

SECRETS OF PROPHECY

WHERE ON EARTH IS HELL?



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Many people see God as a hard, harsh and vindictive judge. He is perceived as aloof and eager to hurl people into an everlasting hell of torment and agony. Do the wrong thing and “zap” – a thunderbolt of judgment on your way to hell!

These perceptions of God have developed through the centuries as Christian preachers frightened their congregations with vivid descriptions of the horrors of hell. If hell can appear scarier than a horror movie, avoiding a billion years of agonising pain and torment becomes an attractive option.

Attention grabbing signs in front of churches reinforce the terrors of hell. One giant sign states, “How will you spend eternity – smoking or non smoking?” Another says “turn or burn”.

In his sermon, “Sinners in the hand of an angry God”, preacher Jonathon Edwards said this,

“The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation don’t slumber, the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them, the flames do now rage and glow ... the God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked ... He will crush you under His feet without mercy; He’ll crush out your blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on His garments so as to stain all His raiment” (Quoted from Jonathon Edwards Centre, Yale University).

The religious children’s book, *The Sight of Hell*, offers this disturbing description,

“The fifth dungeon is the red hot oven. The little child is in the red hot oven. Hear how it screams to come out; see how it turns and twists itself about in the fire. It beats its head against the roof of the oven. It stamps its little feet on the floor” (quoted from Reverend J. Furniss, *The Sight of Hell* in *Christ Triumphant*, Thomas Allin).

“Good old” sermons and books like these are not as popular in the 21st century. Some religious leaders are worried where all the terrors of hell have gone? They fear this trend towards a quick fix or “air-conditioned” hell might lose church members! As a result, there is a call in some religious circles to get back to strong preaching on the subject.

So if God is a God of love, why is there a hell? Where on earth is hell? What is hell? When will it occur? And will sinners suffer and burn in hell forever and ever?

In this study guide we will discover what the Bible says about the fires of hell. We will see how and why God removes sin and what these actions say about His character of love.

Q1 DOES GOD ENJOY THE DEATH OF THE WICKED?

Ezekiel 33:11 ...I have no _____ in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live

Jesus came to this earth to save people, not destroy them (Luke 9:56). The destruction and eternal death of the wicked is an “unusual act” for God because He loves everyone (Isaiah 28:21). God personally created people to be His forever friends. He died so we could live!

God must destroy sin someday because sin is destroying people. There is nothing that is more precious to God than people.



Christ the Creator

Unfortunately there is no other solution to the cancer of sin than the destruction of those who have chosen it. As long as sin is present, it will result in human misery. Therefore it must be eradicated. God must destroy sin someday because sin is destroying people. There is nothing that is more precious to God than people.

Q2 WHAT IS GOD'S HEARTFELT DESIRE FOR HUMANITY?



2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that _____ should perish but that _____ should come to repentance*

God has a vision and commitment for every person to be saved. He would love the whole world to enjoy an eternity of happiness with Him. However, He will not force us to choose eternal life. God allows us to exercise our free will, either for Him or against Him.



If we do not choose eternal life, then the inevitable wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Every person will either be saved or lost. There is no such thing as purgatory, limbo or reincarnation in the Bible. There is only a heaven to look forward to and a hell to avoid.

Q3

WHO WAS HELL DESIGNED FOR?

Matthew 25:41 ... *into the everlasting fire prepared for the _____ and his _____*

Hell was not designed for you! There is a comical myth depicting the devil as the manager of hell. He is responsible for poking the citizens of hell with a pitchfork while “roasting” the wicked. But the Bible says the devil and his angels will be thrown into the lake of fire and they will be turned into ashes (Ezekiel 28:18).

What wonderful news! The devil will be destroyed and he will never tempt, harass, abuse, deceive or condemn anyone again. The devil would

like you to join him in hell, and if you really want to end up there you can. But you are going to have to fight against God to get there!

Q4 IS THERE ANYONE IN HELL TODAY?

Matthew 13:40-42 Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the _____ of this _____. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire

The traditional view of hell is a smouldering furnace somewhere under the ground where wicked people end up as soon as they die. The Bible however portrays a quite different view of hell.

According to Jesus, the wicked are “burned by fire” at the end of the age. This means the end of the world. On another occasion, Jesus said the wicked would be judged “in the last day” (John 12:48).

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The unrighteous are currently in their graves awaiting the resurrection. Jesus said, “for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth ... those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28,29). The voice of Jesus will call the wicked from the grave, not from hellfire.

There is not one single soul in hell today!



It is only fair that the wicked are not currently in hell. Imagine what kind of God would inflict punishment before the judgment? Or imagine what kind of God would inflict 6,000 years more punishment on someone like Cain (who killed one man) than He would on Adolf Hitler who killed people by the millions. There is no justice in that!

Q5 WHAT PART OF A PERSON ENTERS HELLFIRE?

Matthew 5:30 ... *for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole _____ to be cast into hell*

Hellfire is not just for a mystical “soul” that is absent from the physical body. Jesus said that the whole body is cast into hell (see also Matthew 10:28). Those who have chosen to reject eternal life will enter hell alive – with their arms, legs, hands, eyes and feet along with the mind, emotions and personality. The whole person is cast into hell.

Q6 WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE WICKED WHEN THEY GO TO HELLFIRE?

Malachi 4:1 *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be _____. And the day which is coming shall burn them _____,” says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch ...”*

Hellfire does not burn forever. The fire burns until the wicked are destroyed. Notice the word “up” in the text from Malachi. The fire shall burn them “up”. The most well known text in the Bible says that sinners “perish” – they do not have an eternal life in heaven or hell (John 3:16).

When a tree is burnt in a bushfire the branches are burnt but the roots usually are not, so the tree can live and grow again. When the wicked are destroyed in hellfire there is left “neither root nor branch”. They are totally consumed and there is no possibility of living again.

Death in hellfire (also called the lake of fire) is called the “second death” (Revelation 21:8). This is a death from which there is no resurrection. There is complete annihilation.

The words used to describe the fate of the wicked in hellfire include:

- Perish (John 3:16)
- Death (Romans 6:23)
- Burn up (Malachi 4:1)
- Vanish away (Psalms 37:20)
- Cut off (Psalms 37:9)
- Destroy (Psalms 145:20)
- Devoured (Revelation 20:9)
- Fire shall devour them (Psalms 21:9)
- Day of doom (Job 21:30)

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The wicked are destroyed. They perish, and will not go on living forever in hellfire.

Q7

WHERE DOES HELLFIRE TAKE PLACE?

Revelation 20:9 They went up on the breadth of the _____ and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them

Hellfire takes place on the earth. It is not a smoky place of torture far underground. Just as God destroyed the world by a global flood at the time of Noah, at the end of time the world will be destroyed by fire. The “earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

The book of Revelation describes this amazing scene. As the



Holy City comes down from heaven, the wicked surround the city and attempt to capture it. At this time God sends hellfire down from heaven and completely “devours” the wicked (for more details on this event, you can read the study guide entitled “1,000 Years of Peace”).

Q8

HOW LONG WILL THE FIRES OF HELL BURN AND WHY IS THIS ISSUE SO IMPORTANT?

Isaiah 47:14 Behold, they shall be as _____, 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!



Nothing will be left of hellfire once it has completed the task of destroying sin. There will be no “coal to be warmed by” or “fire to sit before”. The fires of hell go out!

The teaching of an eternal hell does not solve the sin problem. It perpetuates sin. It makes sin eternal. Perhaps even worse, it blackens the character of God.

The concept of an eternal hell of pain and torment has resulted in more atheists than any other concept. If this teaching were true, the torture of the Nazis, Pol Pot, Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and any other evil tyrant throughout history would be nothing compared with the sadistic nature of God. At least the others eventually allowed people to die!

To illustrate: If your pet dog was vicious and killed an innocent baby, you would be ordered by the government to put down the dog. No-one would want that dog to be given the opportunity to spread its misery again. But there would not be one sane person who would suggest the dog be tortured to death, or even worse, tortured for eternity! It is a tragedy that some people have a worse view of the justice and character of God than they do of even the worst human beings.



Summary Statement:

Hell is the place and experience of ultimate destruction by fire – the second death. Hellfire takes place on this earth and will destroy the devil and anyone who has chosen a life of sin and rejected the love and grace of Jesus. The major purpose of hellfire is to destroy every last part of sin so the universe is safe for eternity.

Q9

HOW AND WHEN DID THE TEACHING OF ETERNAL HELL ENTER THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

The concept of an eternal hell is closely linked to the concept of the eternal soul. The devil began this teaching when he said in Eden that sinners are immortal; “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). From that origin, this teaching spread throughout the pagan cultures including the Egyptians, Persians and Greeks. Greek mythology even entered the Jewish faith and there was a division amongst the Jews at the time of Jesus. Although Jesus

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at times used popular concepts to illustrate a point (e.g. Rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16), He made it clear that death was a sleep (John 11:11-14).

The pagans taught that good and evil were both eternal and so could never be destroyed. A place for tormenting the evil was devised since the gods were powerless to destroy it. This concept of an eternal place of torture entered the Christian church in the late second century through the church leaders Athenagoras (188AD) and Tertullian who died in 240AD. Like many other doctrines, the concepts from paganism entered church teaching and over time became accepted doctrines. Jerome and Augustine continued the emphasis on eternal torment. This teaching became one of the greatest tools for fear and compliance to the church throughout the Middle Ages.



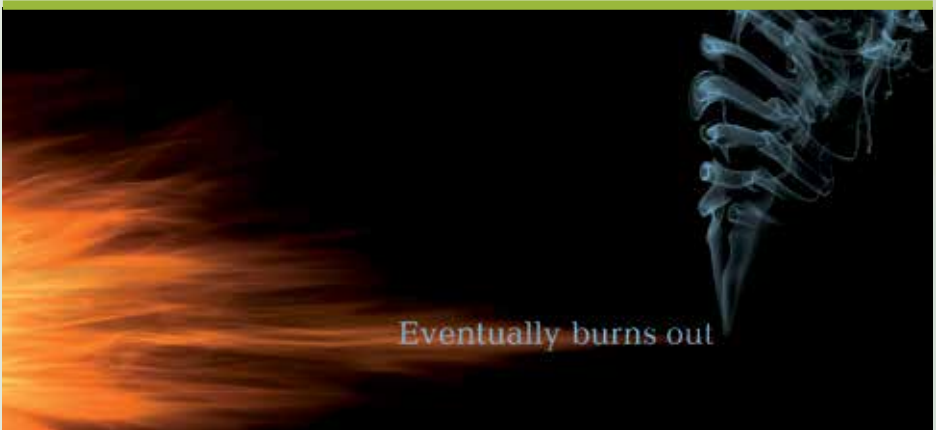
The misunderstanding of hell also made its way into the translations of the Bible. On many occasions, the Hebrew and Greek words for “grave” (Sheol and Hades) were translated as “hell”. The Greek word “Gehenna” (translated as “hell”) is the word used by Jesus to describe the fires of destruction at the end of time. The Greek word “Tartarus” (also translated as hell) is used once in the entire Bible and means “place of darkness”. There is no word in the Old or New Testament, which could be translated as an eternal place of torment.

Q10

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN WHEN IT TALKS ABOUT ETERNAL AND EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT?

The complete annihilation of the wicked is mentioned over 180 times in the Bible. In each case the wicked are destroyed and hell will burn out. There are a few passages that have led to confusion, due to the graphic nature of the word imagery. It is important to see what the whole Bible says on any subject and the weight of evidence on the subject of hellfire is overwhelmingly in favour of complete destruction of the wicked. The Bible does not contradict itself. Let's take a closer look at the more challenging texts as we compare Scripture with Scripture to discover Bible truth.

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**A. Everlasting and eternal fire (Matthew 25:41)**

Jude 7 *As Sodom and Gomorrah ... are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of _____ fire*

Jesus referred to the everlasting fire of hell. This fire is everlasting in the consequences, not in the duration. For instance, Sodom and Gomorrah were wicked cities that God said would be burnt with “eternal fire”. Where are Sodom and Gomorrah today? They were burnt by God and turned into “ashes” (2 Peter 2:6). According to the Bible, an everlasting fire burns the object into ashes, and then goes out.

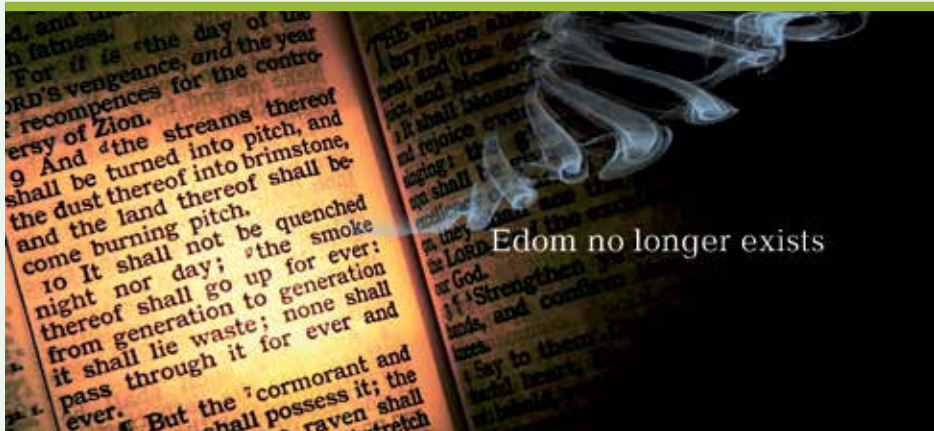


B. Tormented forever and ever (Revelation 20:10)

Isaiah 34:9,10 ...*its land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend* _____

When describing the destruction of wicked Edom, the prophet Isaiah said the smoke would ascend “forever”. Once again, God’s prophet used graphic language to describe complete destruction from judgment. Edom is not burning today. It was destroyed.

Over 50 times the word “forever” is used in the Bible to refer to something that would naturally end. For instance, “forever” means until death (Psalms 48:14) or as long as someone lives (1 Samuel 1:22,28). The smoke or punishment of the wicked will last until that person has been destroyed by hellfire.



C. Everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46)

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is* _____

The wages of sin is not an everlasting life in hell, it is an everlasting death. This is the “second death” (Revelation 21:8), from which there is no resurrection. The apostle Paul said, “These shall be punished with everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The Bible is clear – the wicked will receive everlasting punishment, but not everlasting punishing.

D. Unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17)

Jeremiah 17:27 *But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day ...*

then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be _____

This prophecy from Jeremiah was fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians with fire (2 Chronicles 36:19-21). The city was ruined by unquenchable fire, but Jerusalem is not still burning today. Unquenchable fire is a fire that no man (or fire brigade) can extinguish. Once the fire has accomplished its task, it will naturally go out.



Then they burned the house of God...
burned all its palaces with fire...

2 Chronicles 36:19

Q11

ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “ETERNAL TORMENT”, IS DESTRUCTION BY HELLFIRE SOMETHING TO TAKE LIGHTLY?

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the _____ of the Lord and from the _____ of His power (v9)

To be destroyed by hellfire will be the most horrendous experience known to man. Jesus said there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13). The reason why this will be so traumatic is because for the first time, there will be complete separation from the “presence of the Lord”.

People will realise the enormity of the consequences of their life of sin. All hope will be gone. They will realise the foolishness of clinging to sin, which now costs them everything. Their mental anguish is beyond description and the greater the guilt, the greater the agony. The wicked in total darkness and despair will

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fall to their knees and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. But it will be too late (Philippians 2:10,11).

Now is the time to accept the free gift of life that Jesus is offering you. Jesus wants to be your friend and protect you against hellfire. He loves you and He wants to have a daily close friendship with you throughout eternity.

Q12

WHAT WILL GOD DO ONCE HELL AND SIN ARE ERADICATED?

Revelation 21:1 *Now I saw a new _____ and a new _____, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away*

Bible prophecy predicts a complete new world to look forward to. There will be a new earth. There will be a new atmosphere (with a new ozone layer if that is still required!) and most importantly, a new life without any traces or reminders of sin.



Three Points to Remember:

- God does not want anyone to be lost but He gives us all a free choice
- There are only two options for the afterlife – heaven or hell
- Hellfire will completely destroy the wicked at the end of the world



The Story:

As a young boy, Martin Luther attended the St George's church in Mansfield, Germany. Each week he looked up at a stained glass window in his church. The artwork depicted an angry, sword-wielding God. Martin's imagination ran wild, as he contemplated this angry God ready and waiting to send his frightened little heart into an everlasting hell.

A young Luther also noticed an altarpiece depicting a ship on a rough sea. This boat was heading towards heaven and on this boat sat the Pope and his bishops. The monks were doing the rowing. The trouble was, there sat no common people on the boat, people like Martin and his family. Martin looked anxiously at the common people who were outside of the boat all trying to save themselves by swimming alongside the boat. They were desperate for help to get into the safety of the ship. Some were drowning but the popes and the bishops were all saved. Martin Luther's conclusion? God is harsh and it is almost impossible for people like him to be saved.

It took Martin many years to realise that the God he believed in was not the true God of the Bible. His whole life changed when he found that God was not a God to be afraid of, but a God to be a friend of. God is not a God to run from, but a God to run to.

What is your picture of God?

Now is the time to accept the free gift of life that Jesus is offering you. Jesus wants to be your friend and protect you against hellfire.



Relational questions:

1. Do you think someone will go to heaven if their motivation is escaping hell instead of loving Jesus? Why?
2. Why do you think Christians incorporated the teaching of eternal hellfire into the church?
3. Explain how God could be full of justice and mercy? How does the destruction of the wicked demonstrate this?

Your response:

Are you glad that God destroys sin but does not punish people throughout eternity? _____



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