



myths about HELL

Giving Light to Our World

For most people, *hell* is simply one of a few four-letter words heard daily in the rage of rush hour traffic or the heated scenes of a Hollywood movie. For others, the word hell brings back vivid childhood imaginations of an eternal roasting pit for humans as described by a church pastor or fiery televangelist. Most of us, it seems, would be quite content if the concept of hell just didn't exist. In an attempt to rid their minds of such a fearful idea, some make the choice to disbelieve in the idea of hell altogether. This often leads to the next step—choosing to disbelieve in a God who would create such a place.

What do we do with this terrifying idea of hell? Do we throw it—and God—out altogether? Do we try to ignore it and its implications about God? Do we hope desperately that our church school teachers were somehow mistaken? In this Bible tract, we will choose another option: we will simply study what the Bible really has to say about hell. We'll find that the truth will set us free from the various myths about hell.

WHEN AND WHERE?

Interestingly, the Bible provides explicit information concerning when hell will begin and

where it will be located. Misconceptions are plentiful on these two points. In **Matthew 13:49** Jesus says clearly, "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."¹ According to this text and many others like it,² the flames of hell will not exist until the end of the world. That's right! Your loved ones are not being burned alive as you read this tract.

The apostle Peter gives us clear information about the location of hell. Speaking of the end of the world he says, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (**2 Peter 3:10**). The prophet Zephaniah also speaks of "the whole land" "devoured by the fire of His jealousy" (**Zephaniah 1:18**). In these passages we see that hell is not a giant, flame-filled chasm in the center of the earth. Instead, it will be located right here on earth at the end of the world—a fire devouring "the whole land."

Perhaps the most important fact to understand about hell can be found in Scripture's most famous text, **John 3:16**: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Here Jesus clearly states that believers, not the wicked, live eternally. What? The wicked don't live eternally in the flames? Correct!

IS THE DEVIL IN CHARGE OF HELL?

The wicked will burn only until nothing remains to be consumed. God explains this point in the book of Malachi: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the Lord." In order to confirm that He was speaking literally about the utter destruction of the wicked, He continues, "You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this" (**Malachi 4:1, 3**). In addition to the wicked, hellfire also will destroy completely Satan and his angels (see **Matthew 25:41** and **Revelation 20:10**). Contrary to popular

belief, God plans to destroy the forces of darkness, not place them in charge of an eternal fire pit in the center of the earth!

Some might point out other texts like **Revelation 14:11** and **20:10** which say that the wicked burn eternally. In Scripture the term *forever* indicates a time of indefinite duration in which the beginning and ending of the period depend on the nature of the person or circumstance to which it is applied. The boy Samuel, serving in the temple, was to remain there "forever" (**1 Samuel 1:22**). The bars of the earth closed over Jonah "forever" (**Jonah 2:6**) when he was thrown into the sea. Clearly, neither of these events lasted what we would term *forever*. In our day, a man and woman commit to their marriage vow "forever." For the couple, the term *forever* simply means *as long as they live*. Additionally, every time the book of Revelation mentions the wicked burning forever, symbolic terms (such as a "beast" with seven heads) are *always* used in the same verse.

How do we discover the length of hellfire's *forever*? As we have seen, other passages of Scripture on the same topic explain that *forever means until the wicked are utterly consumed*.

In light of this simple Bible study, one might ask how these myths about hell could exist. This false teaching has permeated Christianity not just because it is a good scare tactic for church attendance, but because our adversary the devil loves to teach lies about God.

Revelation 12:9 describes Satan as one who “deceives the whole world.” He deceives them about what? About God and His character. There are true and false teachings about God. Truth is not a choice, as many would like to believe. Truth is a reality waiting to be discovered in the pages of Scripture.

LIVING IN GOD’S PRESENCE

“Our God is a consuming fire” (**Hebrews 12:29**) to sin and sinners. But rather than the wicked, it is the saved person “who walks righteously and speaks uprightly,” who alone can “dwell with the devouring fire” and “everlasting burnings” (**Isaiah 33:14-15**). According to **Matthew 25:31-46**, all humanity will one day encounter God, in whose presence “the hills melt, and the earth is burned” (**Nahum 1:5**). Only those who have repented of their sins and sought after God will be protected in His

fiery presence where they will live for all eternity. The wicked, on the other hand, will cease to exist and “be as though they had never been” (**Obadiah 1:16**) after they are “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (**2 Thessalonians 1:9**).

Friends, “God is love” (**1 John 4:8**), a love symbolized by fire. Solomon said that God’s love has “a most vehement flame” (**Song of Solomon 8:6**). As fire hardens clay but melts ice, so His fiery love will comfort the saved but consume the wicked. Today you have the choice to harden your heart toward God, or allow His flames of truth and love to melt it. Your choice determines your eternal destiny. Seek Him today, and His love will warm your heart through all eternity!

¹ King James Version.

² See, for example, Matthew 25:31-41; 2 Peter 3:3-7, 12.

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**GIVING LIGHT
TO OUR WORLD**

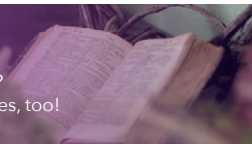


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