



**MAY/JUNE
2012**

**WEDNESDAY
NIGHT BIBLE
STUDY**

HELL – A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS



**Does it exist? What is it like? Who will be in
Hell?**

***“And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.”
Luke 5:31 (KJV)***

2007 May 10-13

(sorted by "believe in") Believe in Not sure about Don't believe in

| | % | % | % |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| God | 86 | 8 | 6 |
| Heaven | 81 | 8 | 11 |
| Angels | 75 | 11 | 14 |
| The Devil | 70 | 8 | 21 |
| Hell | 69 | 8 | 22 |

More Americans say they believe in heaven than say they believe it its counterpart, hell. And more Americans say they believe in God than say they believe in the Devil. Three-quarters of Americans say they believe in angels.

Source: Gallop News Service July 13, 2007

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF HELL?

TRF follows the Great Commission, and that is why we are here in this world, to be ministers of reconciliation with a message of reconciliation to God. We talk “being saved.” But, what do we mean?

Technically, we mean salvation to spend eternity with God. We mean “saved” to or for a purpose. But, there is a perspective that we also want to save people from something – what is that? What is it we want people saved from?

The answer to that question, as far as Scripture is concerned, is simple - HELL. Paul said that believers should:

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Many churches today distance themselves from the doctrine of Hell. Joel Osteen made the following statement:

‘Make church relevant,’ he says. ‘Give them something to be able to take away. **I find today people are not looking for theology.** There’s a place for it, [But] in your everyday life you need to know how to live.

He does not preach sin or Hell.

Others argue Hell is not a real place. This argument comes from people who call themselves “Evangelicals.” Consider the book review of a recent book written by Rob Bell:

Popular evangelist Rob Bell’s new book that challenges traditional concepts of heaven and hell debuted this week at No. 2 on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Bell’s book, *Love Wins: Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, puts Hell on trial by

addressing whether a loving God would send people to a place of eternal suffering. Bell's message is decidedly hopeful—eternal life doesn't start when we die; it starts right now.

That contention drew charges of heresy from some and hallaluaahs from others. Bell encourages the debate he has sparked.

According to *Patheos'* Jeff Cook, Bell's milieu is "urban, postmodern, and discovers the truth more naturally through questions, sarcasm, and intuition." As a result, many fear that Bell's approach could undermine longstanding ideologies about Jesus and the Christian faith, and damage or divide the church.

The popular pastor has built a congregation of thousands by throwing out the conventional sermon-and-worship service. *Time Magazine* tapped him as "a singular rock star in the church world."

Why is the lack of as "Hell" so appealing? We live in a world where sin is freely exploited. Sin is so much a part of our culture that almost every imaginable sin is acceptable! In short, people like their sin.

We're very used to sinning. We're comfortable with sin and consequently society has very few consequences that it places on people for sin. Think about when you were growing up. Weren't there things prohibited then that are acceptable now?

Let me give you an easy example:

Bedroom Scene – The Lucy Show (1960)



Bedroom Scene – Desperate Housewives (2012)

This site is blocked by the SonicWALL Content Filter Service.

Did you really think I would put something in here like that? But you get the idea – not only are people not married any more when they are in bed, but they are not in two beds, and don't have nearly the amount of clothing on that either Ricky or Lucy had.

The problem is that people are growing up in a world where things that once were defined as sin are no longer defined as sin, and behaviors have no consequence in the society. In another recent example, a twelve year old announces to his mother that he's a homosexual, and she becomes a homosexual advocate. There's a warped sense of good and evil and distorted understanding of justice.

And the impact of the family and culture imposing no consequences upon what we call sin is that people get so used to sinning without consequences that when you introduce the idea that they will pay in full forever for every sin, that is just alien to their thinking. In short, people do not feel they are doing anything wrong – just what makes them feel good! And society praises that!

If “Hell” is preached Biblically – as we will see – it is preached at the eternal CONSEQUENCE of sin – and society cannot accept a teaching that actions have consequences.

In sort, if there is no Hell, and there is no sin, people do not see them selves as being in need of help – they “are getting along quite well enough, thank you very much.”

Question: Who spoke more about hell than anybody else in the Bible. In fact, this person spoke more about hell than everybody else in the Bible combined.

Answer: _____ . And if He thought it was important, maybe we should too.

Hell is a topic taken up by every New Testament writer and it dominates the teaching of Jesus. Of the 12 times the Greek word for hell (*Gehenna*) is used in the New Testament, 11 come from the mouth of Christ. He said the most about hell, so to deny the existence of hell is to basically deny the teachings of Jesus.

False teachers do damage not merely by denying the existence of Hell, but by raising doubts and questions about its existence - questions like: Is hell really a *literal* place where unbelievers suffer eternal, conscious punishment, or merely a state of mind? Does hell *really* last forever, or will God annihilate unbelievers? Is the fate of unbelievers *really* sealed forever, or will God give them a post-mortem opportunity to believe the gospel—and escape hell?

This study will answer these questions from the Word of God. The answers are not elusive, but they may be contrary to what you have thought about Hell. The study will focus on the Scripture and will include comments from those who accept the Scriptures as authoritative. We will address questions raised by the so-called post-modern evangelical community.

From the outset, let’s acknowledge that hell is a hard doctrine to digest—perhaps *the* hardest doctrine. It stretches our minds to comprehend how divine justice responds to human guilt. We naturally resist the idea of God tormenting human beings in a lake of fire for all eternity. Jonathan Edwards wrote of hell:

This doctrine is indeed awful and dreadful. It is dreadful to think of it, but yet tis what God the eternal God who made us and who has us soul and body in his hands has abundantly declared unto us, so that so sure as God is true there will absolutely be no end to the misery of hell. (“Concerning the Endless Punishment of those who die Impenitent”).

Spurgeon said:

we know the power of divine grace, we read in the Bible concerning eternal punishment, and we think it is too heavy and too hard, and we are apt to kick against it, and find out some heretic or other who teaches us another doctrine; but when the soul is really quickened by divine grace, and made to feel the weight of sin, it thinks the bottomless pit none too deep, and the punishment of hell none too severe for sin such as it has committed. (“Confession of Sin Illustrated by the Cases of Dr. Pritchard and Constance Kent”)

Another problem exists because, when the subject of hell comes up, we often think of others—and not ourselves. C. S. Lewis once cautioned:

“In all discussions of hell we should keep steadily before our eyes the possible damnation, not of our enemies nor our friends...but of ourselves.”

Why should Hell matter to a Christian? Because, if we truly understand it, we would not want anyone to go there – particularly for eternity. And this should motivate us to witness, invite people to church, spread the Gospel, and so on.

The average non-believer spends more time planning a summer vacation that he or she does planning their eternal destiny.

That being said, what did Jesus say about Hell?

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HELL

We can study the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew meanings of Hell, but the starting point HAS to be what our Lord said about Hell. The verses below reference Jesus' comments and teachings about Hell. Each one will give you a space to write what it means to you:

Matthew 5:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder,^[a] and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause^[b] shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.

Hell is _____
_____.

Matthew 5:29-30 (NKJV)

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Hell is _____
_____.

Matthew 10:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ And 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.

Hell is _____
_____.

Matthew 18:7-9 (NKJV)

⁷ Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

⁸ "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

Hell is _____
_____.

Matthew 23:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Matthew 23:33 (NKJV)

³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

Hell is _____

Mark 9:42-48 (NKJV)

⁴² “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— ⁴⁴ where

‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’^[a]

⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— ⁴⁶ where

‘Their worm does not die,
And the fire is not quenched.’^[b]

⁴⁷ And 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— ⁴⁸ where

‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’^[c]

Hell is _____

_____.

Luke 12:4-7 (NKJV)

⁴“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ 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!

⁶“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins?^[a] And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Hell is _____

_____.

Matthew 13:47-50 (NKJV)

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Hell is _____

_____.

Matthew 25:31-46 (NKJV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy^[a] angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. ³³ And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’

⁴¹ “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they also will answer Him,^[b] saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ ⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Hell is _____

_____.

FOUR WORDS TO UNDERSTAND

There are four words we need to learn to fully understand what the Bible teaches about Hell:

1. **Sheol** - this word is found in the Bible sixty-five times, primarily in the Old Testament. It is translated in literal translations as follows:

- "the pit" -three times;
- "the grave" - thirty-one times; and
- "hell" - thirty-one times.

2. **Hades** - used eleven times, being rendered "hell" ten times and "grave" once.

3. **Tartarus** – used only once in the New Testament and translated “hell.” It is used in 2 Peter 2:4 – “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;” Because it is used only once, we will not focus extensively on it in this study. Biblical scholars are not certain whether Peter was using this word in reference to Sheol/Hades in a general way or if he was referring to a specific part of Sheol/Hades where a certain class of fallen angels were confined awaiting final judgment. Either way, this passage teaches that there is a place of confinement in which a particular group of beings are being held until the time of their judgment. This is consistent with the overall Biblical teaching about the existence and purpose of Sheol/Hades, which we will address below.

4. **Gehenna** – used twelve times and translated “hell.” Jesus uses it eleven times and his half-brother, James, uses it once.

HELL AND JUDGMENT

Judgment of Believers

What happens when believers die?

2 Corinthians 5:8 (KJV)

⁸We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

As Christians, we will be judged by Jesus Christ. This is often referred to as the “Believers Judgment of Rewards” or the “Bema Seat” Judgment. Consider this Scripture:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

The Judgment of Nations

This occurs when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation:

Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these,

you did not do *it* to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Revelation 19:15-21

Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great.”

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The key to understanding this – The Bible tells us that there will be Jews and Gentiles alive at the Second Coming – who survived the Tribulation – and they will be ushered into the Millennial Kingdom. Because they were not raptured, they have not yet received their glorified bodies, and it is these people who will populate the Kingdom.

The Great White Throne Judgment – the Final Judgment

We will see that this Judgment takes place at the end of the Millennial reign and is the final judgment for people of all ages who rejected God during their time on Earth. It is described in:

Revelation 20:11-15

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. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Where will these dead come from?

Revelation 20:13

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

We see this through the descriptions of "Gehenna" in the Scripture as:

- a "*furnace of fire*"

Matthew 13:42 (KJV)

⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

- "*everlasting punishment*"

Matthew 25:46 (KJV)

⁴⁶ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- "*the blackness of darkness forever*"

2 Peter 2:17 (KJV)

¹⁷ These are wells without water, clouds^[a] carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.^[b]

- "*a lake of fire burning with brimstone*" (Rev. 19:20; 20:10; 21:8).

Revelation 19:20 (KJV)

²⁰ Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

Question: Describe Gehenna?

Gehenna, or the Lake of Fire, is referred to in the New Testament as the future, or final, Hell because it is where all of the wicked from all ages will finally end up. See above. Satan, the fallen angels, and all of the lost of mankind will reside in torment there forever and ever.

The Bible teaches that the Lake of Fire, or the eternal Hell, is a literal place of everlasting fire that was originally created by God as a place of punishment for Satan and the angels that followed him in his rebellion against God

Matthew 25:41

New King James Version (NKJV)

⁴¹ “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

While Hell was created for Satan and the other fallen angels, the unsaved of humanity from all ages will be with them in this place of torment where "*there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth*" (Mat. 13:42).

Question: Is there anyone in this place now?

ANSWER: The Scripture teaches that this place will be populated after the Rapture and Tribulation, so there is no one in the Lake of Fire at this time. But, the Bible clearly teaches that it will one day hold a multitude of people. The first residents of this place of righteous retribution will be the Beast (Antichrist) and the False Prophet who, at the end of the Tribulation, will be "*cast alive into a lake burning with brimstone*" (Rev. 19:19-20). Joining them will be the unsaved of the nations who survive the Tribulation (Mat. 25:31-32,41-46). Then, at the end of the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ, Satan will be "*cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever*" (Rev. 20:10). And finally, the unsaved dead of all ages will be raised and judged at the Great White Throne by Jesus Christ and then cast into the Lake of Fire (see Rev. 20:11-15).

WHAT ABOUT UNBELIEVERS WHO DIE NOW?

Unbelievers who die before the Great Tribulation is over go to the Present Hell, which is described by the Hebrew word “Sheol” or the Greek word “Hades.” Scripture tell us there is little difference in the characteristics of the present Hell and the eternal Hell.

Scriptures indicate that “Sheol” or “Hades” is a temporary place where the souls of unbelievers are kept as they await the final resurrection and judgment at the Great White Throne judgment. The souls of the righteous go directly into the presence of God at death:

Luke 23:43 (NKJV)

⁴³ And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

2 Corinthians 5:8 (NKJV)

⁸ We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Philippians 1:23 (NKJV)

²³ For^[a] I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better.

SHEOL/HADES: THE PRESENT HELL

Scripture passages in which Gehenna is used should be distinguished from those using Hades, which refers to a place of temporary torment that we might refer to as the immediate, or present, Hell. At the time of death, the souls of the lost go directly to Hades, where they suffer in torment until the time of the Great White Throne Judgment when they will be resurrected and cast into the Lake of Fire. The souls of all the lost who have already died are

presently there and those who die in their sins immediately go there to join them.

How do we know this? Because Jesus told us.

Luke 16:19-31 (NKJV)

¹⁹ “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell^[a] from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² 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. ²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ 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.’”

How does Jesus describe Hades? _____

Thus, whether Jesus was speaking of the present Hell, or the eternal Lake of Fire, he was describing essentially the same conditions applicable to the lost.

Many claim “confusion” over these concepts. Some of that is simply an attempt to avoid the doctrine of Hell.

Some of the confusion about the meaning of Hell and who goes there probably exists because of the way the Hebrew word “Sheol” and the Greek word “Hades” have been translated in English Bible translations. Since this confusion has led some into an erroneous understanding of what the Bible actually teaches about the present Hell and death, let’s look in more detail at these two concepts.

“Hades” is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament word “Sheol.” When properly considered, the Greek and Hebrew words speak of the same place, the present Hell. However, “Sheol” has been translated "grave" as often as it has "hell" and some teach that these terms only reference the physical grave, despite what Jesus said about Hades. This has resulted in such doctrines as “soul sleep” or even purgatory, because these teachings deny the existence of an immediate or present Hell.

There was a common word for "grave" in the Old Testament at it was “queber.” It is used sixty-four (64) times, and is translated as:

- "grave" - thirty-four times;
- "sepulcher" - twenty-six times; and
- "burying place" - four times.

A comparison of how “Sheol” and “queber” are used reveals they cannot refer to the same thing:.

1. “Sheol” is never used in plural form. Queber is used in the plural 29 times.
2. It is never said that the body goes to “Sheol”. Queber speaks of the body going there 37 times.
3. “Sheol” is never said to be located on the face of the earth. Queber is mentioned 32 times as being located on the earth.

4. An individual's "Sheol" is never mentioned. An individual's queber is mentioned 5 times.
5. Man is never said to put anyone into "Sheol". Individuals are put into a queber by man (33 times).
6. Man is never said to have dug or fashioned a "Sheol". Man is said to have dug, or fashioned, a queber (6 times).
7. Man is never said to have touched "Sheol". Man touches, or can touch, a queber (5 times).
8. It is never said that man is able to possess a "Sheol". Man is spoken of as being able to possess a queber (7 times).

Adapted from "*Life and Death*" by Caleb J. Baker, *Bible Institute Colportage Ass'n*, (1941).

From the differences between how "Sheol" and queber are used in Scripture, it is obvious that they are not the same thing. The Greek word "Hades" is consistent with the proper understanding of "Sheol."

How does the Old Testament describe "Sheol"? Let's look and you will see the comparison to Jesus' descriptions of Hades and Hell:

Ecclesiastes 9:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with *all* your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

Job 10:21-22 - (NASB)

²¹ Before I go—and I shall not return—

To the land of darkness and deep shadow,

²² The land of utter gloom as darkness *itself*,

Of deep shadow without order,

And which shines as the darkness."

PURGATORY

Seems kind of black and white, doesn't it? Jesus and Scripture describe either being with the Lord or an eternity of misery. The Scripture does not describe something known as "Purgatory."

A History of Purgatory

Most people seem to place the blame for the creation of the doctrine of "purgatory" on Pope Gregory the Great, who reigned from A.D. 590–604. The doctrine was so named about 593 A.D. There are admittedly concepts expressed before then, and the doctrine became more formalized later in the Middle Ages.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines purgatory as a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030). It notes that "this final purification of the elect . . . is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (CCC 1031).

The doctrine of Purgatory in the Catholic church is further explained in this statement from the Second Vatican Council, p. 63, which says,

The truth has been divinely revealed that sins are followed by punishments. God's holiness and justice inflict them. Sins must be expiated. This may be done on this earth through the sorrows, miseries and trials of this life and, above all, through death. Otherwise the expiation must be made in the next life through fire and torments or purifying punishments.

Obviously, we look to Christ's atoning death on the cross as being the sufficient payment for sin. To add additional punishment to the cross of Christ demeans the death of Christ.

1 Peter 2:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

This is why Jesus said, "It is finished," (John 19:30). In Greek the term "it is finished" is "tetelestai." It was a term used in legal contexts to state that a debt had been paid in full. "Papyri receipts for taxes have been recovered with the word *tetelestai* written across them, meaning "paid in full." (Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985). Therefore, there is no need for purgatory.

Purgatory is a dangerous doctrine that makes the Cross of Christ insufficient by requiring the person to undergo suffering in order to be made worthy of being with God. Here's one commentator's summary of why purgatory is not Scriptural:

Since the unsaved will go to hell to suffer eternal punishment (Ezk 18:4n, 20n; Mt 25:46), while the saved upon death go immediately to be with Christ (2 Co 5:8. Ph 1:23); since the unsaved will experience eternal torment (Lk 16:24), while the saved experience eternal life (Jn 11:25, 26. Re 14:13), there is no middle ground (Jn 3:36). The sins of the saved person "shall not be mentioned unto him" (Ezk 18:22), for Christ died for our sins (2 Co 5:15, 17, 21), forever purged our sins by his shed blood (Ep 1:7. Re 1:5) by the forever complete and perfect sacrifice of himself just once (He 10:10-12) on the cross (1 P 2:24).

Think about this also— if Jesus died for all our sin debt, as the Bible teaches, does God, being just and having received payment for these sins, have the right to punish us for those same sins? That is just contrary to the nature of God.

Purgatory was beneficial to the Catholic faith. Since Catholicism is to a certain extent a works based, repeated sacrifice salvation, and there is no assurance for salvation, it was a hard religion. Purgatory became the safety net, when you die, you don't go to hell. You go there and get things sorted out and finally get to heaven if you've been a good Catholic. Take away that safety net, that's a hard sell because in the Catholic system you can never know you're saved, you can never know you're going to heaven. With some sins, you can't.

If you are a Christian, the moment you leave this life you go to heaven. The Bible doesn't teach what the medieval theologians referred to as limbus patrum or limbo. There is no purgatory. Paul said he preferred "to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). He said he desired "to depart and be with Christ" (Phillipians 1:23).

ARE THERE DEGREES OF PUNISHMENT IN HELL

The Scriptures teach that Hell is an individual torment, and that not everyone suffers to the same degree.

Luke 12:41-48 (NKJV)

⁴¹ Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable *only* to us, or to all *people*?”

⁴² And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season? ⁴³ Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵ But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶ the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷ And 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*. ⁴⁸ But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

The servants in this story picture every person in the world. Every person in the world is responsible for how that person handles the gifts of God revealed to him. In other words, an opportunity to know the truth. The Law of God written in the heart of every man, a conscience. The truth about God manifests from creation, the light that shines in every heart. Romans 1. What a person does with the opportunity to know the truth and the opportunity to hear the gospel, determines that person’s destiny.

One group in the story is faithful to make the most of that gospel stewardship, and they receive the privilege of being in the Kingdom,

going to heaven. The other group is unfaithful and they're punished with a fierce judgment that describes in the words of Jesus as cutting them in pieces, and then there comes the warning that he gives at the end, that slave who knew his master's will and didn't get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes. But the one who didn't know it will receive but a few. That's talking about eternal punishment. Both are punished, one with few lashes and one with many lashes. And what makes the difference? What a person knew and did with the truth that he or she knew.

Thus, there will be degrees of punishment on unbelievers in hell, not based on categories of sin, not based on amounts of sin, but based on the level of truth they rejected. Consider:

Hebrews 10:29 - (NKJV)

²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Matthew 11:22-24 - (NKJV)

²² But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be^[a] brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

CONCLUSION

The message of Scripture is that salvation is a rescue, a rescue from a real place called hell.