

THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

I do not feel right about starting off this subject without first sharing some scripture about the nature of God.

The Bible tells us that God is love (1John .4:8)

In fact, He loves us so much He made the ultimate sacrifice for us by spilling His own blood on our behalf (John 3:16, Acts 20:28).

God is also a God of justice, and his very nature demands judgment upon all sin (Romans 6:23).

We are also told that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). That's how serious sin is!

The good news is the Lord Himself paid for our sins, all we have to do is repent and accept Him and His payment as a free gift (John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9). He will indeed judge the world. It is also true that people will condemn themselves to hell by rejecting Christ as Lord & Savior and ignoring God's plan of salvation.

It is important to recognize that to demand justice is part of God's nature; however, He does not take pleasure in it.

Ezekiel 33:11 reads, "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"

This is one of my favorite verses that shows the heart of God. Twice He pleads with them to turn back, turn back from evil ways. The Lord asks them why they would choose to die. You see by His Nature that God must judge sin. Yet we also see that He would rather forgive — but He can't unless people repent, because He is a God of justice.

Deuteronomy 10:17-18: "For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing."

Psalms 9:7-8: "But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity."

We are all sinners, and those who do not accept His payment for their sins will receive His wrath. As we will see, Hell is a very real and unpleasant place. Hell was made for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). We can avoid it by turning to Jesus.

There are three Greek words referring to the abode of the unrighteous in the New Testament. These three Greek words are translated in English as "Hell" in the King James Version of the Bible. The word "Hell" is also defined as three different places

1. There is the present Hell as we see in Luke 16:23 (KJV): "And in hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."

Revelation 20:14 (KJV) reads, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

Both of these verses use the Greek word number 86 in the Strong's Greek/Hebrew Dictionary: "halides (hah'-dace); from 1 (as negative particle) and 1492; properly, unseen, i.e. 'Hades' or the place(state) of departed souls: KJV-- grave, hell."

Notice that in the book of Luke, Jesus referred to hell as a place where the unrighteous went. We find in the book of Revelation that this same hell is cast into the lake of fire in the final Judgment.

2. There is the future Hell. Jesus refers to this future Hell in the following passage.

Mark 9:43-44: "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, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

This future Hell Jesus spoke of in Mark 9:43-44 is the lake of fire. Here He describes this Hell as unquenchable fire.

Strong's Greek/Hebrew Dictionary lists the "Hell" written of in Mark 9:43 as word #1067 — "geena (gheh'-en-nah); of Hebrew origin [1516 and 2011]; valley of (the son of) Hinnom; ge-henna (or Ge-Hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem, used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment: KJV-- hell."

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary has the following to say regarding Gehenna: "...Gehenna, the Greek form of the Hebrew word that means 'the vale of Hinnom'— a valley just south of Jerusalem. In this valley the Canaanites worshiped Baal and the fire-god Molech by sacrificing their children in a fire that burned continuously. Even Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah, were guilty of this terrible, idolatrous practice <2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6>....In the time of Jesus, the Valley of Hinnom was used as the garbage dump of Jerusalem. Into it were thrown all the filth and garbage of the city, including the dead bodies of animals and executed criminals. To consume all this, fires burned constantly. Maggots worked in the filth. When the wind blew from that direction over the city, its awfulness was quite evident. At night wild dogs howled and gnashed their teeth as they fought over the garbage.

"Jesus used this awful scene as a symbol of hell. In effect he said, 'Do you want to know what hell is like? Look at the valley of Gehenna.' So, hell may be described as God's 'cosmic garbage dump'. All that is unfit for heaven will be thrown into hell.

“Because of the symbolic nature of the language, some people question whether hell consists of actual fire. Such reasoning should bring no comfort to the lost. The reality is greater than the symbol. The Bible exhausts human language in describing heaven and hell. The former is more glorious, and the latter more terrible, than language can express.”
(end quote)

There is no one in this future Hell (the lake of fire) now. The first ones mentioned in the Bible to be cast into the lake of fire are the beast and the false prophet:

Revelation 19:20: "And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone."

It is after this that the devil and "Hell" (as seen in Luke 16:23), as well as whosoever was not found written in the book of life, are cast into the lake of fire as shown in the text below.

Revelation 20:10-15 (KJV): "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Notice that those who were not written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire. That means the deceased are not there now, but rather they are in the "Hell" that I mentioned in #1) (the Hell of Luke 16:23). The populace of the Luke 16:23 "Hell" shall be cast into the lake of fire during the time written about in Revelation 20:10-15.

3. There is a Hell for certain angels. The third Greek word translated as "Hell" is from the Strong's Greek/Hebrew Dictionary word #5020, "tartaroo (tar-tar-o'-o); from Tartaros (the deepest abyss of Hades); to incarcerate in eternal torment: KJV-- cast down to hell." This Greek word is only used in 2 Peter 2:4: "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment."

These angels are also mentioned in Jude 1:6. Since we know that nobody is as of yet in Gehenna (the lake of fire), and 2 Peter 2:4 uses an entirely different Greek word for Hell, it is logical to believe that this is perhaps a different location or a different part of the Hell mentioned in Luke 16:23, concerning the story of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and the rich man in Hell. We also know that the demons are fallen angels and many of them are here upon the earth. Some people have speculated who these angels were and why they were held captive, but Scripture does not say enough about them to reach a definite conclusion.

In the Old Testament, all of the words translated as Hell in the King James Version of the Bible come from the Hebrew word found in Strong's #7585 — "she'owl (sheh-ole'); or sheol (sheh-ole'); from 7592; Hades or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat), including its accessories and inmates: KJV-- grave, hell, pit."

This Hebrew word has also been translated in King James as "grave" (Genesis 44:29, 31; Job 7:9; Psalm 30:3; and Isaiah 14:11) and it has also been translated as "pit" (Numbers 16:30, 33; Job 17:16). Although the body is usually put into a grave or pit after it dies, it is a mistake to interpret this as its entire meaning.

In the following text the **words in bold and underlined** in verses 9, 11 and 15 are from this same Hebrew word (#7585 in the Strong's Greek/Hebrew Dictionary).

However, the **word in bold and underlined** in verse 19 in Strong's is from the Hebrew word #6913 — qeber, (keh'-ber); or (feminine) qibrah (kib-raw'); from 6912; a sepulchre: KJV-- burying place, grave, sepulchre.”

Isaiah 14:9-19 (KJV):

9. “**Hell** from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

10. All they shall speak and say unto thee, ‘Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?’

11. Thy pomp is brought down to the **grave**, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.

12. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

13. For thou hast said in thine heart, ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

14, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.’

15. Yet thou shalt be brought down to **hell**, to the sides of the pit.

16 They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms;

17. That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?

18. All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, everyone in his own house.

19. But thou art cast out of thy **grave** like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet.”

This passage was addressed to the King of Babylon in verse 4. In this text, verse 9 shows that those in Hell (#7585, she'owl) are eager for him to come so that they may mock him (verse 10). The King of Babylon is cast out of his grave (verse 19, #6913, qeber) to be thrown into Hell.

Since he is cast out of his grave and thrown into Hell it is easy to see they are not same thing. Here #7585 (she'owl) and #6913 (qeber) are opposites, not synonyms. (This passage refers not only to the King of Babylon, but to Satan himself.)

WHO GOES TO HELL?

John 15:6: "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

In this verse, anyone who does not abide in Jesus will go to Hell.

Thessalonians 1:6-9: "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"

This passage says that anyone who does not know God, and those who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus, goes to Hell.

Revelation 21:7-8: "He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Most people focus on the murderers and other immoral people mentioned in this passage, but it actually says that all unbelievers are included in those who will go to Hell.

Revelation 20:12-15: “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Here we find that anybody's name that is not recorded in the book of life will go to Hell.

From these verses we have learned that there are those who will end up in Hell — but we are all sinners. Anyone not covered by Jesus' payment for their sins (because of refusal to accept Him and His substitutional sacrifice on the cross), will go to Hell. The good news is that the blood of Jesus covers all sin (1 John 1:7-10).

WHAT IS HELL LIKE?

The Bible speaks of Hell in metaphorical descriptions. By the descriptions we can learn certain truths (metaphorical or not, Scripture certainly is not describing anything good). We do know that those in Hell

1. Have bodies
2. are conscious and
3. are suffering in some manner
4. They will be in this state forever (There is no second chance)
5. For some, there are greater degrees of punishment.

1. Those in Hell have bodies.

(a) Daniel 12:2: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."

(b) John 5:28-29: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

In this text we see that everyone will be resurrected — whether they are resurrected for eternal life in Heaven, or for eternal judgment in Hell. Paul, when writing to the church at Corinth, described the resurrected bodies that they would receive as imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42); in other words, their new bodies would last forever.

(c) Matthew 5:29-30 "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. 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." (See also Matthew 18:8-9, Mark 9:45-47):

By Jesus' words we can see the seriousness of sin. We also see that Jesus believed that those going to Hell would go there with a body. He gives us a metaphorical description of an irrevocable law. His listeners understood that once an eye was plucked out, it would not be put back. Likewise, once a body is thrown in hell, it will not come back out.

2. Those in Hell are conscious.

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus told a story of a man in Hell. Some people choose to believe this is a parable; others do not. Even if we consider it a parable, we need to remember Jesus always taught specific truths in His parables. In this text, a rich man is in Hell and fully conscious he can see, speak, and experience misery. Also, across the gulf, Lazarus who is not in Hell is also conscious, and he is comforted. The truth being taught here would seem to be a warning that Hell is a place of mental and physical misery.

Jesus spoke to the Sadducees in Matthew 22:23-32, The Sadducees said there was no resurrection, and Jesus said, *"regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."*

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died long before, but Jesus referred to them as alive. Moses had also died long before Jesus was born. Yet as recorded in Matthew 17:1-8, he and Elijah appeared on top of a mountain and talked to Jesus. Moses had to be conscious to speak with Jesus. The Apostle Paul said he would rather be dead and be with the Lord but for the sake of the brethren he knew he must continue. (Philippians 1:20-24, 2 Corinthians 5:6-9). Why would Paul wish for such a thing if death only meant that he would enter a state of unconsciousness? Keep this in mind when I deal with the "3) they are suffering in some manner."

How can those in Hell be in torment if they are not conscious? But before I move on to that subject, there are two Bible passages I would like to comment on. These are passages that some people mistakenly cite as a proof text that the dead are not conscious.

Ecclesiastes 9:5-10: “For **the living know they will die**, but **the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward**, for their **memory is forgotten**. Indeed, their love, their hare, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer **have a share in all that is done under the sun. Go, then, eat your bread in happiness**, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love **all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life**, and in your toil in which you have labored **under the sun**. Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.”

(“Scheol” here is Strong’s #7585, also translated as “grave”, “pit”, or “hell”).

People who believe the dead are unconscious point out the underlined parts of this passage. The thought is that if the dead do not know anything or have any activity, and their feelings have perished, they must be unconscious. There are a couple of problems with this view.

1. This idea does not align with what Jesus said about Lazarus and the rich man. Luke 16:19-31 as other Scripture.
2. This interpretation would not be true to the context of the passage. Solomon is referring to conscious action in this physical world. The context is not about what one does actively in the spiritual realm after death. In the **bolded words** we can see that in the living world, the dead are soon forgotten. The dead no longer know what is happening in our physical world. They no longer have any part of anything here "under the sun". Therefore, enjoy life here while you can because our time here "under the sun" "is passing quickly.

Another verse commonly used by those who try to support their belief of the dead being unconscious is:

Psalm 146:4 (KJV): “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”

The word ('estonet) translated as "thoughts" here in the King James Version of Psalm 146:4 can also be translated as “plans”, which is the way it appears in the NKJ and the NIV.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th Edition lists a partial definition of thought as "a developed intention or plan."

Following is the way this verse appears in the NIV:

Psalm 146:4 (NIV): “When their spirit departs, they return to the ground, on that very day their plans come to nothing.”

Since the Hebrew word can also be translated as “plans” it seems logical to accept this translation. Viewing this verse this way does not affect the context of the passage. The words “thoughts” and “plans”, by definition, can be referring to the same thing. It is more likely that this interpretation of the word is correct than it is that this verse is in contradiction with other Scriptures.

3. Those in Hell are suffering in some manner.

Revelation 14:9-12: “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, he 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. 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.’ Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

The word "tormented" in this passage comes from the Greek word "basanizo."

Thayer's definition of Greek words defines it as following: "928 basanizo- (1) to test (metals) by the touchstone, which is a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with either metal (2) to question by applying torture to torture (4) to vex with grievous pains (used of body or mind), to torment (5) to be harassed, to be distressed; used of those who are struggling at sea with a head wind."

Granted, the passages of the Bible concerning Hell are written with symbolic language. But symbolic of what? The use of this word in no way implies ceasing to exist or being unconscious. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Notice the text here said this state lasted forever and ever, and that they had no rest day or night.

Matthew 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, and will cast them into the furnace of fire, in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The word "weeping" in this passage is defined as follows by Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words "WEEPING klauthmos ^2805^, akin to A, No. 1, denotes 'weeping, crying,' <Matt. 2:18; 8:12; 13:42,50>, RV (KJV, 'wailing'); <22:13; 24:51;25:30; Luke 13:28; Acts 20:37>." C4

I believe that is significant that this same Greek word was used to describe how the people were weeping when Herod had all the boys two years old and younger murdered (Matthew 2:16-18). Can you imagine the sorrow and weeping that took place at that time and place in history?

4. Those in Hell will be in this state forever, and there is no second chance.

The following verse implies that there is no second chance. Even as Christ died only once, man will be judged only once.

Hebrews 9:27-28: “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”

They will be in this state forever.

Revelation 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.”

Matthew 25:46: “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

In this passage the word “eternal” is used twice. It is the same Greek word in both places.

Thayer's definition of Greek and Hebrew words defines it as follows: “166 aionios-1) without beginning and end, what has always been and always will be; 2) without beginning; 3) without end, never to cease, everlasting.”

To say that punishment in Hell is only for a time is the same as saying Heaven will only be for a time. The same Greek word translated as “eternal” is used in this passage.

The word “life”, as in “eternal life”, speaks of the quality of life. Thayer's describes “life” as “used of the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God”. Strong's defines punishment in this verse as (penal infliction: .punishment, torment).

5. For some, there are greater degrees of punishment.

Luke 20:46-47: "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." (See also Matthew 23:14, Mark 12:40.)

The Bible tells us that some will receive a greater condemnation, but it does not tell us how.

Thayer's says the following about the word "condemnation": "a) condemnation of wrong, the decision (whether severe or mild) which one passes on the faults of others."

The following are some of the terms that have been used in the Bible to describe Hell: outer darkness; weeping and gnashing of teeth; unquenchable fire; pits of darkness; furnace of fire; eternal fire; where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched; tormented with fire; he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God; eternal destruction; away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

No matter how you view it, these words do not describe anything good. Jesus, spoke of Hell more than anyone else in the Bible. Why would He go to such lengths to warn people about it if Hell were not real? All his descriptions of it were terrible. Considering what Jesus had to say about it, how can we help but believe that Hell is a very real and terrible place? I have found studying this subject depressing and disturbing. I plead with you, if you do not know Jesus consider Him carefully. Jesus is the only way that you can escape this awful place!!!

Luke 12:4-9 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two cents?

And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.” (See also Matthew 10:28):

Mark 8:36: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?"

2 Corinthians 6:2: “behold, now is ‘the acceptable time’, behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’”.

The following are some related Scripture concerning this subject: Matthew 3:10-12, Matthew 7:19, Matthew 13:40-50, Matthew 23:33, Matthew 25:29-41, Mark 9:43, Luke 3:9-17, Romans 12:19-20, Revelation 14:9-10.

The writings from church leaders in the first couple of centuries are not Scripture. They are, however, helpful in determining if the Church has changed any major doctrine or the interpretation of Scripture. Those living closer to the time when New Testament writers lived would have different insights into the culture of that time. They also would at times have a clearer understanding of what Jesus and the Apostles taught.

The following quotes can be found in The Ante Nicene Fathers (1989):

“Justin’s Dialog with Trypho” (Chapter V) — “But I do not say, indeed, that all souls die; for that were truly a piece of good fortune to the evil. What then? The souls of the pious remain in a better plane, while those of the unjust and wicked are in a worse, waiting for the time of judgment. Thus some which have appeared worthy of God never die; but others are punished so long as God wills them to exist and to be punished.”

“The Second Apology of Justin for the Christians Addressed to the Roman Senate” (Chapter 1)

“For everywhere, whoever is corrected by father, or neighbour, or child, or friend, or brother, or husband, or wife, for a fault, for being hard to move, for loving pleasure and being hard to urge to what is right (except those who have been persuaded that the unjust and intemperate shall be punished in eternal fire, but that the virtuous and those who lived like Christ shall dwell with God in a state that is free from suffering,— we mean, those who have become Christians), and the evil demons, who hate us, and who keep such men as these subject to themselves, and serving them in the capacity of judges, incite them, as rulers actuated by evil spirits, to put us to death.