

A Discussion of Hell

Hell is a subject which is rarely off of the lips of everyday people. “Damn” and “Hell” are two of the most popular expressions in use. In Christian circles, the image of Hell is often used to motivate, to caution, and to stimulate fear. Yet, in spite of this I have found that very few people have given much serious thought to what the Bible says about Hell. I suppose that is understandable, because the mind seems to naturally shrink from the subject.

A TECHNICAL DISCUSSION OF HELL

To begin with, the word “Hell” does not even appear in the Bible. “Hell” is a Teutonic word which has been used in English translations of the New Testament instead of the Hebrew derived word “Gehenna” or the Greek word “Hades.” As it is typically used, “Hell” is a term which speaks of the place of separation from God in the hereafter. In actuality, the Bible describes several places which match parts of our conception of Hell.

Some of the Bible words which are commonly associated with the concept of Hell are: Hades, Sheol, Gehenna, the Grave, Torments, the Abyss, and the Lake of Fire.

The terms Hades, Gehenna, Sheol, or the Grave

The Greek word Hades ᾍδης {hah'-dace} derives from the Greek words meaning “without light” and was used in Greek religion to speak of the infernal regions, a dark and dismal place in the very depths of the earth, the common receptacle of disembodied spirits. It appears 12 times in the New Testament. It is sometimes translated “Torments.” The Greek Hebraism γέεννα {gheh'-en-nah} was derived from the name of the location (the valley of Hinnom) of the garbage pits outside of Jerusalem. There was dumped the garbage of Jerusalem and the fires of the incinerators never went out. It also appears 12 times in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל {sheh-ole'} is used to speak of “Hell.” It appears 65 times and is sometimes translated “the grave.” The word implied “the place of no return.” One Hebrew word also translated “the grave” is בֹּרַי {bor}. In Acts 2:27 Luke uses the Greek word Hades to translate the Hebrew word Sheol in Psalm 16:10. It originally contained several locations which served different functions. It was a place of separation from God.

Before the Resurrection of Christ the place known as Hades, Gehenna, Sheol, or the Grave contained areas of blessing and areas of suffering.

JOHN 5:28-29 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when *all who are in their graves* I will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

1 The Greek word here is μνημείον {mnay-mi'-on} which is literally a place of remembrance and came to be understood as a grave or tomb.

JOB 17:13-16 (*Spoken by Job*) If the only home I hope for is the *grave*,² if I spread out my bed in darkness, if I say to corruption, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'My mother' or 'My sister,' where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of *death*?³ Will we descend together into the dust?"

It may be argued that Hades, Gehenna, or Sheol is in the Depths Of The Earth:

JOB 11:7-9 (*Spoken by Zophar*) "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens--what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of ~~the grave~~ (*sheol*)--what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.

Ezekiel 26:20-21 Then I will bring you (Tyre) down with those who go down to *the pit*,⁴ to the people of long ago. I will make you dwell in the earth below, as in ancient ruins, with those who go down to *the pit*, and you will not return or take your place in the land of the living..

Death is another name for Hades, Gehenna, or Sheol:

Revelation 20:13-15 "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and *death* ⁵ and *Hades* gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then *death* and *Hades* were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Revelation 1:17-18 "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And *I hold the keys of death* ⁶ and *Hades*.'"

Romans 6:9 "For we know that since Christ was raised *from the dead*,⁷ he cannot die again; *death* ⁸ no longer has mastery over him."

"The pit" is another name for Death, Hades, Gehenna, or Sheol:

Ezekiel 26:20-21 "Then I will bring you (Tyre) down with those who go down to the pit,⁹ to the people of long ago. I will make you dwell in the earth below, as in ancient ruins, with those who go down to the pit, ¹⁰ and you will not return or take your place in the land of the living. I will

² שְׁאוֹל {*sheh-ole*'}

³ שְׁאוֹל {*sheh-ole*'}

⁴ The Hebrew word בֹּרַי {*bore*} which means "pit" or "dungeon."

⁵ The Greek word θάνατος {*than'-at-os*} which refers to the state of death.

⁶ The Greek word θάνατος {*than'-at-os*} which refers to the state of death.

⁷ The Greek word νεκρός {*nek-ros*'} which refers to a corpse.

⁸ The Greek word θάνατος {*than'-at-os*} which refers to the state of death.

⁹ The Hebrew word בֹּרַי {*bore*} which means "pit" or "dungeon."

bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

Ezekiel 32:18-25 “Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt and consign to the earth below both her and the daughters of mighty nations, with those who go down to *the pit*. 11 Say to them, ‘Are you more favored than others? Go down and be laid among the uncircumcised.’ They will fall among those killed by the sword. The sword is drawn; let her be dragged off with all her hordes. From within the grave the mighty leaders will say of Egypt and her allies, ‘They have come down and they lie with the uncircumcised, with those killed by the sword. Assyria is there with her whole army; she is surrounded by the graves of all her slain, all who have fallen by the sword. Their *graves* are in the depths of *the pit* 12 and her army lies around her *grave*. All who had spread terror in the land of the living are slain, fallen by the sword. Elam is there, with all her hordes around her grave. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword. All who had spread terror in the land of the living went down uncircumcised *to the earth below*. They bear their shame with those who go down to *the pit*. A bed is made for her among the slain, with all her hordes around her grave. All of them are uncircumcised, killed by the sword. Because their terror had spread in the land of the living, they bear their shame with those who go down to *the pit*; 13 they are laid among the slain.”

Zechariah 9:9-11 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, *I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit*. 14

The categories of Hades, Sheol:

Before the resurrection, all of mankind that had died and some of the fallen angels live in Hades (Greek) or Sheol (Hebrew) or Gehenna (a term that Jesus used).

There were within Hell several categories.

Gehenna or Torments

This is the place where unbelievers who rejected the grace of God reside awaiting the Last Judgement.

10 The Hebrew word בֹּרַי {bore} which means “pit” or “dungeon.”

11 The Hebrew word בֹּרַי {bore} which means “pit” or “dungeon.”

12 The Hebrew word בֹּרַי {bore} which means “pit” or “dungeon.”

13 The Hebrew word בֹּרַי {bore} which means “pit” or “dungeon.”

14 The Hebrew word בֹּרַי {bore} which means “pit” or “dungeon.”

Luke 16:23-28 “In hell (*hades*), where he was *in torment*,¹⁵ he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony¹⁶ in this fire.’ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.¹⁷ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to *this place of torment*.’”¹⁸

Matthew 23:33 “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell (*gehenna*)?”

The word “gehenna” came from the garbage pits outside of Jerusalem at a place called the Valley of Hinnom where the fires never went out. The term speaks to me, not as much of fire as of corruption and waste.

Hell is also called the Abyss and Tartarus

The fallen Angels from Genesis 6 are in chains there:

2 Peter 2:4 “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell,¹⁹ putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;”

Jude 1:6 “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode,²⁰ He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,

Jesus went to preach to the fallen Angels from Genesis 6 who were imprisoned there.

1 PETER 3:18-20 “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison²¹ who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

¹⁵ The Greek word βάσανος {bas'-an-os} which means “broken” or “brought low.”

¹⁶ The Greek word ὀδυνάω {od-oo-nah'-o} which means “broken” or “brought low.”

¹⁷ The Greek word ὀδυνάω {od-oo-nah'-o} which means “broken” or “brought low.”

¹⁸ The Greek word βάσανος {bas'-an-os} which means “broken” or “brought low.”

¹⁹ The Greek word ταρταρόω {tar-tar-o'-o}. In Greek legend it referred to the deepest and darkest region of Hades.

²⁰ “Proper abode” is literally ἀρχή {ar-khay'} which means “first,” or “beginning.” This is often translated “first estate.” This probably just indicates that these fallen angels came down to earth from the heavens (universe) which was their proper abode.

²¹ The Greek word φυλακή {foo-lak-ay'} which means “prison” or “a place under guard.”

Demons were afraid of being imprisoned there on the word of Jesus:

Luke 8:30-31 “Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Legion,’ he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.” 22

They will be let go for time during the Tribulation.

Revelation 9:1-3 “The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.”

Satan will be cast into it for 1000 years after the second coming of Christ.

Revelation 20:3 “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.”

Paradise & Abraham’s Bosom are the Same Place & were Part of Hell (the Underworld):

Prior to Christ’s resurrection, this was evidently located in the underworld and all believers who died from Adam until the death of Christ were kept there. Subsequent to Christ’s resurrection, Paradise, (at least the people therein) was relocated to Heaven. Part of Jesus’ time between His death and His resurrection was spent in Paradise.

Abraham’s bosom

Luke 16:19-26 “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s bosom.²³ The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in *in torment*,²⁴ he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and

22 The Greek word ἄβυσσος {ab'-us-so's} which means “without bottom.” There is no lower or more secure place. In the ancient world, the most secure place to keep a criminal was in the deepest dungeon.

23 Bosom seems to refer to a place of possession and love.

24 The Greek word βάσανος {bas'-an-os} which means “broken” or “brought low.”

send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony 25 in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’”

Paradise

What Jesus said to the dying thief who had repented and believed indicating he was going to paradise which could only have been Abraham’s bosom.

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him (*the dying thief who had just declared his faith*), “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

According to Peter (*who had talked extensively with Jesus after His resurrection*), part of Jesus’ time between His death and His resurrection was spent in Paradise which had been in Hell.

Acts 2:23-31 “This man (*Jesus*) was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him: “‘I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave (*Hebrew – sheol, Greek - Hades*), nor will you let your Holy One see decay.²⁶ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’ “Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave (*Hebrew – sheol, Greek - Hades*), nor did his body see decay.

The following verses indicate that Paradise and Abraham’s bosom (the people there) are now in heaven and will always be where Jesus is.

Psalms 68:17-18 “The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands;²⁷ the Lord [has come] from Sinai 28 into his sanctuary. When you (*Jesus*) ascended on high,²⁹

25 The Greek word ὀδυνάω {od-oo-nah'-o} which means “broken” or “brought low.”

26 Psalm 16:8-10

27 This agrees with the numbers of angels described in Revelation 5:11 and Daniel 7:10.

28 Ephesians 4:8-10 identifies verse 18 with the ascension of Jesus Christ. I believe this verse refers to the return of Christ as High Priest to Jerusalem to fulfill the image of the second goat on the day of atonement. I believe that it is quite probable that the children of Israel who are protected and fed in the desert during the last 3 ½ years of the Great Tribulation are kept at Mt.

you led captives 30 in your train; you received gifts from for men, even from for the rebellious 31-- that you, O LORD God, might dwell there."³²

HOSEA 13:14 "I will ransom them from the power of the grave (*sheol*); I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?"

Revelation 1:18 "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

2 Corinthians 12:3-4a "And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows-- was caught up to paradise."

Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

Zechariah 9: 11 "As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, *I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit*."

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."³³

What is the Lake of Fire?

Sinai. These are the people who were saved by the ministry of the two great witnesses and prophets of Israel, Moses and Elijah. When Christ returns he will go first to Mt. Sinai with His angels, where both Moses and Elijah were tested, and will pick up His people. They will travel in the same fashion as Elijah did, as Moses finally gets to lead the children of Israel, both natural and grafted in, into the promised land.

29 This is an example of what occurs often in prophecy. The ascension of Christ is something that is future to the time of this Psalm, yet it is spoken of here as already accomplished, as something past.

30 The captives here were those that were imprisoned in Paradise because they had not yet been ransomed by the work of Jesus Christ.

31 Alternatively translated "received gifts for men, yes even for the rebellious." This agrees with the sense in which it is used in Ephesians 4:8.

32 The sense is that Christ would give gifts to his Church, that they could function and represent Him.

³³ *Isaiah 61:1-2a*

After Satan's last rebellion at the end of the Millennium will come the Last Judgment. Then Hell, which is also called Death and Hades, the grave, and the Pit, and includes Gehenna, the Abyss, but no longer Paradise, is emptied, judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire which is also called the Second Death.

REVELATION 20:7-15 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented 34 day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death 35 and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Isaiah 24:21-22 “In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; 36 they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.”

Revelation 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Some Thoughts on Hellfire and Damnation Preaching

Early in my Christian life, I encountered not a few preachers who presented Hell as a place where God “got even” with sinners. I have seen Hell used to present God as a vengeful,

34 The Greek word here is βασανίζω {bas-an-id'-zo}. It means to be broken or brought low. Below are the uses of that word.

1) to test (metals) by the touchstone, which is a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with either metal

2) to question by applying torture

3) to torture

4) to vex with grievous pains (of body or mind), to torment

5) to be harassed, distressed

a) of those who at sea are struggling with a head wind

35 The Greek word θάνατος {than'-at-os} which refers to the state of death.

36 The Hebrew word בֹּרַח {bore} which means “pit” or “dungeon.”

vindictive being. And the primary appeal of their message seemed to be a terror of God. It sometimes seemed as if the love of God appeared secondarily if at all in their appeal.

Yet the main purpose of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ was to demonstrate the love of God in ways that we could understand. When Moses and the children of Israel stood in front of the smoke and fire of God at Mt. Sinai, God had plenty of tools at His disposal to terrify. It was at that point the God revealed His greater plan to raise up “the prophet” who was like them. That was Jesus Christ, the “son of man.”

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.’ The LORD said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.’”

1 JOHN 4:9-10 “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

My study of the Bible shows a merciful and loving God, who has done everything possible to keep us in His presence forever. His death on the cross demonstrating His great love for us is the great motivator to come to Him.

God is not willing that anyone should be condemned to hell!

Psalms 145:9 “The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”

Psalms 145:17 “The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.”

Hosea 7:13-14 “Woe to them, because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against me! I long to redeem them but they speak lies against me. They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail upon their beds.”

Matthew 18:14 “In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”

1 Timothy 2:3-4 “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

2 PETER 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Lamentations 3:33 “For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”

Ezekiel 18:23 “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”

Romans 11:32 “For God has bound all men over to disobedience ³⁷so that he may have mercy on them all.”

Acts 17:26-27 “From one man he (God) made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”

Judgement is Still a Part of God’s Message.

However, God has given us free will, and if we reject Him, we are free to leap into the void, trusting to ourselves. The result is judgement which is still part of the message of the Gospel that God wants us to know when we are considering the direction we will go.

Paul made it part of his message to the unbelieving Jews in Rome.

Romans 2:5 “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”

Part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the world is to convict men of the judgment to come against sin.

John 16:7-11 “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;³⁸ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;³⁹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”⁴⁰

37 That is we are bound to the disobedience of Adam, that we might be saved by the obedience of the Son of Adam. 1 Corinthians 15:22 “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

38 All sins have been paid for except the sin of unbelief in Christ.

39 The perfect righteousness of God had been truly on display for the first time in the life of Christ. After He is gone, the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ’s righteousness in the hearts of men.

40 After the death of Christ, the ultimate judgment of Satan and all who belong to his world is assured. That world will be fairly warned.

Some Other Scriptures and Observations about Hell.

There follows some of the descriptions the Bible has about Hell. I feel obliged to observe that it seems to me that many of the descriptions of Hell seem to be contradictory. How can a place that is burning with fire be dark? How can worms live in fire? How can people be in the lake of fire, yet outside of the Heavenly City? It seems to me that like the descriptions of heaven in the Bible, these are figurative descriptions. They are God's way of showing us that Hell is a horrible place that shares some characteristics with fire, darkness, and being worm eaten and excluded. Otherwise I will let the verses speak for themselves.

Hell is Described as Darkness

Job 10:21b-22 (*Spoken by Job*) “--- the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness.”

Matthew 8:12 “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 22:11-14 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. ‘Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ‘For many are invited, but few are chosen.’”

Matthew 25:30 “And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!”

JUDE 1:6 “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home--these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

JUDE 1:13 “They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.”

It seems obvious to me that darkness is meant to convey the opposite of light. Light in scripture speaks of God's truth and the revelation of who God is:

John 1:1-9 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that

through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”

Psalms 27:1a “The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear?”

Psalms 36:9 “For with you (*the LORD*) is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”

Psalms 43:3 “Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.”

Psalms 89:15 “Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.”

Isaiah 60:19 “The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.”

On the other hand, darkness would seem to speak of being shut out from the presence of God.

Hell is Described as a Fiery Furnace

Matthew 13:41-43 “The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Matthew 13:49-50 “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”⁴¹

Hell is Described as Burning Sulfur

Isaiah 30:33 “Topheth 42 has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.”

41 Acts 7:54 Indicates that “gnashing of teeth” was a figure of speech that indicated anger and frustration. Acts 7:54 “When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him (Steven).” See also Job 16:9, Psalms 35:16..

42 The Hebrew Word here is תֹּפֶת {tof-teh’}. Often interpreted as “place of fire.” It is connected with the valley of Ben Hinnom which is referenced in Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 7:31 “They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.” The place was a figure for Hell. By Jesus’ day it had become “Gehenna.”

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

Revelation 20:10 “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Psalms 11:6 “On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.”

Most volcanoes emit large amounts of super-heated sulfur which catches fire on contact with the air. Thus “burning sulfur” connected with the idea of hell being an underworld.

Described as a Lake Of Fire

Revelation 20:1 “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.”

Described as the Second Death

Revelation 2:11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”

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

Described as Fire

MATTHEW 3:12 “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

MATTHEW 25:41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

DANIEL 7:11 “Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.”

Described as Perishing

John 3:16-18 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” *(Note: If going to heaven is “not perishing”, and not being “condemned” then going to hell is perishing and being condemned.)*

1 Corinthians 1:18 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” *(Note: The opposite of being saved is perishing.)*

2 Corinthians 2:15 “For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”

Described as Fire, Sulfur, Darkness, Perishing, and Terror

Job 18:5-21 *(Spoken by Bildad)* “The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out; the flame of his fire stops burning. The light in his tent becomes dark; the lamp beside him goes out. The vigor of his step is weakened; his own schemes throw him down. His feet thrust him into a net and he wanders into its mesh. A trap seizes him by the heel; a snare holds him fast. A noose is hidden for him on the ground; a trap lies in his path. Terrors startle him on every side and dog his every step. Calamity is hungry for him; disaster is ready for him when he falls. It eats away parts of his skin; death’s firstborn devours his limbs. He is torn from the security of his tent and marched off to the king of terrors. Fire resides in his tent; burning sulfur is scattered over his dwelling. His roots dry up below and his branches wither above. The memory of him perishes from the earth; he has no name in the land. He is driven from light into darkness and is banished from the world. He has no offspring or descendants among his people, no survivor where once he lived. Men of the west are appalled at his fate; men of the east are seized with horror. Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man; such is the place of one who knows not God.”

Described as a Fire Unfanned (I.E. Not Made Worse by God) Darkness and Terror

Job 20:25-27 *(Spoken by Zophar)* “Terrors will come over him; total darkness lies in wait for his treasures. A fire unfanned will consume him and devour what is left in his tent. The heavens will expose his guilt; the earth will rise up against him.”

Psalms 73:16-19 “When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!”

Described as a State Of Mind

James 3:6 “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

Described as the Result of Satan’s State of Mind

Ezekiel 28:17-18 “Your (*Satan’s*) heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching.”

Isaiah 1:31 “The mighty ~~man~~ one (*Satan*) will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire.”

Isaiah 33:11 “You (*Satan*) conceive chaff, you give birth to straw; your breath is a fire that consumes you.”

Described as Being Excluded from the Heavenly Jerusalem

Revelation 22:14-15 “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

Described as Being Excluded from the Presence of The Lord

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.”

MATTHEW 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Described as Destruction by Worms, Maggots, and Moths

ISAIAH 14:11 “All your (*Satan’s*) pomp has been brought down to the grave, along with the noise of your harps; maggots are spread out beneath you and worms cover you.

ISAIAH 66:24 “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

Isaiah 50:9 “It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.”

Described as Death (2nd Death), Decay, and Darkness

Psalms 49:13-19 “This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. Selah Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. Selah Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. Though while he lived he counted himself blessed-- and men praise you when you prosper-- his soul will go to the generation of his fathers, who will never again see light.”⁴³

Described while Using Historical Names as Symbolic of Satan and Christ

Isaiah 22:15-22 “This is what the Lord, the LORD Almighty, says: ‘Go, say to this steward, to Shebna, (*type of Satan*) who is in charge of the palace: What are you doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a grave for yourself here, hewing your grave on the height and chiseling your resting place in the rock? “Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, O you mighty man. He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you into a large country. There you will die and there your splendid chariots will remain-- you disgrace to your master’s house! I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position. In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim (*who God will raise up*) son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”

Described as Waterless

Zechariah 9:11b “I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.”

⁴³ This last verse is the ESV translation.

In Luke 16:23-28 the thing Lazarus wanted most was water saying: “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.”

In Scripture water is often used to speak of the healing and hope that comes from God.

Psalms 42:1-2 “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”

Psalms 23:1-3b “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.”

Psalms 46:4 “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.”

John 7:38 “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

John 22:1-3b “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.”

It seems to me that the description of Hell as dry and waterless describes the separation from the LORD and the healing and hope that is found only in Him.

Reconciling the Love of God with the Concept of Hell

Historic orthodoxy has always maintained both that human souls will eternally endure and that their destiny is irrevocably sealed at death. It seems that because some feel that God’s victory cannot be complete until there is the ultimate extinction of evil, this eternal state of affairs cannot exist forever. Therefor there has developed the advocacy of two other general positions as to the eternal outcome of lost souls.

Universalism. This is the view that affirms that in the fullness of time all souls will be released from the penalties of sin and restored to God. I suppose that part of the reason for this view is that it seems inconceivable to us that after a few thousand years separated from God, that those in the Lake of Fire would not be ripe to respond to any act of grace from God, and receive His love. We know that God is not willing that any should perish, so it seems that God would find a way. However, the Bible teaches a principal that the souls of men (and angels) get progressively harder every time they reject God’s grace. Certainly, the idea that the convincing revelation of the truth of God’s word would bring about a change of heart will be disproved at the end of the

Millennium when much of humanity will join Satan in a final rebellion against God. In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man Jesus makes the point that if you won't accept the Word of God spoken by the Holy Spirit, nothing would convince you. John Milton put it well, when in his poem "Paradise Lost" he put in the mouth of Satan the words: "I would rather reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven." Each resident of the Lake of Fire has decided that he is his own God, and has in effect made his own decision to reign in Hell. It is possible that their hearts will not get softer, but harder over the millennia. We certainly see in this world evidence of that kind of mindset in people who persist in self destructive lifestyles in spite of the fact it destroys their happiness and health.

Annihilationism. This point of view may take three main forms:

- (1) that all human beings inevitably cease to exist altogether at death (materialist);
- (2) that, while human beings are naturally mortal, God imparts to the redeemed the gift of immortality and allows the rest of humanity to sink into nothingness (conditional immortality);
- (3) that man, being created immortal, fulfills his destiny in salvation, while the reprobates fall into nonexistence either through a direct act of God or through the corrosive effect of evil (annihilationism proper). I suppose that this view derives from the idea that since it would be kinder of God to allow their existence to cease, he would do so. For me there are two objections to this view. One, we do not know that it would be kinder. Two, it may be that in creating mankind in the image of God, immortality was part of the package as well as free will.

In my view, the orthodox position is correct, although I make that judgement with this warning. The Bible positively asserts the existence of the Lake of Fire and judgement, it says very little within the verses dealing with judgment that state that residence for all is permanent.

It says that Satan and the beast and the false prophet are in permanent residence of such judgement.

Revelation 20:10 "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night **for ever and ever.**"

On the other hand, at the end of the same chapter, it omits to make the same statement about the remainder of those thrown in the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:13-15 "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Also, it must be admitted that the Greek words translated “for ever and ever” is literally “eons unto eons.”⁴⁴ An eon is an age. Does this mean “eternal” as we understand it, or does it just mean “ages and ages.” (a very long time)?

The Bible is also specific as to the punishment of those unbelievers who are on the earth at the second coming of the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10a “Seeing it is right with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and for you who are troubled, rest, along with us. This will happen at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Who shall pay the penalty of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.” KJV, Darby, RST

Again here when we have the translation “everlasting destruction” we have in the Greek literally destruction unto the eons. Since this is the same word which is used when speaking of “everlasting life” I think it is rational to assume that our “everlasting life” and their “everlasting destruction and death” are parallels. However, beyond these two passages, we really don’t have any other verses that I have found that throw light on what God might be able to do in the future. God has not chosen to give us any more information.

Even if we decide to act on information that God has not clearly revealed and decide to take the view that eventually everybody else will be released from the Lake of Fire, or subside into annihilation, it should have no impact on our behavior or those of unbelievers. At the very least, a thousand years in Gehenna and unknown years of residence in the Lake of Fire await those who cannot learn to accept God’s grace while on this earth. Unbelievers should fear such a fate. Believers should long (with God) to deliver them from such a fate. Whatever of the three positions you hold, you depend on the Grace of God to deliver you through faith in the work of His Son.

Just as God’s revelation on the distant past and the angelic conflict is incomplete, so too is His revelation of the distant future. He has given us enough information to live our lives in confidence and hope. We should be careful about making confident assertions about things God has not given us more definite information. God has told us all we need to know.

⁴⁴ The Greek word translated “ever” or “eons” here is αἰών {ahee-ohn’}.