

# THE REALITY OF HELL

**HELL**--The English word 'hell' is from a root word meaning 'to hide or cover.'

In the bible, the word 'hell' has two different concepts.

## 1. *The Abode of the Dead*

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word '*Sheol*' appears 31 times and, is translated 'Sheol,' 'hell,' 'the grave,' or 'the pit.'

In the New Testament, the equivalent Greek word '*Hades*.' is mentioned 10 times, and is translated 'Hades,' or 'hell.'

In these cases "hell" refers to 'the abode of the dead,' both godly and ungodly, and generally has nothing to do with punishment. For example,

**"For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth."** (Isa 38:18).

**"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."** (Rev 1:18).

## 2. *Gehenna - The Place of Eternal Punishment*

The second Greek word to describe hell in the New Testament is '*geenna*,' or "*Gehenna*," which is the Greek form of the Hebrew word for "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.

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, and maggots consumed the decaying flesh. When the wind blew from that direction over the city, its foulness was quite evident. It became a symbol of the wicked, and the place of their future destruction.

'Gehenna' occurs 12 times in the New Testament, and each time it is translated as "hell." With the exception of James 3:6, it is used only by Jesus. In fact nearly all of our knowledge of hell as a place of punishment comes from the teaching of Jesus.

As well as using the word Gehenna, or hell, as a place of eternal punishment, Jesus used other illustrative phrases like **“the everlasting fire,” “the outer darkness,”** and **“the furnace of fire,”** to describe the horrors of hell.

## **JESUS WARNED ABOUT THE REALITY OF HELL**

### ***Consider the Consequence of Hell--Choose the Cross Rather Than the Flesh***

**“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”** (Matt 18:8-9)

**“And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire-- where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'”** (Mark 9:47-48).

**“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”** (Matt 10:28).

### ***A Place of Eternal Punishment***

**“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”** (Matt 25:46).

**“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matt 13:41-42).

**“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** (Matt 3:12).

**“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.”** (Matt 5:22).

***As a Place of Separation:*** **“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those**

on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:31-34).

"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matt 13:49-50).

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt 25:41).

"And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us." (Luke 16:26).

#### **Hell Associated With the "Outer Darkness"**

"Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matt 22:13).

"And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matt 25:30)

#### ***The Apostles***

Although hell is not mentioned outright by the apostles, its existence is referred to indirectly. For instance, Paul writes,

**"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek..."**(Rom 2:5-9).

Being certain in his heart concerning the existence and nature of hell gave impetus to Paul's desire to save souls. **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."** (2 Cor 5:10-11).

In describing hell, the apostle Peter used another Greek word, 'tartaroo' meaning 'a deep abyss.' **"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast**

**them down to hell (tartaroo) and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment...**" (2 Pet 2:4).

## THE USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

In all cases where hell is described, figurative language is used. For example, Jesus is not speaking literally when He tells us to pluck out an eye; He does not have a literal winnowing fan in His hand, nor is there a threshing floor; there is no literal furnace of fire, and a literal bottomless pit is an impossibility.

In (Matthew 5:22; 18:9), and (Mark 9:47), hell is associated with fire as in **"hell fire," "everlasting fire," a "furnace of fire," and unquenchable fire."** In (Mark 9:46 and 48), hell is described as a place where **"their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."** Jesus also referred to the **"outer darkness"** where there will be **"wailing, weeping, and gnashing of teeth."** (Matt. 8:12; 13: 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28).

The Book of Revelation, (known for its symbolic or figurative language), describes hell as **"a lake of fire burning with brimstone"** (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). Into hell will be thrown the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19:20). At the end of the age the devil himself will be cast into it, along with death and hades, and all whose names are not in the Book of Life. **"And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever"** (Rev. 20:10). The terms **"bottomless pit,"** and **"the abyss"** are also associated with hell.

Exposition of the symbolic language used in describing hell has caused some confusion, and even rejection of the doctrine of hell. Some people deny the existence of hell altogether because of their reaction to the crude literal interpretation by some expositors. After all, they say, how could a God of love consign people to the eternal torturous pain inflicted by unquenchable fire and gnawing worms.

Human language is inadequate in describing heaven and hell. The former is more glorious, and the latter more terrible, than language can express. For this reason figurative language is employed to create a sense of the horrors of hell. Nevertheless, to gain a more accurate picture, it is necessary to allow the symbols to create an impression or feeling about the nature of hell. For example:

***Bottomless Pit*** Confinement to an inescapable prison-house.

***Fire*** Fire is a symbol of judgment.

**"Everlasting fire," and unquenchable fire."** Judgment of eternal duration.

***Lake of fire*** Judgment that is all embracing—all encompassing.

***"Furnace of fire"*** Intensity of punishment or suffering.

***Worm that does not die.*** Constant gnawing dissatisfaction and lack of peace and rest.

***Weeping, wailing*** Sorrow, regret, guilt and shame because of recognition of God's righteous judgment.

***Gnashing of teeth.*** Frustration with the hopelessness of their situation.

***Outer Darkness*** Complete isolation from all goodness and the blessings of God in heaven.

### ***Existence in Hell***

The existence of hell is indisputable, but its exact nature is speculative.

The most consistent aspect about hell taught by Jesus, is that it is a place of banishment and separation. Hells occupants will be separated from God and His heavenly hosts, from all purity, holiness, beauty, goodness, and righteousness—from all the blessings a loving Father wants to bestow on His children. A gulf of separation will separate those in hell from the glorious existence of those in heaven. In this respect hell is likened to a prison house.

Those in hell will be surrounded by spirits associated with every kind of evil. They will be at enmity with those around them and their inescapable surroundings. Instead of an atmosphere of love, peace, trust, joy and satisfaction, there will be hatred, unfulfilled lust, suspicion, and every tormenting evil desire. We are reminded of the state of man before the flood.. **“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”** (Gen 6:5).

There will be a solemn recognition of the righteousness of God's judgment, and a shameful resignation to the eternal duration of their miserable condition.

In Revelation, Satan is declared to be the ruler of hell. **“And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon (destruction), but in Greek he has the name Apollyon (the destroyer—i.e. Satan).”** (Rev 9:11). The occupants of hell will be subjected to the ruthless reign of Satan and his fallen angels. To them they will have to pay homage.

There may be different areas or differing degrees of the severity of hell's punishment.

**“But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”** (Matt 11:24).

**“Then He said to them in His teaching, “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”** (Mark 12:38-40).

**“And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.”** (Luke 12:47-48).

## CONCLUSION

The doctrine of hell as a place of judgment was persistently expounded by Jesus with such clarity that it cannot be denied. This is not surprising because His eternal sacrifice potentially saved every man created. **“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours (as Christians) only but also for the whole world.”** (I Jn 2:2).

It is His earnest desire that no one should **“neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him...”**(Heb 2:3-4).

Figurative language is used to create an impression of the horror of hell and the suffering of its inmates. The essence of their torment is their eternal isolation from all the goodness of God, and their inescapable surroundings in proximity to all that is evil.