

Truth For These Times



32. WHAT AND WHERE IS HELL?

The average idea about ‘hell’ and what the Bible teaches, is remarkably different. Many look upon ‘hell’ as a vast fiery pit where sinners suffer and burn forever, while demons with pitch forks enjoy torturing the eternally damned. The Bible does not endorse such an idea. As we examine the teaching of the Bible on this subject, it is important to note first of all the meaning of the word ‘hell’. Actually, there are four different words used in Biblical language, but they are all translated to the one English word ‘hell’.

1. SHEOL is a Hebrew word meaning death, and the state of death; or the grave and its dominion. This word carries no idea of fire or conscious torment. It simply means death, and the abode of death for both good and evil.
2. TARTAROS is a Greek word referring to the place of banishment of evil angels, meaning the regions of space about this earth, where they were cast after their rebellion in heaven. It has nothing to do with the fate of sinners. It occurs only once in the New Testament, 2 Peter 2:4.
3. HADIS is a Greek word which refers to that which is in darkness, or is hidden. It applies to the abode of the dead and is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word SHEOL which means simply – ‘the grave’.
4. GEHENNA is a Greek word which applies literally to the Valley of Gehenna which was close to Jerusalem, and was used to burn rubbish, including the carcasses of animals and unburied bodies of criminals. The fires burned continuously to consume all waste. The fires of Gehenna were not for the torment of the living, but the destruction of the dead. Jesus used Gehenna as a symbol of the second death – the total destruction of the wicked by fire at the close of the Millennium.

Matthew 7:13,14 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Here Jesus made it abundantly clear that the majority of people would be lost and only a minority saved. If a wicked person was consigned to a hell fire at death there would be some inequality in respect to punishment, for those who died over 5,000 years ago would have suffered 5,000 years longer than one who dies today. Such a doctrine is not to be found anywhere in the Bible. Jesus made it plain in this text that the fate of the wicked is ‘DESTRUCTION’ – not eternal life in a burning hell. Such a teaching were true, God would be classed as a monster or a sadist. The truth about God’s character is this... “God is Love” 1 John 4:8.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE WICKED?

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

The contrast is absolute. Life and death. The righteous have everlasting life, but the wicked everlasting death.

Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.

Some feel that the ‘soul’ is immortal. This text shows clearly that the soul can die.

Matthew 10:28 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.



The destruction of the mortal body is only temporal – but the loss of eternal life is irreversible. The ‘soul’ generally refers to a ‘person’ not a part of man separate from the body (see study [The Nature of Man in Life and in Death](#)). Sometimes ‘soul’ refers to our eternal life, but no Bible text says the soul can operate independently of the body.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE WICKED?

In Psalm 37:20 it states that the wicked will consume into smoke, and Revelation 20:9 reveals a devouring by fire.

Malachi 4:1-3 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked. For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do *this*,” says the LORD of hosts.



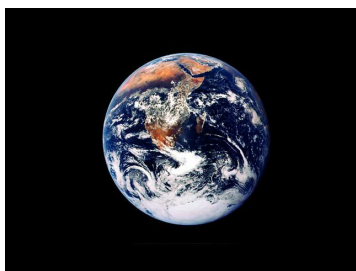
Here is a very clear picture of the destruction of the wicked by fire – a fire that reduces them to ashes.

WHERE IS HELL?

2 Peter 3:7,10 But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

The burning hell for the destruction of sinners is very clearly seen to be upon this earth at the end of time. This is God’s way of disinfecting the earth from everything that is evil and unclean.

Matthew 13:40-42 Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. 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.



Hell will be on the earth.

Jesus shows that hell fire is not burning now, but is reserved until the end of the world.

2 Peter 2:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

We have seen that the time of punishment is at the end of the world. No person need fear about a present burning hell. No such place exists. All the wicked will ultimately be destroyed together. There is not one single soul in hell fire today. But the wicked and the righteous are in their graves awaiting the day of resurrection. The righteous rise to life everlasting, and the wicked to eternal destruction. John 5:28-29.

Revelation 20:7-9 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. They

went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

The ultimate final destruction of the wicked occurs at the end of the millennium. This lake of fire is where the second death takes place. Revelation 20:14. There is no resurrection from the second death. The wicked are destroyed forever.

BIBLE TEXTS THAT APPEAR TO TEACH ETERNAL SUFFERING

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched.

At first glance it appears that this fire will burn forever, but the text does not say this. It says the fire shall not be quenched. To quench simply means to 'put out'. So Jesus is saying that the fire will not be put out. When God starts the fire it will not be put out by anyone, but when the fire has consumed the material fed to it, then it will go out by itself.

Jeremiah 17:27 But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.



Jesus teaching about Hell.

Jerusalem was destroyed by fire (2 Chronicles 36:19) and it is described as unquenchable fire. The truth is that it could not be quenched while it had its work of destruction to do. However, it did go out when there was nothing more to burn, for quite obviously it is not burning today.

Matthew 25:41 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."

We have already noted in Malachi 4, that the wicked will be reduced to ashes. What does Jesus mean then by the term 'eternal fire'. It can mean a fire that will never go out, or it can describe the RESULTS of such a fire. The meaning becomes clear as we look at our next text.

Jude 7 As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire many thousands of years ago, yet this text calls the fires of destruction 'eternal fire'. Are these fires burning today? Of course not. Everlasting fire simply means that the fire is eternal in its effects. The everlasting fire at the end of time will destroy the wicked for all time, just as Sodom and Gomorrah were annihilated with never a hope of recovery.



Lot and family escorted out of Sodom.

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

Notice Jesus did not say everlasting 'PUNISHING', but everlasting 'PUNISHMENT'. Punishing is continuous, but punishment can be effective forever, yet have an end. What form of punishment is Jesus referring to here? Romans 6:23 says that the wages, or punishment, for sin is death. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 states that the punishment of the wicked is 'everlasting destruction'. Jesus said that the righteous would not 'perish', indicating that the wicked would – John 3:16.

Revelation 20:10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Even Satan will be destroyed. His outcome is eternal death. The lake of fire will bring about his destruction. He will be tormented (i.e. to try, or test) for eternity. Torment does not mean torture. His trial in the fire will result in his eternal end.

Ezekiel 28:18,19 Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth A FIRE FROM THE MIDST OF THEE, it shall devour thee, and I WILL BRING THEE TO ASHES upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee; thou shalt be a terror and NEVER SHALT THOU BE ANYMORE. (KJV)



Satan will be burnt to ashes.

Here it clearly reveals Satan's end – brought to ashes – never to live again. We need to understand the meaning of the word 'forever', as did the ancient Jew. To him it did not mean to continue throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. 'Forever' meant a continuous period without a break – sometimes long and sometimes very short. For example, in Exodus 21:1-6 it meant the lifetime of the servant. In 1 Chronicles 28:4 (see also 1 Chronicles 29:27) 'forever' was for 40 years, or as long as David was to live. In 1 Samuel 1:22-28 'forever' in verse 22 meant simply as long as Samuel lived. In Jonah 12:6, 'forever' was for three days – the length of time Jonah spent in the big fish. So Satan burns only as long as he stays alive. When he dies and his body becomes ashes, 'forever' ceases.

The Bible clearly teaches that the wicked will be destroyed by fire and will cease to exist for all time. Out of the ashes of the cleansed earth, purified by fire: God makes a new earth – the eternal homeland of the redeemed. Sin and its consequences are eradicated for all time. The only one consumed in hell fire are those who have chosen to cling to sin rather than turn to a loving God and accept His beloved Son.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them: "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

God wants all men to be saved. It is not His desire that anyone be consigned to hell. He who suffers eternal destruction does so because of his persistence in choosing evil and his choice in rejecting the guidance of Jesus Christ. People shut the door of eternal life against themselves.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.



Jesus welcomes saints into heaven.

The punishment of the wicked is God's 'strange act'. It is out of harmony with His nature to destroy. His character is one of building – not destroying. But God's withdrawal of the gift of life from the wicked is in kindness to them. They could not be happy in a sinless universe. They would rather die than be in the presence of God, the angels and righteous.

Lesson 32 - Hell

“The sinner could not be happy in God’s presence. He would shrink from the companionship of holy beings. Could he be permitted to enter Heaven, it would have no joy for him. His thoughts, his interests, his motives, would be alien to those that actuate the sinless dwellers there. Heaven would be to him a place of torture. He would long to be hidden from Him who is its light, and the centre of its joy.” *Steps to Christ*, pages 17,18.

Because God is love, He must ‘amputate’ the infection of sin from the universe. For the sake of all creation and their happiness, sin must be entirely cut off. If this was not so the contamination may spread. But God will make a clean cut – a complete separation from sin. The affliction of sin will not rise again.

God loves you too my friend. He wants you to have eternal life, but only you can choose. God has already chosen you, for this is why Jesus died on Calvary – to save you from the second death and give you eternal life. But you must choose Him. He will not force you, but He pleads with you that you might choose LIFE.

Review Sheet – Hell

ASSIGNMENT – Read the Bible study carefully before answering the following questions.

1. Explain the meaning of the words:
 - a. SHEOL _____
 - b. TARTAROS _____
 - c. HADES _____
 - d. GEHENNA _____
2. Where did Jesus say the ‘broad way’ leads? Matthew 7:13,14
Broad is the way _____
3. Do the wicked have eternal life in a burning hell? John 3:36
He who does not believe the Son _____
4. Can the soul die? Ezekiel 18:4
Yes _____ No _____
5. How complete is the destruction of the wicked? Malachi 4:1-3
(In your own words)
Answer : _____
6. What is the location of the burning hell for the destruction of sinners? 2 Peter 3:7,10
The _____
_____.
7. When does hell fire take place? Matthew 13:40-42
At _____
8. Explain the meaning of Unquenchable, Everlasting and Eternal fire.
(In your own words)
Answer: _____
9. The wicked are destroyed in hell fire. What happens to the devil? Revelation 20:10; Ezekiel 28:18,19
Answer _____
10. What did the word ‘forever’ mean in the mind of a Jew?
Answer _____
11. Does God delight in the destruction of the wicked? Ezekiel 33:11
Says the Lord God, _____

12. Does God want you to have eternal life? 2 Peter 3:9
Longsuffering toward us, _____

After the destruction of the wicked are you thankful that sin will never rise again in the universe?

YES _____ NO _____