

The Truth About Hell

Scripture: Revelation 14:10–11; Revelation 20:15

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More than 150,000 people die every day. That's 4.5 million each month, a number that exceeds the population of Los Angeles. Add to that the number of dead throughout human history—it's a staggering figure. Tragically, many of those people died without knowing Christ. What fate awaits them? Do they really *Rest In Peace*, or do they find a different reality beyond the grave?

Sadly, those who reject God and His way of salvation don't find rest when they die. They enter into eternal hell where there's no peace for the wicked. That's a grim, terrible reality, and it's what the Bible teaches.

The real conflict over the biblical doctrine of hell is essentially an issue of authority. What the Bible affirms about hell forces you to believe or disbelieve, to accept or reject. It's back to the same question that confronts everyone: Do you believe the Bible, or do you not? At the end of the day, the answer determines the fate of every person who ever lived.

The Bible is the only authority source that tells the truth about death, hell, and eternity. The Bible has the final word on that subject—and on *every* subject—because it is a revealed book. It has come from God, from the spiritual realm, and has the answers about where all of us will spend eternity one day.

So, what *does* the Bible teach about hell?

Hell Is

Far from legend, myth, metaphor, or allegory, the Bible presents hell as a *real place* where wicked people suffer the wrath of God. Consider these vivid portraits of hell from three different New Testament writers:

Then the King will say to those on His left, "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." . . . These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (**Matthew 25:41, 46**)

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. (**Mark 9:43**)

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (**Revelation 20:15**)

Scripture presents a terrifyingly clear case for a literal hell. It's a place where God punishes unbelievers for all eternity. Contrary to what some so-called evangelicals are teaching, hell is not a

state of mind or a hard life on this earth. Your state of mind can change; your circumstances can improve. Hell never changes, never improves. Hell is not chastisement; it's everlasting, insufferable *punishment* at the hands of an angry God.

According to the revelation Jesus gave to the apostle John, the fate of every unbeliever is to,

...drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger. And he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night. (**Revelation 14:10-11**)

Jesus and Hell

Though every New Testament author acknowledges the doctrine of hell, Jesus has the most to say about it. The existence of hell wasn't something He questioned, debated, or defended, and He certainly didn't apologize for it. He assumed the reality of hell just as much as He did the resurrection (John 5:28-29). Jesus viewed hell as a real place, a *certainty*, and so should you. In fact, He's the *model* on how you should think about hell.

When Jesus talked about hell, His purpose was always to warn, not to raise questions or plant doubts. Consider the graphic words He used to portray hell—they clearly aren't meant to provide comfort, but to frighten.

According to Jesus, hell is a place of outer darkness (Matthew 22:13) where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12). Hell is a fiery furnace (Matthew 13:42, 50) of unquenchable fires (Mark 9:48-49). Hell is a place of spiritual and bodily destruction (Matthew 10:28) where there are endless torments (Luke 16:23-24). Hell is most certainly a place, a horrific place where agonizing conditions exist.

No Way Out

Have you ever been *stuck* somewhere in a situation beyond your control—an airplane, an elevator, a jail cell? In times like those we usually have a reasonable hope of rescue or escape.

Remember the mine that collapsed last year in Chile? Thirty-three miners were trapped thousands of feet below ground. It took sixty-nine days, but all of them were rescued from their underground tomb.

We love stories like that—against unthinkable odds, finding a surprise exit route or the execution of a successful rescue in the eleventh hour. But that's not possible when it comes to hell. God built the prison of hell, and there are no doors or windows. God is hell's jailer, and there is no key. There are no escape routes, and no one is powerful enough to rescue anyone out of His hand. That's why Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

Hell offers no means of escape, rescue, or relief—no way out, ever. The occupants of hell are sealed in their damnation (Revelation 22:11). Friends and family *can't* help; God *won't* help. The time for mercy has passed.

As one who knows exactly what awaits the wicked, Jesus told the story of a rich man who was tormented in hell:

And the rich man cried out and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.”

But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.” (Luke 16:24-26)

Dante seemed to understand that message. His imaginary inscription over hell’s entrance, “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,” rightly pictured hell as a place where mercy and hope are left at the door. But some reject that view, believing against Scripture’s testimony that God gives people a second chance. Some still say there’s a postmortem opportunity to believe the gospel, repent, and be saved. That may sound appealing (especially to sinners), but it doesn’t come from the Bible.

Others hold to a form of universalism that holds out the false hope that hell is not the *final* destination for sinners. In their view, God’s redeeming work doesn’t stop at death. God will eventually reconcile every creature to Himself—yes, even those in hell. As British evangelist John Blanchard put it,

All the ways to hell are one-way streets. The idea that those who go there will eventually be released and join the rest of humanity in heaven has not a shred of biblical evidence to support it.

Children are sometimes told fictional adventure stories with the delightful ending: “And they all lived happily ever after.” We call that kind of story a fairy tale. Universalism is exactly that. (John Blanchard, “Whatever Happened to Hell?”)

In the face of such clear, undeniable evidence about hell from the pages of Scripture, it seems absurd that professed evangelicals would challenge the existence, nature, or eternity of hell. But we shouldn’t be surprised. Satan continues his efforts to make sin less offensive, heaven less appealing, hell less horrific, and the gospel less urgent.

Don’t be ignorant of Satan’s devices. The Word of God leaves no doubt about the existence or nature of hell. With clarity and authority, God has told us everything we need to know about hell, and how to avoid it through the merits of Christ.

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