

What Do We Know About Hell?

By Melanie Stone

Heaven and Hell are topics that most everyone has an interest in because it deals with our spirituality and what happens to us after we die. Whether someone is a believer in the Christian faith, a believer of another religion, or has no religion at all; most are curious, and some concerned, about the afterlife. For the Christian believer, the Bible is our source of information, the Holy Spirit is our guide for understanding, and Jesus is the hope of our eternal life in the presence of God.

Eternity

This is a topic of eternal existence. Physical death is not a cessation of life. Whether someone is born again or not, we continue a conscious existence throughout eternity. For the unsaved, the Bible warns about unending eternal torment in Hell. For the Christian, we look forward to living forever and ever with our God.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

God made the way for anyone who wants to have life with Him to have it through surrendering to Jesus as Lord. To have eternal life, we need to be with Him, the source of life. Anything outside of God is outside of life. Separation from God is death, an eternal dying.

A Window of Choice

God gave mankind authority to rule in the earth while we are in it. Being in an earthly body gives us the right to make choices. Our eternal destiny is determined while we live. Once a person leaves their body, they no longer have the right to choose whether they will surrender to God and receive His salvation or deny Christ's sacrifice and turn away from His Lordship. Eternity is decided only while we live.

The life we live in this body is fragile and fleeting. Everyday people die. Even healthy, young people can die unexpectedly. These bodies are vulnerable to physical death, so we don't want to take a chance of missing the opportunity to choose eternal life.

Sheol (Hades): Before and After the Cross

The Bible has a lot to say about what happens to the human race when we leave our mortal bodies. Under the old covenant, before Christ's death and resurrection, when people died, whether righteous or unrighteous, their spirit went to a place deep in the earth called Sheol,¹ also known as Hades in the New Testament. It has also been translated the grave.² Since Christ's resurrection, the saved are taken up into Heaven, and the unsaved continue to be held in the earth in Hades.

¹ Numbers 16:30-33, Ephesians 4:9

² Genesis 37:35

Most New Testament translations use the word “Hades” where it is used in the original language. Unfortunately the King James Version translates the word as “hell” for Hades, and several Old Testament translations also use the word “hell” for “Sheol,” which could be confusing. There is a separate Hell that follows the Great White Throne Judgment where Hades will give up its dead for eternal damnation.³ Hades and Hell are two separate experiences.

In Hades, there are two compartments that are divided by a large gulf so that people cannot pass between the two sides. The righteous went to one compartment and the unrighteous to the other. The righteous were those who lived by their faith in God. The unrighteous were those who did not. The side that the righteous went to was known as “Abraham’s bosom” or “paradise.”⁴ In Abraham’s bosom, the righteous were comforted; however, on the side of the unrighteous, there is a tormenting flame.

Before we go any farther, I want to mention that God has always been very aware about the people that have gone to Hades. God cares about which choice you make, wanting you to choose life with Him, but if you do not, His holy anger will bring judgment.⁵

Proverbs 15:11 “Hell (Sheol) and Destruction (Abaddon/Hell) are before the Lord; so how much more the hearts of the sons of men.”

In Luke 16:19-21, Jesus tells a story about a righteous man and unrighteous man that died under the old covenant. This account is not a parable, but an accurate description of what happened to these two men in Hades. In these verses we see very plainly that both men were alive and conscious of their surroundings.

There are several other scriptures in the Bible that tell us about Sheol. Many passages are about the righteous in Sheol, such as Psalm 16:10, Psalm 30:3, and Isaiah 38:10. Others are about the unrighteous, including Numbers 16:33, Job 14:13, Job 24:19, Hosea 13:14, and Psalm 9:17.

Hades was also known as the seat of the powers of darkness.⁶ It is the place that God sent Satan when he was cast out of heaven as Lucifer, a place that he rules from.⁷ Anyone who lifts themselves up in pride and self-sufficiency, like Satan, is included in this demise.⁸ In Matthew 16:18 Jesus told Peter that the gates of Hades would not prevail against His church.⁹

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

³ Revelation 20:13,14

⁴ Luke 23:43

⁵ Deuteronomy 32:22

⁶ James 3:6

⁷ Isaiah 14:15

⁸ Matthew 11:23 to Capernaum

⁹ Revelation 6:8

When Christ died, he went to Hades. In Hades, He led the captives of Abraham's bosom, or Paradise, with Him to be in the presence of the Lord in Heaven.¹⁰ Jesus Himself is with the Father in Heaven. Now when someone who has received the new birth through salvation, they go to Heaven; the unsaved continue to be held in the same compartment of torment in Hades.

Jesus also defeated Satan, taking the keys or the power of Death and Hades away from Satan.¹¹ Sin no longer has a hold on us, and we are free from its control and dominion. Furthermore, when Jesus comes to meet us in the air, the saints raised and raptured from this planet, there will be no more corruption and no more physical death for the redeemed.

I Corinthians 15:54-57 'So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 55) O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' 56) The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57) But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Hell (Lake of Fire) After the Great White Throne Judgment

The Bible also tells us about a separate place of torment from Hades that is called Hell. Hell is where the wicked from Hades will be sent after the Great White Throne Judgment.¹² In the Greek, the word is "geenna" from the word Ge-Hinnom. The word is derived from the Valley of Hinnom (Tophat), where Jews would sacrifice their children to Moloch. In I Kings 11:7, we read where King Josiah used that area to dispose of dead bodies. The place served as a symbol of corruption and death, and later was used to describe Hell. The word Gehenna comes from it. Hell is also known as the Lake of Fire, the Abyss, and the Pit. It is also known as the Second Death (the first death being the physical death that led the person to Hades).¹³

Hell was originally a place that was designed to punish Satan and his demons. However, if you choose not to surrender to the Lord, you are under the rule of Satan as someone in opposition to God, and you will receive the same punishment. This isn't a punishment that God wants any of His children to experience, but He will not force anyone to surrender to Him.

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

God is a good God and we celebrate His grace. Unfortunately, we can get unbalanced in our perspective of God if we forget that He is also a God of holiness and judgment. Should we be in a fearful awe of God? Yes. Are there people who claim to believe in God but have not surrendered to His Lordship? I believe so. I believe that we have people participating in our church services who have not made Jesus Lord. They are

¹⁰ II Corinthians 5:8; Acts 2:27, 31; Psalm 16:10

¹¹ Revelation 1:18; Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 1:19-23; Matthew 28:18

¹² Revelation 20:13-15

¹³ Revelation 2:11; Revelation 20:14; Revelation 21:8

enjoying our music but not worshipping, they are enjoying the messages but not applying the Word, they are serving in our ministries but are not serving the Lord, and if Jesus Christ were to rapture His saints, many of them would be left behind.¹⁴

Hell is a place of torment. Even the demons fear the torture that is coming for them.¹⁵ Some are deceived to think that Hell will be a place where God can be defied and a wicked lifestyle can be continued without punishment. The deceived believe that Hell is a place where they can maintain their selfish lives in wicked pleasure for eternity. The deceived believe that Hell is a place where people will know the support of one another. The deceived believe that their choice of wickedness is better than the choice of holiness. Their pride has led to their deception.

God gives us a description of Hell because He wants us to choose life with Him over death without Him:

- Hell is a judgment, destruction, the same punishment as Satan
Matthew 23:33; II Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:14
- Hell is eternal, never ending
Matthew 18:8; Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:10
- Hell has an unquenchable lake of fire, burning with brimstone
Matthew 18:9, Mark 9:44; Revelation 19:20
- Hell is pitch-black darkness with no ability to see anything
II Peter 2:17; Jude 13
- Hell has worms that eat at a person's flesh without stopping
Mark 9:44
- Hell is where people are wailing and gnashing their teeth in pain
Matthew 13:42
- Hell is separation from God
Romans 6:23

It's Your Choice

If Jesus is the Lord of your life and you are working out your salvation with surrendered obedience, you can be confident that you will be in the presence of God for eternity. If you have not yielded your heart to the Lord, you are in danger of eternal fire. God has chosen to love you and make the way for your salvation. Will you make the choice to trust His Lordship and surrender your life to His care? If so, believe that Jesus died and rose again for you. Surrender your life to His. Believe you have received your salvation and allow God to begin a process of transformation in your life.

¹⁴ Luke 12:5; Matthew 23:15, 33

¹⁵ Luke 8:31