

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HELL

By Russell K. Tardo

Is hell for real? Do people go there when they die? Is hell here on earth? Questions and opinions abound on the subject of hell. Some people make a joke of it; others do not believe in its existence at all. Unfortunately, even Christians seem confused about this important biblical doctrine. It is no longer in vogue to believe in hell or to preach about it, and few churches do anymore. This is all the more tragic since the Bible speaks very often and clearly on the subject. Once we learn the Bible facts about hell, the more inclined we will be to live a life pleasing to the Lord!

Greek and Hebrew

The Bible speaks of hell in both Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the single Hebrew word “sheol” is translated into three different English words: *hell*, *pit*, and *grave*. The New Testament does the opposite. It translates three different Greek words (hades, gehenna, and tartarus) into the single English word, *Hell*. While this may seem confusing, the Bible translators had reasons for using different words. Sheol and hades are synonymous terms for the afterlife or *the realm of the dead*. All who die are said to go there. Perhaps it can be best thought of as *a spiritual dimension* the dead pass into immediately at the moment of their death. Within this realm of the dead (sheol/hades) however, the righteous are divided from the wicked. The righteous dead are said to go to *Paradise, Heaven or Abraham’s Bosom*, and are blessed and comforted in the presence of the Lord (cf. Luke 16:22; 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; 12:2, 4), while the wicked go into the *pit or hell* to be tormented and punished. When referring to the physical body, the translators simply spoke of it going to the *grave*. The ten most important things for us to know about hell is that:

1. Hell Exists!

Jesus spoke more about the reality of hell than any other person in the Bible! In one account, recorded in Luke 16:19-31, He spoke of two men who died. One awoke in “Abraham’s bosom” (typifying heaven), the other in a fiery furnace! Jesus left us no reason to doubt the reality of hell.

*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, **being in torments**, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; **for I am tormented in this flame.** But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: **but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.***

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he might testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Some Bible versions may use the word “hades” instead of hell. Here, Hades is seen to be the interim place of punishment for lost souls. In Hades the unsaved dead suffer terrible torment and misery while awaiting the resurrection judgement of the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-15), and God’s righteous pronouncement of their damnation to an eternity of hell fire (Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:13-15). Two sobering facts literally jump out at us from these verses: One, **there is life immediately after death** (Luke 16:22-23). Man does not cease to exist at death nor is he unconscious or oblivious to feelings, sensations or pain. Two, **some, after death, go immediately to a place of comfort while others find themselves plunged into a place of fire and torment.** “*For I am tormented in this flame,*” the rich man cried in verse 24. The Bible plainly declares that **there is life after death, and you will live forever!** This passage stands in stark contrast to those who believe in soul sleep or that hell is just the grave or the annihilation of the soul. Obviously, the soul does not cease to exist at death nor does it sleep. The Bible teaches that you will continue to be conscious after death, and you will enter either into a place of comfort and joy or a place of fire and torment.

2. Not a Parable

Critics protest the use of Luke 16 to illustrate the reality of hell, claiming that it is only a “parable.” Several factors, however, prove otherwise. First, parables are usually always identified as such in Scripture (cf. Matthew 13:18, 24: 21:33; Mark 13:28; Luke 5:36, etc.). Second, people’s proper names are never used in parables. The verses above use the beggar’s name, Lazarus, four times. Third, the majority of conservative Bible scholars do not classify this passage with the parables. Fourth, parables are not myths or fables. They are a graphic and profound method of teaching through illustration. Therefore, even if Luke 16:19-31 were a parable, it still cannot be dismissed as though untrue. The fact is, Jesus said it to demonstrate the awful reality of the retributive punishment of the wicked.

Like It or Not, Hell Is a Reality!

Its existence is a fact and not fiction. Jesus Christ himself warned people repeatedly that a life of sin on earth would result in eternal fire and torment in hell. In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks of a future when He will judge the people of the earth from His throne of glory. To the righteous He shall say, “*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25:34). But to the unrighteous He shall say, “***Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels***” (Matthew 25:41). Friend, if you were to stand before God and give an account for your life right now, which of these words would Jesus Christ tell you? Would He welcome you to heaven for the godly life you have

lived? Would He say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”? Or, would He condemn you to eternal punishment for having led a sinful, self-centered life?

Condemned to Eternal Flame

Dare you imagine the frightful horror of having Jesus Christ, the Righteous Judge and the King of Glory, point His finger at you and say, “*Depart from me cursed one...into the eternal lake of fire*”? The horrible realization of our condemnation would begin to penetrate our being, and the sinking consciousness of our total ruin and utter hopelessness would cause us to tremble and wail in despair. None will be there to plead our case for us, no lawyer to bargain a plea, no friend or family member to lend us strength or support before this awesome court of justice. **All will stand naked before God!** No sin shall be hid, no wickedness undiscovered. Every one of our unrighteous deeds, words, and thoughts will be exposed before Him.

“For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness....” (Job 11:11).

“For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed” (Job 34:21,22,25).

*“If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; Shall not God search this out? **for He knoweth the secrets of the heart**”* (Psalm 44:20,21).

“O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee” (Psalm 69:5).

“The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity” (Psalm 94:11).

“For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much sope, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God” (Jeremiah 2:22).

“For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins....” (Amos 5:12).

“For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known” (Matthew 10:26).

3. Hell Is Not Here On Earth

People often express foolish and unscriptural opinions on the subject of hell. “I don’t believe there is a hell” or “I believe hell is just the grave” or even more popular is the “I believe hell is here on earth” theory. **What deceived individuals!** Jesus Christ himself tells us **hell is for real**. It is He, our beloved Savior, who gives the fullest teaching about hell (cf. Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5). The Bible makes its reality unmistakably clear. No doubt there are multitudes now suffering the torment of eternal flame who once said, “I don’t believe in hell.” **They believe now!**

Why hell is not here on earth:

- 1) You can drink cool water and buy cold drinks here. Water fountains and coke machines are everywhere. Therefore, this cannot be hell (Luke 16:24).
- 2) If you don’t like it here, you can leave. You can move to a colder climate anytime you choose. Obviously, this can’t be hell because in hell no one can ever leave (Luke 16:26).
- 3) Hell cannot possibly be here on earth because there are Christians here; but there are no true Christians in hell.

4) This cannot be hell because you can still repent of your sins and be forgiven. Once you're in hell, it will be too late to pray, too late to ask forgiveness, and too late to get right with God.

5) There is no laughter in hell! How could anyone possibly believe that hell is here on earth? Even the most troubled soul finds occasions to smile or laugh or sleep or enjoy some simple comfort and pleasure here on earth. Dear reader, be aware that **there is no laughter in hell!** There is no peace, no rest, no sleep, no pleasure, no comfort in hell. There is only horrible agony, pain, thirst, torment, suffering, and misery for eternity. Some deceived individuals have thought they could escape from all of their troubles and problems by "ending it all" and committing suicide. **How wrong they were!** Oh, when will men realize that only Jesus Christ offers us escape from our problems?

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).

4. Hell Is Eternal

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46).

In these verses Jesus makes it painfully clear that **hell is eternal**. It is **everlasting fire**; it is **suffering without end!** Note also that verse 46 declares that the righteous shall experience life eternal! They shall inherit real life; a blessed, conscious existence in peace; joy; and comfort. **Both the wicked and the righteous shall live eternally**, either blessed with Christ and the righteous believers of all ages, or tormented in hell's inferno with the devil and the fallen angels. The blessings and rewards Christ bestows upon His faithful servants shall be theirs forever, and the suffering of hell's inhabitants will never cease throughout all eternity! Notice that *punishment* is everlasting and *life* is eternal. Oddly, while cults believe in eternal life, they reject the doctrine of everlasting damnation. However, in both of these clauses Jesus used the identical Greek word to describe the eternality both of heaven and hell. Thus it is clear that if heaven is eternal, so is hell.

Rejected By False Religion

Every religious cult, virtually without exception, denies the reality and eternity of hell! They choose not to believe the Bible and substitute their own carnal reasonings and arguments for the infallible Word of God. Dear reader, be forewarned: **Any religion that denies the reality and eternity of hell is a false religion and offers false hope to the wicked!** Satan, through these lying religious cults, offers sinners the false hope of escape from God's wrath and judgement. How the devil hates the doctrine of hell, for he knows that he, too, will spend eternity in torment there (cf. Revelation 20:10). You can be sure that God will punish sin! He is a holy God who will judge the world in righteousness! Nothing shall be overlooked, no sin shall escape His all-seeing eye. *"In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ..."* (Romans 2:16).

5. Hell Is Final!

Not Like Ten Years in Prison

Being condemned to hell for eternity is not like merely going to prison for a few years! As bad as that may be at least in prison there is always the hope that you could be pardoned or paroled, or given a new trial and found not guilty. Also, in prison, inmates possess a mounting excitement and anticipation as the end of their sentence and their release date draws near. They have something to look forward to. **But not so in hell!** From hell there is nothing to look forward to—no pardon, no parole, no release, no anticipation, no hope, and no end to its awful suffering and punishment. There is no redemption from hell; **it is eternal!** Even after you've been there ten thousand years, your suffering has only just begun. In Revelation 14:10-11, the Bible describes hell as a place where *“the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture,”* and where the wicked *“shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night.”* Anyone who dies without a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ will be certainly and irreversibly be condemned to the eternal lake of fire.

No Purgatory

Contrary to Roman Catholic doctrine, there is no such place as purgatory; it simply does not exist. Nowhere in the entire Bible is purgatory mentioned. Jesus never referred to the existence of such a place nor did the apostles or any other writers in the Old or New Testaments. Scripture clearly teaches that all souls go to either heaven or hell at death. There is no intermediate place; no limbo, no purgatory. How many millions of people have been deceived into thinking that they or their loved ones could be prayed out of purgatory by paying priests to say masses for them? The fact is, the doctrine of purgatory was invented by the Roman Catholic Church to enrich its own coffers and to produce a counterfeit confidence in its carnal members. The doctrine has absolutely no basis in Scripture, and I repeat, simply does not exist. Of this you can be certain: if you die a sinner without being born again, you will not go to purgatory; you will go to hell.

No Reincarnation

The theory of reincarnation is one of the biggest deceptions the devil has ever introduced. How gullible men are to believe such nonsense! Amazingly, even some who profess to be Christians have swallowed this ridiculous doctrine without realizing that it is a view incompatible with true Christianity and is repudiated by the Scriptures.

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Don't be deceived; once you die, it is too late to repent! It's too late then to pray for forgiveness. You'll never again have any chance to obey God and live a holy Christian life. **There will be no second chance!** God extends to every one of us the opportunity to believe the Gospel **now** and to repent from our sins and follow Christ.

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Corinthians 6:2).

The Bible clearly reveals that once you die, it is too late to be saved. The devil-inspired doctrine of reincarnation is a pied piper leading multitudes to a Christless grave.

6. Hell Is a Place of Fire and Torment

The Bible describes hell as a place of great suffering, intense agony, and torment. It is a place of horror, pain, grief, punishment, and tears. Scripture depicts it as an awful place of choking, stinking, sulfuric fumes; a burning, churning **sea of fire** where the ear is continually tormented with the loud yelling and continuous outcries of the damned; where the nostrils are scalded with sulphurous flames and the tongue with burning blisters and the whole body rolled in flames of liquid fire. It's a place where all of the powers and faculties of the soul shall be violently and excruciatingly tormented continually, ceaselessly, eternally!

*“The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; **And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth**”* (Matthew 13:41-42).

To the inhabitants of hell, death or unconsciousness would be a welcome relief. But they can't die because they're already dead! They are dead yet fully awake and conscious of their condemnation to this prison of eternal fire!

The Painfulness of a Burn

A burn is probably the most painful injury a person could suffer. It causes unceasing, gnawing pain that throbs and pounds at the flesh and produces great suffering. In our present bodies of flesh, blood, and bone there is a physical limitation to the amount of pain and suffering one can endure. If pain, terror, or suffering became too severe, one would either faint or die. But after death, the soul is free from all physical limitations, and the capacity to experience pain is multiplied a thousand fold. There is no relief for the tormented soul!

Jesus used the Greek word “gehenna” to describe hell as a place “*where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*” (cf. Mark 9:43-48). He likened hell to a stinking garbage dump; a place of perpetual fires where maggots and other repulsive, loathsome creatures live in all of the decaying, putrid refuse; eating, gnawing, devouring, and yet never consuming the filth and corruption there. According to Christ, hell is a place where loathsome creatures bite, tear, and devour the inhabitants, inflicting unimaginable torture upon them, **yet never totally consuming them and thus never relieving them of their agonies!**

7. A Place of Abysmal Darkness

Jesus further describes hell as a place of unnatural darkness and torment: “*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into **outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth***” (Matthew 25:30).

In another passage, the destiny of sinful man is depicted as a place of **perpetual darkness** reserved for those:

*“Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray...**to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever**”* (II Peter 2: 14,15,17).

The epistle of Jude also portrays the destiny of the wicked as those: “*...to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever*” (Jude 13).

A Horrible Kind of Fire

Perhaps you imagined that where there is fire there must be some degree of light. But this is not so in hell! The fires of hell are of a different and far more horrible nature than fire here. Hell fire produces no light! The infernal flames rage while leaving hell's inhabitants in total darkness. They see and feel the lick of the flame but cannot see through its black walls. Here on earth fire devours and reduces its prey to ashes and burns out when its fuel is depleted. But this is not so in hell. There, the fires burn with a fierceness that none can comprehend but those who experience it, **yet it does not consume them and never will!** They shall ever be burning; they shall ever be tormented, yet never consumed!

You Won't See Your Friends There!

I've heard people comment that they were "going to hell and looking forward to it" because they were going to see all of their friends there. One man told me, "My friends and I are going to play cards there and have a good time." **What a deceived individual!** You'll see no one in hell. It's a place of abysmal darkness so thick that even the light from the flames won't penetrate it.

8. Total Isolation

You are wrong if you think you'll see your friends and loved ones there. Hell is a deep, black, burning caldron from which you will **never see them again!** It's a place of total isolation. You'll probably hear the groans and cries of agony from the parched, cracked, and swollen mouths of the damned; but in that unearthly blanket of thick darkness you'll never see them. *The inhabitants of hell will spend eternity alone in a fiery pit of darkness.*

No Visiting Rights in Hell

Dear reader, think long and hard about this. The damned shall be **eternally separated** from God and isolated from all of their friends and loved ones.

9. A Place of Utter Hopelessness!

The condition of the damned is totally hopeless. There is such suffering and torment in the flame but no one to hear their cries. There are none to offer a sympathetic ear, no one to lend a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on. Imagine the utter desolation one must feel to be eternally rejected by God. **There is no hope in hell!** There is no chance for pardon or parole; there is no chance that God will change His mind; there is no chance to ever escape, and there is no end to the hideous torture of worm and flame. There is **nothing to look forward to** except more of the same. Those who rejected Jesus Christ in their life on earth now find themselves **rejected by God and damned forever.** This is the quintessence of hopelessness!

Your Present Situation Is Not Hopeless

No matter how bad things may seem and no matter how desperate your present circumstances are, things are not hopeless; at least **not yet.** It's not too late to call upon Jesus Christ **if you do it now!** Learn to trust in God. Serve Him with all of your heart

and life. **Put Christ first** and you will find how quickly and easily He can change your situation. But if you die a sinner, you'll soon know what the word "hopeless" really means. For once you are condemned to hell, that fatal sentence shall never be reversed!

People Die Like They Live

Don't be deceived into thinking that you have plenty of time to be a Christian later in your life. You have no guarantee that you will live to see the sun come up tomorrow. **If you died tonight, where would you spend eternity?** It would be too late then to repent and ask God's forgiveness. Don't think that you can live a life of sin and then "get right with God" just before you die. The fact is, **people die like they live!** If you live like sinners; proud, cursing, lying, self-centered, worldly, etc., **that's exactly how you will die!**

Our newspaper recently reported the tragic account of one of the worst airliner crashes in aviation history. A giant airliner loaded with passengers was cleared for takeoff and began its high speed run down the airstrip. Suddenly, another huge jet, also loaded with passengers, veered directly across the path of the approaching airliner. The approaching pilot realized that he was going to collide with the other plane and desperately tried to pull his plane up to avoid crashing into it. His attempts failed and the two jets collided at high speed, exploded, and killed hundreds of people. The passengers died instantly with no chance to "get right" with God. Airline officials were anxious to retrieve the "black box" from the wreckage in order to determine what might have caused such a mix-up and disaster. They wanted to hear the last words of the pilot and crew before they met death and stepped off into eternity. All were shocked to discover that **the pilot's last remarks were a barrage of four-letter words too filthy to print!** He died cursing, not repenting! Dear reader, those who live cursing, die cursing. Those who live blaspheming, die blaspheming. If you live in sin, you will die in sin and be damned eternally. You must not gamble. Eternity is at stake! You cannot put repentance off until later. You may find, like the passengers and crew of those planes, that **those who wait until the eleventh hour to get right with God die at 10:30.**

10. The Best Thing to Know about Hell is That You Don't Have To Go There.

The blessed truth is no one has to go to hell. Those who wind up there have chosen to live in rebellion to the revealed will of God and have rejected a life of discipleship to Christ. God, in His great mercy and love, has provided for us a way of escape; **but only one way!** That is the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6). Dear reader, God is calling you and warning you now to turn from a selfish life of sin. Repent from all of your sins and ask Christ to forgive you. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and give Him control of your life. Submit to His lordship over you and determine to follow and obey Him.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him" (John 3:36).

Don't Let This Be a Preview of Your Future

Revelation 20:11-15 tells of a future scene that will occur exactly as described here. This is referred to as the "great white throne judgement." Every person who has ever lived and who died in their sinful, unrepentant state will be judged by Jesus Christ at this time. Everyone included in this judgement will be cast into the lake of fire!

"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."

Is Your Name Written In The Lamb's Book of Life?

All true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have their names written in this book. God knows who they are. They are the ones that love Him and obey Him. They serve Christ and trust completely in Him. Whenever a person is born again, his name is written in this heavenly book.

Are You Born Again?

According to Jesus Christ, you cannot enter heaven and inherit eternal life unless you are born again.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

You can be born again right now by simple faith in Jesus Christ. Believe that He died on the cross to pay the terrible penalty for your sins. He died for you! When you receive Him as your Savior, God erases every trace of your past sins and forgives you completely. At the moment you receive Him into your heart as your personal Savior and repent from your sins, you are born again and your name is written in heaven. Why don't you surrender your life totally to Christ and experience the blessings of genuine Christianity right now?

How You Can Be Saved

1. Recognize that you are a sinner in the eyes of God, and as such you stand guilty and condemned before Him.

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

2. Be aware that God will punish sinners. He is a holy and righteous judge who will not overlook sin!

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

3. Realize that Jesus Christ died for sinners. He paid the penalty you owed for your sins against God by dying in your place.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly...But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6,8).

4. Know that God will forgive you of every one of your sins if you will turn away from them and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life.

“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved....For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:8,9,13).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

You cannot earn or merit salvation in any way. None of us deserve it. It is God’s free gift to all who believe. *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved....” (Acts 16:31).*

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Why don’t you pray now and receive Christ as your Savior?

Pray something like this:

“Heavenly Father, I admit that I am a sinner and I ask you to forgive me for all of my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ died for me on the cross and that He rose again from the dead. I confess that He is Lord, and I receive Him now into my heart and life. I turn away from sin and commit my whole life to you. Lord Jesus, help me to live as your disciple; help me to please you with my actions, word, and thoughts. I love you, Lord Jesus! Thank you for hearing my prayer and forgiving me now. Thank you, Lord, for saving me and giving me eternal life, in Jesus’ Name” (I John 5:13).

Find a church that preaches the Bible and attend faithfully. You will blossom and grow into a mature disciple of Christ!



About the Author

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