

Questions About the Difference between Hell and the Lake of Fire

By Pastor Ed Anderson

What's the difference between Hell and the Lake of Fire?

Answer:

This is a vital and often misunderstood topic. The Bible makes a clear distinction between **Hell (Hades/Sheol)** and the **Lake of Fire (Gehenna/Second Death)** — and understanding the difference reveals God's justice, mercy, and ultimate plan for judgment and restoration.

1. HELL (Greek: Hades / Hebrew: Sheol)

What it is:

- **Temporary** holding place for the dead.
- The **grave** or **realm of the dead**, where the wicked await final judgment.
- In Old Testament Hebrew: **Sheol** = the grave / pit.
- In New Testament Greek: **Hades** = same idea — not eternal torment, but unconscious sleep or waiting place.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 – “For the living know that they shall die: but the **dead know not anything...**”

Psalms 6:5 – “In death there is **no remembrance** of You...”

Acts 2:31 – “[Jesus’] soul was not left in **hell** (Hades), neither did his flesh see corruption.”

Key Points:

- Not a place of active torment.
- Not the final punishment.
- Often misunderstood as a fiery place — but that image more accurately belongs to **Gehenna** or the **Lake of Fire**.

2. THE LAKE OF FIRE (Gehenna / Second Death)

What it is:

- The **final, eternal punishment** for sin and rebellion — **after the final judgment**.
- Described in **Revelation 20** as the “**second death**.”
- A place of **complete destruction**, not eternal life in torment.

Revelation 20:14–15 – “And death and hell were cast into the **lake of fire**. This is the **second death**.”

Matthew 10:28 – “Fear Him who is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna)**.”

Malachi 4:1 – “...the day comes that shall burn as an oven... all the proud... shall be stubble.”

Key Points:

- This is **after the resurrection and final judgment**.
- The wicked (unrepentant) are destroyed **completely**, not tortured forever.
- Satan, demons, death, hell — all are cast into the Lake of Fire.
- It's the **final end of sin**, not its endless continuation.

3. What Happens to “Hell” in the End?

“**Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.**” — *Revelation 20:14*

- Hell (Hades/Sheol) is **emptied** at the resurrection.
- The **unsaved dead are judged** (Revelation 20:12–13).
- Then, both **death and hell are destroyed forever** in the Lake of Fire.

This means that **Hell is not eternal**. It is **destroyed** in the end. Only the **Lake of Fire** — the “second death” — is final.

4. Why the Distinction Matters

Concept	Hell (Hades/Sheol)	Lake of Fire (Second Death)
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Timing	Now (before final judgment)	After final judgment
Duration	Temporary	Eternal (final)
Purpose	Holding place for the dead	Final destruction of sin and sinners
Who is there?	All who die, righteous and wicked (until resurrection)	Only those not written in the Book of Life
Biblical Picture	Grave / sleep / silence	Fire / final end / judgment

Common Misunderstandings

- **Hell ≠ Lake of Fire** — They are different in **time, purpose, and nature**.
- **Souls aren't burning in hell now** — the Bible consistently teaches that the **dead sleep** until resurrection (John 5:28–29; Daniel 12:2).
- **Judgment is future** — punishment doesn't occur until **after** the books are opened and judgment is rendered (Revelation 20:12).

Conclusion

Hell is the temporary state of the dead — a waiting place (like sleep) until resurrection.

The Lake of Fire is the final judgment — the second death — where sin, death, and all rebellion against God are permanently destroyed.

“For the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is **eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.” — *Romans 6:23*

You don't want to just “not go to hell.”

You want to **receive eternal life** — and that only comes through Jesus.