

6 Meanings for Hell

Based on the King James Version of the Bible

Sheol – 3 Nuances

Synonyms

#1A

#1B

Hades

Sheol

[10 Verses*]

[18 Verses*]

#1

Death

Destruction

Corruption

Grave

Pit

[No fire except in

one New Testament

parable:

Luke 16:19-31]

Note: Additionally,

“Hades” is once

translated “grave.”

#2

A Place

Beneath

Where You

Descend.

[One use

of fire

potentially

applied to

idolatrous

Israelites while

they lived

on earth

Deut. 32:15-24]

[5 Verses*]

[There are 6 additional column #1B verses that include this focus]

#3

Trouble

Affliction

Sorrow

Experienced

by Living

People

Who Have

Never Died

[No Fire]

[5 Verses*]

“Sheol” is also translated:
1) Grave: 31 times
2) Pit: 3 times

#4

Used

Figuratively

of the Dead

Who Taunt

Powerful

People

Who have

Recently

or Will Soon

Experience

Their Demise

[No Fire]

[3 Verses*]:

(But only 2 accounts)

#5

Tartarow

Evil Angels

Confined

On Earth

and its

Surrounding

Environment

Until They

Are Burned

After the

Millennium

[No Fire]

[1 Verse*]:

2 Peter 2:4

#6 (The Hell)

Gehenna

Fire

Applied

to Lost

People

and

Fallen

Angels

Who

Eventually

Become

Ashes

[Much Fire]

[12 Verses*]

*The above clusters of verses are presented as groups in the attached document.

Six Meanings for “Hell” (August 24, 2019)

The study of hell is certainly not at the top of anyone’s list of inspirational topics. Yet an accurate understanding of hell is vital as it speaks to the character of God.

Some have estimated that over the centuries, more than a hundred thousand people have become atheists because they were taught by the clergy that the unsaved are thrown into hell to suffer intense torment, by fire, throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Paintings and written descriptions portray demons and people, with contorted faces, enduring extreme torture forever and ever. These images have driven many to think of God as a most cruel tyrant.

This study seeks to convey the truth about hell and vindicate God’s nature. We shall discover that the Bible presents hell as an event of limited duration that results in the utter destruction of the unrighteous.

Before we dive in to study verses that directly speak about hell, it will prove helpful to review four over-arching passages that describe the two possible destinies for all mankind. Our first stop takes us to the most well-known verse in the Bible: **John 3:16**. (Note: all Bible verses included in this presentation are from the King James Version [KJV]. Verse numerals are inserted within all Scriptures consisting of two or more verses.)

John 3:14-16: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The above passage declares that there are only two possible eternal futures for individuals. Either a person will have eternal life or he/she will perish. Further note that eternal life is **contrasted** with perishing. Thus, even before we look up the exact meaning of “perish,” we know for certain that those who perish will NOT exist forever in hell. The text plainly establishes that only those who believe in the Son of God will have eternal life. Thus, if we only had this text to consider, we would know that a burning hell is NOT an eternal reality.

Now let us examine more closely the meaning of perish. This word comes from the Greek word “apollumi” (pronounced ap-OL-lu-mee). A review of five Greek dictionaries confirms that this word means to destroy fully, to kill, to be lost. The word’s Greek parts of speech are aorist subjunctive passive which collectively indicate **non-continuous action**. Thus the process of “perishing” only lasts for a limited time period.

Let’s also consider how the Bible uses this word in two other verses. The following two underlined words are translated from “apollumi”:

Luke 17:27-29: “They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. 28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; 29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”

This passage takes us back to ancient times to learn what “perish” means. Notice that the word is translated both times as “destroyed.” And what does the term “destroyed” signify? We have the two above Bible stories to consider.

In verse 27 we read about Noah (Noe) and the flood. Now I ask you, what happened to those who remained outside the ark when the flood waters covered the earth? They drowned, of course, and died. Surely no one would say those people are still drowning today. They are all dead!

Likewise in verse 29, we note that the word “destroyed” (the translation of the Greek “apollumi,” from which we get the word “perish” in **John 3:16**) is applied to **Sodom**, when God reduced the city to ashes (see **2 Peter 2:6**). Again, are the inhabitants of Sodom still burning today? Of course not! The people were consumed to ashes just like the city. Indeed **2 Peter 2:6** reads, “And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.”

In Luke 17, both verses 27 and 29 include the word “destroyed” based on the Greek word “apollumi” with the Greek parts of speech aorist indicative active which collectively denote **non-continuous action**.

Thus we see that the word “perish” used in John 3:16 means exactly what we would normally think; namely complete destruction. Thus hell cannot be a place of eternal torment. It is indeed an event of limited duration.

Now let’s consider **Romans 6:23**: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Notice the verse does NOT say that the wages of sin is eternal burning. Death, after a period of burning, is the final state for those to whom God does not grant eternal life (salvation).

A third passage that states the two eternal options for mankind is **Matthew 7:13-14**: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Once again the alternative to life is destruction, not eternal burning.

A final verse provides additional proof that eternity holds out either unending life or destruction. **Galatians 6:8** states, “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption (Gk. “phthora” = corruption, destruction, ruin); but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” People who are not saved by Jesus will not experience eternal life. They will eventually face destruction via hell fire as we will discover throughout this treatise.

Thus, even before we examine ALL the verses that use the word hell in the King James Bible, we pretty well know that the lost will not burn in hell for unending ages because their lot is characterized by death, destruction, and having perished.

Following is a chart that captures the two eternal options presented in the above passages. Since it is self-evident that the positive choice is eternal life, connected with heaven, we must assume that the effect of hell is expressed by the second alternative as described by the words death, destruction, and perish.

Two Eternal Options

OPTION 1

OPTION 2

Scripture Verse(s)	Heaven-Related Words	Hell-Related Words
John 3:14-16	Eternal/everlasting life	Perish
Romans 6:23	Eternal life	Death
Matthew 7:13-14	Life	Destruction
Galatians 6:8	Life everlasting	Corruption (Gk. destruction)

Four Ancient Words for Hell

Here's an amazing fact! The Bible translates one Hebrew word and three Greek words as "hell." Yet only ONE of these four words consistently represents a scenario where humans are burned (punished) with fire. The core meaning of the other three words essentially denotes a non-agony "holding place" (a human corral, if you will) for people (based on one Greek word and one Hebrew word) or wicked angels (based on one Greek word) until they face judgment occurring sometime after Christ's Second Coming. You should know that in the King James Version of the Bible, the word "hell" appears 54 times, BUT in only 12 places (22%) does the word convey the concept of burning fire applied to people.

Briefly, the three words for hell that do not inherently include a component of fire are:

1) **Sheol:** The abode of the dead, describing the lifeless existence of both the righteous and unsaved from the time of their death until Christ's Second Coming. This is a Hebrew word, the only word translated "hell" in the Old Testament. Specifically it is translated "hell" 31 times, "grave" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times.

2) **Hades:** Basically the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Sheol. This word is translated "hell" 10 times and "grave" 1 time in the New Testament.

3) **Tartarow:** This word is only used once in the New Testament (2 Peter 2:4) and it applies to fallen angels (demons). It apparently refers to the earth and its immediate environs where evil angels are restricted until they are cast into a burning hell (the lake of fire) after the millennium. (See **Revelation 20:10**.)

The one Greek word for hell that consistently includes **fire** is **Gehenna**. This word appears 12 times in the New Testament and is always translated "hell." (Please know that the Bible includes other verses that refer to or describe hell even though the actual word "hell" is absent. The context and/or details indicate that hell is in view. We will examine such verses later in this paper.)

Note: the underlying Hebrew and Greek meanings for some of the English words appearing in the remaining presentation are provided. "Heb." stands for Hebrew and "Gk." indicates Greek.

We begin our review of verses that include the word "hell" in the Old Testament. As stated above, the one Hebrew word (Sheol, pronounced shə – owl') translated "hell" in the Old Testament basically means the abode (or experience) of the dead. Yet the Hebrew word "Sheol" has **four** distinct shades (groups) of meaning or usage as follows:

- 1) The core connotation is destruction, death, corruption, debasement, a grave, or a pit.
- 2) Beneath, a place to where one descends.
- 3) Used to describe the experience of people who are alive (having never died) on earth who are enduring sorrow, despair, distress, trouble, or affliction.
- 4) Associated with the dead who figuratively speak from the grave to taunt powerful people who have recently or will soon experience their demise.

We begin with the verses that detail the core theme of Sheol:

- 1) A Place of Destruction, Death, Corruption, Debasement, a Grave, a Pit

Job 26:6: “**Hell** is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.”

By **Hebrew parallelism**, hell is here equated with destruction. (Hebrew parallelism indicates that God is saying the same thing two times in a row, using different combinations of words that collectively convey the same meaning. By saying the same thing twice, in different ways, the more easily understood statement can inform the meaning we apply to the more difficult, complex, or less understandable statement.)

Psalms 16:10: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in **hell**; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption (Heb. “sahat” = pit, destruction, grave).” Hell is a place of corruption (destruction).

Psalms 55:15: “Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into **hell**: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.” Note that hell is equated with death.

Proverbs 5:3-5: “For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: 4 But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.” Again, Hebrew parallelism links hell with death.

Proverbs 7:25-27: “Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. 26 For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. 27 Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.” Once again, hell is connected with death.

Proverbs 9:16-18: “Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 17 Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. 18 But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.”

Once more, being dead is equated with residing in hell.

Proverbs 15:11: “**Hell** and destruction (Heb. “abaddon” = destruction, ruin) are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?” Hell is once again equated with destruction.

Proverbs 23:13-14: “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. 14 Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.” This passage declares hell and death to be the same thing.

Proverbs 27:20: “**Hell** and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.” Again, hell is tied to destruction.

Isaiah 14:13-19: “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. 15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. 16 They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; 17 That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? 18 All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. 19 But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet.”

Hell is linked to being thrown in a pit as one who has been slain with a sword.

Isaiah 28:15: “Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with **hell** are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:” This verse states that death and hell are alike (Hebrew parallelism).

Isaiah 28:18: “And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.” Here again death and hell are stated to be the same thing.

Isaiah 57:9: “And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto **hell**.”

Ezekiel 31:16-17: “I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts (Heb. “tachtiy” = lower parts) of the earth. 17 They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen.”

Hell is linked to those who descend into a pit who were slain by the sword (equates to death).

Ezekiel 32:27: “And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living.” Hell is linked to those who have died. In “Sheol” all people are dead!

Psalms 9:17: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

Habakkuk 2:5 “Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.”

The pattern continues. Hell is described as a place of death, not a land where living people are burning in a fire.

There you have it. The main theme of hell (Sheol) in the Old Testament is destruction, death, corruption, debasement, a grave, and a pit. Fire is NEVER even mentioned in this group of verses.

A second, small group of verses indicates that hell (Sheol) descends down (as in a grave) in the earth:

2) Hell is Beneath, a Place to Where One Descends

Isaiah 5:14: “Therefore **hell** hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.”

Proverbs 15:24: “The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from **hell** beneath.”

Psalms 139:8-10: “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost [Heb. end, most distant] parts of the sea; 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”

The above passage proclaims that we can't hide from God no matter where we go, even if we should try to conceal ourselves in a hole or a pit below the earth's surface, or far away at sea.

Amos 9:1-2: “I saw the Lord standing upon the altar: and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. 2 Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.”

Again, you can't escape from the observation of God, even if you dig or burrow into the depths of the earth or try to hide far away at sea.

Deuteronomy 32:15-24: “But Jeshurun [“the upright one,” said as a taunt to wayward Israel] waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. 16 They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. 17 They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. 18 Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. 19 And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. 20 And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward [Heb. perverse, in this context---deviating from God's ways] generation, children in whom is no faith.

21 They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. 22 For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest **hell**, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. 23 I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. 24 They shall be burnt [Heb. wasted] with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust.”

In verse 22, fire is NOT a natural element of hell [Sheol – the grave], but is potentially to be sent by God throughout and below the earth's surface to punish Israel for engaging in unrelenting idolatry. To say it another way, God's holy wrath is provoked not against the dead, but by the living Israelites. God is saying that wayward Israel would not be able to hide from His fury, should He

release it. Also the passage centers on the words consume, devour, and destruction, words that convey the cessation of life or existence. The verses you have just reviewed definitely do not describe unending torment of people facing God's fury. To say it another way, this passage has absolutely nothing to do with fire being applied to people who have died and "gone to hell."

The following verses, included in the previous section, also indicate that hell (Sheol) is a place to which one goes down or descends: Psalms 55:15, Proverbs 5:3-5, Proverbs 7:25-27, Isaiah 14:13-19, Ezekiel 31:16-17, and Ezekiel 32:27.

3) Hell is Used to Describe the Experience of People Who Are Alive (Having Never Died) on Earth Who Are Enduring Sorrow, Despair, Distress, Trouble, or Affliction

2 Samuel 22:6-7: "The sorrows of hell compassed me [David] about; the snares of death prevented [Heb. "qadam" = to come before, meet, or confront] me; 7 In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears."

See **2 Samuel 22:1** for the context regarding the above verse. David was rejoicing because he had escaped from the attack of King Saul. Again notice how "hell" is here symbolically equated with "death" in the above passage, with no mention or any hint of the presence of fire.

Psalms 18:4-6: "The sorrows of death compassed me [David], and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. 5 The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. 6 In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears."

Again the living David praises God for rescuing him from trouble (represented by hell = Sheol).

Psalms 86:12-13: "I [David] will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. 13 For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell."

David once more experiences God's deliverance.

Psalms 116:3-4: "The sorrows of death compassed me [David], and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. 4 Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." (Hebrew parallelism symbolically equates death with hell.)

Hell (Sheol) symbolizes trouble and sorrow experienced by the living (David).

Jonah 2:1-3: "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me."

Jonah's horrendous experience of being swallowed by a great fish is represented as hell.

4) Hell is Associated with the Dead Who Figuratively Speak from the Grave to Taunt Powerful People Who have Recently or Will Soon Experience Their Demise

Isaiah 14:1-19: “For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. 2 And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors. 3 And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, 4 That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! 5 The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. 6 He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth.

7 The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. 8 Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. 9 **Hell** from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. 10 All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? 11 Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! 13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. 15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. 16 They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; 17 That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? 18 All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. 19 But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet.”

The above passage includes a number of very important words that are presented in bold text. The context for this passage that includes the word hell actually extends back to the entire chapter of Isaiah 13. Isaiah 13 concludes with God’s judgment against Babylon, the leading nation that oppressed Israel and additionally attacked adjacent pagan territories. Then the first few verses of Isaiah 14 tell about God restoring the Israelites (the house of Jacob) to their land where they would rule over those that once oppressed them. Israel was to experience rest and freedom from hard bondage.

Now the passage transitions to describe the collapse of Babylon with special emphasis on the utter fall and death of the king of Babylon. The living Israelites deride Babylon by saying, “How hath the oppressor ceased!...The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked.” Then we move into metaphorical (figurative) language in Isaiah 14:8: “Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us.” Now do you really think that fir and cedar trees could actually discuss events that transpired around them? The answer is obviously, “No.”

So likewise we encounter figurative language in the following verses (9-11) which read, “**Hell** from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the

chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. 10 All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? 11 Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.”

Note how “hell” is equated with the “grave.” (See the two bolded words immediately above.) Also it is specifically in the grave where the deceased were covered with worms. Thus, if we take literally that the dead can speak from the grave, then a **graveyard should be one of the noisiest places on earth**. Yet we all know that a graveyard, devoid of grieving visitors, is the quietest place around. (Just think, if you dug up a dead person in his grave, do you think you could make him say even a single word, even if you threw cold water on him, or gave him an electrical shock, or beat him with a stick. Nothing you could do would prompt him to speak even one syllable.)

Thus in verses 8-11 above, the dead metaphorically give witness that though the king of Babylon and his armies had ruled over the world, they then were dead and characterized by loss of power, pomp, and absence of authority, just like everyone experiences when his or her life passes away.

Finally, Isaiah 14, verses 12 and onward, transitions from the fate of Babylon and its king to Lucifer’s fall and eventual decease. Like the king of Babylon, Lucifer, who became the devil/Satan, aspired to greatness to become equal with God. Yet Satan will be cut down and permanently destroyed, just like the king of Babylon!

Ezekiel 32:2, 18-22: “Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou art as a whale in the seas: and thou camest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers...18 Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether [lower] parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit. 19 Whom dost thou pass in beauty? go down, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised.

20 They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: she is delivered to the sword: draw her and all her multitudes. 21 The strong among the mighty shall speak to him [Pharaoh/Egypt] out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword. 22 Asshur is there and all her company: his **graves** are about him: all of them slain, fallen by the sword:”

Once again “hell” is linked to the “grave.” The dead mighty ones give a metaphorical message that death awaits Pharaoh and Egypt, despite the fact that Pharaoh has reigned as a superior to the nations about him. The two above passages contain figurative language just like **Genesis 4:9-11:** “And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? 10 And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. 11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.”

Metaphorically, this passage states that blood speaks. Obviously, blood does not really communicate but it did serve as evidence (a representation) regarding the death of Abel at the hands of Cain. The above two passages regarding fallen warriors and leaders convey that strong men, once deceased, are characterized by inability and powerlessness. Please remember that if you believe the two above passages indicate that the dead literally speak from Sheol (the tomb), then

graveyards should serve as one of the most loud-mouthed places on earth. Yet who has ever heard dead people talking from their place of burial (except as reported in the *National Inquirer*)?

You have now read every Old Testament verse that includes the word “hell” in the King James Version of the Bible. The main characteristic of hell (Sheol) is described by the words destruction, death, and corruption, all as elements related to the grave. There are also some nuances of Sheol that relate to living people who are experiencing sorrow, despair, distress, and affliction. Additionally, Sheol two times conveys the thought of the dead metaphorically speaking to provide a “reality check” to the living indicating that even if the living hold exalted positions on earth, their eventual fate in Sheol will take away all their pomp and power. Sheol also represents a place beneath to which one descends. Finally, there is absolutely no fire in Sheol applied to the deceased.

The second ancient word translated “hell” in the Bible that we will study is **Hades** (pronounced Haw’-dace). This author’s review of a number of Bible dictionaries brings to light that the Greek word Hades and the Hebrew word Sheol (which we just studied) are to a large degree synonyms (having similar meaning) as verified by Easton’s Bible Dictionary, Eerdmann’s Dictionary of the Bible, New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, and other scholarly sources. Like Sheol, Hades central significance is characterized by destruction, corruption, death, and the grave. Yet unlike Sheol, Hades does not include the nuance of the living experiencing sorrow, despair, distress, or trouble. Also Hades does not include the concept of dead people speaking metaphorically from the grave to alert or guide the living.

Following are all the verses in the Bible, all found in the New Testament, that include the word “hell,” translated from Hades:

Matthew 11:23: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to **hell**: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

Matthew 16:18: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of **hell** shall not prevail against it.”

Luke 10:15: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to **hell**.”

Acts 2:25-31: “For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: 26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in **hell**, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. 29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. 30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in **hell**, neither his flesh did see corruption (Gk. “diaphthora” = destroy, perish, corruption).”

The above verse is a New Testament rendition (repeat) of **Psalms 16:10:** “For thou wilt not leave my soul in **hell**; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption (Heb. “sahat” = pit, destruction, grave).” The message is crystal clear. Hell is a place of corruption (destruction).

Revelation 1:18: “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of **hell** and of death.” Hell and death are linked together.

Revelation 6:8: “And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and **Hell** followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.”

Hell is linked to death and to those who are killed.

Revelation 20:13-15: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and **hell** delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire [reference to Gehenna which we will study later in this document]. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Hell is FILLED with the dead who, after being judged, are then thrown into the lake of fire. Thus hell (Hades) is not a place of fire, else it would not need to be thrown into the lake of fire.

1 Corinthians 15:55: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave (Hades), where is thy victory?”

Again Hades, here translated the “grave,” is connected with death.

The last reference to Hades appears in a lengthy parable usually titled, “The Rich Man and Lazarus.” Following is the entire passage that comprises this parable.

Luke 16:19-31: “19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23 And in **hell** [Hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And 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 thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

If we take every detail of the above parable as a literal description of hell and the state of the dead for the both the righteous and the wicked, we will encounter a host of inconsistencies with the rest of the Bible. Also we will contend with some simply ridiculous and unlikely assertions.

Ridiculous or Unlikely/Awkward Elements

- 1) In verses 22-25 above, the rich man is taken to hell where he experiences fiery torment. Yet, he freely converses with “Abraham.” Now imagine a living person engulfed in flames. Also consider all the smoke that would fill the air from all the nearby lost people who would also be burning. What sounds would come from the lips of such an individual? The answer is obvious: screaming, shrieks of pain, gasping, and probably cursing. The burning person would surely not engage in normal dialogue with a being from “heaven” or anywhere else.
- 2) In verse 24, the tormented rich man requests Father Abraham to direct Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool the rich man’s tongue. Again, how ridiculous! If a person was burning in fire he or she might likely ask for a filled swimming pool in which to jump. A single drop of water would not help a bit. Also, while Lazarus was traveling from “Abraham’s bosom” (verse 24) to the rich man, the drop of water would certainly evaporate. (Even if Lazarus flew at the speed of light to the rich man, it would do no good because then the drop of water would immediately blow off into space.)
- 3) In verse 26, the distance between Abraham’s bosom and hell is described as a great gulf (think of the distance between opposite sides of the Grand Canyon in Arizona). Yet the rich man can easily project his voice to the hearing of Abraham. How could this be? Are the wicked “dead” given the gift of greatly amplified voices?
- 4) Also regarding verse 26, the rich man had requested Abraham (see verse 24) to send Lazarus with a drop of water to cool the rich man’s tongue. Abraham responds by saying, essentially, that the distance is too far for Lazarus to travel to attend to the rich man. Again how ridiculous that two people who are close enough to talk to each other are considered too far removed to travel, one to the other.
- 5) Here’s a horrifying thought! If the saved (in Abraham’s bosom) and the lost (in hell) can readily see and hear each other, then the redeemed would view their lost ones writhing in torment for however long hell would exist. What joy could heaven possibly afford under such gruesome circumstances?
- 6) Abraham’s bosom: what is this? There is no other reference to such in all of Scripture except when Sarai gave Hagar, for child-bearing purposes, to Abram for a wife...and later Sarai, with regret, stated to Abram, “I have given my maid unto thy bosom.”

Here’s the complete passage as recorded in **Genesis 16:5-6**: “And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee. 6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.”

So throughout the rest of the Bible, Abraham’s bosom is not associated with heaven. Instead, it is once connected with lack of trust in the promise of God. (In **Genesis 15:4-5**, God had assured

Abram that Abram would have numerous descendants. The assumption here was that Abram would not need to pursue “extra-curricular” means [sexual relations with Hagar] to initiate what God had promised.)

- 7) If the righteous dead (Lazarus, in this parable) go immediately to Abraham’s bosom at death, where did the saved dead go before Abraham died, that is, left planet earth? (Abraham deceased over 2,100 years after the earth was first populated by Adam and Eve.) Did the righteous dead just float around in space for hundreds or thousands of years, as applicable, waiting for Abraham to show up with his “heavenly bosom?”

Parable Elements that Directly Contradict the Rest of Scripture

- 1) In the above parable, both the righteous and the wicked receive their eternal (presumably) rewards immediately after they die. But **Revelation 22:12** tells us, “And, behold, I [the Lord God, see verse 6] come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

The Lord gives out His rewards when He returns to earth, not before, not at the time of death for any given individual.

Job 21:29-32 explains when the wicked will be punished. It states, “Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens, 30 That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. 31 Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done? 32 Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb.”

Please note that the wicked do not each go to a burning hell at death. They are all reserved till the judgment day to receive their punishment (destruction), all at the same time. Likewise, the just do not receive their eternal reward till after Jesus returns at His Second Coming.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 assures us, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Indeed we are not “with the Lord” until He comes to get us at His Second Coming. This fact is reinforced in **John 14:1-3** which declares, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many mansions [Greek meaning is “places,” as in places to reside or stay] if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Just think, why would the saved look forward to their own resurrection if at death they went to a “heavenly place” in a conscious state? It’s quite clear, the righteous do not go to be with the Lord at death. Instead, Jesus must come down from heaven to receive them and take them to heaven, but only AFTER He has made a place for them to reside. (It’s basically a hospitality issue.)

- 2) In the parable we have been discussing, both the rich man and Lazarus retain their bodies when they go to either Abraham’s bosom (heaven?) or hell. (**Luke 16:23, 24** shares that the rich man

had eyes and a tongue, and Lazarus had a finger.) But the Bible repeatedly emphasizes that in death, the bodies of both the saved and the lost return to the dust from which mankind was originally formed.

In **Genesis 3:19**, God tells Adam, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

Ecclesiastes 12, verses five and six, describes death in poetic terms. Then in verse seven we read, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” The chapter makes no distinction between the condition in death for the just versus the lost. Their bodies all return to dust and their spirit essence returns to God from which it came.

Job 34:14-15 confirms, “If he [God] set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; 15 All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.” Again, the experience of all men (both righteous and wicked) is the same during death until the resurrection. The spirit essence returns to God and the body decomposes into dust.

It may be interesting and even shocking to learn that sea creatures (see **Psalms 104:25-28** for the context), when they die, experience the exact same fate as all mankind. **Psalms 104:29** states, “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.”

3) In the parable, the lost rich man is active (both burning in pain and talking to Abraham) and righteous Lazarus is thought to have the potential to bring water, with his finger, to the rich man to ease his discomfort. But again this supposition is at direct odds with the rest of Scripture. The Bible likens the experience of death, for both the saved and the lost, to sleep, rest, and inactivity.

Job 14:10-12 declares, “But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? 11 As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: 12 So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.” Death is equated with sleep.

Again **Job 3:11-16** speaks about death. Then in **verse 17**, we specifically read about the condition of death for the **unrighteous**. The verse reads, “There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.” This verse reinforces that the account of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable for which the details should not serve as the basis for understanding hell or the state of the dead.

Psalms 13:3 focuses on the request of righteous David who said, “Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

Finally, **Psalms 31:17** focuses on the lost as it states, “Let me not be ashamed, O Lord; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave.” So the pattern of Scripture assures us that death is characterized by sleep. This is in direct conflict with the rich man and Lazarus parable where no one ever sleeps.

4) The story of the rich man and Lazarus presents the rich man as burning in hell without any apparent disintegration of his body. He appears to face an eternity of intense suffering without

any hope of relief. Yet throughout the Bible, the ultimate fate of the wicked is presented as a state of total destruction.

You recall that at the beginning of this paper, we read **John 3:16**. This most well-known verse in the Bible proclaims, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Since “perish” is contrasted with eternal life, those that perish will not live forever in hell. The lost will come to an ultimate end.

Now check out **Malachi 4:1**. This verse looks ahead to the final judgment and its attending punishment by proclaiming, “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”

When you want to get rid of a tree, you don’t just cut its trunk. You also must remove all the roots. Likewise the lost will face total extinction.

Similarly **Matthew 10:28**: exhorts, “And fear not them which **kill** the body, but are not able to **kill** the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Greek “Gehenna” includes fire, a place of total destruction). “Destroy” in this text comes from the Greek word “apollumee” which means to destroy fully or kill. Also notice how “destroy” corresponds with the word “kill” that is found twice, earlier in the verse. Finally, the Greek word comes in the form of aorist infinitive active which denotes **non-continuous action**. Thus, hell does NOT burn through ceaseless ages. It operates for a period of time and then ends.

The above passage confirms that hell (Gehenna) completely terminates the existence of both body and soul (the spirit essence).

Notice the contrast between the existence of the saved and the lost. **Psalms 37:18-20** declares, “The Lord knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. 19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. 20 But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume [Heb. come to an end, be used up] away.”

Notice that the wicked do not burn forever. Instead they become smoke and are no more.

2 Peter 2:4-6 echoes the same sentiment as it exclaims, “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to **hell** [Tartarow], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.”

The utter annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrha provides an example of the ultimate destiny of the wicked. They will be reduced to ashes and live no more.

Just think! If today, the worst earthly criminal (a mass murderer) was subjected to non-stop torture, even for just a few days, prisoners’ rights groups and society at large would rise up to stop the

abuse. So how could a loving God torture the lost with fire for eternity? The answer is, of course, that He will do no such thing. Instead the lost suffer for a while before they turn into smoke.

- 5) Recall how in the parable, the rich man only addresses Abraham in his request for mercy and intercession. Where is God the Father and Jesus in this story? Isn't Jesus the only mediator between heaven and other places? **1 Timothy 2:5** states, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."
- 6) The parable we are studying indicates that there is fire in "Hades," (the Greek word there translated "hell"). But this assertion is directly opposed to the rest of Scripture. The word Hades is used 9 other times in the New Testament and its Hebrew equivalent, "Sheol," is used 65 times in the Old Testament. In these 74 combined occurrences, fire is never associated with hell except in **Deuteronomy 32:22** where God threatens to send out fire to destroy the entire earth, including below the earth's surface. (Even in the larger passage that includes this verse, fire is NOT portrayed as a normal or usual element in hell. God would have to intentionally send it there if he released his wrath on the living – never having died - idolatrous Israelites.) Thus we have a consistent pattern throughout the Bible. Hades (and its Hebrew equivalent, Sheol) are NOT places that include fire, except in the fictional parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Also it is interesting that "Sheol" is translated 31 times as "grave" and 3 times as "pit." These translations comprise part of the evidence that fire is not an element of Hades. (Indeed, if one digs up a grave, does he ever find fire present? The answer is obviously, "No.")

There is, however, one Greek word translated "hell" that consistently includes fire. The word is "Gehenna," which appears 12 times in the New Testament. ("Gehenna" is always translated "hell" in the New Testament.) In eight of the twelve occurrences, fire is specifically stated as an agent of punishment and destruction (annihilation).

- 7) Some argue that since the actual word "parable" is not included in the account of the rich man and Lazarus, the story must be true, including all the details. But the book of Luke includes many other stories that everyone acknowledges are parables, though they do not include the word "parable." Here are some examples:

Luke 11:24-26: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. 25 And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. 26 Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

This parable teaches that we need to fill our lives with God-approved thinking and action to replace the evil we are seeking to eliminate.

Luke 14:16-24: "Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: 17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. 18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. 19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. 20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

21 So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. 22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. 23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Luke does not use the word parable in this story even though the account is obviously a parable. But the message is clear. Not everyone who is invited to Christ’s supper will actually partake. Those who respond to Christ’s call will receive the reward.

Following are two more accounts found in Luke that certainly are parables, even though that word is not included in the details:

Luke 15:11-32 (Read these verses about the prodigal son. Once again the word “parable” is not attached to the story.)

Luke 16:1-12 (Read these verses about the rich man and the unprofitable steward. Here is an obvious parable, though that specific word is not included in the account.)

So the carry-away message is clear. While these parables do not include the word “parable,” the writing style demonstrates they are not necessarily literal in their details.

Conclusion

The evidence is overwhelming! The specifics included in the rich man and Lazarus parable should not be considered an accurate description of hell or a portrayal of what happens after death. The particulars are characterized by bizarre assertions and other elements that totally conflict with the larger testimony of Holy Writ. There is actually no fire present in Hades (translated “hell”) as asserted in this parable.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus does, however, convey at least two great truths:

- 1) Unfaithful religious leaders (represented by the covetous, money-loving rich man) will not enjoy God’s favor throughout eternity.
- 2) We need to read and follow the messages contained in the Bible, including Moses and the prophets, if we would be found in God’s eternal kingdom. We should not expect someone from the dead to arise to teach us!

Please know that in **Greek mythology**, fire is present in Hades. But surely we must not allow Greek folklore to dictate or even influence our understanding of biblical truth.

The third word translated “hell” in the Bible that we will now study is Tartarow. This word is only used once in the New Testament and it applies to fallen angels. It apparently refers to the earth and its immediate environs where evil angels are confined until they are cast into a burning hell (the lake of fire) after the millennium. Following is the verse of interest:

2 Peter 2:4: “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.”

Notice that “Tartarow” is not a place of final punishment but rather a “holding place” for fallen angels (demons) who are reserved (retained) until a future judgment. It is interesting that when Jesus, while on earth, was casting the evil spirits out of the demoniacs, the wicked angels said something of great importance for us to understand. **Matthew 8:28-29** states, “And when he [Jesus] was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. 29 And, behold, they [the devils] cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?”

Thus we learn that the devils expect to experience agony in the future in a fiery hell as expressed in **Matthew 25:41:** “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Thus the devils were not yet experiencing God’s full wrath during the time when Jesus lived on earth.

Also the devil and his fallen angels are not trapped somewhere below the earth’s surface for the devil is described as the “prince of the power of the air” in **Ephesians 2:1-2:** “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:” Who else but the devil and his imps would be working within those who were dead in their sins, the children of disobedience?

Please note that **2 Peter 2:4**, quoted above, includes no fire.

We suggested earlier that tartaroo, the place where the fallen angels were sent, refers to the earth and its immediate environs. A passage that reinforces this conclusion is **Revelation 12:7-9** which declares, “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Furthermore we recall **1 Peter 5:8** that warns, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” The devil is indeed here, seeking to destroy all of mankind.

Also, with regards to **2 Peter 2:4** which we recently reviewed (above), here is another verse that confirms that the fallen angels were not immediately thrown into a burning hell when they were exiled to earth. **Jude 6** reads, “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. These angels will not experience their final punishment until the great day of judgment as described in **Rev 20:7-10:**

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. 10 And the devil that deceived them was

cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

The devil is cast into the lake of fire after the millennium (thousand years). The context for **Revelation 20:10** (see above) is **Revelation 20:2-3** which reads, “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

Just think what we have learned so far. The three words we have studied – Sheol (in Hebrew), Hades (in Greek), and tartaroo (in Greek) – that are translated “hell” in the King James Bible, never depict a place where fire is applied to lost, deceased people except in one obvious parable often referred to as “the rich man and Lazarus.” We know this account is fictitious in its details as evidenced by its array of ridiculous/awkward statements and its frequent disagreement with well-established biblical doctrine.

Now we are ready to encounter the fourth and final word translated “hell” in the King James Version of the Bible. The word is “Gehenna.” This is the only word out of the four ancient (key) words we are studying from the original biblical languages that consistently includes the element of fire that burns people. Gehenna appears 12 times in the New Testament and it is always translated “hell.” Let’s review all the verses that include this Greek word.

Matthew 5:22: “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of **hell fire**.”

Note how hell includes fire.

Matthew 5:29-30: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into **hell**. 30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into **hell**.”

Matthew 18:9: “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into **hell fire**.” Hell (Gehenna) indeed includes fire. It’s quite clear, hell is real! It will impact the entire body of every person who is lost.

Matthew 23:15: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of **hell** than yourselves.”

Matthew 23:33: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of **hell**?” Those who God condemns will experience hell.

Mark 9:43-47: “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into **hell**, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is

better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into **hell**, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into **hell** fire.”

Again hell includes fire that destroys, just like worms are agents of destruction.

Luke 12:5: “But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into **hell**; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”

James 3:6: “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”

The above “Gehenna” verses frequently include the word fire. Yet none of these verses indicates whether or not the unsaved will burn (exist) through unending ages. Fortunately the next verse specifically addresses this issue:

Matthew 10:28: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in **hell**.”

Especially note that the word “destroy” (Gk. apollumi = to kill, destroy wholly, be lost) in the above verse includes the following Greek parts of speech: aorist infinitive active which collectively express non-continuous action, NOT continuous action (as verified by The Complete Word Study Bible). This verse is very important to our study. The word destroy tells us that the lost are completely annihilated in hell (body and soul). Since the Greek tense of “destroy” (aorist infinitive active) denotes **non-continuous action**, the activity (burning) of hell cannot remain operative without end (throughout eternity), based simply on the Greek parts of speech.

The previous 12 uses of the word “hell” provide solid information regarding the reality of future judgment for the wicked. The good news is that hell only lasts for a period of time, not eternally.

To better understand the function of hell (Gehenna), we need to examine relevant information from the Old Testament. Nearly all Bible scholars agree that the word and concept of Gehenna (a New Testament word) springs from the Old Testament depiction of the **Valley of Hinnom** (or the Valley of the son of Hinnom). As we will see, the Valley of Hinnom was a place adjacent to the southeast section of Jerusalem, which was linked with human sacrifice by fire, destruction of the wicked, and even continuous burning of trash and other waste. Please review the following verses that describe the Valley of (the son of) Hinnom.

Joshua 15:8: “And the border went up by the **valley of the son of Hinnom** unto the south side of the Jebusite; the same is Jerusalem: and the border went up to the top of the mountain that lieth before the valley of Hinnom westward, which is at the end of the valley of the giants northward:”

Scholars generally don’t seem to know who Hinnom was, but it is presumed he was a local hero or prominent individual residing in the area of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 32:31-32, 35: “For this city hath been to me as a provocation of mine anger and of my fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before my face,

32 Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem....35 And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the **valley of the son of Hinnom**, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto **Molech**; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”

This passage describes God’s anger at Israel and Judah because His people were sacrificing, by fire, their own children to the Ammonite (heathen) god Molech (see **1 Kings 11:7**).

Jeremiah 19:3-8: “And say, Hear ye the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. 4 Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; 5 They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind:

6 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that this place shall no more be called Tophet (Heb. “Topheth” = a place of fire located in the southeast end of the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem) nor **The valley of the son of Hinnom**, but The valley of slaughter. 7 And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to **fall by the sword** before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcasses will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. 8 And I will make this **city desolate**, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof.”

Carefully re-read the above passage. Especially note the bolded words that describe God’s specific intent or actions that would be directed at the inhabitants of the Valley of Hinnom; namely it would become a place of slaughter where the inhabitants would be run through with a sword and the land would become a desolation (wasteland, according to the Hebrew).

History also records that in Christ’s day, the Valley of Hinnom was used as a dump for Jerusalem’s inhabitants. A fire constantly burned because new garbage was continually added to the dump, even including the dead bodies of criminals and animals. Yet even though the **fire continually burned**, the individual items thrown IN the fire obviously burned up. The fire kept going because new refuse was added to the flames on a perpetual basis.

So to summarize, the image conveyed by the Valley of Hinnom depicts a place characterized by complete destruction (slaughter) and desolation, an apt portrayal of the final event of hell.

In addition to the previous passages, there are some Old Testament verses that express the effect and imagery of a burning hell even though the word hell is not mentioned. Consider these verses that were previously quoted in our review of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus:

Malachi 4:1: “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”

The phrase “leave neither root or branch” describes complete annihilation of the wicked (lost).

Likewise **Psalms 37:20** states, “But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.”

Here is yet more evidence that the wicked will be utterly destroyed in hell (Gehenna). They will burn for a time and then exist no more.

So why do many Christians believe that hell is a place of eternal torment?

There are at least four phrases in the Bible that, at first glance, seem to convey the idea of hell existing as a place of eternal (unending) burning of the wicked:

- 1) Unquenchable fire
- 2) Everlasting fire
- 3) Everlasting punishment
- 4) Smoke going (goes) up for ever and ever

The reader must remember that the Bible must ultimately serve as its own dictionary and interpreter. To be safe and accurate, we must review these terms in connection with their immediate contexts. We need to look at the details present in the surrounding text to determine what the above phrases actually mean. We must not understand or explain them merely in the framework of our modern thinking or circumstances.

Unquenchable Fire

Matthew 3:10-12: “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Many people who are not diligent in their Bible study will simply read the phrase “unquenchable fire” and then effectively shut their Bibles and believe that this phrase proves that the lost will burn forever, for fire can’t burn without something (in this case, lost humanity) to burn. But the above text clearly states that the chaff is burned up. This author looked up the Greek word (katakaio), translated “burned up,” and discovered it means to consume wholly, reduce to ashes, or burn utterly. Thus the object of the fire, the chaff, completely burns up. It appears that the term “unquenchable fire” stresses that no one can put out this fire from the Lord while it is performing its task of wholly consuming what God has designated for destruction.

Let’s consider another passage. **Jeremiah 17:27:** “But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall **devour** the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”

Note once again that though the fire is “not quenched,” yet the palaces of Jerusalem were to be **devoured** by fire. The Hebrew word for “devoured” (‘akal) means to eat, consume, devour. Thus the palaces were intended for complete destruction and no human could stop it.

Ezekiel 20:47 likewise states, “And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall **devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree**: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein.”

Fire **devours** both green and dry trees though the flame is depicted as unquenchable. Thus “unquenchable fire” does not indicate that lost people will burn through ceaseless ages. To say this another way, “unquenchable fire” is a tool, but the impact of the tool is conveyed by the verb “devour,” that is, complete destruction.

Everlasting Fire

Matthew 25:41: “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”

First of all we have some good news. Hell is NOT made for humans. We only experience hell if we make Satan and the things of Satan our god and thus share his fate.

The Bible defines what it means by everlasting fire in **Jude 7**: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

We discussed earlier that Sodom was reduced to ashes when God poured fire and brimstone on it (see **2 Peter 2:6**). So when it comes to God’s judgment on people, “eternal fire” conveys the thought of complete destruction from which there is no reviving or rebuilding, as in the case of Sodom. (See **Zephaniah 2:9** which describes the destroyed Sodom using the words “perpetual desolation.”)

Everlasting Punishment

Matthew 25:46: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

As far as this author could find, this is the only use of this exact phrase (“everlasting punishment”) in the KJV Bible. We should note that the key word is **punishment**, not **punishing**. The word “punishing” would denote an ongoing process of retribution. But “punishment” means the state of being dead based on **Romans 6:23**: “For the wages of sin is death...” Notice the verse does NOT say that the wages of sin is eternal burning. After all, we in the United States are familiar with the phrase “capital punishment.” This punishment - whether by hanging, gas, shooting, or lethal injection – involves a short period of suffering followed by death. Once hell renders an individual dead (ashes), death becomes the everlasting (capital) punishment, for the lost will then never return to life.

This line of reasoning is substantiated in **Revelation 21:7-8** which links the future lake of fire to the second, or final death. These verses read, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be

his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the **second death.**”

Smoke Goes up Forever and Ever

Isaiah 34:1-10: “Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. 2 For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath **utterly destroyed** them, he hath delivered them to the **slaughter**. 3 Their **slain** also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. 4 And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. 5 For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea (Heb. “Edom” = place of Esau’s descendents), and upon the people of my curse, to judgment.

6 The sword of the Lord is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a **great slaughter** in the land of Idumea. 7 And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be **soaked with blood**, and their dust made fat with fatness. 8 For it is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. 9 And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. 10 It shall **not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever**: from generation to generation it shall **lie waste**; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.”

Please review the above lengthy passage for there lies a BIG LESSON in allowing the Bible to define its own terms. The above verses end with the two phrases:

- 1) (Fire) not quenched night or day.
- 2) Smoke thereof shall go up for ever.

Now review the bolded and underlined text in the above passage. The two phrases listed immediately above serve as summations of the following elements:

- 1) Utterly destroyed
- 2) Slaughter
- 3) Slain
- 4) Sword
- 5) Great slaughter
- 6) Soaked with blood
- 7) It shall lie waste (Hebrew “charab” means desolate, destroyed)

Thus the phrases “fire not quenched” and “smoke going up for ever” have nothing to do with people (or anything else) burning forever. These phrases are simply idioms that denote total, irreversible destruction. (Let the Bible speak for itself!)

Likewise **Revelation 19:3** reads, “And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.” This verse serves as a capstone or conclusion regarding the entirety of content presented

in Revelation 18 that describes the fall of Babylon. (Please read the entire chapter now, if possible.) Similar to the passage we just reviewed, “smoke rising forever” is linked to the following elements presented in **Revelation chapter 18**:

- 1) **Verse 8**: Babylon being **utterly burned** (Greek “katakaio” means consume wholly, reduce to ashes, and burn utterly.)
- 2) **Verse 19**: Babylon made **desolate** (Greek “eremoo” means laid waste, destroyed, deserted.)
- 3) **Verse 21**: Babylon **found no more at all** (the collective Greek meaning is destruction/desolation with the implication of being deserted and abandoned.)

So once again when we let the Bible define its own terms, we discover that the idiom – “smoke rising for ever and ever” – refers to total, irreversible destruction.

Certainly the combination of the two above passages proclaims that ever-rising smoke illustrates that the wicked will indeed fully perish (become smoke) and will retain that condition forever, never returning to existence as functioning humans, and certainly not suffering for eternity as **it is impossible to torture smoke!**

The “grand clincher” for this progression of thought is the account of the last things that will occur on this old earth before God replaces it with a new earth and new heavens. The verses below follow directly after a description of the millennium (**Revelation 20:1-6**).

Revelation 20:7-15:

Vs. 7: “And when the thousand years are expired, **Satan** shall be loosed out of his prison,”

Vs. 8: “And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.”

Vs. 9: “And they went up on the **breadth of the earth**, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and **fire** came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

Vs. 10: “And the **devil** that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the **beast** and the **false prophet** are, and shall be **tormented day and night for ever and ever.**”

Vs. 11: “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.”

Vs. 12: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

Vs. 13: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [Hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

Vs. 14: “And death and hell [Hades] were cast into the lake of fire. **This is the second death.**”

Vs. 15: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 21:1: “And **I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away**; and there was no more sea.”

There are some extremely important facts contained in this account. Verses eight and nine describe the nations joining forces across the earth’s surface to attack the saints. Then fire comes down from

God and **devours** them. Thus hell occurs on the earth's surface. Note that the lost are not transported to hell. Instead hell fire comes down to them from God.

The “rank and file” (most of earth's teeming masses) are devoured by this fire. “Devoured” comes from the Greek word “katesthio,” meaning to devour or consume. Also, “devoured” is presented with the Greek aorist indicative active combined parts of speech which represent **non-continuous action**. Thus the lost of the earth will not burn for eternity, although they will experience a period of torment.

Verse 10 changes the focal point from the great majority of lost people on earth to specifically focus on the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. These entities are cast into the lake of fire and burn for an extended amount of time as described by the phrase “tormented day and night for ever and ever.” While the masses of lost people have already been devoured by the fire, the devil and his imps burn longer. (For ever and ever is literally translated “for an age and an age,” that is an extended, but not eternal, time frame.)

Now verse 12 backtracks a bit and speaks about judgment. **Hell does not begin until there is first a judgment!** Next in verse 14, hell (Hades) and death are cast into the lake of fire (Gehenna), that is those who are condemned by the judgment.

Now **Revelation 21:1** delivers a most important truth. Here God creates a new heaven and a new earth that replaces our current earth and its environs. Thus the **place of hell** (on the earth's surface) will be **no more**.

So hell must end because the place of hell (our old earth) will no longer exist. You can't have a hell if there is no place for hell to reside because this earth has been destroyed and replaced by a new earth. Thus sin and sinners will be no more...and God will wipe away all tears (**Revelation 21:4**). We know hell will not exist in the new earth because **Revelation 21:27** states (regarding the New Jerusalem that descends to the new earth), “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

God is not a tyrant. He ultimately destroys the wicked and provides a spectacular home for the redeemed (see the rest of Revelation chapters 21 and 22 which describe the New Jerusalem).

Now we focus on five New Testament passages that do not include the word “hell,” yet they likely convey hell imagery tied to destruction by fire, not eternal burning:

Matthew 13:36-42: “Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. 37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; 39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. 40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; 42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

The “tares,” here representing lost individuals (children of the wicked one) who are burned, appear in the literal world as a particularly undesirable weed resembling wheat, yet possessing a seed which is poisonous. This symbol depicts people who put on an outward show of Christianity but are not committed to Christ in their mind, heart, and soul. Also the word “burn,” in bolded text above, comes from the Greek word “katakaio” which means to burn down or consume wholly. Again we see hell fire completely destroys the lost of earth.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-9: “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; 4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: 5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: 6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; 7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction [Gk. “olethross” = destroy, kill, utter ruin] from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

Again, the phrase “**everlasting destruction**” does not read “**everlasting destructing**.” Destruction is synonymous with death. Remember that **Romans 6:23** states, “The wages of sin is **death**...” (not everlasting burning).

2 Peter 3:7-12: “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition [Gk. “apoleia” = to destroy fully, death, perish, ruin] of ungodly men. 8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up [Gk. “katakaio” = to burn up, burn utterly, reduce to ashes, completely consume].

11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting [Gk. “speudoo” (present active participle) = eagerly desiring, by extension “looking for”)] unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt [Gk. “teko” = liquefy, destroy] with fervent heat?”

This passage confirms that our present earth and surrounding heavens will be completely destroyed. Thus hell (Gehenna) cannot burn throughout eternity because the place of hell (this earth) will no longer exist.

Furthermore, **Revelation 21:7-8** proclaims, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

Notice that the lake of fire (equivalent to the term Gehenna) leads the unfortunate participant into the second death which is eternal in duration and nature. Thus we read in **Hebrews 12:29**: “For our God is a consuming fire.”

Allow me to repeat one of the first few verses presented in the introduction to this study, which confirms that eternal life is only promised to those who are the Spirit-filled righteous. **Galatians 6:8** states, “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption (Gk. “phthora” = corruption, destruction, ruin); but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Once again note that there are only two possible futures for mankind: eternal life or corruption (Gk. **destruction**). Thus the unredeemed will not experience an eternal existence in hell (Gehenna). Thank God they won't be subject to eternal torment!

John 12:25-26 concurs, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. 26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”

The immediate two verses above, when compared with each other, seem to say that those who value serving Jesus more than protecting their own life will eventually experience eternal life. In contrast, those who love their life above serving Jesus will ultimately lose their life, eternally.

Finally **John 6:47** reads, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me [Jesus] hath everlasting life.” Only those who believe on Jesus will know eternal life. The unredeemed will not experience eternal life in hell (Gehenna).

Grand Summary

The word “hell” is translated from one Hebrew word (Sheol) and three Greek words (Hades, tartaroo, and Gehenna). Although the word “hell” is found 54 times in the King James Version of the Bible, in only 12 occurrences (22%) does it (Gehenna) refer to a place (really an event) where unsaved people burn as a group during a period of time after the millennium (one thousand years described in Revelation 20). Only Gehenna includes the experience of the unrighteous burning for a length of time before they become ashes, never to return to life. The other 42 uses of “hell” in the Bible usually refer to death, destruction, the grave, a pit in the earth, going below the earth's surface, a troublesome experience for the living (who have not yet died), or a holding place (the earth and its surrounding environment) for wicked angels till they meet future judgment in Gehenna (the lake of fire).

Combined with additional descriptions (imagery) of burning hell in verses that do not actually contain the word “hell,” the verses that include 12 instances of the Greek word Gehenna declare that hell fire will completely destroy both body and soul (the spirit essence) of the unsaved. However there are verses that use phrases that, taken by themselves, could lead someone to believe that hell operates forever. These expressions include unquenchable fire, everlasting fire, everlasting punishment, and smoke that goes up for ever and ever. Yet the context and details associated with these phrases demonstrate that hell does not burn without end. Finally, God will destroy the future place of burning hell (Gehenna), our present earth, and replace it with a new earth. Thus hell and its occupants (the unsaved) will be no more.

So we declare that God is not a sadist. He is both a righteous judge and a loving Father.

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