

of the lost from His people. Those belonging to Christ will share in the eternal order of the Kingdom of God, but those outside will be cast into Hell for eternal damnation. This is but one of many such emphases on this topic by Jesus. Later on with the establishment of Christianity after Pentecost the apostles will continue this emphasis with frequent mentioning of it in their writings and preaching. Neither Jesus nor the apostles were trying to scare people into superficial commitment to discipleship. But both did not hesitate to warn people of the dangers of rejecting God's will and way for humanity.

And this is my goal today. The love of God is the greatest pull to bring people of Christ. But the example of Jesus and the apostles also mandate that preachers today give the biblical warning of how dangerous it is for individuals to turn their backs on God in rejection of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This I seek to do today.

How does the Bible talk about the fate of the lost? The presentation in the New Testament is along the pattern of a kaleidoscopic presentation of this awful reality. A variety of terms are used, along with a wide number of graphic images that stress one aspect or another of the reality. None of us has ever been there to know first hand what it is like. Only through God's Word given to us can we begin to grasp something of the severe reality that awaits those outside of Christ. One should note that with descriptions of both Heaven and Hell analogous language is used. How does one describe something that lies beyond what we have experienced in this life? Only by comparing aspects of that reality to things in this world that we have experienced. But in so doing, the comparison to something in this life only conveys a small part of the ultimate reality of eternity; it never gives us the complete picture, because such is impossible to achieve.⁴ To fully understand eternity we must experience it first hand. But then we have left this world and can't return to share what we know.⁵ Consequently we must depend on the only One who knows about Heaven and Hell to provide us with the necessary information. This Jesus did in abundance in His teachings. And through the inspiration of God's Spirit the apostles were given insights to share with us as well.



Because our minds don't function like kaleidoscopes I want to organize the biblical materials around four questions: 1. Is Hell taught in the Bible? 2. How is it described? 3. Who winds up there? 4. How can we avoid going there?

BODY

I. Is a doctrine of Hell taught in the Bible?

The answer to this question is clearly, "Yes, the Bible teaches that Hell exists!" To be sure, the emphasis upon Hell comes in the New Testament, rather than in the Old Testament. Throughout most of the centuries of Israelite existence one only reads of Sheol in the Old Testament.⁶ This was understood vaguely in terms

⁴"Who shall describe the misery of eternal punishment? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of body; the eternal sting of an accusing conscience; the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels; the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised; the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future—all this is misery indeed: it is enough to make our ears tingle, and our blood run cold." [John Charles Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Matthew* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1974), 344–45.]

⁵Remember Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. When the rich man landed in Hell and realized his extreme torments there, he pleaded for the opportunity to return to earth to warn his brother, even that the beggar Lazarus be sent back. But he was told this was impossible, because death forever fixes our existence in either Heaven or Hell and there is no reversing of it.

⁶"Any discussion of the back ground of hell in the Gospels must begin with a discussion of the problematic use of *šē,ōl*, frequently rendered *sheol* in English translation. Though its precise meaning in any given instance may be difficult to ascertain, it is evident that it refers in some way to the place of the dead. A problem arises, however, when it is discovered that both the righteous (cf. Gen 37:35; Is 38:10; Ps 30:3, 9) and the unrighteous (cf. Num 16:30, 33) go there. This led the early church to teach that the OT saints went to an upper level of sheol, from which Christ delivered them. This doctrine rests on tenuous exegetical support at best, and it is better to understand sheol as originally referring simply to the grave (cf. Is 14:11; Job 17:13–16; Ps 30:3 [MT 30:4], 9; 88:3–5 [MT 88:4–6]; Prov 7:27) and/or death (cf. Hos 13:14; Hab 2:5; Is 28:15, 18; 38:18; Song 8:6; Ps 49:14 [MT 49:15]; 89:48 [MT 89:49]; 116:3; Prov 5:5; 1 Kings 2:6, 9). Gradually, however, it began to take on the specialized connotations of a realm of the dead (cf. Is 14:9–10; Job 26:5–6), moving closer to the notions surrounding the concept of hell. This would then explain its character as the universal lot of humankind (Eccles 9:10), as well as the place reserved for the wicked (cf. Ps 9:17 [MT 9:18]; 31:17 [MT 31:18]; 49:13–14).

"When described, its location is almost always in a downward direction (cf. Ps 55:15 [MT 55:16]; 86:13; Prov 9:18; Page 2

of “the grave” where the dead when upon their passing, both the righteous and the unrighteous. The Israelite people had no clear understanding of life after death. Not until the intertestamental period, the four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments, did a concept arise of the righteous spending eternity with God and the unrighteous being condemned to eternal punishments. Even then varying ideas emerge from a variety of Jewish sources, especially in apocalyptic Judaism. But one notices in this literature emerging ideas of Hell as a place of punishment for the wicked. Notable is the surfacing of two distinct Greek terms, *hádēs* and *géhenna*. Hades was the key translation word in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *sheol*. Gehenna had its origin in the Hebrew expressions *gê hinnōm*, *gê ben-hinnōm*, and *gê b^enê-hinnōm*, which mean respectively “valley of Hinnom,” “valley of the son of Hinnom,” and “valley of the sons of Hinnom.”⁷ By the beginning of the Christian era, Hades became increasingly the place where the wicked went upon death to await the judgment of God. Gehenna become the final destiny of the wicked upon being judged by God. Both Jesus and the apostles will build off this distinction and revise the concepts with changes and expansions.⁸ Thus inside the New Testament, Hades is the place the lost go to upon death to await the resurrection and the Day of Judgment, while Gehenna is the final destiny of eternal torments and punishment for those outside the Kingdom of God. In the beginning of the English Bible through the King James Version, both terms were translated as ‘Hell’ and thus left the false impression of being the same place. In the modern era of the English Bible in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these two Greek terms normally are translated as Hades and Gehenna (sometimes, as Hell) in order to match the underlying Greek expressions.

1. Jesus

Did Jesus believe there was a place of eternal damnation for the lost? Any simple reading of the four gospels will signal that the clear answer to this question is yes, He believed and taught about Hell. In fact Jesus talks about Hell more than anyone else in the entire Bible. Hear a couple of His declarations:

Matt. 8:12

11 And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. 12 But many Israelites -- those for whom the Kingdom was prepared -- will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 13:41

15:24; Is 14:15; Jon 2:2 [MT 2:3]), functioning as the extreme opposite of the heights of heaven (Job 11:8; Ps 139:8; Amos 9:2). It is portrayed as a place of “darkness” (Job 17:13) and “dust” (Job 17:16), and the place where the worm feasts (Job 17:14; 24:19–20; Is 14:11). Its inhabitants are reduced to silence (Ps 6:5 [MT 6:6]; 31:17 [MT 31:18]; Is 38:18). The general belief is that once one passes through its portals (Is 38:10), there will be no return (e.g., Job 7:9–10; Is 38:10, 18). Some notions of future hope for the righteous do exist (Hos 13:14; Ps 16:10; 49:15 [MT 49:16]; Job 14:13; 1 Sam 2:6). Many of these themes will be picked up by the subsequent literature, including the NT.”

[Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 307-11.]

⁷“All refer to a valley south of Jerusalem which became infamous for its sacrificial site called Topheth where children were offered to the god Molech during the reigns of such wicked kings of Judah as Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6). King Josiah defiled the site during his reforms so that children no longer would be sacrificed there (2 Kgs. 23:10), but the valley may have been used again for such practices after his time (Jer. 7:31–32; 19:2–6; 32:35). As punishment for this, Jeremiah proclaimed that in the future the valley of the son of Hinnom would be called the valley of slaughter since many would be slain there and, for lack of room elsewhere, the dead would be buried in Topheth (7:32; 19:6).

In later Jewish thought the name of this place of infamy and horror became associated with the growing belief in the existence of a place where the wicked would be punished for eternity (cf. Isa. 66:24). Likewise the conviction was growing that a final resurrection and judgment would come, separating those destined for “everlasting life” from those destined for “everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). The site of this judgment was variously placed in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:12ff. [MT 4:12ff.]; according to tradition this is the Kidron valley) and on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:3ff.). The image of Gehenna as the place of punishment for the wicked is also used in later Jewish writings (As. Mos. 10:19; 2 Esdr 7:36; 2Apoc. Bar 59:10; 1 En 27:2–3; 48:9; 54:1; 90:26–27; 103:8), where it often has strong associations with darkness and burning fire.” [Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 478-79. S.V., “Hell.”]

⁸In the New Testament Gehenna (γέεννα) is used 12 times, all inside the Synoptic Gospels except for James 3:6. Hades (ᾍδης) is used 10 times distributed across Matthew, Luke, Acts and Revelation.

41 I, the Son of Man, will send my angels, and they will remove from my Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil, 42 and they will throw them into the furnace and burn them. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

With graphic imagery Jesus speaks of “outer darkness” and of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in the place called Hell. He speaks of Hell as a furnace of fire where “weeping and gnashing of teeth” take place. And these are but a few of the many expressions found in His teachings.

2. **Paul**

2 Thess. 1:9

7 And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power 10 when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people. And you will be among those praising him on that day, for you believed what we testified about him.

Clearly the Apostle Paul followed the path of Jesus in teaching about a place of eternal damnation for those refusing to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 2 Thess. 1:9 describes Hell in stark, dramatic tones of everlasting destruction, and forever separated. And these are but a few of the terms Paul will use. His key term of salvation carries with it the clear assumption of needing to be saved from everlasting punishment because of our sinfulness.

3. **Peter**

2 Pet. 2:4

4 For God did not spare even the angels when they sinned; he threw them into hell, in gloomy caves and darkness until the judgment day.

The Apostle Peter also had clear ideas of eternal damnation in a place called Hell. In 2 Peter 2:4 he uses a different term, found only here in the New Testament, for banishment to Hell. It is the Greek verb *ταρταρώ* (*tartarōō*), which comes from the classical Greek *Tartarus*.⁹ In classical Greek thought, this was the lowest part of the underworld and was a place of punishment. Peter uses the verb to designate the place where the rebellious angels were thrown awaiting Judgment Day and total banishment into Gehenna. Again, this is but one of several texts from the apostle Peter clearly indicating his adoption of the teachings of Jesus.

4. **Jude**

Jude 6

6 And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the day of judgment.

In a manner similar to 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6 speaks of the prisons of darkness for the rebellious angels as they await the Day of Judgment.

What then should we say? Jesus believed in Hell; the apostles believed such a place existed. We have no higher authority than this as the basis for our belief. For us to then deny that Hell exists would be to reject the teachings of Christ, the founder and the foundation of our entire religious experience! Unquestionably Christ and the apostles believed in and taught about the place called Hell. Our responsibility is not to question them. Instead, it is to seek to understand what they had to say about Hell.

II. **How is Hell described in the Bible?**

The description of Hell in the pages of the New Testament is varied and dramatic. A wide array of terms and descriptive comparisons are used by Jesus and the apostles to give us a visual portrayal of a reality that

⁹“The only other appearance of English “hell” in the RSV is in 2 Pet. 2:4 where the Greek text uses a verb form of the classical name *Tartarus* meaning “consigning to *Tartarus*.” In classical thought *Tartarus* was the lowest part of the underworld and a place of punishment over against *Elysium*, the place of the blessed. Thus it was distinct from *Hades*, the general abode of the dead, although in popular usage the two terms may have been interchangeable. In 2 Peter the name is used of the infernal region to which the rebellious angels were consigned, and hence here signifies a place of punishment of the wicked.” [Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 478-79. S.V., “Hell.”]

none of us has experienced. And hopefully won't ever experience, assuming that we come to Jesus as Savior and Lord.¹⁰ Two key concepts emerge from the many characterizations of Hell inside the New Testament. First it is a place of separation -- total and forever -- from God. Second, it is a place of unending punishment of individuals for their wickedness and sinfulness.¹¹

1. Separation from God

Matt. 7:23

Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers."

With His daunting declaration of final Judgment, Christ declares to the religious workers who did all kinds of religious actions but didn't do the will of God that they are to depart from His presence. Repeatedly in His teachings and in Paul the idea of being forever banished from the presence of Almighty God is a central point of Hell.¹² In this world relationships play a hugely important role for us as humans. We are connected to family; we have friends that we enjoy being with. We are created for relationships. God made Adam and Eve that way in the Garden of Eden. None of us can function well cut off from other people. Medical science even has shown that high levels of social dysfunction severely impair one's health and shorten one's life span.

Why is all of this so? And how are we able to relate? Clearly because God created us this way, and He enables us to relate to others in this life. Hell, then, becomes being cut off completely from the presence of God and from His enabling power. Will there be parties in Hell? Absolutely not! No one in Hell, neither the people nor the devil and his angels, will be able to develop relationships with one another. Everything will be characterized by anger, deceit, and violence toward others. The lost will live completely cut off from any kind of relationships. And most importantly, cut off from any contact or relationship with Almighty God.

I could think of nothing more painful, nothing more ruinous to life, than this. No prayer is possible. No help can be given. No leaning on others for support. Alone! Isolated from everyone! No connections to anybody! And for all eternity!

2. Punishment of men

Matt. 25:46

"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ δίκαιοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

¹⁰The New Testament views hell (*Gehenna*, as Jesus calls it, the place of incineration, Matt. 5:22; 18:9) as the final abode of those consigned to eternal punishment at the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:41-46; Rev. 20:11-15). It is thought of as a place of fire and darkness (Jude 7, 13), of weeping and grinding of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), of destruction (2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:7; 1 Thess. 5:3), and of torment (Rev. 20:10; Luke 16:23) — in other words, of total distress and misery. If, as it seems, these terms are symbolic rather than literal (fire and darkness would be mutually exclusive in literal terms), we may be sure that the reality, which is beyond our imagining, exceeds the symbol in dreadfulness. New Testament teaching about hell is meant to appall us and strike us dumb with horror, assuring us that, as heaven will be better than we could dream, so hell will be worse than we can conceive. Such are the issues of eternity, which need now to be realistically faced." [J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995).]

¹¹"Acc. to the traditional Scholastic theology, souls experience in hell both the *poena damni*, i.e. the exclusion from God's presence and loss of all contact with Him, and a certain *poena sensus*, denoted in the Bible by fire, which is usually interpreted as an external agent tormenting them." [F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 753. S.V., "Hell."]

¹²Matt. 8:12, "while the heirs of the kingdom **will be thrown into** the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matt. 22:13, "Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and **throw him into** the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

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

Luke 16:26, "Besides all this, **between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.**"

John 3:18, "Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

2 Thess. 1:9-10, "They will be punished with everlasting destruction, **forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power** when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people."

With these concluding words to Jesus' great parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, Christ pronounces the awful sentence of eternal banishment upon those who did not follow God's will. And He speaks of them going away into eternal punishment, εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον. The idea of this word is simply punishment by infliction of torments etc. upon the offender. The concept of punishment was widespread in the ancient world, and especially punishment from a deity upon a mortal person. Both here and in 1 John 4:18, the only two uses of this particular word in the New Testament, the standard idea of punishment is intended. The particulars are not specified here, although elsewhere the nature of this punishment is presented by graphic images.

1) *Description of punishment*

The New Testament spells out aspects of punishment by means of several graphic images, that grow out of extremes of experience in this life. The images individually touch on an aspect of punishment. No attempt is ever made by Jesus and the apostles to correlate and systemize these images into any kind of logical bundle. They must be considered mostly individually for their own contribution to the general idea of punishment as a major part of the experience of Hell.

a. *Darkness*

Matt. 8:12

“10 When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the heirs of the kingdom **will be thrown into the outer darkness**, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Numerous times the New Testament will speak of darkness as a source of punishment in Hell.¹³ In Matt. 8:12, the term ‘outer darkness’ (εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον) is used. Elsewhere we come across “gloomy caves and **darkness**” (2 Pet. 2:4, σειραῖς ζόφου); and the “**everlasting gloom and darkness**” (Jude 13; ζόφος τοῦ σκότους εἰς αἰῶνα). What we are seeing here is at least twofold in its thrust of meaning. Darkness is the opposite of light, that is, God. To be in total darkness is to be totally cut off from God's presence. But darkness is the inability to see, and to be able to function. To be in total darkness is to be completely helpless and hopeless. Thus the idea of gloom in 2 Peter and Jude. Nothing is more depressing and disabling than to be completely unable to help yourself. And this lasts ‘forever’ according to these texts.

b. *Weeping & gnashing of teeth*¹⁴

Matt. 22:13

Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Another image that is starkly graphic is ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων). Seven separate times this phrase is used by Jesus to depict the torments of Hell. The image is possibly of anger, and most likely it is built off Psalm 112:10, “The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.” Raging anger and hostility characterize Hell. Vexation at not obtaining one's desires overflows and controls the mind and emotions. Hell is not a happy place, nor is it a fun place. Just the opposite. It is the dumping ground of all of the pent up anger

¹³Matt. 22:13, “Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him **into the outer darkness**, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

2 Pet. 2:4, “4 For God did not spare even the angels when they sinned; he threw them into hell, in gloomy caves and **darkness** until the judgment day.”

Jude 13, “They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the dirty foam of their shameful deeds. They are wandering stars, heading for **everlasting gloom and darkness**.”

¹⁴Matt. 13:41, “I, the Son of Man, will send my angels, and they will remove from my Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil, 42 and they will throw them into the furnace and burn them. There will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.”

Matt. 24:51, “He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.”

Lk. 13:28, “There will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth** when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out.”

and rage of all humanity for all time!

c. Worm

Mk. 9:48

47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.”

In Jesus’ statement in Mark. 9:48 He speaks of a worm that never dies (ὅπου ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ). What is this? The place of the worm is Gehenna. Remember the origin of this concept from the dumping grounds of the city of Jerusalem. There one finds maggots working unceasingly among the piles of garbage. But the image here comes from Isaiah 66:24, where Marks terminology is remarkably close to the LXX of Isaiah

And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

In later Jewish apocalyptic writings,¹⁵ the undying worm and fire were linked as expressions of the unending torments of the wicked. The picture is of suffering torments and pain in the extreme.

d. Fire

Matt. 13:42

41 I, the Son of Man, will send my angels, and they will remove from my Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil, 42 and they will throw them into the furnace and burn them. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Very often in the New Testament, fire is connected to the idea of Hell.¹⁶ And this while complete darkness is also connected. What is the idea behind fire? Again, torment and pain is the point of the image. The flames of the fires of Hell burn on and on; the people in Hell suffer the pains of the flames. But nothing burns up. There’s never ever relief from the pain coming from the flame.

Punishment of the damned continues in severe, intense manner in Hell. These images make this abundantly clear. No relief ever comes. The punishment is unrelenting and continues forever.

2) Degrees of punishment

Matt. 11:22

But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Rom. 2:12

“All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.”

Both Jesus and Paul, in their statements, allude to a concept that existed in apocalyptic Judaism and was spelled out in great detail in several Jewish writings of the ancient world. But neither Jesus nor Paul go into

¹⁵Cf. Judith 16:17; Ben Sira 7:17.

¹⁶Matt. 25:41, “Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into **the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;**”

Mk. 9:43, 48, “43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go **to hell, to the unquenchable fire.** 44 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. , 46 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown **into hell, 48 where** their worm never dies, **and the fire is never quenched.**”

Lk. 16:22-24, “22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24 He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony **in these flames.**”

2 Pet. 3:7, “But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved **for fire**, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless.”

Rev. 20:15, “and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into **the lake of fire.**”

Rev. 21:8, “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in **the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.**”

the details that the Jewish scribes did.

The concept is that of degrees of punishment. The idea plays off a basic principle of Jesus: to whom much is given much will be required. Those with greater opportunity to respond to the Gospel and don't will suffer more severe judgment than those with less opportunity. All sinners will be punished and will suffer the torments of Hell. But some will suffer more greatly than others will.

3. *Everlasting punishment*¹⁷

Matt. 25:46

“And these will go away into *eternal punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life.”

One thing that should be clear by now is that Hell lasts forever. And the people that enter Hell stay there forever. At various times over the centuries of Christian history the idea of annihilation of the lost crops up. That is, the lost enter Hell and after a while when ‘fully punished’ they just cease to exist. But such thinking has absolutely no basis in scripture. It is a human idea that has no connection to God or to the Bible.

Jesus makes it very clear in Matt. 25 that just as long as God's people enjoy eternal life in Heaven, just that long the wicked will suffer the torments of Hell.

III. Who will go to Hell?

The righteousness and holiness of God mandate a place to send those who are wicked and unqualified to stand in His holy presence. What is Hell for? The Bible speaks of two functions of Hell.

1. *Prepared for the Devil and all evil*¹⁸

Matt. 25:41

Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire *prepared for the devil and his angels;...*”

Jesus is clear that originally Hell was created as the place of punishment for the devil and his angels. God did not create Hell originally for people. Instead, the very source of evil and wickedness, the devil himself, needed a place where God's punishment of him could be carried out. The angels that sided with him then suffer the same fate as he.

2. *Unbelievers*¹⁹

Jhn. 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; *whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must*

¹⁷Jhn. 3:36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.”

²Thess. 1:9-10, “They *will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated* from the Lord and from his glorious power when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people.”

^{Jude 13}, “They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the dirty foam of their shameful deeds. They are wandering stars, heading for *everlasting gloom and darkness.*”

^{Dan. 12:2}, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and *everlasting contempt.*”

^{Lk. 16:26}, “Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.”

¹⁸2 Pet. 2:4, “For if God did not spare *the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment;*”

^{Rev. 20:10}, “And *the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur*, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

^{Ps. 11:5-6}, “5 The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and his soul hates the lover of violence. 6 On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur; a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. 7 For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.”

¹⁹Rev. 20:15, “and *anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life* was thrown into the lake of fire.”

²Thess. 1:7-10, “He will come with his mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire, *bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus.* 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power 10 when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people.”

endure God's wrath.

Jesus makes it clear, as does John in Revelation, that those who refuse to believe in Christ in their action of rejection of Christ are taking the devil's side. Their alliance with Satan in rejecting Jesus means that they will suffer the same fate as the devil.

My friend, if you end up in Hell, it will not be so much because God has sent you there. Instead, it will be because you have rejected Jesus Christ as your Savior. And in so doing you align yourself with the Devil. And in so doing, you will suffer the same fate in eternity as he will: eternal torments in the lake of fire.

IV. How can people escape Hell?

In light of the awful reality of Hell, no one in their right mind would intentionally choose such a destiny. So how can one avoid going to Hell for all eternity? The answer is rather clear, and simple.

1. Through Jesus Christ

Rom. 5:9

Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, ***will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.***

Matt. 26:28

“for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Both Paul and Jesus in their teaching make it clear that Jesus Christ is the only way to escape Hell. No one can live good enough to avoid this horrible fate. Jesus died on the cross to save sinners from God's wrath, Paul declares. His shed blood is the key to forgiveness and cleansing from your sin. You can't reform yourself. You can never clean yourself up before God yourself. Only God can do that through the blood of Jesus Christ.

2. By faith commitment to Christ

Acts 10:43

“All the prophets testify about him that ***everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.***”

But Jesus' death doesn't automatically qualify you for Heaven and enable you to avoid Hell. You must choose Christ. You must come to Him in simple faith commitment turning over your life to Christ. Out of that commitment comes a life-long journey of faithfulness to Christ. And in this faith commitment the cleansing work of Christ on the cross is applied to your life.

Matt. 10:32

32 “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.”

How do you make this faith commitment? Jesus put it this way: confess me as Lord before men. Public confession of faith in Jesus Christ is mandatory. And this confession of faith is completely realized in believer's baptism.

CONCLUSION

Hell! It's a hot subject! It's real. If you're here today without Christ as the center of your life, then, my friend, you're one heart beat away from Hell! Life is uncertain and we're not promised tomorrow. Thus the scripture says,

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works 10 for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, “They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.’ 11 As in my anger I swore, “They will not enter my rest.’ “ 12 Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb. 3:7-13)