

The Bible Truth
about

HELL

Separating the FACTS
from the FABLES



The Bible Truth About Hell

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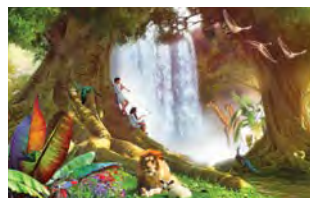
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Hell

The Myth vs. the Bible

What have you heard about hell?

Throughout the centuries, billions of humans have been terrified of being cast into a fiery pit, a place where their flesh burns and their worst fears are realized forever and ever—and all for the sins of a comparatively brief lifetime. They picture unspeakable scenes of never-ending terror and torture, sometimes at the hands of a horned devil who laughs maniacally at their suffering.

Of course, some think that hell is nothing more than dramatic medieval fiction that unscrupulous televangelists use to scare people into giving them money.



Either way, this concept of hell is the very reason many people—maybe even you—reject the Christian faith altogether. After all, if God *is* love (1 John 4:8), how could He burn His own creation for all eternity? If

that's what the Bible says, then maybe it is easier to just delete the idea that God exists.

But do these long-held notions about hell actually match up with the Bible? Do all the movies and TV shows accurately depict what Jesus believed about hell? Is what you've heard from other Christians the truth?

Take, for instance, this most famous speech, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," delivered by 18th-century minister Jonathan Edwards. Preached in 1741 in Northampton, Massachusetts,

the sermon is full of terrifying imagery aimed at turning people from sin:

[Hell] is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this **exquisite, horrible misery**. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, **a boundless duration** before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, ... and you will **absolutely despair** of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty **merciless vengeance**.

Sound familiar?

Does it cause your pulse to rise? Your heart to pound? Your forehead to sweat?

Wait—there is some good news you need to know.

This whole picture—all that you've heard about hell—*is not true*. None of it comes from Scripture, but instead is an unseemly brew of beliefs cobbled together from other religions, superstitions, and tall tales. In fact, the Bible teaches something entirely different. That's why in this magazine, we'll look at the whole landscape of the truth about hell.

We won't rely on what others have said about God and hell; we won't take Bible passages out of context. Instead, we'll help you see what the Bible says and decode the many symbols or puzzling words so that you—at long last—can make perfect sense of it all.

And by the time you turn the last page, we're certain that you will find more confidence in the Scriptures and complete peace with a God of love, mercy, and justice. Are you ready?

Good. Then let's get started ...



Famous Christians and Hellfire

Edwards wasn't alone when he presented his picture of hell as a place born of God's fiery vengeance awaiting all sinners at the moment of death. Here are just a few more famous Christians talking about hell ...

Their bodies are now ... "all salted with fire;" all so tempered and prepared, as to burn the more fiercely, and yet never to consume. —John Whitaker, "Sermon XI" in *A Course of Sermons upon Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell*

But he that goes to hell shall suffer ten thousand times worse torments than these, and yet shall never be quite dead under them. There they shall be ever whining, pining, weeping, mourning, ever tormented without ease, and yet never dissolved into nothing. —John Bunyan, *A Few Sighs from Hell*

In order that the happiness of the saints may be more delightful to them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, they are allowed to see perfectly the sufferings of the damned. ... "The elect will go out by ... seeing manifestly, so that they may be urged the more to praise God." ... The saints in heaven know distinctly all that happens ... to the damned. —Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

Body and soul shall be together, ... thyself, put in a vessel of hot oil, pained, yet coming out undestroyed; ... every nerve a string on which the devil shall ever play his diabolical tune of Hell's Unutterable Lament. —Charles Spurgeon, "The Resurrection of the Dead"



Hell and Atheism

Atheism and evolutionism are related systems of belief that have gained prevalence around the world. But did you know that both of these ideologies were at least partially inspired by commonly believed distortions on the doctrine of hell?

One of "the four horsemen" of modern atheism, Richard Dawkins controversially compared a belief in an eternal hell to child abuse, saying, "If your whole upbringing, and everything you have ever been told by parents, teachers and priests, has led you to believe, really believe, utterly and completely, that sinners burn in hell, it is entirely plausible that words could have a more long-lasting and damaging effect than deeds."

Charles Darwin, known as the father of evolution and author of *On the Origin of Species*, said, "I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine."

What does this tell you about the significance of knowing the truth about hell?

Part 1

What the Bible (Actually) Says About Hell



You've heard sermons at church, you've watched TV programs, maybe you've even read entire books about hell.

But the Bible says, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). "This word" is the Word of God—the Bible, the most reliable document ever handed down through the centuries. If you want "light," if you want the truth, then the Bible is your best source. Don't take the preacher's word just because he should know better. Don't believe the movies just because they are popular. The Word of God is there for you to understand, for you to "[search] ... to find out whether these things [are] so" (Acts 17:11).

So, what does the Bible really say?

What Is Hell?

First, it's important to clear up some widespread confusion about the use of the word "hell" in English translations of the Bible. Of course, the Scriptures were not originally written in English. They were written in the languages of their authors: The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew, the New Testament mostly in Greek.

The word "hell" is most often used as a translation for the Hebrew word *sheol* and for the Greek word *hades*. Interestingly enough, however, these two terms, *sheol* and *hades*, weren't always translated as "hell." They were also often translated as "the grave."

Take, for instance, these two verses:

- Genesis 37:35 says, "I will go down into *the grave* unto my son mourning" (KJV, emphasis added).
- Proverbs 5:5 states, "Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on *hell*" (KJV, emphasis added).

The first is translated as "the grave," the other as "hell"—yet both of these words are translations of the same Hebrew word *sheol*.

What's going on here?

Looking up the original definitions of the two terms *sheol* and *hades* in a Bible concordance, you will discover that they both have the same meaning: the "grave" or "the place of the dead." There is no mention whatsoever of a place of burning, of screams of agony and torturous pain. In fact, the



Bible gives us even more of a description of *sheol*: "There is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave" (Ecclesiastes 9:10); there's no feeling (v. 6); there's nothing to see (Job 17:13).

There is likewise no distinction that this "place of the dead" is reserved for the wicked alone. Everyone dies; *everyone*, saint or sinner, goes into the grave:

What man can live and not see death?
Can he deliver his life from the power of
the grave? (Psalm 89:48).

So, is that all that "hell" means? Is it just the grave, the place where we go when we die? Well, not quite. Let's keep looking ...



When we come to the New Testament, we find that the term “hell” is also used in a different sense and to translate a completely different word: **gehenna**. In contrast to *sheol* and *hades*, *gehenna* has been translated as “hell” in many Bible versions. This term comes from the Hebrew word *Ge-Hinnom*, which means “Valley of Hinnom,” a real historical place that you can see today on the south side of Jerusalem.

At one time in this valley, unfaithful Israelites offered up their children as sacrifices to pagan gods (2 Chronicles 28:3). The prophet Jeremiah predicted that this place would come to be known as “the

Valley of Slaughter” (Jeremiah 7:32). It was eventually turned into a garbage dump, in which dead animals and trash were burned to ash.

When Is Hell?

With *gehenna*, we are introduced to the idea of a final judgment that will occur sometime in the future. In fact, Jesus repeatedly used this term in this context: “in danger of hell fire” (Matthew 5:22), “cast into hell” (vv. 29, 30; Luke 12:5), “cast into hell fire” (Matthew 18:9). All of these referred to a time that had not yet occurred.

Now, let’s take a look at a powerful parallel that Jesus described in one of His parables, the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, found in Matthew 13:24–30.

Take a look at all the words associated with “hell” in the Bible:

SHEOL: A Hebrew word in the Old Testament depicting a burial or resting place of the dead; some translations, such as the King James, render it as “hell.” (See Deuteronomy 32:22; Psalm 139:8; Proverbs 15:11.)

ABADDON: A Hebrew word that means “destruction” or “ruin.” The term is used only once in the King James translation, in Revelation 9:11. In the Revised Standard, of its seven mentions, it is once associated with a fire that consumes “to the root” (Job 31:12 NRSV) and often runs parallel to the word *sheol*—and, thus, the grave and death. (See Job 26:6; Proverbs 15:11; 27:20.)



GEHENNA: A Greek term designating a place of utter destruction. Seen 12 times in the New Testament, it refers to the “Valley of Hinnom,” a gorge near Jerusalem where trash was burned. Jesus used the place to illustrate the destructive fires of the final judgment. (See Matthew 5:22; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5.)

HADES: A Greek word that refers to an unseen world, the world of the dead, or the grave. It is equivalent to *sheol*. Some translations, such as the King James, render it as “hell.” (See Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15; Revelation 1:18.)

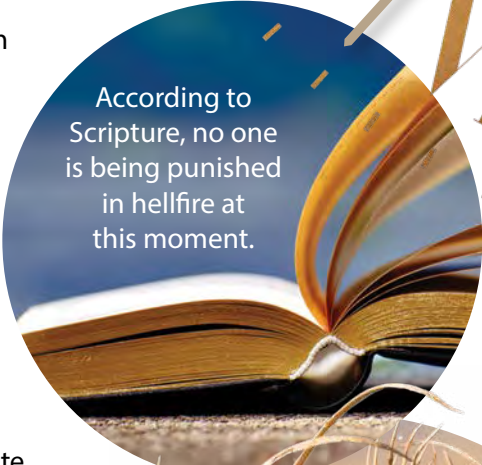
TARTAROS: This Greek word is used only once and is interpreted as “hell,” but it literally means “to cast into Tartarus,” the destination of rebellious angels. (See 2 Peter 2:4.)

We have special insight into the meaning of this parable because it is one that Jesus carefully deciphered for His disciples. In the parable is a man who sows a field of wheat. But at night, the man's enemy sneaks into the field and plants tares—that is, weeds—right in with the wheat. When both begin to grow, the man's workers ask him if they should rid the field of the tares. The man instructs them to refrain from doing so until the wheat is ready to harvest, as they may mistake the wheat for the tares, given that the two look nearly identical in their early stages of growth. At the time of the harvest when they are easily distinguishable, the man tells them, then will they separate the wheat from the tares.


What happens? The wheat will get stored in a barn, while the tares will be discarded and incinerated. This sounds a lot like what the Valley of Hinnom became, doesn't it? The tares in the parable were dumped and burned, just like the waste collected in the valley.

Jesus, in His subsequent explanation, confirmed the following:

- The wheat represents God's people.
- The tares represent those who follow the devil (v. 38).
- The time of the harvest, when the wheat and tares will be separated, represents "the end of the age" (v. 39)—that is, the end of the world, when every person will be judged as either a wheat or a tare.



According to Scripture, no one is being punished in hellfire at this moment.



Even though no one is being punished right now, the Bible does say that the ungodly will be punished: "If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner" (Proverbs 11:31).

Christ focused on the outcome of the tares especially: "As the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age" (v. 40). In other words, the fire that will destroy the wicked will not start *until* the end of the world—until the day of judgment.

The apostle Peter said, "The Lord knoweth how ... to reserve the unjust *unto the day of judgment to be punished*" (2 Peter 2:9 KJV, emphasis added).

This must mean that punishment for one's sins occurs not at the moment of death but, as Christ refers to in Matthew 13, at a future time: when "all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ... [are] cast ... into the furnace of fire" (vv. 41, 42).

The fires of Gehenna were a symbol of the coming judgment—not something happening now. Just because most of Christianity teaches that the

Where are all the dead now, if not in hell?

They are in the grave. They have, as we have learned, no concept of what is happening anywhere. They are not thinking; they feel nothing; they are unconscious. And they remain that way until Christ returns and, by His voice, brings them back to life: "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28, 29). A future day of judgment is again what is being referred to here. "The hour is coming"; it has not yet come. When it comes, then will one's sentence be carried out—not before: "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

unrepentant are immediately transported to hell upon death does not mean the Bible teaches it.

Study it out for yourself; the Word is clear.

Where Is Hell?

Let's take a look at the concept of hell as a place. The common belief about hell is that it is a place where people are sent; for example, how often do we talk about "going to hell"? And how often do we picture some

subterranean cavern located beneath the earth's surface? Yet are these beliefs biblically sound?

It's understandable: Burning lava, spewed out by volcanoes and coming from deep within the earth, was easily observed and thought by the ancient Romans to be caused by a mythological god of fire named Vulcan. (It is from his name that we get the word "volcano.")

But actually, the last book of the Bible clearly describes the location of hell. Revelation 20:9 states that "fire came *down* from God *out of heaven* and devoured them" (emphasis added). The "them" is referring to the wicked, those who follow Satan and have gathered "on the breadth of the *earth*" (emphasis added) around the people of God. That fire from God is hellfire; it is soon after additionally described as "the lake of fire" (vv. 14, 15) which consumes the entire earth and all the wicked on it.

Notice that the Bible, in direct contrast to popular tradition, teaches that hellfire will actually come from above, not from the bowels of the earth like a volcano does. Notice also that hell is not a place the wicked are sent to, nor some hotbed near the earth's core; rather, hell is on the very earth itself.

In fact, hell is probably more accurately described as a thing rather than as a place—the hellfire that ignites the entire surface of the planet.





What Does Hellfire Do?

We have learned that the “what,” “when,” and “where” of hell is drastically different from popular opinion. Now, we’ve come to the crux of the issue. What happens in hellfire? Will those cast into it suffer eternally in tormenting fires and brimstone, as is commonly imagined?

Let’s take a look:

- “There will be no prospect for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out” (Proverbs 24:20).
- “Evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Psalm 37:9).
- “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God *does not have life*” (1 John 5:12, emphasis added).
- “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him *should not perish* but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, emphasis added).

These passages are pretty clear. But the Bible gets even more direct:

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*, ... that will leave them neither root nor branch. ... You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be *ashes* under the soles of your feet (Malachi 4:1, 3, emphasis added).

Scripture even affirms that the devil himself will be turned into ashes. In picturing the fate of Satan, the Bible says:

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 any more* (Ezekiel 28:18, 19 KJV, emphasis added).

The Bible uses the same word, “devoured,” to describe what will happen to the unrepentant sinners in Revelation 20:9. They will be annihilated, consumed, destroyed.

There is one thing blatantly absent from all of these verses—the idea of eternal suffering. To the wicked, “God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). There is a completeness to the act; there is an end. ■



Part 2

The Most
Misunderstood
Passages About



The Smoke of Their Torment

He shall 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 ascends forever and ever (Revelation 14:10, 11).

This is one of the most common passages used to support the teaching that the wicked will be eternally tormented in fire. While a surface reading may seem to support that view, let's take a deeper look—"precept upon precept, line upon line" (Isaiah 28:10).

First, let's consider the word "smoke." How is this word used in the Bible? Let's take a look at Psalm 37:20:

The wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.

Here, smoke is used to illustrate a person's death. One property of smoke is emphasized: It vanishes. That is, it is no more. We can see this happen in life: Smoke gradually dissipates into the air. The Bible tells us that this is like what happens when people die:

they become no more. "My days are consumed like smoke" (Psalm 102:3). In Revelation 14:11, we're told, "The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever." Here, "forever and ever" does not refer to time; instead,

it refers to distance. That is, the smoke created by the fires of judgment will ascend so high, it will disappear out of sight. Abraham saw smoke from the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (see p. 24) ascend like the smoke of a furnace (Genesis 19:28).



The Judgment of Edom

Let's dig further. In describing the desolation of the land of Edom, the Bible says:

It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever" (Isaiah 34:10).

This was what God said would happen to Edom; in other words, this was Edom's judgment. It sounds very similar to what is described in Revelation 14, doesn't it? Yet we know that Edom is not still burning to this day. The ancient kingdom, were it still in existence today, would be in the country of Jordan; there is no eternally burning fire pit in that region—or anywhere else for that matter.

Instead, as the Bible predicted, Edom simply "[lies in] waste." It was never rebuilt, and it never again prospered. In that sense, its "death" as a nation was permanent—that is, "forever and ever."

Revelation 14:11 is referring back to an ancient kingdom as well: Babylon. In this context, Babylon symbolizes world powers at the end of time fighting against God and His people—forces that are led by the devil. (See Revelation 14:8; 17:3–6.)

But Babylon was also literally, in the sixth and seventh centuries BC, the most powerful nation in the world—luxurious, proud, and rife with idolatry. Thus, the Lord warned, “I will ... cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and offspring and posterity. ... I will sweep it with the broom of destruction” (Isaiah 14:22, 23). This indeed came to pass when, in 539 BC, Cyrus, king of Persia, stormed the metropolis and overtook Babylon. That once-mighty empire waned into the pages of history. Literal ancient Babylon never rose again. The Bible assures us that the demise of the symbolic Babylon the Great is equally as sure.

Defining “Forever”

Next, let’s consider the word “forever.” Did you know that the Bible uses it more than 50 times in connection with things that have already ended? (Check it out by looking up the word “forever” in a concordance.)

For instance, in Exodus 21:1–6, the Hebrew servant was to serve his master “forever.” That did not mean for the rest of time but, rather, only as long as the servant lived. Hannah took her son Samuel to God’s house to abide



The Bible gives us this invaluable principle to use in our study of it: “Precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10). Build your understanding of biblical truths a verse at a time, a concept at a time, looking at the entirety of Scripture. The Bible will not contradict itself. Each scripture will support other scriptures; confusing scriptures must be tested against and clarified by other scriptures.



“forever” (1 Samuel 1:22), but a few verses later, the Bible explains that by “forever,” she meant “as long as he lives” (v. 28).

This follows with what the rest of Scripture says: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)—death, no thought, no feeling, no existence; it is, as we learned, the grave.

Perhaps the question is put simplest this way: Is being burned alive by hellfire “forever and ever” the definition of death? No! In fact, it’s just the opposite. That torturous existence would actually be eternal life, albeit the most horrific life imaginable.

In contrast, what the Bible supports is that the wicked will ultimately die and never come back to life—they will be dead for all eternity.

Unquenchable Fire

Another Bible passage that has generated confusion about hellfire is found in Matthew 3:10–12, when John the Baptist was rebuking some Jewish leaders. Let's clear up what John said here concerning the final judgment *and* what he actually meant:

Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with **unquenchable fire**.

Perhaps you recall here the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13:24–30. Do you see the similarity to this passage? The same two groups are represented: the wheat and the chaff (tares). As in the parable, the wheat is placed “into the barn,” while the chaff is “[burned] up.” Scripture tells us that the wicked are “like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney” (Hosea 13:3), “like the chaff which the wind drives away” (Psalm 1:4). John and Jesus were referring to the same time period—“the end of the age” (Matthew 13:39).

Now, let's focus on the word “unquenchable.” According to one dictionary, “unquenchable” means “incapable of being quenched, extinguished, allayed, or the like.” Thus, an unquenchable fire would be a fire that could not be put out. That means that once hellfire begins, no firefighter could extinguish it; no amount of water could stop it. It would do what fires do: consume. (See Psalm 104:35; Proverbs 5:11; Isaiah 1:28.)

Notice these two important facts. **First**, this is a quality of the hellfire. It would be an entirely



different matter if the verse had said “the unquenchable bodies of the wicked.” But it is the hellfire that will not be able to be put out, not the wicked who are unable to die. Concerning the consequence of Judah's rebellion, God said, “My wrath will be poured out on

this place, and not be quenched” (2 Chronicles 34:25). It is God's wrath, His hatred of sin—not Judah itself—which is represented as an “unquenchable fire.”

Second, while hellfire will not be able to be *put out*, that doesn't mean it won't be able to *go out* on its own. When do fires naturally stop burning? They stop when there is no more fuel. When all sin and those who have held onto sin are consumed, hellfire will go out.

Note this example: The prophet Jeremiah foretold that the great city of Jerusalem would be burned with “a fire ... [that] shall not be quenched” (Jeremiah 17:27), and indeed it was. The entire city—“its gates,” its “palaces”—was incinerated by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, and yet again by the Roman army under Emperor Titus in AD 70. Both

times, it was totally destroyed by a fire that simply would not be extinguished.

Note the historian Josephus' account of the Roman siege of Jerusalem, wherein he noted that even Titus attempted to give an "order [to his soldiers] ... to quench the fire; but they did not hear what he said" (*The Wars of the Jews* 6.4.6); and again, the emperor's impassioned command "to quench the fire"—and even "to beat" and "to restrain" the soldiers—before it consumed the Jews' magnificent temple came to no avail, for his men's "hatred of the Jews" was too much to be quelled and their "hope of plunder" too great (6.4.7). Jerusalem, therefore, went up in "unquenchable fire." But let's ask this all-important question: Is Jerusalem still burning today? The more than 900,000 residents and 3.5 million tourists who visit the city per year will tell you that it is not.

Isaiah 47:14 describes it this way: "Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; it shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before!" Likewise, after the work of destruction at the end of the world, there will no longer be a fire "and no survivor" (Obadiah 1:18).

When Fire Is Good

Take a closer look at the entirety of John the Baptist's passage. The prophet made a distinction between the saved and the lost: The tree with good fruit gets

saved, but the tree without good fruit gets burned up; the wheat gets saved in the barn, but the chaff gets burned up.

Notice, however, that the saved also get burned with fire—in fact, that's part of the plan for salvation. With a person's acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior comes a repentance of the sins in his life; as John the Baptist said, "I indeed baptize ... with water unto repentance" (Matthew 3:11). Then, as the person gets to know and follow Christ,

he begins to be cleansed from the sin in his life. This is the refining process, and in Scripture, it is likened to a purification by fire. God is "like a refiner's fire and ... [He sits] as a refiner



and a purifier of silver" (Malachi 3:2, 3).

Thus, as the person's sins are burned up like chaff, the repentant sinner himself is transformed "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11).

At the end of the day, what God burns up is sin. The difference lies in whether you'll allow God to separate you from your sin, or whether you'll continue to cling to your sin.



Was Jesus in Hell?

Did Jesus go to the fiery chasm of hell after He died? Many Christians believe that He did based on this Catholic variation of the well-known Apostle's Creed:

Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven.¹

Remember all that we have learned so far about hell: For one, it's more of a thing, hellfire, than a place. For another, there is no descent to get to hellfire, as it occurs on the surface of the earth. And last, since it won't occur until the end of the world, it couldn't have existed during Jesus' lifetime on earth.

Let's take a brief look at the Scripture from which this Apostle's Creed was conceived. In his epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul explained concerning Christ's resurrection:

Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:8–10).

The quotation Paul used is from Psalm 68:18, which he attributed to be about Jesus. Here, the apostle reasoned that in order for Christ to have ascended—namely, to have been resurrected and then to have returned to God the Father—Christ first needed to have come down from heaven to the earth. These "lower parts of the earth" could very well mean Christ's death and subsequent burial in the tomb (Luke 23:52–55), the crux of His descent to earth. In no way do "the lower parts of the earth" equate to a hell somewhere underground. At most,

it simply refers to the grave—the very term, recall, that the King James often translates as "hell."

In short, it is a stretch to conclude from this passage that Jesus journeyed to hell at His death. Rather, it is Paul's poignant summary of the gospel itself, that through Christ's death and resurrection, we also have the opportunity to escape the grave and receive the gift of eternal life.

What about the apostle Peter's impassioned exhortation in Acts 2, in which he quotes from Psalm 16? Like the passage in Ephesians, Christ's death and resurrection are similarly referred to here. In the King James version, in both the psalm and in Peter's quotation of it, the Scripture reads: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell" (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27). So, was Christ in hell after His death?



No—we need only look in any concordance to realize that this is one of the many instances in which the King James translates the terms *sheol* and *hades* as "hell." Thus, we can determine that this passage in Acts has the same meaning as in Ephesians: that Christ was in the grave after He died, just like everyone else; and because He "was not left in" the grave but rose to heaven (v. 31), we have the assurance that we, too, by His grace, will someday rise as well (Romans 6:5).

¹ <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Order-of-Mass.pdf>

A Worm that Doesn't Die

A worm that does not die—at first glance, you might assume this to be the title of a horror film instead of a verse of Scripture. But let's study for ourselves what the Bible means.

In a discourse to His disciples, Jesus instructed:

If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—where “Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47, 48).

The Scripture that Jesus quoted is from Isaiah, in which the Lord said of His people, “They shall ... look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched” (Isaiah 66:24). The definition of “corpses” is dead bodies. What happens after a body dies? It's not a pleasant thought, but it is common knowledge that after a body dies, maggots—or, to use the biblical term, worms—begin to consume the body. What is being associated with hellfire here is not life; it is death. If worms continue to do their work, it's an indication that a body is dead.

Some have interpreted “the worm” to represent an ethereal human soul. Yet nowhere in the Bible is there an allusion to an immortal soul as a worm. In this instance, Jesus used the word *gehenna*, which, we've learned, was a place for burning refuse and dead bodies outside Jerusalem. No doubt, Christ's listeners could see the smoke from the fires of destruction curling up from the Valley of Hinnom. If anything fell outside those destructive flames, it was eventually consumed by maggots—that is, “worms.” With such vivid scenes of extinction before the eyes of His listeners, Jesus used those fires as a powerful example of the destructive work of hellfire.

Just as the fires of Hinnom were never quenched, the worms were constantly at work upon the bodies of the dead—an illustration of total and complete destruction.



The Rich Man and Lazarus

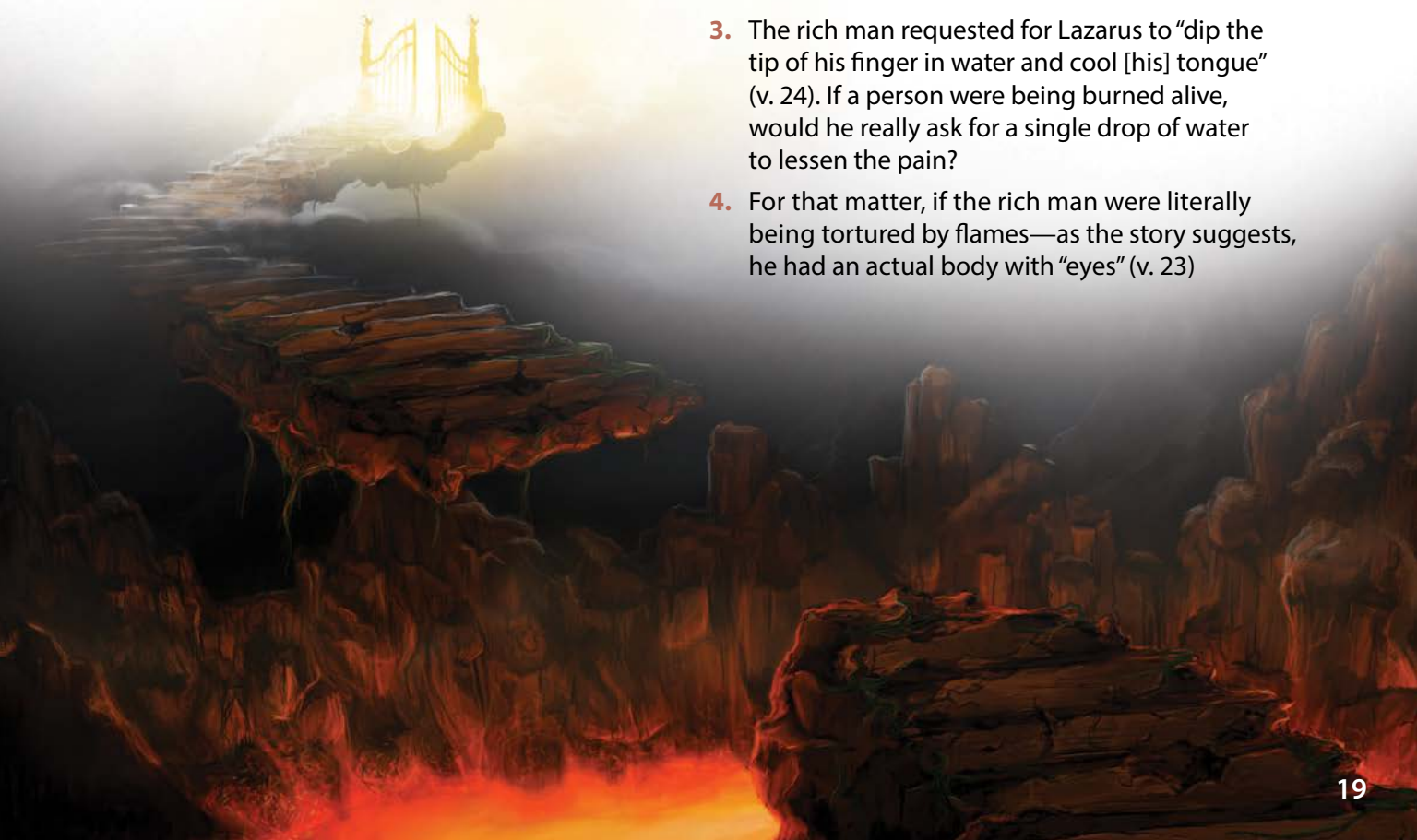
In Luke 16:19–31, Jesus tells a memorable parable that has left many wondering if it is to be taken literally. Let's take a look now:

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom (vv. 22, 23).

We have two choices here: Either the story is literally true, describing a hell in which the wicked, upon their death, are tortured by being burned alive, or it is an illustration used to teach a biblical truth about salvation.

Some Christians view Jesus' story as real, but how do those who hold this viewpoint reconcile certain elements in the story that could only be symbolic? Take, for example, the following observations:

1. When "the beggar died, [he] ... was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom" (v. 22). How could Abraham, in life a mere mortal man, have a bosom so large as to be the abode of the righteous dead?
2. When the rich man spotted Abraham and Lazarus, the two were "afar off" (v. 23) across "a great gulf" (v. 26). Yet despite this wide span between them, Abraham was still able to hear the rich man speak to him and vice versa?
3. The rich man requested for Lazarus to "dip the tip of his finger in water and cool [his] tongue" (v. 24). If a person were being burned alive, would he really ask for a single drop of water to lessen the pain?
4. For that matter, if the rich man were literally being tortured by flames—as the story suggests, he had an actual body with "eyes" (v. 23)



to see and a “tongue” (v. 24) to taste—would he really be having a lengthy conversation with Abraham?

Besides these reasons, if taken literally, this story repeatedly contradicts what the rest of Scripture teaches about heaven and hellfire. As we have seen, the Bible does not teach that people go to heaven or hell immediately after they die; neither does the Bible teach that people will be burning alive in hellfire for an indeterminate amount of time, nor that heaven and hell are located right next to each other separated by a gulf. What we do find is that this parable includes several of the commonly misunderstood beliefs about hell. So then, why did Jesus use all of these fables to teach truth?

To answer that, we have to understand two important factors: the subject that Jesus was teaching and the audience to whom He was teaching it. Parables were meant to illustrate real-world truths. So we must be careful not to make something true that the parable is not actually teaching. The lesson of a parable is usually found near its end; in this case, the lesson is found in verses 30 and 31, where the rich man says to Abraham, “But if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” But he said to him, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.” This parable is not about what



happens to people after they die; it is not about the details of heaven and hellfire. Rather, it is an illustration designed to teach that what a person does in his or her life on this earth determines his or her judgment after this life has ended.

As for Christ’s audience, they were Pharisees, the Jewish leaders of the day; and what is more, *they* believed some of the same erroneous traditions being debunked in this magazine! This parable is a prime example of Jesus explaining a concept in a way that His listeners could understand, given their own belief system. He was, in effect, meeting them where they were.

And soon after, Christ gave them the opportunity to put this very teaching into action—when He literally raised His friend, named Lazarus, from the dead (John 11:1–44).

This act was no coincidence; the connection to the parable was clear as day. Would the Pharisees repent of their deeds and choose the path of salvation in Christ, the only One who could resurrect them to eternal life?

Sadly, the Jewish leaders proved Jesus right: They didn’t believe even when one named Lazarus was raised from the dead (vv. 45–53), even when the truth was right in front of them. Don’t let the same thing happen to you!





The Thief on the Cross

But, some might say, the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is not the only passage in Scripture that supports the idea that people go immediately to heaven or hell at the moment of death.

For instance, what about the account of the thief on the cross, found in Luke 23:39–43? Didn't Jesus assure the thief that he would be with Him in Paradise the very day he died? In verse 43, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Actually, there are many problems with this train of thought. If we follow this perspective, then why did Jesus tell Mary three days later, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father"? (John 20:17). This certainly indicates that Jesus did not go to Paradise on the day of His crucifixion.

From what Scripture tells us, after Christ died upon the cross, His body was buried in a tomb that same Friday evening by a man named Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50–54). And Christ stayed in that tomb until His resurrection two days later, on Sunday morning (24:1–7). When Christ was dead,

He remained in the grave, just like the rest of those who have died.

So, why did Jesus say what He did to the repentant thief? Did He lie? Absolutely not! This dilemma is easily resolved by understanding the Bible's use of punctuation. Realize that the original Greek manuscripts of the Bible contained no punctuation at all. These marks were later added at the time of translation. Long ago, a translator chose to place a comma before the word "today" instead of after it.

As such, the verse is better translated as, "Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise." What did Jesus accomplish that day on the cross? On that day, every sin was bought and paid for by the death of the Son of God. On that day, even while dying on that cross, Christ knew that by virtue of His sacrifice, it would now be possible for that thief to be with Him in Paradise. That was the meaning of "today," Christ's promise that at the coming of His future kingdom, the thief's faith would be remembered.

The Bible does not contradict itself. Not even Jesus ascended to heaven immediately at His death. The dead wait in their graves, at rest (John 11:13; 1 Corinthians 15:18) until resurrection morning at the end of the age (John 5:28, 29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17).



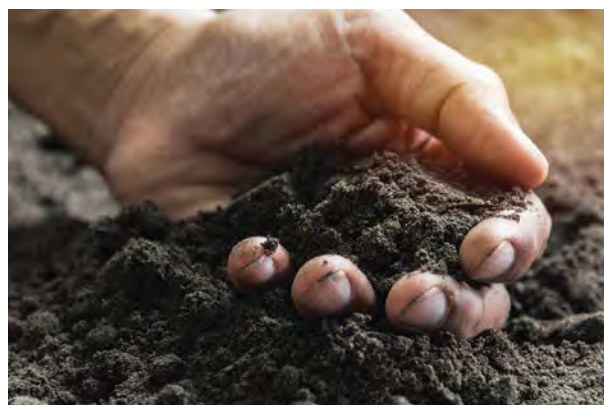
Destroying the Body and the Soul

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 (Matthew 10:28).

For many, this is a confusing and troubling verse. Did Jesus mean that the soul is immortal, that it'll live on long after the body is dead and be ultimately tortured in hell for all eternity?

We have already learned that the body is what is cast into hell—but what about the soul? Notice first that the soul and body are both destroyed in hell. Right off the bat, this tells us that the soul is not naturally immortal. Only God is immortal by nature (1 Timothy 6:15, 16).

So, what is a soul? This verse seems to indicate that it exists apart from the body. But does it?



The definition for a “soul” comes early in Scripture:

The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7 KJV).

The word “soul” here is a translation of the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which means “a life,” “a self,” “a person.” The New King James translates this word as “a living being.” God “formed” man’s body from “the dust of the ground”; then God breathed His “breath of life” into the man. As a result, “man became a ... soul.” Thus, a soul is the combination of the body plus the breath from God. It is not some ethereal spirit that lives on after the body dies; it is not some ghost haunting the living.

Quite plainly, the soul cannot exist without the body. So what does Matthew 10:28 mean? What was Jesus really saying?

Again, the confusion lies with the translation of Scripture. The word “soul” in Matthew 10:28 is a translation of the Greek word *psuche*,

The Bible Word for “Soul”

Old Testament (Hebrew) Word

nephesh

נפש

New Testament (Greek) Word

psuche

ψυχή

Meaning

Person, being, life, creature

which means “self” or “person.” In many other texts, it has been translated simply as “life.” For example, see Matthew 16:25, where Jesus said, “Whoever loses his *life* for My sake will find it” (emphasis added). Thus, we can actually read Matthew 10:28 as: “Fear Him who is able to destroy both *life* and body in hell.” Well, what does that mean?

The devil caused the world to be under the curse of death. Throughout the ages, he and those who follow him have persecuted, terrorized, and



taken the lives of God’s people—yet the devil is still only able to snuff out the *physical* life, “the body.” No matter how powerful he is, the devil is one of God’s created beings, just like us. He will never be able to create life, a “soul.”

At the end of the world, God will restore the body and give the breath of life back to every human being who has ever died,

the righteous at Christ’s coming and the wicked a thousand years later. (See Revelation 20:4–6.) Thus, the dead will again become living souls.

Only God has the ability to do this because He is our Creator. And it follows that only God has the ability to take away life and not give it back. This He does to the wicked by casting them into hellfire. This is the meaning of the destruction of “both soul and body” in Matthew 10:28. The living being, *nephesh*, is destroyed; the body returns to the earth from whence it came and the breath of life returns to God from whence it came—and that individual will never become a living being again.

See the proof in the words of Jesus:

My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Luke 12:4, 5).

This is Luke’s parallel account to Matthew. Notice how Luke’s passage does not say anything about destroying “the soul”; it states simply that the entire person is “cast into hell.” The passage in Matthew teaches the same thing. The devil can take away only the physical life; only God has the power to cast into hell and take away eternal life. ■



Sodom & Gomorrah

An Example of Hell

The Carolina Reaper is considered one of the world's hottest peppers. A cross between a ghost pepper and a red habanero, this world champion of mouth scorchers was bred to burn: It is 200 times hotter than a jalapeño.

Did you know that the Bible provides a small taste of what hellfire will be like? You'll find it in Genesis 19.

The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is so infamous that even those who have never read the Bible are familiar with their reputations.

In the account, God sent two angels to rescue a faithful man named Lot and his family before destroying those cities. "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city. ... Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed," the angels said to Lot (vv. 15, 17).

Soon after, "the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens" (v. 24). Again, we see that fire comes from *above*, not below. Abraham, a man of God and Lot's uncle who knew about the coming destruction, on that morning "looked toward Sodom and


Gomorrah, ... and he saw ... the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace" (v. 28).

Notice the similar language to that in Revelation 14:10, 11, in which "fire and brimstone" is also poured upon the wicked until all that is left is "smoke." Indeed, some two thousand years later, Jesus pointedly declared:

Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:28–30).

Another way of describing the time that "the Son of Man is revealed" would be the "revelation" of the Son of Man, Christ's second coming. We find that the apostle Peter made a similar comparison as His Master:

For if God[,] ... turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, ... then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:4, 6, 7, 9).



And Jude did the same:

The Lord ... has reserved [Satan and his angels] ... for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah ... are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 5–7).

Is what Jude termed “eternal fire” the same hellfire that we have been learning about? That would make it sound as if hellfire will be burning forever. But we know that cannot be the case for a very simple reason: Sodom and Gomorrah are not still burning. Though scholars debate the exact location of the cities, it is without question that, as with Edom and Jerusalem, there is no eternally burning fire anywhere in that region today.

Thus, we are to treat “eternal fire” as we do “unquenchable fire.” The adjective describes the results of the fire, not the fire itself. It is the results of hellfire that are



No fire is burning today at any of the sites believed to be the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible says they were turned into ashes.

eternal; it is the death that results from hellfire that lasts forever.

Scripture gives these three powerful examples—one from Jesus Christ Himself—that we may look at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and be assured of the conflagration at the end of the world. At this future time, there will be judgment, fire, and annihilation.

Part 3

Satan: The Custodian of Hell?



No doubt, you've seen the films and TV shows that depict Satan running the day-to-day operations of hell. Comedians even like to joke that the devil has created a special place for lawyers and bankers. With the help of pop culture and even some televangelists, Satan is viewed as a humanoid who sports black horns and red skin and carries a pitchfork in his hands—and who is allowed to decide how unrepentant sinners suffer for their sins today and, presumably, throughout eternity.

But does that make sense? Why would God put someone who has waged war against Him for millennia in charge of *anything*? Perhaps some believe that God simply didn't have a choice, that either God is not omnipotent or, worse, that He is colluding with the devil. What is interesting in all of these views is that they end up depicting God in a less than stellar light—and the devil as nothing more than a myth invented by



the power-hungry to manipulate people.

But the Bible actually says something very different about Satan.

The Devil in the Bible

Did you know that Satan was not always evil? Scripture gives us a window into his history. Let's take a look at a passage found in the book of Ezekiel, where a description of "the king of Tyre" (28:12) illustrates the origin of Satan. God said,

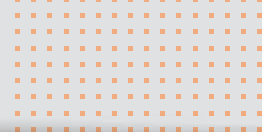
You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ... The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you (vv. 12–15).

From this passage, we learn that Satan is a "cherub," an angel. We also learn that he was "created," indeed, like all other angels and as "all things" (Ephesians 3:9) were, by God. The Lord also created him "perfect in [his] ways" (Ezekiel 28:15). Furthermore, we see that he was the "cherub who covers" (v. 14), also known as the "covering cherub." This means that he was one of the angels closest to God, who stood beside the Lord's very throne. (See Exodus 25:17–22; Psalm 99:1.)

We can conclude that Satan held a position of leadership in heaven and that he was given that position by God. It was God who "established" (Ezekiel 28:14) Satan, but note that this authority was given him before he betrayed God—not after. Satan was also renowned for his "wisdom and ... beauty" (v. 12); he excelled at music, at "timbrels and pipes" (v. 13).

The Bible also tells us that Satan was not the angel's original name. God first called him "Lucifer" (Isaiah 14:12), which means "light-bearer." Lucifer, one of the angels most continuously in God's presence, was to bear God's light to others. But he ended up





failing. How did it happen? Let's look at two eye-opening passages:

Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor (Ezekiel 28:17).

For you have said in your heart: ... "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; ... I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13, 14).

Pride, jealousy, and discontent arose in Lucifer's heart. He eventually desired to take God's place in the hearts of intelligent beings. God had created



a perfect angel; it was Lucifer who, by his own choice, lost that perfection in exchange for "iniquity" (Ezekiel 28:15). He allowed his unsavory desire to grow until he "became filled with violence within, and ... sinned" (v. 16). Thus, the Bible reveals, it was "the devil ... [who] sinned from the beginning" (1 John 3:8); he was the first being in God's universe to sin.

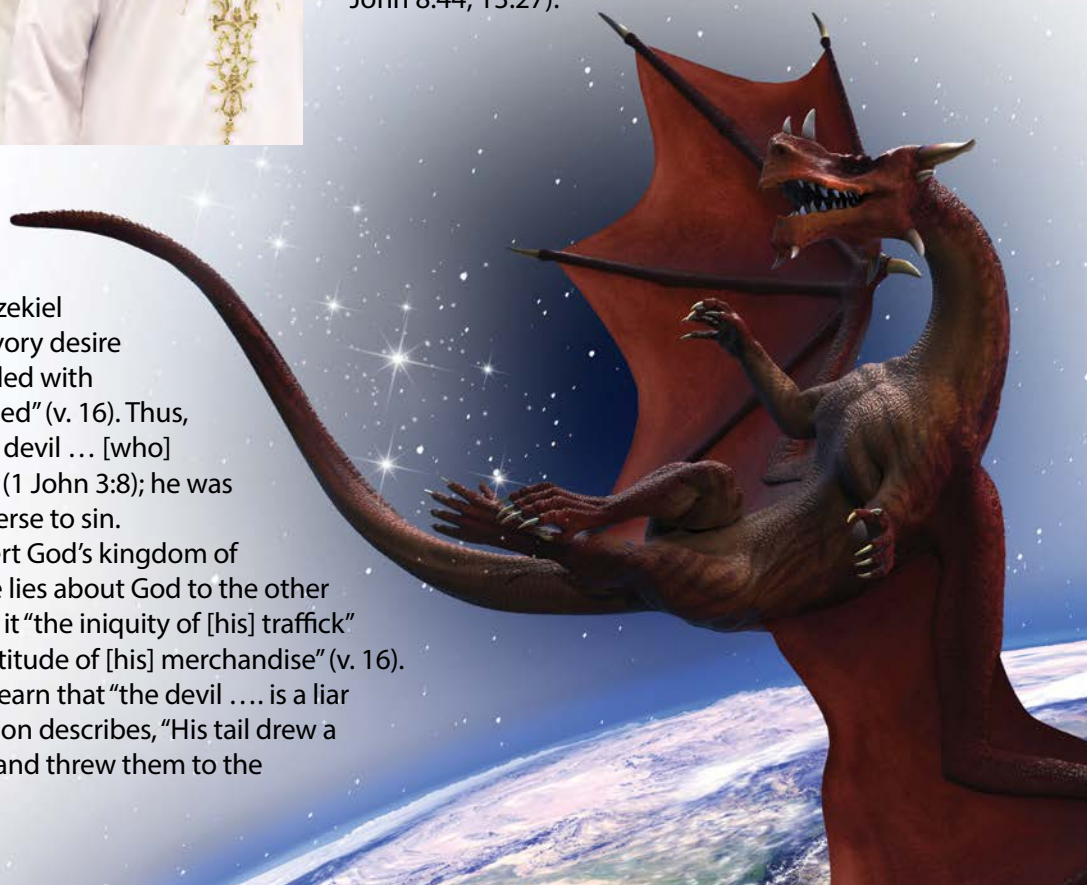
In his attempt to subvert God's kingdom of love, Satan began to peddle lies about God to the other angels; the King James calls it "the iniquity of [his] traffick" (Ezekiel 28:18) and "the multitude of [his] merchandise" (v. 16). Indeed, from John 8:44 we learn that "the devil is a liar and the father of it." Revelation describes, "His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the

earth" (12:4). The "tail" represents deceit: "The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail" (Isaiah 9:15). The stars of heaven represent the other angels (Revelation 1:20). We see this progression clearly when we read further in Revelation. After Lucifer persuaded a third of the angels to join him in his rebellion against God:

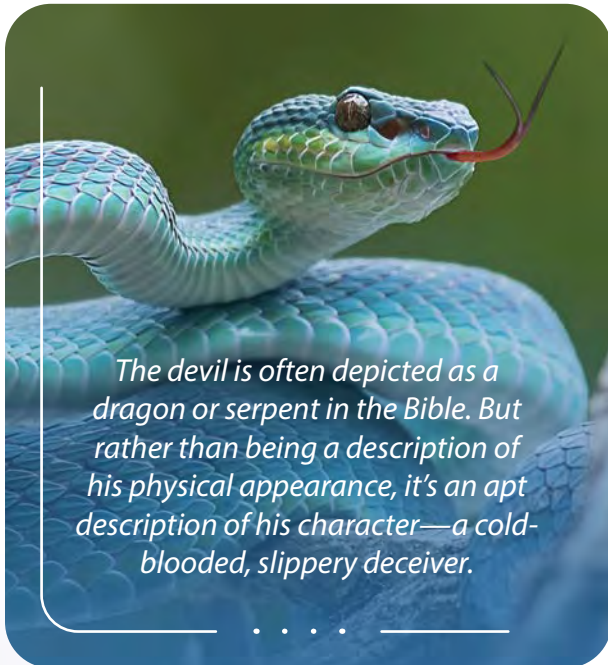
War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels ... with him (12:7-9).

Lucifer's angels were "cast to the earth" with him because they were duped by his "tail," his lies. In Jesus' words: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Lucifer's coup d'état had failed; and he was now called Satan, meaning "adversary," and the devil, meaning "slanderer."

Yet this defeat did not quell the devil's envy of God. Eventually, Satan's hatred drove him to orchestrate the murder of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:3; John 8:44; 13:27).



Now, after having learned what the Bible recounts about the devil, is it reasonable to believe that God would employ Satan—who hates God, His law, and His character—as the custodian of hell?



The devil is often depicted as a dragon or serpent in the Bible. But rather than being a description of his physical appearance, it's an apt description of his character—a cold-blooded, slippery deceiver.

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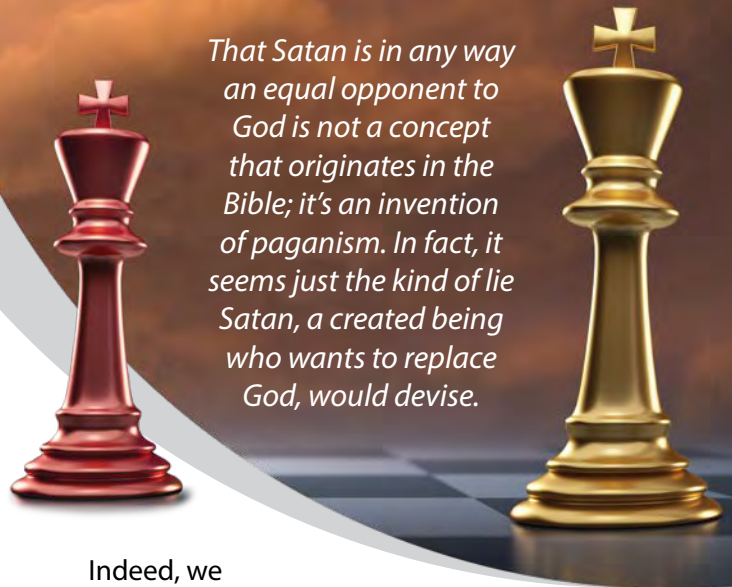
Where Is Satan Now?

According to popular myth, Satan should be found in hell right now. But this is also contradictory to Scripture. Satan's headquarters is not in hell but on the earth itself:

The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Satan answered[,] ... "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it" (Job 2:2, emphasis added).

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time (Revelation 12:12).

That Satan is in any way an equal opponent to God is not a concept that originates in the Bible; it's an invention of paganism. In fact, it seems just the kind of lie Satan, a created being who wants to replace God, would devise.



Indeed, we have already learned that Satan was evicted from heaven to the earth. But what happened next?

At the Creation, God gave Adam and Eve "dominion ... over all the earth" (Genesis 1:26). But when the two sinned in the Garden of Eden, they chose, in essence, to follow Satan's will instead of God's will. In doing so, they relinquished their dominion of the earth to the devil: "The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19), "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), "the prince of this world" (John 14:30 KJV).

But the Bible also says that as humanity once did, Satan will lose his dominion one day:

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10).

Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

I [will] bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth. ... Never shalt thou be any more (Ezekiel 28:18, 19 KJV).

Yes—just like any other unrepentant sinner, the devil will not live forever. He will be judged and sentenced: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31).

Satan will burn in hellfire and be turned to ash. ■

Part

4

What Is the Purpose of Hell?



The world was horrified.

In January 2015, Islamic State jihadists thrust Muath al-Kasasbeh, a captured 26-year-old Jordanian pilot, into a metal cage, doused him with gasoline, and then set him on fire. As he helplessly screamed and writhed in the flames, the terrorists filmed it and posted the video online as a warning to the entire world.

Outraged, prominent Christian leaders denounced it as an act of consummate evil. But don't many of them also believe that God is going to do much worse to the lost? Don't they believe that hell is going to be for unrepentant sinners what that metal cage was for al-Kasasbeh—but for all eternity? What does that say about their understanding of God?



Why does this matter? Understanding the truth about the purpose of hell is of profound importance because it will shape your picture of God. And your picture of God shapes the trajectory of your life and the influence you have on others.

The most reliable—and really the only—way to understand any Bible teaching is to start with Jesus. For us to get a complete and accurate picture of hell, we must first have a complete and accurate understanding of God's plan of salvation; in other words, His plan to rescue us from eternal death.



The Plan of Salvation

All the suffering in the world is a result of sin, which we learned began with Lucifer.

What is sin? The Bible says, "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). That law broken by sin is the moral law of God, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments. The apostle Paul confirms this, using as an example the tenth commandment:

I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet" (Romans 7:7).

Sin and God's law are at odds with each other, so let's take a quick look at how they contrast. Jesus summarizes God's law in this way:

Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ... And ... love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37, 39).

In contrast, here is sin:

Unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; ... whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful (Romans 1:29–31).

Who hasn't experienced the ravages of sin in the world today? Who hasn't been a part of and privy to

some cruel deed? We have seen throughout history what sin does. But the problem with sin is that it often looks deceptively harmless, attractive—even perhaps like the right thing to do!

Just look at what happened when Satan brought sin to the earth and infected the human race.

The Fall

When God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, before Satan entered the picture, He gave them a specific command:

Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:16, 17).

The command was clear. God wanted to *prevent* death; He didn't want anyone to die. He did not want His creation to experience evil or pain. But then came Satan, disguised as a serpent (Revelation 12:9), and he peddled the same lies about God on the earth as he had to the angels in heaven. He told Eve the exact opposite would happen if she disobeyed God's command:

You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:4, 5).

Who was telling the truth? It may have appeared at first that Satan had said something true, as neither Eve nor Adam dropped dead after biting into the fruit. But we know that they eventually died. Also notice that after following the devil's counsel, the couple realized that they had been duped. Satan had implied that eating the fruit would yield positive results: They would become "like God," powerful and wise. But that was far from

what happened. Instead, Adam and Eve felt shame and covered themselves with leaves (v. 7); they became frightened and attempted to hide their guilt (vv. 8, 10); they became querulous, blaming others and even God Himself (vv. 11–13).

When God questioned them, Eve said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." She was aware that Satan had lied to her.

Indeed, Satan has been lying all along. He targeted Eve—and through her, Adam—with lies to get them to transgress God's law (1 Timothy 2:14). In doing so, he succeeded in bringing his war against God to planet Earth. And he has been conducting a continuous onslaught upon humanity ever since.

Satan's reign of sin leads to only one place: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

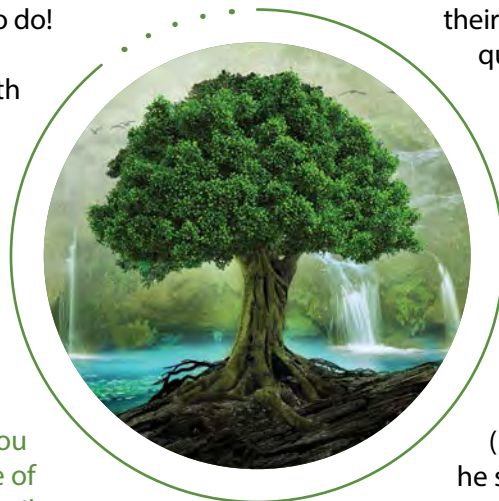
All Have Sinned

We are all sinners. From the day of Satan's temptation in the Garden, the entire human race has fallen under the same chains. "There is none who does good, no, not one" (Psalm 53:3); "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23)—and that means all will die.

Now, if that were the whole story, there'd be no point in reading on—but that's not the end. This is where the plan of salvation comes in.

Yes, the wages of sin is death, but Romans 6:23 also explains "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus *is* the plan of salvation: "You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins"

(Matthew 1:21). Jesus' death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection from the grave is the means to our salvation: "He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26); He "who knew no sin [was] to be sin for us, that we



might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through Christ, "all our sins [are cast] into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19); and with Christ, we are able to "sin no more" (John 8:11).

We have read that "God is love" (1 John 4:8)—but not only that, God personally loves you: "For God so



loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," Jesus Christ (John 3:16). "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The plan of salvation is the ultimate manifestation of God's love for us.

And God, who "knows all things" (1 John 3:20), put this plan in place before Adam and Eve were even created, before He formed the world. Christ "was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:20). God knew He would have to suffer the worst torment imaginable, yet He created us anyway. That is the depth of God's love for us.

Now, we understand the reason for the plan of salvation in terms of hell. Satan started us on a pathway to hellfire; that is, to eternal death. But God forged another pathway for us to paradise; that is, to eternal life.

Jesus Made It Possible



You might be wondering: "If Christ died so that we wouldn't die, why is everyone still dying?"

In a sense, those who die with a saving faith in Jesus do not "die"; instead, they go to sleep—they "rest in peace."

Jesus came to save us from the second death, from which there is no resurrection.

The first death is temporary. The Bible says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

"The wages of sin" is actually paid by "the second death" (Revelation 20:14)—the death that is caused by hellfire and from which there is no resurrection. We have already seen this concept in Matthew 10:28: The death of the body is the first death; the death of the soul *and* the body is the second death.

Thus, it is this second death from which Christ saved us. He has given us eternal life in exchange for what we should have received—eternal death. Consider:

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, [Jesus] Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

If God bore ridicule, torture, and infamy in our place, how can we believe that He desires to execute the second death upon anybody?

"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" (Ezekiel 33:11).

"The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

"God our Savior ... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3, 4).

God Himself died so that we wouldn't have to! It was while Christ was on the cross of Calvary that "mercy and truth ... met together; righteousness and peace ... kissed" (Psalm 85:10).

Do you know what the Bible calls the destruction of the wicked? It describes it as God's "unusual act" (Isaiah 28:21). The King James translates it as God's "strange act." In other words, hellfire is something that is foreign to God—He is a Creator—and also something very unique. It speaks equally to God's mercy and to His justice. God has never caused hellfire before, and He will never do it again.



loved ones who do not choose Christ being met with eternal death. Some may wonder if it is even necessary for a person to be destroyed forever.

But left unchecked, sin would eventually destroy the world and every human being in it. Even today, you need only turn on the news or search the Internet or look outside to see the results—murders, wars, and unspeakable cruelties happen day in, day out. If those who love sin were to live on, they would eventually destroy everything and kill everyone for their own selfish gain.

It is natural for us to think about those who will be cast into hellfire. But are we thinking about those who are saved out of it? God is. Hellfire is His just act of salvation for those who

The Need to End Sin

While it might seem that God's plan of salvation ended at the cross, in a way, that was where it began. It is now your individual free choice, granted to every human being by God, on which pathway you will travel. Consider these Scriptures:

If it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:15, emphasis added).

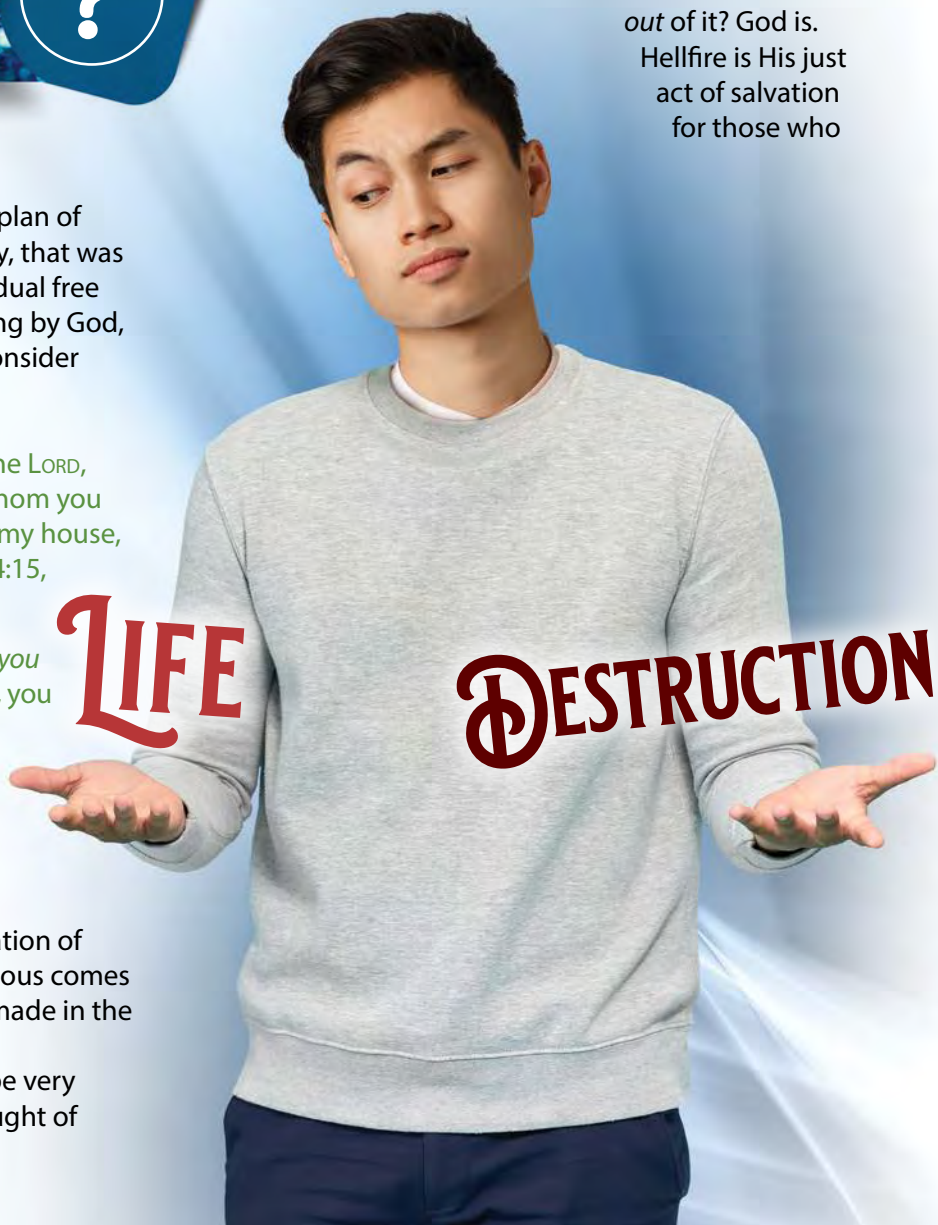
Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? (Romans 6:16, emphasis added).

It's made clear: The final destination of both the righteous and the unrighteous comes about by their own decision, freely made in the light of Jesus' sacrifice.

However, for many, it may still be very difficult to see past the horrible thought of

LIFE

DESTRUCTION



How does GOD feel about YOU?

From his first lies in heaven, Satan has continued to misrepresent God as unfeeling, aloof, exacting, stern, and unapproachable, and even labels his own ugly, calamitous violence as “acts of God.” He did it to Eve in the Garden, and he’s doing it today through the false doctrine of eternally burning hellfire. Jesus came to wipe away this slander and to demonstrate that the heavenly Father loves us even more than a mother loves her child (Isaiah 49:15): “What He sees the Father do ..., the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19).

This is what the Bible says about how God feels about you:

God ... is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us (Ephesians 2:4).

Our God and Father ... has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace (2 Thessalonians 2:16).

He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

God’s great and perfect love for you compels Him to:

[Be] ready to pardon, [be] gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and ... not forsake [you] (Nehemiah 9:17).

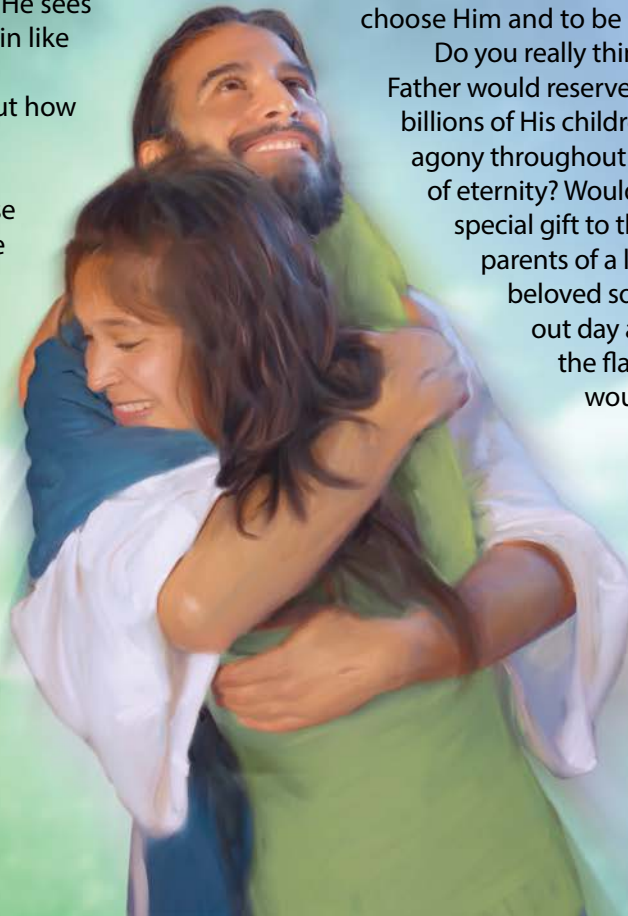
[Be] a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness (Jonah 4:2).

Give grace and ... [withhold] no good thing ... from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11).

Why do you think the Bible shares with us the plan of salvation, and the judgment, and hellfire itself? God is giving us every opportunity to choose Him and to be saved by Him.

Do you really think that such a loving Father would reserve a burning pit where billions of His children scream in torturous agony throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity? Would that actually be His special gift to the redeemed, for the parents of a lost child to hear their beloved son or daughter crying out day and night from within the flames? Such a thing would be hell for *them*.

This cannot be. No, on the contrary, it is “God [who] will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).



call upon Him in repentance, for as much as God is forgiving, He is also a God who loves justice:

All His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He (Deuteronomy 32:4).

The LORD is a God of justice (Isaiah 30:18).

He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth (42:3, 4).

Our just God will eradicate sin for those people He has saved. Says Christ, “Lift up your heads, because your *redemption* draws near” (Luke 21:28, emphasis added).

The purpose of hellfire is to stop the violence, the hatred, the corruption, to make sure that no sin hurts anyone ever again. Hellfire is the culmination of the plan of salvation, God’s full and ultimate deliverance of His people, the final victory of good over evil. ■

Part 5

Armageddon and Hell



“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10).”

On an apocalyptic day in AD 79, one of the ancient world’s worst disasters razed the Roman city of Pompeii. The city’s residents had become accustomed to minor tremors, not knowing they were the signs of coming destruction from the nearby volcano Vesuvius.

When the mountain finally erupted, the intense heat incinerated thousands instantly, and the entire city was buried in ash. For the next 1,600 years, the ruins lay untouched.

As excavations began, clues were unearthed that revealed the city to be a den of immoral living. Evidences of vice were found. The ash had created a snapshot in time: Victims were clinging to precious jewels and coins, silent witnesses of what they had treasured most.

The Day of the Lord

The sudden destruction of Pompeii is a stark illustration of the ultimate apocalyptic day of Christ’s return. The Bible reveals that what happened in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius will be repeated on a global scale: “The elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

But not so fast—while this may sound like the workings of hellfire, it is not. The Bible explains that at Jesus’ second coming, a countless number of angels will appear in the heavens with Him

(Matthew 25:31) and that “every eye will see Him” approaching (Revelation 1:7). He is also depicted as coming on “a white horse” (19:11), the Champion to the battle; “and the armies in heaven ... [follow] Him” (v. 14). This event will

“shake not only the earth, but also heaven” (Hebrews 12:26). Earthquakes will move “every mountain and island ... out of its place” (Revelation 6:14), and every city will be destroyed (Jeremiah 4:26).



But the primary objective of Jesus’ return is not about destruction; it is about salvation. The main reason is to gather up the saved:

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I

am, there you may be also (John 14:3, emphasis added).

Jesus comes to rescue the redeemed!

The First Resurrection

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

This is it—the moment for which so many have been waiting. The Life-giver, by His voice—the same voice that spoke the world into being at Creation, the same voice that called out, “Lazarus, come forth!” (John 11:43)—will bring forth our loved ones from the grave at last. Christ refers to this as “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29): “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 57).

While the righteous dead may have met death with diseased and broken bodies, on this day, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet[,] the dead will be raised incorruptible” (v. 52). Then will the righteous living also experience a complete transformation of their bodies: “We shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (vv. 52, 53). It is at Christ’s second coming that He will give the saved immortal life:

We shall not all sleep [die], but we shall all be changed (v. 51).

Then, all the saved, both those who have been resurrected and those who are alive at His coming, will return to heaven with Christ:

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

This marks the beginning of the culminating act in the plan of salvation. The two pathways, one to eternal life, the other to eternal death, have been

chosen, and all who walk them are reaching their destinations.

But as the saved make their way to heaven, what about the lost? What happens to them at Christ’s second coming?

The Judgment Must Come First

While Christ’s return brings unfathomable joy to the saved, it strikes terror in the hearts of the lost. Those who have chosen sin over their Savior are overcome with dread, “[hiding] themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains” (Revelation 6:15) and crying out to them:

Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (vv. 16, 17).

While the voice of Christ is the breath of life to the saved, it is the death knell for those who have scorned it: “And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse” (19:21), that is, Christ. That sword is “the word of God[,] ... living and powerful, and sharper



than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). That living, powerful, and sharp word can mean only death to those who have chosen against eternal life, for "with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:4). At that last day, the lost who are still living will die; the lost who are already dead will simply stay that way. But this is not the final end yet: The judgment must come first.

The Millennium

After Jesus' second coming, the earth is left desolate, without a single living human being on it:

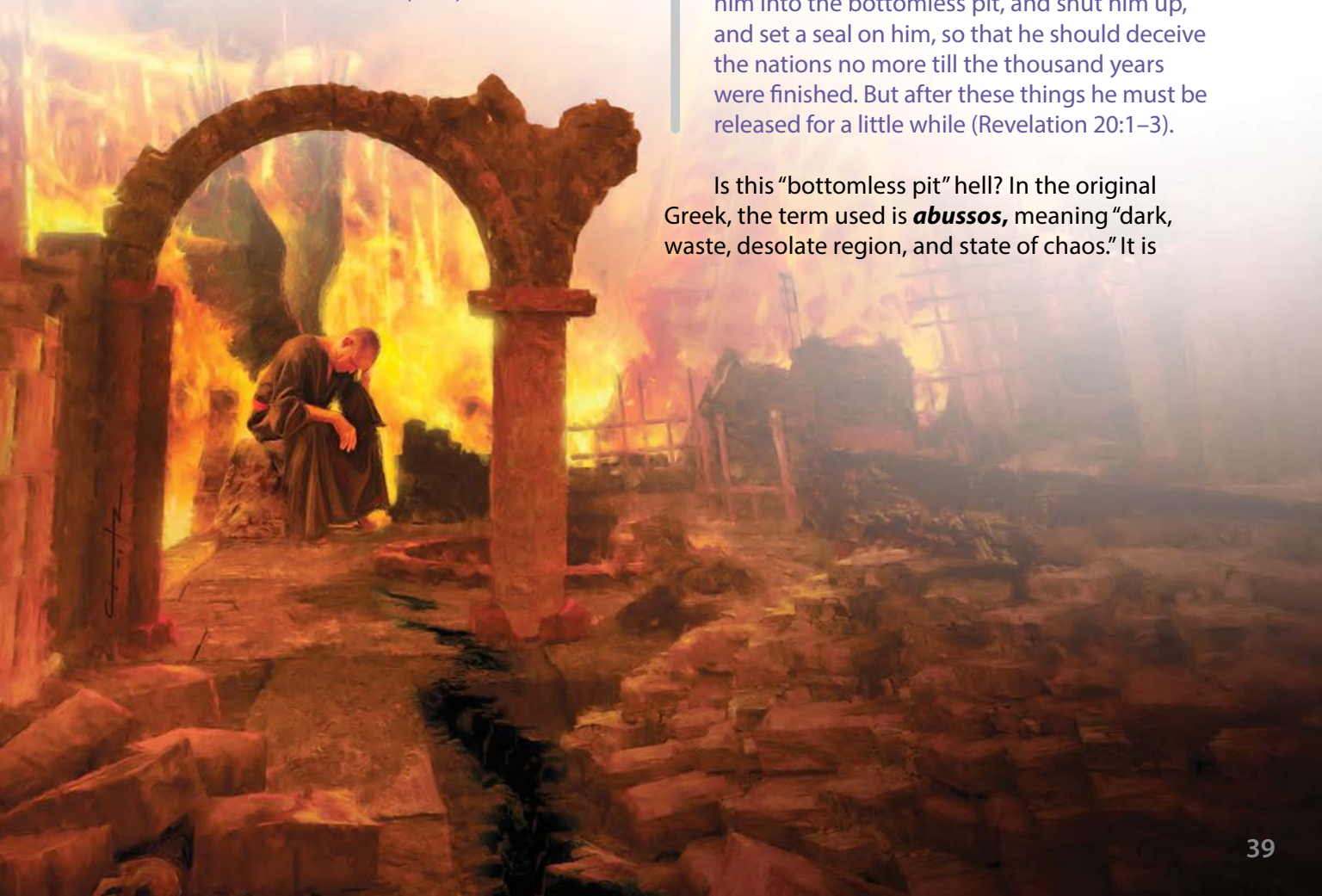
At that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground (Jeremiah 25:33).

Indeed there was no man (4:25).

But there is still Satan. The apostle John records:

I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while (Revelation 20:1–3).

Is this "bottomless pit" hell? In the original Greek, the term used is **abussos**, meaning "dark, waste, desolate region, and state of chaos." It is



the equivalent of the Old Testament word used in Genesis 1:2 and Jeremiah 4:23 when describing the earth as “without form, and void.” The “bottomless pit” is not hell—it is the earth in a state of disorder. In other words, the second coming of Jesus reduces the world to what it was before the Creation.

It is this emptiness in which the devil is imprisoned. And his angels are held there with him (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). There is no more damage they can do; there is no one left they can deceive. While the saved are in heaven and the unsaved lay dead on the earth, the devil and his demons must live with themselves for a thousand years.

1,000 Years in Heaven

Meanwhile, what are the people of God doing in heaven?

The apostle John describes: “They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4). He further explains, “I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them.” Who will the saved judge? The apostle Paul explains:

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

Imagine being in heaven and discovering that a loved one whom you expected to be there is missing. You would naturally wonder why. The saints will be able to review the lives of every person and ask every inquiry as to the judgment made. All questions will be laid to rest with open and honest answers.

So, we have learned that during the 1,000 years:

- The saved of all generations are alive and well in heaven with Jesus, judging and reigning with Him.
- The unsaved of all generations are dead, scattered over the face of the earth.
- Satan and his angels are bound to the earth, unable to cause harm to anyone else.

At this stage, according to the Bible, hell has not yet begun. So what happens next?

The Final Judgment

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:7, 8).

How is the devil once more able to do this? The answer is found in verse 5, which says,

The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.

The “rest of the dead” being referred to here are all of the unrighteous dead scattered upon the earth. Jesus refers to this as “the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29), the second resurrection.

In Revelation, we read that Christ, His people, and the glorious city descend to the earth (21:2). At the same time, the devil is “released for a little while” (20:3). Did those 1,000 years teach him anything? Did he spend the Millennium thinking about the many lives he had ruined, how many he had led to destruction? Will he finally be sorry for what he has done?





Everyone who has ever lived is present, the unsaved outside the city, the redeemed inside—but “all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10).

The Purpose of the Judgment

Why have the wicked been raised to stand before God’s throne if they are just going to be killed again? Just as the redeemed did during the Millennium, so will the wicked get their day in court.

When the books are opened, every sinner who has rejected the grace of God will have their account laid bare before them. They can look over every sinful act they committed, and they will

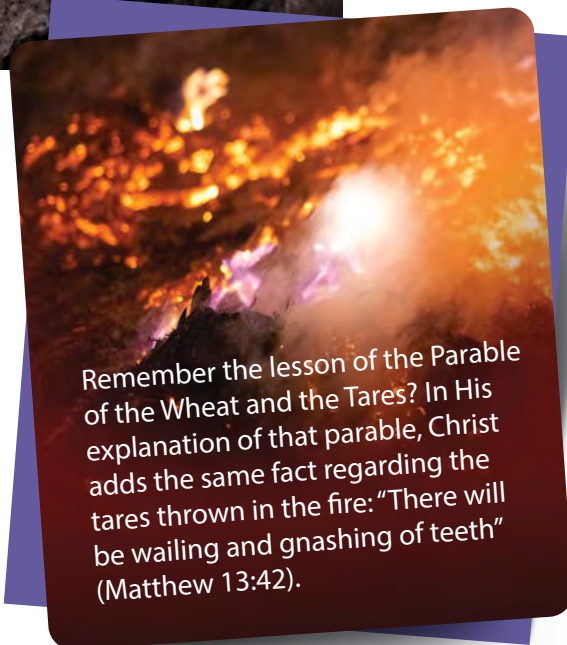
also see every opportunity God made for their salvation. Each unrepentant person will know the part they played in rejecting the mercy of the Lord and bringing pain and suffering to others for their own selfish ends.

“What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?” (Isaiah 5:4), the

It is here that we see the horrifying outcome of choosing sin. After all that time, after all that mercy, the devil still hates God. He still wants God’s throne. He still wants to murder his Creator. Using his deceptive tactics (v. 8), Satan rallies the wicked to “[surround] the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (v. 9), attempting to capture it by force.

But before they do, God commences the final judgment:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books (vv. 11–13).



Remember the lesson of the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares? In His explanation of that parable, Christ adds the same fact regarding the tares thrown in the fire: “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42).

Lord asks. The answer is, tragically, nothing. God did everything He could to grant salvation to all people; the lost simply did not want it. Jesus describes what would be happening at this time: “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:28).

Amazingly, not only the redeemed but the wicked also will render God’s verdict as just;



they will all confess that they have earned eternal death:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11).

As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Romans 14:11).

To Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath (Isaiah 45:23).

Finally, all will acknowledge: “Just and true are [His] ways” (Revelation 15:3) and “true and righteous are [His] judgments” (16:7). The loving character of the Creator will be affirmed and vindicated by everyone who has ever lived. Satan’s great accusations against God will dissolve—like smoke.

The Lake of Fire

It is then that the judgment will be complete: Christ will have “[brought] to light the hidden things of darkness and [revealed] the counsels of the hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5); “God will [have brought] every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). All that is left is the carrying out of the sentence:

And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ... Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:9, 15).

Significantly, hellfire will occur “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb,” Jesus Christ (14:10). Here, the culmination of the great conflict between good and evil will be in full view: on one side Christ, our Sacrifice, who paid our penalty of sin with His own life, and on the other, Satan, the cause of all sin. Then will be seen the result of choosing Christ, eternal life, versus the



Did you know that forest fires are often deliberately started by those wishing to prevent ... well, *forest fires*? Called “controlled burns,” these events are meticulously planned and carefully carried out to reduce naturally occurring fuels (brush, dead trees, etc.) that could trigger uncontrolled, destructive, and deadly wildfires. Just as controlled burns get rid of dangerous debris and keep a forest healthy, at the end of time, God will likewise start a careful and controlled burn to make the universe safe again.

Sin and Justice

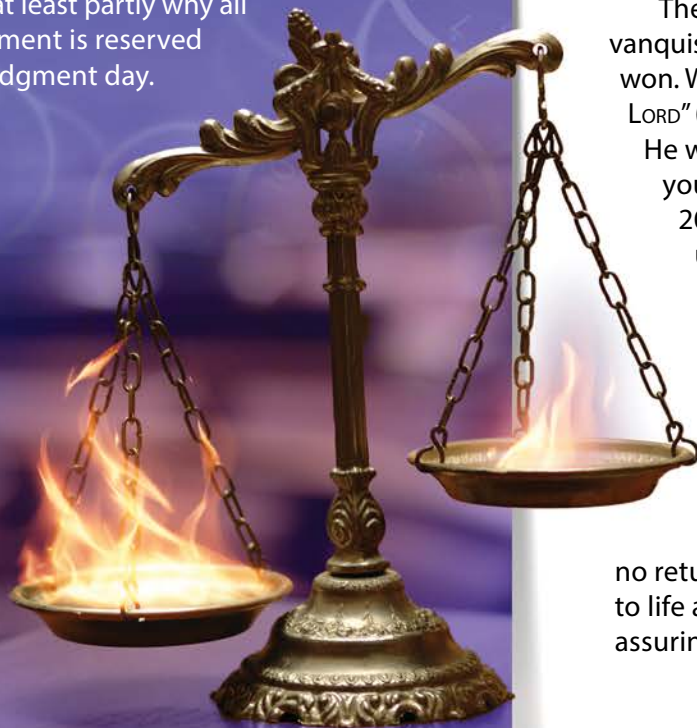
Would it make sense for an unrepentant thief in Old Testament times to suffer in hell for thousands of years longer than Adolf Hitler, who was responsible for murdering millions? The Bible is clear: The intensity and duration of hellfire will vary for each person according to their works and their knowledge:

Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is (1 Corinthians 3:13).

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

That servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few (Luke 12:47, 48).

Most certainly, Satan, the ultimate instigator of sin, will suffer the longest. This is at least partly why all punishment is reserved until judgment day.



result of choosing the devil, eternal death. The law will have been kept; its claims satisfied. The wages of sin will have been paid when the devil, the fallen angels, and all humans who rejected Christ's sacrifice are consumed and forever obliterated:

For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more (Psalm 37:10).

"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" (Malachi 4:1).



The adversary, Satan, will have been vanquished forever. Christ, our Savior, will have won. We will be able to say, "Deliverance is of the LORD" (Proverbs 21:31), "for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deuteronomy 20:4). Evil will never more stain God's universe: "Affliction will not rise up a second time" (Nahum 1:9). God destroys both death *and* the grave forever, for, as it is written, "the last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). Indeed, "then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Revelation 20:14), the death from which there is no return, the death that will never come back to life again. Sin will never live again. What an assuring promise! ■

Part 6

After Hell:
A New Earth



Just as the devil has deceived people regarding the nature of hell, he has tried to confuse us about the reality of paradise. How many picture heaven as a boring eternity spent sitting on a cloud, strumming a harp, and with a halo on our head?

If the devil can portray our future home as a surreal or even ghostly existence, a place that limits freedom and destroys individuality, then maybe we won't want to go there; maybe we'll spend all our time and efforts and resources trying to make our own version of heaven here on the earth.

But the Bible says otherwise. According to the Word of God, paradise will be every bit as tangible as our planet now is and also infinitely better.

Paradise, or the new earth, is what humanity will call home. People often merge the idea of heaven and the new earth because so many believe that we go to heaven when we die and stay there forever. But as we learned, this is not the case. While the redeemed will be in heaven with very real bodies for 1,000 years, after all sin has been consumed and removed, God's promise of "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13) will finally be realized. In the last pages of the Bible, the apostle John explains:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. ... Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:1, 5).



From the ashes of the purified world and before the wondering eyes of the redeemed, God will restore Eden, recreating the world into a paradise: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17).

Eternal Joys

What will we do on the new earth? With a God of infinite creativity, we can be certain there will be no shortage of fascinating things to experience. For starters, Isaiah 65 says that we will "build houses and inhabit them[,] ... plant vineyards and

enjoy the work of [our] hands" (vv. 21, 22).

In this new Eden, "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together" (11:6); "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (65:25); and "a little child shall lead them" (11:6). And we will take up our duties that God gave to



Adam in the first Eden (Genesis 1:28).

We will travel and explore, enjoy music, visit loved ones, and make new friends. We will enjoy getting to know people from all times in history and



all parts of the world. Best of all, we will get to spend time with Jesus, the One who gave His life so that we could have this life!

The New Jerusalem

There will also be a magnificent city, a special home for the redeemed. Jesus told His disciples that this city is being built in heaven:

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:2, 3).

The name of this wonderful house is "the New Jerusalem" (Revelation 3:12). It is this same city "which comes down out of heaven" with Christ and all the redeemed at the end of the Millennium:

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:2, 3).

This is the greatest joy of all. God will truly be with us for all time! This is the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy given to Christ on earth: "Call His name Immanuel, ... 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23). Revelation 21:23 says, "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."

Can you imagine living in a place where there's no loneliness, tragedy, sickness, or death, where the inhabitants all live in harmony with one another, and where we get to see Jesus face to face? This is the full intent of the plan of salvation—restoration of the life Christ always wanted us to have, a life of peace and goodness, an abundant life.



How Can I Know I'll Be in Paradise?

You've made a huge first step by learning the Bible truth about hell, guarding your heart and mind from the devil's deception about God's character. But if you're worried that you're not saved, here's what you should know:

1. God Loves You

"God is love" (1 John 4:8). The Bible says our Creator personally cares about you: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God" (3:1). He wants you to have a happy life (Jeremiah 29:11); and He wants a meaningful and joyful relationship with you, but ...



2. Your Sin Separates You from God

Our planet was created perfectly. There was no death or pain. But sin broke everything, including your connection with God: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2). You're not alone—everyone has broken God's law of love: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This means we are all doomed to die: "The wages of sin is death" (6:23). Sin is serious because it cuts us off from the Source of life. However ...

3. Jesus Reconnects You with God

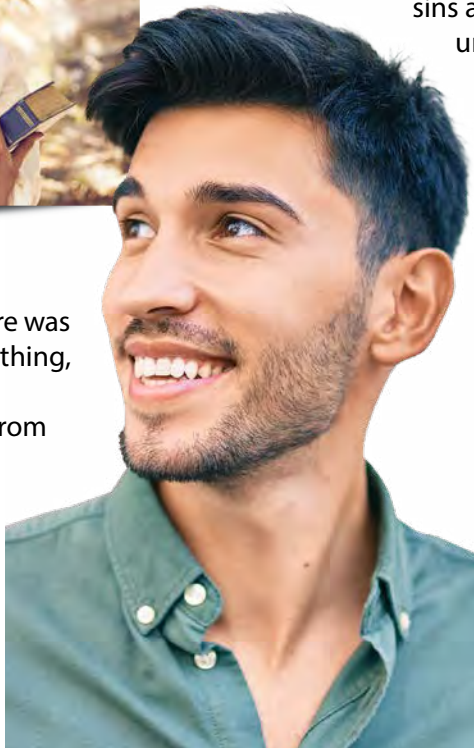
Because God loves you, Jesus took upon Himself the wages of sin so that you would not die

and would instead live eternally: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through Christ's sacrifice, you are restored to a life-giving relationship with Him and given a new heart to live a life of love and peace. Jesus' offer of salvation is not something we can buy—it is a gift. And as with all gifts, you can either refuse or accept it.

4. How to Accept Jesus into Your Life

If you would like to receive Christ and His gift into your life right now, follow these simple steps:

- Confess to God that you are a sinner and repent. "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Luke 5:32).
- Believe Jesus died for you. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).
- Believe you are forgiven. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).
- Believe you have eternal life. "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).
- Now live your new life by faith every day! "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).



If you've accepted Christ into your life, you are a citizen of heaven and the New Jerusalem. So, begin to live out your life under the principles of God's kingdom today! ■

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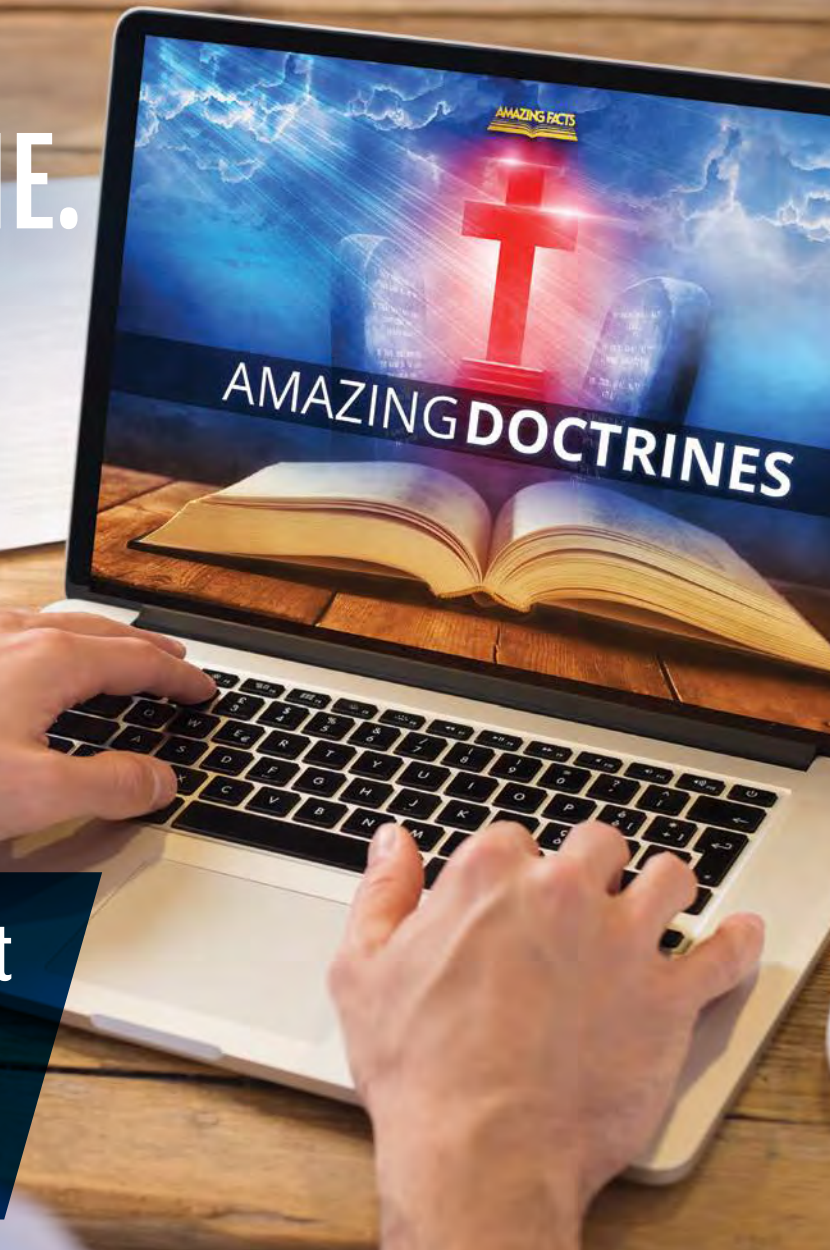
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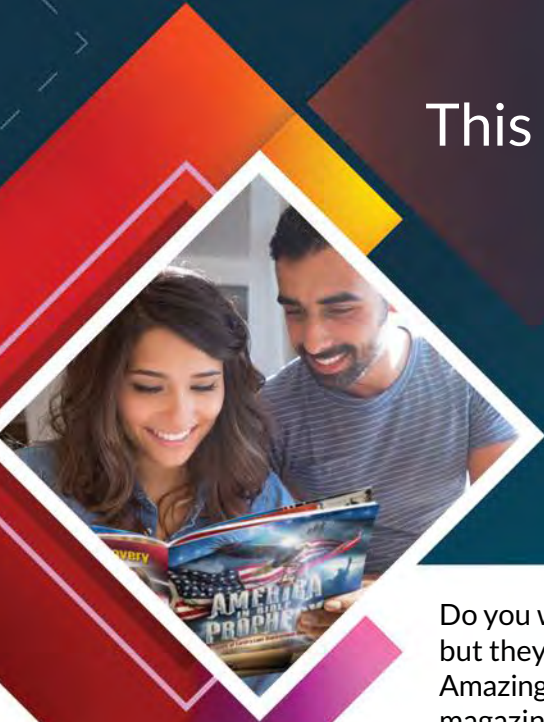
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