

## Doctrine of Hell

### Is there a Literal Hell?

1. The question under consideration, “Is there a Literal Hell”, is an important study for several reasons.
  - This study is important so that individuals can be forewarned. In the Biblical stories, grace generally precedes judgment.
  - This study is important so that an individual can repent and seek for God’s grace and mercy. In the opening scene of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian is found concerned after reading of the judgment to come. He sets off on a quest for salvation.
  - This study is important so that the justice and holiness of God might be upheld as well as His great love.
  - This study is important so that the works of the devil might be destroyed. One of the works of the devil is to deceive people by luring them into a false sense of security. The devil does not want people to know truth. The truth might very well be that there is a place of eternal conscious damnation that awaits all who reject the love of God and the finished work of Christ at Calvary. Every person must determine whether or not annihilation for a hedonistic, playboy, Epicurean lifestyle is all that God will demand of a soul.
  
2. The first mention of hell in the New Testament came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said there is a hell, and that hell is a place of fire.
  - *Matthew 5:21-22 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*
  
3. In Matthew 5:29, Jesus taught that it is better to lose an eye, or even be completely blind, than to have two good eyes and use them in the wrong way to commit sin that will bring damnation and cast the whole body into hell.
  - *Matthew 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*
  
4. There is figurative and spiritual language associated with the study of hell. Jesus taught that hell is a place with “gates”, to which He holds the keys.

- *Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*
  - *Revelation 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*
5. Jesus warned the Pharisees of the damnation of hell. If it were true that the Jewish community did not have a fully developed understanding of the fate, and the state of the lost, then the Lord's dire warning was meaningless. Hell is a place of damnation, and that damnation is unending.
- *Matthew 23:33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*
6. The Lord Jesus spoke on the subject of hell many times. In Mark 9:43-46 alone Jesus used the word "hell" three times and the word "fire" six times, concluding with the imagery that hell is a place, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."
- *Mark 9:43 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, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*
7. In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus taught that hell was a place of conscious eternal torment. Even if this narrative is understood as a parable, there is spiritual truth conveyed. Hell is a terrible place where the wicked open their eyes and are in torment.
- *Luke 16:19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 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; 23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 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. 25 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. 26 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. 27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:*

*28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

8. Jesus taught that Hell was created for a purpose. Hell was created for the devil and his angels.

- *Matthew 25:41 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:*

Therefore, Hell is a prepared place for a prepared personage. It has not been from everlasting, for only God is ever lasting.

- *Psalms 90:1 A Prayer of Moses the man of God. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*

9. Some of the angels of the devil are already in hell.

- *Jude 6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

10. Hell is a place where the souls of men are forced to depart from God. Hell is a place of separation from God.

- *Matthew 25:41 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:*

11. As hell has a point of origin, so the devil has a point of origin. The devil is a created person, though he was not created as the devil. He was originally called, Lucifer.

12. Many Bible teachers believe the devil's (Greek: διάβολος or diábolos, slanderer or accuser) origin is spoken of in Ezekiel 28:11-15 under the assumed appearance, "*the king of Tyrus.*"

- *Ezekiel 28:11 Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 12 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. 13 Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. 14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.*

### The Original Characteristics of the Devil

- Full of Wisdom
- Perfect in Beauty
- Was Present in Eden, the Garden of God
- Covered with Emeralds
- Majestic in Music
- An Anointed Cherub
- Established upon the Holy Mountain of God
- He Walked in the Midst of the Stones of Fire
- He Was Perfect in His Ways

13. Something terrible happened to this personage. Iniquity was found in him. Specifically, this lovely personage, “*full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty*”, became a rebel against God. The prophet Isaiah tells what happened when Lucifer, the creature, exercised his will against the Creator.

- *Isaiah 14:12 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.*

### The Five “I Will’s” of Lucifer

- 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.
- I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.
- I will be like the most High.

14. Sin entered into the universe prior to the creation of humanity. However, once man was created, he too rebelled against God. Eve was the first to sin, being deceived by Lucifer, who had become, the devil.

- *Genesis 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

***Special Note.***

The essence of sin is transgression against the Law of God. *1 John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.* Bold was Lucifer to sin. Bold was Eve to violate the known will of God. Bold was Adam to do wrong, with tragic consequences. *Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* And yet, bold is the heart of men and women today to exert their wills and fulfill their pleasures at the expense of holiness and righteousness. First the heart of God weeps, and then He moves in judgment. Far better for individuals not to rebel against God than to be forced to depart from God and join the devil and his fallen angels in the special place prepared for them.

Of Judas it was said he went to his own place. *Acts 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, 25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.* There is a “place” for every man and every woman who rebels, without remorse or repentance, against the Lord.

**Three Biblical Lists of those who will be  
United with the Devil and His Angels  
in Hell**

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived:
  - ❖ neither fornicators,
  - ❖ nor idolaters,
  - ❖ nor adulterers,
  - ❖ nor effeminate,
  - ❖ nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
  - ❖ nor thieves, nor covetous,
  - ❖ nor drunkards, nor revilers,
  - ❖ nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.
- Galatians 5:19-21. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these;
  - ❖ Adultery,
  - ❖ fornication,
  - ❖ uncleanness,
  - ❖ lasciviousness,
  - ❖ idolatry,
  - ❖ witchcraft,
  - ❖ hatred,
  - ❖ variance,

- ❖ emulations,
- ❖ wrath,
- ❖ strife,
- ❖ seditions,
- ❖ heresies,
- ❖ envyings,
- ❖ murders,
- ❖ drunkenness,
- ❖ revellings, and such like:

of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

- Revelation 22:14-15. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are

- ❖ dogs,
- ❖ and sorcerers,
- ❖ and whoremongers,
- ❖ and murderers,
- ❖ and idolaters,
- ❖ and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

15. The Hebrew word *sheol* is found sixty-five times in the Old Testament. Thirty-one times it is translated “hell”, thirty-one times it is translated “grave”, and three times it is translated, “the pit”.

16. The corresponding Greek word in the New Testament is *hades*. It is translated ten times into English as “hell”.

17. The word hell is used in many other passages in the New Testament based on the translation of the Greek word, *ghenna*. γέεννα *genna* (geh'-en-nah), which is of Hebrew origin and refers to the valley of (the son of) Hinnom; ge-henna (or Ge-Hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem. The Greek term “ghenna” is used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment.

### Biblical Terms

- |           |        |                        |                  |
|-----------|--------|------------------------|------------------|
| • sheol   | Hebrew | Rendered in English as | grave, hell, pit |
| • hades   | Greek  | Rendered in English as | hell             |
| • Gehenna | Greek  | Rendered in English as | hell             |

18. The Old Testament “*sheol*” and the New Testament “*hades*” have the same meaning. However, exactly what that meaning might be, is not always easy to discern.

“We have no clue to the origin of the word [Sheol] and must seek for its meaning in the several passages in which it occurs.

In Genesis 37:35, "And he [Jacob] said, 'I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son,'" the meaning is obvious.

In Numbers 16:30 Moses declares that Korah shall go down alive into Sheol (v. 33).

In 2 Samuel 22:6 we read, "The cords of Sheol surrounded me."

In Job 11:8 there seems to be an allusion to the belief that there is a dark and deep abyss beneath the center of the earth, tenanted by departed spirits, but not necessarily a place of torment.

"Sheol from beneath is excited over you," etc. (Isaiah 14:9), is thus rendered by Delitzsch (Commentary, ad loc.), "The kingdom of the dead below is all in uproar on account of thee"; and its meaning thus interpreted, "All Hades is overwhelmed with excitement and wonder, now that the king of Babel . . . is actually approaching."

In the great majority of cases in the OT, Sheol is used to signify the grave; and it can have no other meaning in Genesis 37:35; 42:38; 1 Samuel 2:6; 1 Kings 2:6; Job 14:13; 17:13,16, and in many passages in the writings of David, Solomon, and the prophets.

The darkness and gloom of the grave was such that the word denoting it came to be applied to the abiding place of the miserable.

Some passages are doubtful, but concerning others scarcely a question can be entertained (e.g., 11:8; 139:8; 9:2), in which the word denotes the opposite of heaven.

Still more decisive are Psalm 9:17; Proverbs 23:14; in which Sheol can only mean the abode of the wicked, as distinguished from and opposed to the righteous. In nearly every instance Sheol is translated as "grave" in the New International Version.

In the New Testament the Greek, "hades" is used in much the same sense as Sheol in the OT, except that in fewer cases can it be construed to signify "the grave."

It takes this meaning in Acts 2:31, but in general the Hades of the New Testament appears to be the world of future punishment (e.g., Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 16:23) (*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*).

19. Based on Ecclesiastes 9:5-10, some people teach that hades, sheol, and the grave, are one and the same. If true, the doctrine of annihilation would be established, and the doctrine of a literal hell, with literal fire, would be invalidated.

- *Ecclesiastes 9:5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. 7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. 10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*

***Special Note.***

A conservative understanding of this passage is that these verses speak only about the body going into the grave; therefore it is the body that sleeps. It is the body that has no knowledge. The soul of man goes either to heaven, or to hell.

20. Other arguments by annihilationist against a literal hell include the following.

- It is argued that the phrase “everlasting punishment” in Matthew 25:26, where it is parallel to the phrase, “life eternal”, does not necessarily carry the idea of endlessness. The Greek word, *aionios* means, “belonging to the age to come”. *Matthew 25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

***A Conservative Response.***

The New Testament writers are united in expecting the age to come to be unending. Therefore, the problem for the annihilationist remains. It begs the question to argue that in the age to come, life for the righteous continues unending, while punishment ends. The word order and usage of *aionios* by Jesus does not allow for such a divergent understanding, nor was it meant to.

- It is argued that the idea of the immortality of the soul, that is, the immortality of the conscious person, is rooted in a Platonic (Greek) view of the soul. It is contended that the only New Testament images of death, destruction, fire and darkness for the unbeliever are only meant to convey the idea that such a person will cease to exist.

***A Conservative Response.***

The church has consistently maintained that the controlling principle in Biblical interpretation is the power of Scripture to illuminate its own teaching from within itself. While outside forces may try to influence Christian understanding, such as Platonic mysticism in the third century BC, or Gnosticism in the first century AD, the Bible consistently interprets itself. While there are some texts in the Bible that would fit into an annihilationist’s understanding, there are other texts that cannot naturally fit into that form.



“Jude 6 and Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 show that darkness signifies a state of deprivation and distress, but not of destruction in the sense of ceasing to exist. Only those who exist can weep and gnash their teeth, as those banished into the darkness are said to do.

Nowhere in Scripture does death signify extinction; physical death is departure into another mode of being, called sheol or hades, and metaphorical death is existence that is God-less and graceless; nothing in biblical usage warrants the idea... that the “second death” of Revelation 2:11; 20:14; 21:8 means, or involves, cessation of being.

Luke 16:22-24 shows that, as also in a good deal of extra-biblical apocalyptic, fire signifies continued existence in pain, and the chilling words of Revelation 14:10 with 19:20; 20:10 and of Matthew 13:42, 50 confirm this.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul explains, or extends, the meaning of “punished with everlasting [eternal, aionios] destruction” by adding “and shut out from the presence of the Lord” — which phrase, by affirming exclusion, rules out the idea that “destruction” meant extinction. Only those who exist can be excluded.

It has often been pointed out that in Greek the natural meaning of the destruction vocabulary (noun, *olethros*; verb, *apollumi*) is wrecking, so that what is destroyed is henceforth nonfunctional rather than annihilating it, so that it no longer exists in any form at all” (J. I. Packer, *Reformation & Revival magazine*, Volume 6, Number 2 - Spring 1997).

- John Stott pleads for annihilation based on the words of Revelation 14:11. *Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.* Says Mr. Stott, “The fire itself is termed “eternal” and “unquenchable”, but it would be very odd if what is thrown into it proves indestructible. Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed forever, not tormented forever. Hence it is the smoke (evidence that the fire has done its work) which “rises for ever and ever.”

#### ***A Conservative Response.***

Robert A. Peterson replies to Mr. Scott in the following way. ““On the contrary, our expectation would be that the smoke would die out once the fire had finished its work... The rest of the verse confirms our interpretation: *‘There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image’*” (*Hell on Trial*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1995, 161-62).

- It is argued by annihilationist that eternal hell would be an unjust punishment. John Stott writes, “I question whether ‘eternal conscious torment’ is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity.”

### *A Conservative Response.*

It is always dangerous to question the actions of God and bring into human judgment His character, whether God is just or unjust to punish as He wills. Basil Atkinson was wise to say, ““I have avoided . . . any argument about the final state of the lost based upon the character of God, which I should consider it to be irreverent to attempt to estimate.”

With that being noted, J. I. Packer observed the horns of a dilemma the annihilationist is impaled upon with this argument.

“The uncertainty expressed in Stott’s “perhaps” is strange, for there is no reason to think that the resurrection of the lost for judgment will change their character, and every reason therefore to suppose that their rebellion and impenitence will continue as long as they themselves do, making continued banishment from God’s fellowship fully appropriate;

but, leaving that aside, it is apparent that the argument, if valid, would prove too much, and end up undermining the annihilationist’s own case.

For if, as the argument implies, it is needlessly cruel for God to keep the lost endlessly in being to suffer pain, because His justice does not require this, how can the annihilationists justify in terms of God’s justice the fact that He makes them suffer any postmortem pain at all?

Why would not justice, which on this view requires their annihilation in any case, not be satisfied by annihilation at death?

Biblical annihilationists, who cannot evade the biblical expectation of the Final Resurrection to judgment of unbelievers along-side believers, admit that God does not do this, and some...admit too that there will be some pain inflicted after judgment and prior to extinction;

but if God’s justice requires no more than extinction, and therefore does not require this, the pain becomes needless cruelty, and God is thus in effect accused of the very fault of which annihilationists are anxious to prove Him innocent, and to condemn the Christian mainstream for implying;

while if God’s justice really does require some penal pain in addition to annihilation, and continued hostility, rebellion, and impenitence Godward on the part of unbelievers remains a postmortem fact, there will be no moment at which it will be possible for either God or man to say that enough punishment has been inflicted, no more is deserved, and any more would be unjust” (Packer, *ibid*).

- A final main argument of the annihilationist is that eternal punishment in a literal hell would produce unhappiness in heaven.

*A Conservative Response.*

Since the believer will be like the Lord, the eternal joy of the Christian will not be impaired if the holiness of God remains intact by insisting upon merited retribution. “In heaven Christians will be like God in character, loving what He loves and taking joy in all His self-manifestation, including the manifestation of His justice (in which indeed the saints in Scripture take joy already in this world)” (Packer, *ibid.*).

*Isaiah 65:17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. 18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.*