

Hell is not a literal place and neither is the eternal punishment of sinners a true Biblical concept, or so the devil's minions would have you believe. In 2007 Gallup conducted a poll<sup>1</sup> in which approximately sixty-nine percent of respondents stated that they believe in the existence of the devil and seventy percent of the respondents believe in the existence of hell. Yet, in the same poll, eighty-six percent stated a belief in the existence of God and eighty-one percent stated a belief in the existence of heaven. We can see, from this poll that more Americans believe in heaven than believe in hell. The question is "Why?" If one admits the reality of heaven, the why would the same person deny the existence of hell? I believe this is because they do not *want* to believe in the existence of hell. They have, perhaps, been misled by the false teaching of those who deny its existence or deny its eternal nature. We will examine several of these of these false teachings and attempt to equip Christians with a Biblical answer for those who question hell's existence and nature. But first let us examine, briefly, what the Bible has to say about hell, particularly the New Testament.

### What Is Hell?

There are three different Greek words are rendered "Hell" in the King James N.T.: *hades*, *tartarus*, and *gehenna*. Hades is where the departed spirits of Christians and non-Christians alike await the resurrection, the grave. Tartarus is the portion of hades where the non-Christian awaits damnation. Gehenna the word most commonly found translated as "hell" and is defined by Thayer's Greek Definitions as, "Hell is the place of the future punishment call "Gehenna" or "Gehenna of fire". This was originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned; a fit symbol of the wicked and their future destruction."<sup>2</sup>

### What is Hell Like?

The N.T. teaches about the reality of Hell. Jesus spoke of it in very real and practical terms. He said that it is reserved for the devil and his angels, but that those who reject Christ or are disobedient to Him will also be cast in with them. (Mat. 25:41) He states that it would be better to lose an arm, or a leg, or an eye than to be cast into that place of eternal suffering and fire. (Mark 9:43-48) These and other passages demonstrate that, as far as Christ is concerned, the doctrine of eternal hell and eternal punishment is, in fact, the truth. The question, then is, "Do you believe that Jesus, the Son of God, knew what He was talking about?" If not, then He cannot be the Son of God!

## What the Bible says about hell<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Hell Is Real, A Literal Place

Shall go ...punishment. Matt. 25:31-46  
Go into hell, into the fire. Mark 9:43-48  
In hell he lifted up his eyes. Luke 16: 19-31  
Punished, destruction. II Thess. 1:7-9  
Shall have their part in fire. Rev. 21:8

### 2. Hell Is A Place Of Torment, Agony

Lake of fire. Rev. 20: 14-15  
Place of outer darkness. Matt. 25:30  
Eternal destruction. Matt. 10:28  
Weeping and gnashing. Matt. 8:12  
Punishment forever. Matt. 25:46  
A place of no hope. Luke 16:26

### 3. A Place Of No Rest - Ever

Torment forever. Rev. 14:11  
Fire is not quenched. Mark 9:47-48  
Everlasting fire. Matt. 18:8

### 4. Wicked, Horrible Inhabitants

Devil and his angels. Matt. 25:41  
All evil of all ages. I Peter 4: 17-18  
Disobedient. Rom. 2:8-9  
Unbelievers, liars, etc. Rev. 21:8  
Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude 7  
Erring members of Christ. II Pet. 2:4, 20-22  
Those who never obeyed. II Thess. 1:7-9  
Ones listed in I Cor. 6:9-10

### 5. Hell Will Be For ETERNITY

Everlasting punishment. Matt. 25:46  
Eternal destruction. Matt. 10:28  
Everlasting destruction. II Thess. 1:8-9  
Eternal judgment. Heb. 6:2

## Answering the Skeptics

There are many individuals and some modern religious groups that claim to believe in God and the Bible, while at the same time denying that the Bible teaches an eternal hell or denying that the very concept of eternal punishment is in harmony with the loving nature of God.

Let's first look at the arguments made by those who discount the concept of hell based upon the loving, merciful nature of God. They usually frame their argument something like this, "Surely a loving God would never send anyone to a place of eternal torment and punishment, from which there is no hope of recovery." From the outset, this sounds logical to those who have been brought up believing that God is love and nothing else. Yes, we do affirm that God is love. The Bible states this unequivocally and emphatically in 1 John 4:8 and 4:16. However, the Bible also clearly teaches that God is righteous. (Ezr. 9:15; Psa.7:9) The Bible affirms that His

judgment is equally righteous. (Rom. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:5-6; Rev. 16:7). Other attributes of God, stemming from His righteousness include God's justice and, yes, even God's wrath and vengeance. These so-called "negative" attributes of God are clearly emphasized in the O.T., even as most religious people would agree. But since, the N.T. focuses upon the love, mercy and grace of God, many seem to believe that these attributes have replaced God's justice, wrath and vengeance. Yet this is not so. God has not changed. The Bible clearly states that God is eternal (Deut. 33:27) and since this is truth then it stands to reason that His attributes have not been changed. To say otherwise would be to deny His eternity. To understand how a loving it is that God can and will punish the wicked in an eternal hell, one needs to have an understanding of God's sense of justice.

What is Justice? Justice means that one gets the recompense one deserves. (Deut. 32:4; Acts 22:14; Rev. 15:3). God's justice demands that sin and iniquity be punished. (Rom. 6:23) To God, sin is tremendously detestable and wicked rebellion against Him is an abominable affront. He takes sin personally; all sin is ultimately an attack upon the very person of God. (Hab. 1:13; c.f. Gen. 39:7-9) It is a just thing for God to take vengeance upon those who transgress. (Rom. 3:5-6) With a proper understanding God righteousness and justice, one can easily invert the question of, "How could a loving God send sinners to hell?" and ask, "How could a righteous God NOT send sinners to hell?"<sup>4</sup>

God is love and God is righteous. He is both in equal proportions at the same time. Because He is righteous, His wrath when someone transgresses, can and will be stirred toward vengeance. But, because God is love, that wrath and vengeance is withheld with a view toward allowing man to be forgiven – this is attribute of God is mercy and from this stems His longsuffering. (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15). Mercy, simply put, is where one does not receive the punishment they justly deserve. God's Justice demands the death of the sinner but God's mercy and longsuffering makes it possible for God withhold punishment for a time. (e.g. Parable of the Tares in Mat. 13:37-43) But the true depth of God's love is seen in the grace that he extends, whereby one need not suffer eternal damnation in hell because of sin. Grace is defined as unmerited favor, or one could define it as being when one receives that which is undeserved. God's grace has made it possible for one who believes and obeys the gospel to escape the wrath and vengeance of God. (Titus 2:11; Rom. 5:6-10)

Another argument against hell is made on the grounds that eternal punishment of a sinner would be unfair and therefore it contradictory to the nature of God. The contention is raised that it would be unfair of God to sentence one to eternal hellfire for just one impenitent sin. The same could be said about God granting eternal life to someone who has lived a lifetime of sin, but repented and obeyed the gospel very late in life. Few skeptics about the existence of hell would call God unfair for that, yet is it

not the same principle? To grant eternal life to Christians but not sentence the wicked to eternal punishment would not be fair or balanced. God is fair and balanced in all of His dealings. Once again, this view stems from a misunderstanding of the very nature of God. He is a God of love, but He is also just (fair) God.

Others contend that hell is reserved only for the devil and his angels and a few of the very worst examples of humanity; people like Adolph Hitler, Charles Manson, or Ted Bundy. That idea is clearly shown to be false in Revelation 21:8, where even liars, all liars (even the ones who don't hurt anyone) will be cast into the lake of fire along with evil men like Hitler. God views all impenitent sin as equally worthy of death.

There are a number of religious groups that do not deny God's vengeance upon sinners, but do deny its eternality. The Jehovah's Witnesses and some other religious people teach a doctrine of annihilation of the wicked. This doctrine stems from the false doctrine which denies the existence of an immortal human soul. They teach that there is no such thing as a human soul, so therefore the wicked cannot possibly be punished for an eternity, because there is no part of them that continues on after death. *"Scripturally, death is a state of nonexistence. The dead have no awareness, no feelings, no thoughts... Since the dead have no conscious existence, hell cannot be a fiery place of torment where the wicked suffer after death..."*<sup>5</sup>

The doctrine of annihilation means that, at death, the wicked are cast into the lake of fire and are burned completely out of existence. According to this doctrine, at death, the faithful also cease to exist, except in the mind of God, and at the judgment He will remember them once more and will resurrect them into their same, but glorified body to live on a renewed earth. *"The lake of fire symbolizes eternal destruction. Death and Hades are "hurled into" it in that they will be done away with when mankind is freed from sin and the condemnation of death. Willful, unrepentant sinners will also have their "portion" in that lake. (Revelation 21:8) They too will be annihilated forever. On the other hand, those in God's memory who are in hell—the common grave of mankind—have a marvelous future..."*<sup>6</sup>

This doctrine is false because the Bible affirms that we do have a conscious awareness after death, in the grave—both the righteous and the unrighteous. In Luke 16:19-31, when Jesus speaks of the rich man and Lazarus, He describes the rich man in torment (tartarus) as being aware of where he is and why he is there. Further, he speaks to Abraham and Abraham speaks with him. Clearly we see that both are conscious and both are aware. As well, we see this truth demonstrated in Luke 20:37-38, *"Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him..."*

The Greek participle, (noun that acts like a verb) "living" is in the present tense and active voice indicating that Moses, Isaac and Jacob still, actively live. Furthermore, the Greek verb "live" is also in the present tense, active voice and indicative mood—again factually stating that "all" (the righteous) themselves are currently living. They are not physically alive, but spiritually they continue exist and live in the hadean realm. The same is true for the wicked, also based upon the account of the description of the rich man and Lazarus.

Hell is real. Hell is terrifying. Hell is painful. In Hell there is physical pain, both external and internal. (Mark 9:47-48, Dan 12:1-2) In Hell there is emotional pain caused by loss and separation and there is the pain associated with a missing out on heaven. (2 Pet. 2:20-22; Luke 16:23-25) All of these types of pain, and infinite others intensified far beyond all possible human imagination, are a part of the condition of those in hell. With each of these earthly pains, we know that they will gradually lessen until they fade away. And with this knowledge comes comfort and the ability to endure the agony with grace. We often sing the wonderful hymn, "Amazing Grace," which states, "When we've been here ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise, Than when we've first begun." In Hell, when one has been there TEN BILLION years, he has no fewer days to be immersed in that torturous pain than when he first began! (Revelation 14:11)

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>[www.gallup.com/poll/27877/Americans-More-Likely-Believe-God-Thin-Devil-Heaven-More-Than-Hell.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/27877/Americans-More-Likely-Believe-God-Thin-Devil-Heaven-More-Than-Hell.aspx)

<sup>2</sup>For a thorough study of these three terms see article at [www.christiancourier.com/articles/406-the-use-of-hell-in-the-new-testament](http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/406-the-use-of-hell-in-the-new-testament)

<sup>3</sup>Paul Sain, "Ready Reference for Growing Christians: Facts and Scriptures on 100 Biblical Subjects" (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications), p. 83

<sup>4</sup>For a thorough study of this concept observe the following: [www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=12&article=960](http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=12&article=960) & [www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=12&article=216](http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=12&article=216)

<sup>5</sup>[www.watchtower.org/e/20020715/article\\_02.htm](http://www.watchtower.org/e/20020715/article_02.htm)

<sup>6</sup>ibid

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the  
29th Annual Mid-West Lectures,  
"They Shall Be Turned Unto Fables"  
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**"They Shall Be Turned  
Unto Fables"**

# **"There's No Such Thing As Hell"**

by  
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International Bible Studies  
Tract Series