurs only once in the New Testament, in 2 Peter 2:4.

## Hades

*"Hades" also translated "hell" occurs ten times in the New Testament, and is referred to by three writers, Matthew, Luke, and John.*

The most detailed information we can find out about Hades is in Luke, Chapter 16, where we are told about a rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus died in a righteous condition and the angels took him into Abraham's bosom, to a place of peace and security. The rich man, on the other hand, went to "hades" or "hell", and was in great torment. He was obviously fully conscious of his surroundings, and not in a condition of "soul sleep", for the account in Luke records,

*"....The rich man also died and was buried, and in hell [or hades], he lifted up his eyes, being in torment..... " [Luke 16:22, 23].*

He pleaded for a drop of water to cool his tongue because of the torment of the flame. He could see the happy condition of Lazarus, but he could not leave his place of torment. He spoke about his worry over the condition of his five brothers who had yet to die. He

wished to spare them his present agony. Yet this pitiful rich man had all his faculties, and was indeed experiencing ongoing torment

**Could Luke 16 Be "Only A Parable"?**

Groups denying the reality of hellfire do indeed claim that the above account is only a parable or is "figurative" or "spiritual". However this account is not a parable, since proper names of recognizable Bible characters are used, whereas Jesus never used proper names in his parables, and generally indicated when he was teaching a parable.

Even stretching the point, and allowing that it could be a parable, it teaches an important truth, and Jesus taught truth, not falsehoods.

**Hades Is Not The Final Destination**

"Hades" in Greek, finds its parallel in the Hebrew word "Sheol". Hades and Sheol [both translated "hell"] are often called the "holding tanks" by some Bible scholars, since souls in this "hell" are not in their final destination. According to Revelation, chapter 20, those in Hades will yet stand before the Great White Throne Judgment. Hades will be terminated at this time. Those with condemnatory judgment will be cast into "gehenna" [hell], the Lake that burns with "Fire and Brimstone".

"Hades" or "Sheol" does not mean only the grave as the cult groups teach. That is one meaning for these words, but other original words are used to mean the literal grave with its headstones or pit-marker. "Hades" or "sheol" refers to the condition of the dead, as we considered in Luke, chapter 16. Hades will finally be done away with in God's time, but gehenna will remain.

**What Did Jesus Say About Gehenna?**

One has only to read the words of Jesus in Mark 9:42-48 to know the seriousness of a final destination of gehenna.

*"And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell [or gehenna], into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."*

This same warning is issued regarding a foot or an eye that would hinder us, that "the fire would not be quenched", and "the worm would not die". Christ stresses that it would be better to lose the most precious things in this life and to avoid hell, than it would be to retain all that this life holds dear, and be cast into this dreadful place.

Cult groups like to think the fire would annihilate them or consume them, but God is capable of altering the properties of fire. Consider the burning bush of Moses' day that

was not consumed, and also the "fiery furnace" of Daniel's day, where the fire did not consume the inhabitants.

**What About Soul Sleep?**

A condition of "soul sleep" is obviously not taught by Christ. The inhabitants of hell are not unconscious or annihilated. When we really believe the word of God as it is written, and don't try to "figuratize" or "spiritualize" it away as the cults do, it becomes evident that Hell is a very real place of destination, and it's inhabitants are conscious. The Bible makes this very clear.

Let's compare Revelation, chapter 19, verse 20, with Chapter 20 and verse 10. Before the 1,000 year reign of Christ, the beast and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire. Were they annihilated as the cults teach? No, for 1,000 years later, they are still alive, and the Devil joins them in their condition of torment. Scripture says, they; "shall be tormented day and night, forever and ever." [Revelation 20:10].

**Let's Believe Jesus**

Let's just believe the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25:46, that there are two destinations, one for believers, and one for unbelievers.

*"And these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life".*

The same exact word in the Greek describes both conditions. Both are "everlasting," "eternal" and "ongoing". We may choose eternal life, or eternal punishment and torment. Denying the reality of Hell won't prevent us from going there, if we wait for our death to find out for sure.

**Why Not Choose Eternal Life?**

Jesus offers to each one of us a precious gift. It is the gift of eternal life. We receive this gift when we receive Jesus Christ into our hearts. He needs an invitation to come in, issued by us in an attitude of heartfelt repentance for our lives up to this point, which have been devoid of Him. Why not stop right now and pray, inviting Jesus Christ into your life? John 1:12,13 will hold new meaning for you.

*"But as many as received Him, to them He GAVE the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God".*

Please notice that Jesus does not limit salvation to a chosen few, like 144,000. Jesus opens the door wide so that "...whosoever will may come". The apostle John says "***...as many as received Him" have the right to be sons of God. (John 1:12).***

**Now is the time for all of us to turn away from false teachings on the subject of death and hell, and turn to Jesus Christ so we may live eternally with Him.**

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http://www.mmoutreachinc.com/jehovahs_witnesses/deathhell.html

# Hell

Hell is one of those subjects that make people uncomfortable. We hear stories of hell being a place of fire, demons, and endless torment. Throughout history many authors have written about it, Dante's Inferno for example. Western culture is very familiar with the concept. Even Hollywood has made it the subject of many movies. Whatever the context, whatever the belief, hell is definitely taught in the Bible. But even the doctrine of hell is not without its controversy. Some say it is only the grave with no consciousness. Others say it is a place of correction and punishment that is not eternal. Others say it is an endless agonizing punishment in fire. Whichever it is, hell is the total absence of the favor of God.

**The words associated with Hell**

**Gehenna**

In the OT, the word for hell is 'ge-hinnom' meaning "Valley of Hinnom." It was a place to the southwest of Jerusalem. This place was once "called 'Topheth' and derived from an Aramaic word meaning 'fireplace.' It was here that some pagan kings practiced human sacrifice by fire (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 7:31; 32:25)[(1)]. This is probably why in the NT the word came to be associated with destruction by fire. The word 'gehenna' is found in the NT 12 times and every instance is spoken of by Jesus. In the NT, "gehenna" is used of a condition and never of a place.

**Hades**

This word only occurs in the NT, ten times, and corresponds to the OT word "sheol." Jesus uses the word four times: Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23. The other six occur in Acts 2:27,31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14.

It was probably the "subterranean abode of all the dead until the judgment. It was divided into two departments, paradise or Abraham's bosom for the good, and Gehenna or hell for the bad."[(2)] In particular, in the account of Lazarus and the Rich man of (Luke 16:19-31), it is the place of the conscious dead who are wicked.

**Sheol**

"The Hebrew word *Sheol* is probably derived from a root "to make hollow," and was seen as the common receptacle of the dead and in the great many places the word appears in the OT, it is referring to the grave.[(3)] It is a place and is mentioned in Gen. 37:35; Num. 16:30,33; Psalm 16:10, etc. Sheol has many meanings in scripture: the grave, the underworld, the state of the dead. It was supposed to be below the surface of the earth (Ezek. 31:15,17; Psalm 86:13).

**Is Hell Eternal Conscious Torment?**

There are some Christian groups and many cults that deny the idea that hell, in the general sense, means eternal, conscious punishment. Some maintain that God's eternal punishment is annihilation, or non-existence. Others say it is temporal and that eventually all will be saved out of hell. Perhaps the most common objection is that a loving God

would never punish people in eternal torment. We agree that God is love (1 John 4:8), but He is also just (Neh. 9:32-33; 2 Thess. 1:6), and eternal (Psalm 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17 ). God punishes the evil doer (Isaiah 11:13) and this punishment will be eternal. But the question remains. Is this eternal punishment conscious or not?

There are verses that can be interpreted to support the idea that the dead are not conscious after death: (Ecc. 9:5 - the dead know nothing[4] and Psalm 146:4 - their thoughts perish, are good examples.) Other verses compare the dead to sleep: Acts 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:1-6; 1 Thess. 4:13, etc. But these latter verses are merely comparing the similarity between the appearance of the dead and the appearance of someone sleeping.

**The Dead are Conscious After Death**

The wicked descend alive into Sheol

Num. 16:30, "*But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the Lord . . . 33So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.*"

Cast to outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth

Matt. 8:12, "*but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

Those cast into the fire suffer consciously

Matt. 13:41-42, "*The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" See also Matt. 13:50.

Cast into a tormenting fire

Rev. 14:9-11, *"And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, 10he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'"*" See also, Rev. 21:8.

**Hell is a place of eternal fire and punishment**

Unquenchable Fire

Matt. 3:12 "*And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*"

Fiery Hell

Matt. 5:22, *"whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.*" See also, Matt. 5:29,30.

Fiery Hell

Matt. 18:8-9, "*And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire.* [9]*"And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell."*

Eternal Fire

Matt. 25:41, "*Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels*.

Eternal Punishment

Matt. 25:46, "*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*."

The word 'eternal' in both places is "aionios" which means 1)without beginning and end, that which always has been and always will be; 2)without beginning; 3)without end, never to cease, everlasting. The word 'punishment' is the word kolasis and it means "to punish, with the implication of resulting severe suffering - 'to punish, punishment.'"[(5)]

Eternal Fire

Jude 7, "*Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.*"

Lake of Fire

Rev. 20:15, "*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*"

**Luke 16:19-31, Lazarus and the Rich Man**

In Luke 16:19-31 is the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Basically, Lazarus is a poor man who suffers during life. The rich man is, of course, rich. They both die. The rich man goes to Hades. Lazarus goes to Abraham's bosom, another term for paradise. In Hades, the rich man lifts up his eyes and sees Lazarus far off. He cries out to Abraham and asks for mercy because he is in agony in flame. Abraham says no. Then the rich man asks if someone from the dead were to rise and go tell his brothers not to come to this terrible place. Abraham teaches him that that will not be done either.

Some say that this is a parable. However, if it is, it is unique because no other parable actually names a person. It isn't a story. It is history. It really happened. But many who believe in no consciousness after death will say it is still a parable. The question then is, if it is? What is it teaching? If hell fire is false and if self-awareness after death is also false, then Jesus is using false doctrines to teach a truth. Parables illustrate truth. If it is a

parable what does the consciousness after death symbolize? Also, what does the agony in flame symbolize? Are they not real? Of course they are.

**Conclusion**

Hell is a real place. It is not mere unconsciousness. It is not temporal. It is eternal torment. Perhaps that is why Jesus spoke more of hell than heaven and spent so much time warning people not to go there. After all, if people just stopped existing, why warn them? If it was temporal, they'd get out in a while. But if it were eternal and conscious, then the warning is strong.

Jesus said, "*And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.* [30]*"And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell*," (Matt. 5:29-30).

1. Achtemeier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper's Bible Dictionary, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985.*
2. Unger, Merrill F., *Unger's Bible Dictionary, (Chicago: Moody Press*, 1966, p. 437.
3. Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.*
4. Ecclesiastes is a book that is addressed as things appear "under the sun" (Ecc. 1:3,9,14, etc.). In fact, the phrase "under the sun" occurs 29 times in Ecclesiastes, a book written from the human perspective and boldly states that all is vanity.
5. Louw, Johannes P. and Nida, Eugene A., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains, (New York: United Bible Societies) 1988, 1989.*

Written by CARM http://www.carm.org/doctrine/hell.htm

# Is There Really a Hell?

The story has been told of C. S. Lewis listening to a young preacher's sermon on the subject of God's judgment on sin. At the end of his message, the young man said: "If you do not receive Christ as Savior, you will suffer grave eschatalogical ramifications!" After the service, Lewis asked him the question, "Do you mean that a person who doesn't believe in Christ will go to hell?" "Precisely," was his response. "Then say so," Lewis replied. (1)

This story illustrates something that most Christians know, but few articulate: that of all the doctrines of the Christian faith, the one we feel most uncomfortable discussing is the doctrine of eternal punishment or hell. And it is not difficult to understand why this is so. The doctrine of hell is offensive to unbelievers and contradicts the emphasis on tolerance and on human potential that dominates our times. Who of us enjoys alienating our friends by speaking of eternal judgment for sin? For many of us, the doctrine of hell is also difficult to reconcile with the the love and grace of God. Furthermore, we are well aware of Christians who have misused the doctrine of hell by using it to manipulate and control other people. In seeking to distance ourselves from the abuse of this doctrine, and to avoid appearing intolerant and uncaring, many of us have eliminated the word "hell" entirely from our vocabulary (making our belief an entirely personal matter).

Recent surveys have revealed some very interesting facts about current attitudes toward hell. A survey conducted by George Gallup in 1990 revealed that just under 60% of Americans believe there is a hell (down over 10% from 1978), though only 4% believe that hell was their own personal destination. A survey in the mid-1980s of American evangelical college and seminary students revealed that only one in ten believed that the first step in influencing unbelievers for Christ should be to warn about hell. 46% of seminary students believed that to emphasize to non-believers that eternal judgment would be a consequence of rejecting Christ was "in poor taste." A survey conducted in 1981 revealed that 50% of theology faculty believe in the existence of hell (61% of Roman Catholics, and 34% of Protestants)! (2)

In spite of the prevailing current attitudes toward hell revealed by these surveys, however, it is still apparent to most Christians that the doctrine of hell is firmly grounded in the teaching of Scripture. All but one of the letters of the Apostle Paul mention the wrath or judgment of God on sin. And of the twelve uses of the word *gehenna* (the strongest word for hell) in the New Testament, eleven come from the lips of Jesus himself! In fact, the Savior taught more about hell than He did about heaven! Of the more than 1850 verses recording the words of Christ, 13% pertain to the topics of judgment and hell. Of the 40 or so parables uttered by Jesus, more than half relate to God's eternal judgment on sin. Surprisingly, the much beloved "Sermon on the Mount" contains some of Jesus' most straightforward words about hell!

# What Does the Bible Teach About Hell?

In his book simply titled "Inferno," Dante Alighieri describes in great detail his imaginary tour through nine levels of hell. Dante's book makes for fascinating reading. But to learn what hell is really like, we must turn to another source: the Bible.

As we begin reading through the Old Testament, we find frequent references to "sheol" (the world of departed spirits) as the abode of all the dead (cf. Deut. 32:22). As we continue reading, we find also that a day will come when the bodies of all who are in sheol will be resurrected: some to "everlasting life" but others to "everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

The common belief of godly rabbis during the intertestamental era that sheol was divided into two sections is reflected in the New Testament, which refers to the abode of the righteous as "Paradise" (Lk. 23:43) or "Abraham's bosom" (Lk. 16:22), and the abode of the unrighteous as "Hades" (Lk. 16:23). After Christ's resurrection, it appears that those who resided in Paradise were ushered into the presence of God in heaven where they await the future resurrection of their bodies. But those who are in Hades await a resurrection to a different destination-- hell.

The word that is used most frequently in the New Testament for hell is *Gehenna*. Gehenna is a reference to the Valley of Hinnom located on the south side of Jerusalem, which served as the city's "garbage dump" during Jesus' time. The fires that burned here never went out.

As did his contemporaries, Jesus referred to Gehenna as the place where "the fire is not quenched" and where "their worm does not die" (Mk. 9:48). Whether He implied a literal flame and a literal worm is not of great importance. Jesus also described hell as a place of "outer darkness" (Mt. 22:13). But it is clear that He meant us to understand that hell is a place of continual deterioration and suffering for those who inhabit it! Jesus also referred to those who were cast into hell as being "cast outside" (Mt. 8:12), or as Paul simply puts it "away from the presence of the Lord" (II Thess. 1:9). Hell is a place of exclusion and loss of every blessing that comes from God. Hell is described as a place of "contempt" by the prophet Daniel (Dan. 12:2)--where every person is despised by every other inhabitant. As one writer has put it: "Sinners in hell will have company but no sympathy" (3)

Jesus said hell will be a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 13:42). The weeping no doubt speaks of terrible remorse and grief. But the gnashing of teeth speaks of intense anger--anger at oneself, anger at Satan, anger at God. Paul speaks of hell's inhabitants as experiencing "wrath and anger ... trouble and distress" (Rom. 2:8-9).

The Bible also tells us that in hell not all will be judged alike. Jesus made it clear that there will be degrees of judgment in hell. He said that the one "who knew his master's will and did not ... act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few" (Lk. 12:47-48). But though not all will be judged equally, all will be judged with certainty.

Exodus 34:7 tells us that though the Lord is "compassionate and gracious, ... yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

## Why Would a Loving God Send People to Hell?

Does the Bible teach that hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for sin? One alternative proposal is that for many (if not all) a second opportunity will be given after death to respond to the grace of God. Appeal is usually made to the statement in Peter's first letter that "the gospel ... has been preached even to those who are dead" (4:6). William Barclay states that in this passage we find a "glimpse of nothing less than the gospel of a second chance" (Commentary on the Epistles of Peter). Yet, the context makes clear that he is speaking of those to whom the gospel was preached during their lifetime, but who now were deceased! There is no indication at all that a "post-mortem" opportunity to repent exists.

In John 8, Jesus says that for those who "die in their sins" there is no possibility of joining Him in heaven (vv. 21,24). In contrasting the expectation of the believer of being reunited with loved ones in heaven, he says that unbelievers "have no (such) hope" (I Thess. 4:13). These statements are difficult to reconcile with the belief that the deceased are offered a second opportunity after death. Hebrews 9:27 says that "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."

Another proposal, that is gaining a wider acceptance today, is that unbelievers will simply be snuffed out of existence or "annihilated." Support for this belief is often sought in statements throughout Scripture that describe sinners as "perishing" or being "destroyed." The psalmist says, "May the wicked perish before God" (68:2). The same word, however, is used in Isaiah 57:1 to refer to the righteous: "The righteous perish and no one ponders it in his heart." It is clear that in the latter case, the word implies "severe suffering." It could not possibly mean that the righteous are "extinguished." There is, therefore, no reason to believe that the opposite is the case when the word is used to describe the fate of sinners. To "perish" or be "destroyed" means to "suffer ruin," not to be "annihilated."

That the Bible teaches eternal conscious punishment for sin in hell, is the only deduction that can be reached from the fact that the most emphatic words available to the biblical writers were consistently used to describe hell's endless duration, as well as to describe the duration of heaven, and even the eternal existence of God! Just as Jesus described the destiny of the righteous as "eternal life," so He described the destiny of the unrighteous as "eternal punishment" (Mt. 25:46). Just as John described God as the one who "lives forever and ever" (Rev. 15:7), so He described the fire of hell as lasting "forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11).

Sometimes it is said that the Greek word for eternal (*aionios*) really means "age lasting," implying that at the end of a series of ages God will empty hell of all its inhabitants. Those who hold this interpretation, however, fail to recall that while this present age is

finite in duration, it was the common understanding among Jesus' listeners that the "age to come" was eternal!

In reference to the fate of Judas, Jesus said: "It would have been better for him if he had never been born" (Mt. 26:24). If indeed it is as terrible a fate as these words suggest, and if it is eternal in duration, why would a loving God send people to hell? If God is a God of love, why would He consign anyone to an eternity as terrible as the Bible describes the fate of those whose destiny is hell?

Perhaps the biblical doctrine of hell can begin to make more sense to us when we reexamine our understanding of two other teachings of Scripture: the nature of God, and the nature of man and of sin.

One of the wonderful revelations of Scripture is that God is a God of infinite love and grace. Who of us is not refreshed when we read the words of the psalmist: "But Thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth" (86:15)? Yet it is the same God who is also described as the One who "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7)! The God who loves the sinner is also the God whose "eyes are too pure to approve evil" and who cannot "look on wickedness with favor" (Hab. 1:13). The psalmist quotes God at one point as saying, "You thought that I was just like you" (50:21). But we are in need of the realization that just as God's love is far beyond our own, so the purity of his holiness exceeds all our conceptions! When Isaiah was granted a vision of the Lord on his throne, he was shaken by his impression of his holiness (Isa. 6:3)! For sure, God is a God of indescribable love, but He is just as much a God of absolute holiness and righteousness! When we gain a vision of the holiness of God as it is portrayed in the Bible, we begin to understand the reasonableness of the doctrine of hell.

We are also helped when we allow Scripture to more fully inform us in our comprehension of the nature of man and of sin. The emphasis in our generation on the value and dignity of the human person has been a welcome corrective to a past overemphasis on the depravity of man. Yet it is easy for us to lose sight of the fact that though we are indeed created in the image of God and of very special value in His eyes, nonetheless we are also deeply and indelibly stained by sin in every area of our being. The God who knows every thought and motive of every human heart, said that it "is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). Jesus himself said that "from within, out of the heart of men, proceed (all manner of evil)" by which we are defiled (Mk. 7:21-23)!

When Ezra learned of the disobedience of the people of Israel in marrying unbelievers, he said, "I tore my garment and my robe, ... and sat down appalled" (Ezra 9:3). When the Apostle Paul saw the city of Athens filled with idols, "his spirit was ... provoked within him" (Acts 17:16)! Is it possible that we have lost something of the sense of the seriousness of sin that seemed to grip the heart of these two men?

Some have objected that while sin is certainly worthy of punishment, a "finite" sin is hardly worthy of the "infinite" punishment of hell. But that our rebellion against God should be considered "finite" in nature is not entirely clear.

When we consider that the One against whom we have rebelled is the One who gave us life, who is the source of every good thing that we know in life, and who has extended his love by giving his own Son as payment for our sin, how can we possibly measure the gravity of our sin or the punishment it deserves? When we consider too that there is no indication that those in hell will ever experience a "change of heart" in attitude toward God, perhaps we can see that God's judgment is entirely just.

## The Doctrine of Hell: What Difference Does It Make?

We want to focus on three areas of life that should be impacted by our understanding of the biblical doctrine of hell.

The first is our attitude toward sin ... particularly our own. A number of years ago, Dr. Karl Menninger wrote a book entitled *Whatever Happened to Sin?* In it he challenged the popular notion that all of our thoughts and actions can be accounted for by factors beyond our own personal control, that we are rarely responsible for our own conduct. For sure, there are "mitigating" factors in most of our lives that influence our character and conduct to greater or lesser degree. And God is not unaware of these things. "He knows our frame, that we are but dust" (Ps. 103:14). He knows as well that we are born with a sinful nature that is beyond the power of human will to overcome (cf. Rom. 7:14-25). But He also knows that the choice is our own as to whether we approve and condone the fruit of our sinful nature, or whether we turn to Him for grace to hold in check our sinful impulses and to learn to follow his will. In his book *The Screwtape Letters,* C.S. Lewis said that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "Thy will be done." The choice is ours as to which kind of person we will become.

When we realize that we are responsible for what we choose to do about our sin, and that it is more than merely an act that may result in unpleasant consequences for ourselves, but that it is also a disposition of rebellion against God, that requires his holy judgment, we cannot help but become more sensitive to its presence in our lives!

The second result of a biblical understanding of hell is a much greater appreciation for the grace and salvation we have received from God! Our appreciation for the immense value of this gift is greatly enhanced when we fully comprehend the nature of that from which we have been delivered. Our perception of the awesomeness of salvation is determined in large measure by our perception of the awfulness of hell!

Finally, a biblical understanding of hell should move us to include in our proclamation of the gospel a clear warning about the consequence of failing to respond. We need to be more forthright than the preacher whom Charles Spurgeon reported as saying, "If you do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be sent to the place which it is not polite to

mention." (4) C.S. Lewis once said: "If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference." (5) If there really is a hell, then Christianity is far more than one more bit of good advice!

In his book *Our Guilty Silence*, John Stott recounts how the seventeenth century Jesuit missionaries to China, not wanting to offend the sensitivities of the Chinese, excluded the cross of Christ and other details from their message. Quoting Hugh Trevor- Roper, Stott says, "We do not learn that they made many lasting converts by the unobjectionable residue of the story." (6)

There is little question that the doctrine of hell has at times been abused. But as one writer has well put it: "May its misuse not result in its disuse" in our efforts to lead people to Christ.

**Notes**

1. Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News*, Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992. p. 13

2. Dixon, pp. 10-13; Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992, pp.2-3.

3. John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1992, p. 146.

4. Quoted in Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions About Hell*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991, p. 171.

5. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan Press, 1960, p. 133)

6. John Stott, *Our Guilty Silence*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, nd, p. 45.

**Recommended Resources on the Subject of Hell:**

Blanchard, John. *Whatever Happened to Hell?* Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1992.

Dixon, Larry. *The Other Side of the Good News*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992.

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