

The Truth About Hell

When you die, you are going straight to hell!

Does this statement shock you?

It wouldn't, that is, if you knew how many times the word "hell" in the Christian Bible just means "the grave".

Sadly most people do **not** understand what the Christian Bible confirms about the subject of hell or blind their minds to the subject altogether.

Yet many, when confronted with death, fear of dying and going into an eternally burning fiery hell where they will be tormented throughout all time.

Others live with another type of fear, the hideous worry that some departed loved one is right now suffering such a fiery fate.

Still others are unable to accept that a loving God would punish even the wicked in such a manner, then reject God's existence altogether.

The teaching in the Christian Bible on this topic is plain and reassuring.

Depending on the Hebrew or Greek word from which the English word hell is translated has three very differing situations.

- a) Simply means the grave;
- b) A place of restraint for spirit beings **not** human beings;
- c) A place where the unrepentant wicked are burned up and die [not live immortally in pain].

Many concepts of hell do not originate from the Christian Bible but from the imaginations of a writer in the Middle Ages named Dante Alighieri and his classic work 'The Divine Comedy'.

His ideas were in great part based on the philosophers Plato and Virgil and their thoughts on the subject of life after death.

The place to start is to remember that the original writers of the Christian Bible, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote in either Hebrew or Greek, **not** English.

The original idea behind the words translated "hell" are **not** faithfully conveyed to us in some translations such as the Authorised or King James versions.

The original Hebrew word "sheol" and the Greek word "hades" both translated "hell" simply mean "the grave." For example –

Acts 2:27 [King James] and **Revelation 1:18** [King James]

– in both the above scriptures the word translated "hell" is the Greek word "hades" meaning grave. [Also see **Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15; Revelation 20:14**]

"Hell" is the translation of the word "hades" in the King James version.

Proverbs 5:5; Proverbs 7:27 the King James word “hell” is a translation of the Hebrew word “sheol.”

1 Corinthians 15:55 [King James] “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*”

The translators themselves regarded the Greek word “hades” as meaning “grave” instead of “hell.”

Another Greek word that has been translated “hell” is found only once in the Christian Bible.

2 Peter 2:4 [King James] “*For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;*”

Here the original Greek word is “tartaroo” meaning a place of restraint or incarceration and is only used of fallen angels or demons, **never** of human beings.

Also this word gives **no** implication of ever-burning fire.

The other Greek word translated “hell” in many English versions **does** indeed refer to a punishment for the unrepentant wicked by fire.

Mark 9:43-48 [NIV] “*If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 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 than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”*”

This is a fire that will **not** be quenched, the Greek word translated “hell” is “gehenna.”

The same Greek word is used in **Matthew 5:22; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 18:9** and **James 3:6**.

The Greek word “gehenna” refers directly to a valley just outside Jerusalem called the Valley of Hinnom, which in the time of Jesus Christ was a place where refuse and even dead bodies of animals and despised criminals were thrown to be burnt up.

Jesus Christ used this valley to describe, in type, a very real punishment by fire for the unrepentant wicked.

This hell fire is very different to the mythical hell of human imaginations through the ages.

Malachi 4:1, 3 [NIV] “*Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,*” says the LORD Almighty. “*Not a root or a branch will be left to them.*” ... “*Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,*” says the LORD Almighty.”

Malachi adds to our understanding of this “gehenna” hell fire by telling us that the unrepentant wicked will end up ashes under the feet of those who avoided this annihilation.

The reason many believe that hell fire torments a person but never kills them is that they believe in the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

Matthew 10:28 [NIV] “*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*”

The two key words in this verse are “destroy” from Greek word “apōllumi” which means to perish or destroy fully. The Greek word “soul” is “psuchē” which denotes the “breath of life,” when this is destroyed, taken from us, we have **no** conscious life. [**Psalms 6:5; Psalms 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5**]

This lake of fire will only be kindled at the end of this present age, at the return of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [NIV] *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”*

“We” refers to Christians who have repented and accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour. [Also read Christ’s words in **John 5:25**]

“Sleep” is referring to death being like a sleep with **no** consciousness or thoughts. [**Psalms 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6**]

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 [NIV] *“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”*

Paul is referring to this resurrection of faithful Christians who have died or are alive at the return of Jesus Christ. Physical death will **no** longer have any power over these human beings.

Revelation 20:6 [NIV] *“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”*

This is the job description of these faithful Christians, alive at Christ’s return or resurrected at His return.

The human beings who remain alive after the traumatic event at Christ’s return, as expanded in the Book of Revelation, given to the apostle John by Jesus Christ.

This remnant of the human race will then be taught the true gospel message and given a first chance to repent and accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

What about the rest of humanity who have lived and died without the opportunity to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour?

Revelation 20:11-13 [NIV] *“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.”*

All these billions of human beings will be resurrected back to human existence, to be educated in the truth as expanded in the Christian Bible [*“books”* – Greek *“biblōs”* referring to the scrolls on which the Christian Bible was first written.]

Ezekiel 37:1-14 [NIV] *“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ I said, ‘O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.’” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast army. Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”*

This passage of scripture is referring to this same resurrection back to physical life. These people will for the first time have available to them the Holy Spirit [v14] Who will open their minds for the first time to the Christian Bible. [**John 16:8, 13**]

Matthew 25:31-46 [NIV] *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’” “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’” “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’” “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’” “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’” “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

Jesus Christ Himself expands on this time of judgement as to who will inherit a place in the Kingdom [created family] of God and who will face annihilation in the lake of fire.

Exactly where will this final lake of fire take place?

2 Peter 3:10 [NIV] *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”*

The whole surface of the earth will be destroyed by fire and the smoke of this fire will black out the atmosphere that covers the earth.

The only humans who will exist after this event will be those who have immortal, spirit bodies. [**1 Corinthians 15:53**]

What then?

2 Peter 3:13 [NIV] *“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”*

A new heaven, atmosphere free from pollution and a new earth. For the now immortal Christians to start a new life, an eternal life in intimate relationship with our Creator God. [**John 17:3**]

Revelation 21:1-7 [NIV] *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”*

More details of this new earth in which Jesus Christ and all true Christians. [His bride – **Revelation 19:7-9**]

What about the unrepentant wicked? What will happen to such human beings?

Revelation 21:8 [NIV] *“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”*

The second death from which there is no resurrection.

Although what we have studied makes the subject of hell very clear, some people cite certain scriptures to try to prove that hell is an ever-burning fire that tortures the wicked forever.

I would like to address these scriptures at the end of this study.

Mark 9:43-48 [NIV] *“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 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 than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”*

The fact that this fire is **not** quenched, put out, refers to any action of stopping the fire completing its job of turning wicked into ashes, [**Malachi 4:3**] and dies out itself.

Revelation 14:9-11 [NIV] *“A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.”*

The context of these verses is the beast and his “*image*” Greek “*ēikōn*” meaning representative. The “*their*” refers to Satan, the beast and the false prophet [**Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:10**].

Satan as a spirit being is the only one who could be tormented forever. But those who are deceived by Satan, through his representatives will not avoid the judgement of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 25:46 [NIV] “*Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*”

The King James translation of the Greek word “*atōniōs*” is “*everlasting*” but the word in New International Version is a better translation “*eternal*” punishment **not** punishing.

The subject of hell has been much misunderstood. The truth as expressed in this article is sobering but also reassuring, and I hope has given you peace of mind.