



Is There A Hell?

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Forward

Hell, as an experience

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10

Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed.

The Bible presents hell as a *real place* where unbelieving 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)

Chapter 1

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 8:12

But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

A centurion was a career military officer in the Roman army with control over 100 soldiers. Roman soldiers, of all people, were hated by the Jews for their oppression, control, and ridicule. Yet this man's genuine faith amazed Jesus! This hated Gentile's faith put to shame the stagnant piety of many of the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus told the crowd that many religious Jews who should be in the kingdom would be excluded because of their lack of faith. Entrenched in their religious traditions, they could not accept Christ and his new message. We must be careful not to become so set in our religious habits that we expect God to work only in specified ways. Don't limit God by your mind-set and lack of faith.

"The east and the west" stands for the four corners of the earth. All the faithful people of God will be gathered to feast with the Messiah (Isaiah 6; Isaiah 55). The Jews should have known that when the Messiah came, his blessings would be for Gentiles too (see Isaiah 66:12, 19). But this message came as a shock because they were too wrapped up in their own affairs and destiny. In claiming God's promises, we must not apply them so personally that we forget to see what God wants to do to reach *all* the people he loves.

Matthew emphasizes this universal theme—Jesus' message is for everyone. The Old Testament prophets knew this (see Isaiah 56:3, 6-8; Isaiah 66:12, 19; Malachi 1:11), but many New Testament Jewish leaders chose to ignore it. Each individual has to choose to accept or reject the gospel, and no one can become part of God's kingdom on the basis of heritage or connections. Having a Christian family is a wonderful blessing, but it won't guarantee you eternal life. *You* must believe in and follow Christ.

There shall be a separation of the saved and the unsaved.

Matthew 25:32

"All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task.

What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick. How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers?

Jesus used sheep and goats to picture the division between believers and unbelievers. Sheep and goats often grazed together but were separated when it came time to shear the sheep. Ezekiel 34:17-24 also refers to the separation of sheep and goats.

The unbelieving shall be cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:8

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

The “cowardly” are not those who are fainthearted in their faith or who sometimes doubt or question, but those who turn back from following God. They are not brave enough to stand up for Christ; they are not humble enough to accept his authority over their lives. They are put in the same list as the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the liars, the idolaters, the sexually immoral, and those practicing magic arts.

People who overcome “stand firm to the end” (Mark 13:13).

They will receive the blessings that God promised:

- (1) Eating from the tree of life (Rev. 2:7),
- (2) Escaping from the lake of fire (the “second death,” Rev. 2:11),
- (3) Receiving a special name (Rev. 2:17),
- (4) Having authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26),
- (5) Being included in the book of life (Rev. 3:5),
- (6) Being a pillar in God’s spiritual temple (Rev. 3:12), and
- (7) Sitting with Christ on his throne (Rev. 3:21).

Those who can endure the testing of evil and remain faithful will be rewarded by God.

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Chapter 2

The unfaithful shall be cast into the lake of fire.

Matthew 25:41-46

"Then He will also 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; 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; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.

God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task.

What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick.

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This parable describes acts of mercy we all can do every day. These acts do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received. We have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we cannot hand over this responsibility to the church or government.

Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others' needs (Isaiah 58:7).

Eternal punishment takes place in hell (the lake of fire, or Gehenna), the place of punishment after death for all those who refuse to repent. In the Bible, three words are used in connection with eternal punishment.

(1) **Sheol**, or “the grave,” is used in the Old Testament to mean the place of the dead, generally thought to be under the earth. (See Job 24:19; Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 38:10.)

(2) **Hades** is the Greek word for the underworld, the realm of the dead. It is the word used in the New Testament for Sheol. (See Matthew 16:18; Rev. 1:18; Rev. 20:13-14.)

(3) **Gehenna**, or hell, was named after the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem where children were sacrificed by fire to the pagan gods (see 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3).

This is the place of eternal fire (Matthew 5:22; Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5; James 3:6; Rev. 19:20) prepared for the devil, his angels, and all those who do not believe in God (Matthew 25:46; Rev. 20:9-10).

This is the final and eternal state of the wicked after the resurrection and the last judgment.

The wrath of God will fall on the unbelievers.

John 3:36

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Jesus says that those who believe in him *have* (not *will have*) everlasting life. To receive eternal life is to join in God's life, which by nature is eternal. Thus, eternal life begins at the moment of spiritual rebirth.

John, the author of this Gospel, has been demonstrating that Jesus is the true Son of God. Jesus sets before us the greatest choice in life. We are responsible to decide today whom we will obey (Joshua 24:15), and God wants us to choose him and life (Deut. 30:15-20).

The wrath of God is God's final judgment and rejection of the sinner. To put off the choice is to choose not to follow Christ. Indecision is a fatal decision.

Chapter 3

God's anger will kindle the fire.

Deuteronomy 32:22

For a fire is kindled in my anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

Silver and gold cannot deliver the unbelieving.

Zephaniah 1:18

Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the LORD'S wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Some people think of God as an indulgent heavenly grandfather, nice to have around, but not a real force in shaping modern life. They don't believe in his power or his coming judgment. But God is holy, and therefore he will actively judge and justly punish everyone who is content to live in sin, indifferent to him, or unconcerned about justice.

When people are indifferent to God, they tend to think that he is indifferent to them and their sin. They will be surprised to find that "the great day of the LORD is near."

The great day of the Lord was near; the Babylonians would soon come and destroy Jerusalem. The day of the Lord is also near for us. God promises a final judgment, a day of worldwide destruction (Rev. 20:12-15).

The Babylonian conquest occurred just as surely and horribly as Zephaniah had predicted. And God's final day of judgment is also sure—but so is his ability to save.

To be spared from judgment, recognize that you have sinned, that your sin will bring judgment, that you cannot save yourself, and that God alone can save you.

Money is not evil in itself, but it is useless to save us. In this life, money can warp our perspective, giving us feelings of security and power. Just as the Israelites' wealth could not save them from the Babylonian invasion, so at the final judgment, our riches will be worthless.

Only Christ's redemptive work on our behalf matters for eternity. Christ alone will ransom us if we believe in him. Don't trust money; trust Christ.

Believers must flee from the wrath to come.

Matthew 3:7

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

The Jewish religious leaders were divided into several groups. Two of the most prominent groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees separated themselves from anything non-Jewish and carefully followed both the Old Testament laws and the oral traditions handed down through the centuries.

The Sadducees believed the Pentateuch alone (Genesis-Deuteronomy) to be God's Word. They were descended mainly from priestly nobility, while the Pharisees came from all classes of people.

The two groups disliked each other greatly, and both opposed Jesus. John the Baptist criticized the Pharisees for being legalistic and hypocritical, following the letter of the law while ignoring its true intent.

He criticized the Sadducees for using religion to advance their political position. For more information on these two groups, see the chart in Mark 2:16.

Chapter 4

Unrepentance is stored up for the day of wrath.

Romans 2:5

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Although God does not usually punish us immediately for sin, his eventual judgment is certain. We don't know exactly when it will happen, but we know that no one will escape that final encounter with the Creator. For more on judgment, see John 12:48 and Rev. 20:11-15.

Paul says that those who patiently and persistently *do* God's will find eternal life. He is not contradicting his previous statement that salvation comes by faith alone (Romans 1:16-17). We are not saved by good deeds, but when we commit our lives fully to God, we want to please him and do his will. As such, our good deeds are a grateful *response* to what God has done, not a prerequisite to earning his grace.

Jesus can rescue you from the wrath of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:10

And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

All of us should respond to the Good News as the Thessalonians did: *turn* to God, *serve* God, and *wait* for his Son, Christ, to return from heaven. We should turn from sin to God because Christ is coming to judge the earth. We should be fervent in our service because we have little time before Christ returns.

We should be prepared for Christ to return because we don't know when he will come.

Paul emphasized Christ's second coming throughout this book. Because the Thessalonian church was being persecuted, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that Christ would bring.

A believer's hope is in the return of Jesus, our great God and Savior (Titus 2:13).

Our perspective on life remains incomplete without this hope. Just as surely as Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, he will return (Acts 1:11).

The wicked shall be turned into hell.

Psalm 9:17

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:50

And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Chapter 5

The fire shall never be quenched.

Mark 9:43

And if thy hand offends 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:

Jesus used startling language to stress the importance of cutting sin out of our lives. Painful discipline is required of his true followers.

Giving up a relationship, job, or habit that is against God's will may seem just as painful as cutting off a hand.

Our high goal, however, is worth any sacrifice; Christ is worth any possible loss. Nothing should stand in the way of faith.

We must be ruthless in removing sins from our lives now in order to avoid being stuck with them for eternity. Make your choices from an eternal perspective.

The wise may depart from hell beneath.

Proverbs 15:24

The way of life is above to the wise that he may depart from hell beneath.

The righteous weigh their answers; the wicked don't wait to speak because they don't care about the effects of their words. It is important to have something to say, but it is equally important to weigh it first.

Do you carefully plan your words, or do you pour out your thoughts without concern for their impact?

Those who receive the mark of the beast will be cast into hell.

Revelation 19:20

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The battle lines have been drawn, and the greatest confrontation in the history of the world is about to begin.

The beast (the antichrist) and the false prophet have gathered the governments and armies of the earth under the antichrist's rule. The enemy armies believe they have come of their own volition; in reality, God has summoned them to battle in order to defeat them.

That they would even presume to fight against God shows how their pride and rebellion have perverted their thinking. There really is no fight, however, because the victory was won when Jesus died on the cross for sin and rose from the dead. Thus the evil leaders are immediately captured and sent to their punishment, and the forces of evil are annihilated.

The fiery lake of burning sulfur is the final destination of the wicked. This lake is different from the Abyss (bottomless pit) referred to in Rev. 9:1.

The antichrist and the false prophet are thrown into the fiery lake. Then their leader, Satan himself, will be thrown into that lake (Rev. 20:10), and finally death and Hades (Rev. 20:14).

Afterward, everyone whose name is not recorded in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

The believing shall receive the keys to heaven.

Matthew 16:19

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The religious leaders thought they held the keys of the kingdom, and they tried to shut some people out. We cannot decide to open or close the kingdom of heaven for others, but God uses us to help others find the way inside. To all who believe in Christ and obey his words, the kingdom doors are swung wide open.

All shall be judged according to their deeds.

Revelation 20:13

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

At the judgment, the books are opened. They represent God's judgment, and in them are recorded the deeds of everyone, good or evil. We are not saved by deeds, but deeds are seen as clear evidence of a person's actual relationship with God. The book of life contains the names of those who have put their trust in Christ to save them.

Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. God's judgment is finished. The lake of fire is the ultimate destination of everything wicked—Satan, the beast, the false prophet, the demons, death, Hades, and all those whose names are not recorded in the book of life because they did not place their faith in Jesus Christ.

John's vision does not permit any gray areas in God's judgment. If by faith we have not identified with Christ, confessing him as Lord, there will be no hope, no second chance, no other appeal.

The wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

Ezekiel 18:20

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

God is a God of love, but he is also a God of perfect justice. His perfect love causes him to be merciful to those who recognize their sin and turn back to him, but he cannot wink at those who willfully sin.

Wicked people die both physically and spiritually. God takes no joy in their deaths; he would prefer that they turn to him and have eternal life. Likewise, we should not rejoice in the misfortunes of nonbelievers. Instead, we should do all in our power to bring them to faith.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary