

What and Where is Hell?

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Introduction

The Italian Poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) in his poem ‘The Divine Comedy’ wrote about the spirit of a dead person. In the poem, the spirit (or soul) either went to hell, which was in the earth or the spirit went to a place he named Purgatory. The spirit that went to Purgatory was to bathe in flames to take away their sin. After the spirit’s sins were burned away, then the spirit could go to heaven, which in Dante’s poem was named Paradise. Then, according to Dante, the spirit will live with God Himself.

Of course the poem is a make-believe story. Sadly, this poem caused people to believe false ideas about what happens to the spirit after death. These false ideas became part of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Even today, Catholics believe that a person’s spirit or soul stays alive after his or her body dies. Then the spirit goes to hell, purgatory, or heaven straight away.

Like Satan’s lie in the Garden of Eden (thou shall not surely die), many Protestants also believe that the spirit or soul never dies. These Protestants believe the spirit goes right away to heaven or hell after a person’s death. False ideas about what happens when we die have caused Christians to believe many terrible lies.

This booklet has been prepared to dispel some of these myths.

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Part 1: Is Hell for Real?

There are only two options: (1) life eternal or (2) being lost/destruction/eternal fire (John 3:16) “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.”

(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: 14) Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

(Matthew 25:31) “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:”

(Matthew 25:32) “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:”

(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:”

Destruction/eternal fire is a future event connected to Christ's

second coming. Therefore, “hell” still lies in the future.

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) wrote, “Wherever God erects a house of prayer, The devil always builds a chapel there; And ‘twill be found upon examination, The latter has the largest congregation.”

I heard a rousing sermon by a Baptist preacher a few years ago with this title: “For God’s Sake, in Heaven’s Name, Where on Earth is Hell?”

Some Bible translators have rendered various words with “hell” which in reality have other meanings. Four key words have been translated to the term ‘hell’. These are *sheol*, *hades*, *tartaros*, and *gehenna*.

1. *Sheol*

While everything in the Bible is true, not everything in the Bible is the truth. For example, it is not true that the image of Artemis fell down from heaven, but it is true that the city clerk at Ephesus said that it did (Acts 19:35). It is also not true that there is a place beneath the surface of the earth called *sheol*, but it is true that the Hebrews believed in *sheol*.

Sheol is used 66 times in the Old Testament. It is the realm of the dead who are in the grave. Normally the Greek translation of the term is *hades*.

Gen 37:35 Jacob expects to go down to *sheol*/the grave, to his son Joseph. (Genesis 37:35 “And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.”)

1 Sam 2:6 God brings down to *sheol* (the grave) and raises up. (1 Samuel 2:6) “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.”)

Ecclesiastes 9:10 In *sheol*/the grave there is no activity, no planning, and no knowledge. *Sheol* is the place of the dead. There is no fire, neither is there torment. The righteous and the unrighteous are found there. (Ecclesiastes 9:10 “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”)

2. Hades

Hades is found ten times in the New Testament. It is also is the place of the dead, the grave. It corresponds with the Hebrew *sheol*. Acts 2:27, 31 In *hades* there is decomposition, putrefaction and decay. In the story of Lazarus we read in John 11:39 “Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.”

Jesus was the exception to this rule of science as he rose again. (Acts 2:27 “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”)

(Acts 2:31 “He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.”)

In Asia Minor the term *hades* is frequently found on tombstones. But relatives of the deceased would certainly not want to say that their loved one was in hell, simply that he or she rests in the grave. *Hades* is not hell, which supposedly is already burning.

3. Tartaros

The Greek *tartaros* is not directly found in the New Testament, however, the verb “to cast in *tartaros*” is. It occurs in 2 Peter 2:4 only and is the abode of the fallen angels, who cannot return to the

presence of God in heaven. It is not used to describe the place of the dead nor a hell in which people are cast after their death. (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;”)

4. Gehenna

In the New Testament twelve times *gehenna* is mentioned. This is the hell about which Jesus spoke. It is the future place of punishment of the unrighteous. The term may be derived from *gê hinnom* pointing to the valley of Hinnom, a gorge near Jerusalem. According to Jeremiah 7:32-33 it is a place of judgment. (Jeremiah 7:32-33 “Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place. 33) And the carcasses of this people shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall fray them away.”)

Rabbinical tradition understood it as a place outside Jerusalem for burning carcasses and rubbish.

Mark 9:43 Here *gehenna* is associated with fire. This fire begins only after Jesus’ second coming (Matt 25:41), at the end of the age (Matt 13:49-50). Until then people “sleep” in their graves.

Luke 12:5 Because God alone possesses immortality (1 Timothy 6:16), *gehenna*/hell does not begin immediately after death for the person that has passed away. (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.”; 1 Timothy 6:16 “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.”)

Revelation 20:9-10, 15 Does not mention the word *gehenna* but talks about the lake of fire in which after the millennium the unrighteous are burnt up. (Revelation 20:9-10 “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. / 20:15 “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”)

Since *gehenna* is associated with fire and is a future event after the Second Coming, having to do with judgment, it is best to understand hell in the context of Revelation 20. This is the hell Jesus warned us about.

A Catholic tract for children published in 1855 are to be found these words: “The eyes of a young man are burning like coals. Long flames come out of his ears. He hardly can breathe. When he opens his mouth blazing fire rolls out of it. The blood is boiling in his veins. The brain is boiling and bubbling in his head. The marrow is boiling in his bones, and yet he is conscious, and one can talk to him. He will be suffering torment and pain not only for hundred millions of years but throughout eternity.”

How different is (John 3:16 “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.”

God is a God of love (1 John 4:8 “...God is love.”). All Bible teaching must reflect this characteristic of God.

Jesus taught that it is the whole body that will be cast into hell-fire—not an invisible, immortal soul. (Matthew 5:30 “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.”)

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Part 2:

Some Questions Answered

Does the Soul Live on After Death?

(Ezekiel 18:20-22) “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. 21) But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. 22) All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.”

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that some people do not go to hell when they die. But these people aren't ready for heaven. So, they go to purgatory. As we already learned, the Catholic Church teaches that a person's spirit can go to purgatory after he or she dies. There, in purgatory, a person bathes in flames to take away his or her sins. Purgatory is not the same as hell. Catholics teach that purgatory and hell are two different things. When the spirit is clean from sin, then the spirit can fly to paradise or heaven. People who are alive can pray for the spirit of the dead person who is in purgatory. The prayers, good works, and offerings of the living can help the spirit get out of purgatory faster.

Ellen G. White (“The Great Controversy”, p545) wrote, “Upon the fundamental error of natural immortality rests the doctrine of

consciousness in death—a doctrine, like eternal torment, opposed to the teachings of the Scriptures, to the dictates of reason, and to our feelings of humanity. According to the popular belief, the redeemed in heaven are acquainted with all that takes place on the earth and especially with the lives of the friends whom they have left behind. But how could it be a source of happiness to the dead to know the troubles of the living, to witness the sins committed by their own loved ones, and to see them enduring all the sorrows, disappointments, and anguish of life? How much of heaven's bliss would be enjoyed by those who were hovering over their friends on earth? And how utterly revolting is the belief that as soon as the breath leaves the body the soul of the impenitent is consigned to the flames of hell! To what depths of anguish must those be plunged who see their friends passing to the grave unprepared, to enter upon an eternity of woe and sin!”

(Ecclesiastes 9:10) “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

(Ezekiel 18:20-22) “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. 21) But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. 22) All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.”

(Hebrews 9:27) “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”

Ellen G. White (Manuscript 51, December 10, 1890) wrote, “Satan's work since his fall is to make God look bad. Satan invented the idea

that the spirit lives forever and never dies. . . . Satan also lied about hell. Satan says that sinners in hell never stop burning in fire. Purgatory is Satan's idea, too. These false teachings lie about God. They cause people to believe that God is mean, nasty, and doesn't forgive anyone."

When will hell-fire burn?

The wicked are punished at the end of the world. (Matthew 13:36-43 "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. 43) Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.")

No one is rewarded according to their works until Jesus returns. (Matthew 16:27 "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.")

The punishment of the wicked is "reserved" until the judgment day. (2 Peter 2:9 "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:")

The wicked are "reserved" in the grave until they are brought forth

in the “resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28, 29) “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29) And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.; (Job 21:29-32 “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.”)

According to Billy Sunday (1862-1935), “Hell is the highest reward that the devil can offer you for being a servant of his.”

Where Will Hell-fire Burn?

2 Peter 3:7 The atmospheric heavens and the earth are reserved by God and will be used to destroy the wicked in the final judgment. (2 Peter 3:7 “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 of ungodly men.”)

Revelation 20:11-15 The final phase of the judgment will occur at the second resurrection where the wicked will be sentenced and receive their final “reward” in the lake of fire at the end of the world. (Revelation 20:11-15 “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. 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. 13) 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. This is the second death. 15) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life

was cast into the lake of fire.”)

Revelation 20:9-14 As the wicked try to overtake the holy city, fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them. (Revelation 20:9-14 “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. 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. 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. 13) 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. This is the second death.”)

This is the second death. The second death is never called a “sleep” as the first death is because there will never be a resurrection from it. It will be an eternal annihilation.

How Long Will Hell-fire Burn?

According to my journal jottings, a visiting preacher during a revival service in the 1950s said this of the person who has been delivered to hell: “They will be in the lake of fire, suffering terribly. They try to escape the pain and fear, so they swim to the north for ten thousand years. There is no end in sight, so they turn and swim to the east for another ten thousand years. Still there is no relief. They then swim south for ten thousand years. Then in desperation they swim to the west for another ten thousand years. Yet after all this searching and swimming things are the same as they always were. In frantic

desperation they cry out, “How long? How long will this go on? How long?” And an answer will come back to them in the darkness: “Forever and forever.”

1 John 3:15 No murderer (wicked person) has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:15 “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”)

The wages of sin is death, not everlasting life in hell-fire. (Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”)

God gave His Son that we should not “perish” which means “to be destroyed.” (John 3:16 “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 wicked shall not be any more. They will cease to exist. (Psalms 37:9-11 “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. 10) For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 11) But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”)

The wicked shall perish and consume into smoke. (Psalms 37:20 “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 away.”)

All of the wicked receive their final destruction together. (Isaiah 1:28 “And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.”)

The wicked will be as stubble. The fire shall burn them up, and they

will be ashes under our feet, in the day that God does this. (Malachi 4:1-3 “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. 2) But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3) And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.”)

Jesus stated that the gate the wicked enter through leads to destruction (annihilation obliteration, ruin), and not to eternal life in hell-fire. (Matthew 7:13 “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:”)

After the wicked have drunk of the “cup of the wrath of God” (Obadiah 1:15 “For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.; Revelation 14:10 “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:”), they shall ‘be as though they had not been.’

The devil will also be devoured in the lake of fire. He will be brought to ashes and will never be any more. (Ezekiel 28:18 “Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee.”)

(Ezekiel 28:19) “All they that know thee among the people shall be

astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.”

Hell is prepared for those who prepare themselves for it by forever rejecting Christ.

Part 3:

Perplexing Biblical References

1. Unquenchable Fire

Mark 9:43-44 “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.”

Luke 3:17 “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.”

Jerusalem was destroyed with unquenchable fire (Jeremiah 17:27), but it is not still burning today. 2 Chronicles 36:19,21 says Jerusalem was burnt to fulfil Jeremiah’s prophecy. (2 Chronicles 36:19-21 “And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 20) And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21) To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.”)

Unquenchable fire cannot be put out (quenched), but it goes out when everything is burnt up.

2. Forever and Ever

The English words ‘forever’ and ‘everlasting’ come from the Hebrew word ‘*olam*’, which in the Greek language is ‘*aionios*’.

Revelation 20:9-10 “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.”

Revelation 20:9 says the fire devours the wicked. Verse 10 seems to say the fire goes on and on. How long is forever and ever? The word that is translated “forever” in the English is a word that becomes relative to that which it is describing. For example, in Jonah 2:6, “for ever” was only for three days and three nights. (Jonah 2:6 “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.”)

In Psalm 48:14, “forever and ever” means “until death.” (Psalms 48:14 “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.”)

1 Samuel 1:22 and 28 shows us that “forever” means “as long as Samuel lived.” (1 Samuel 1:22 “But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever. ... 28) “Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.”)

Isaiah 47:14 says, when the fire burns the wicked as stubble and goes out, there won’t be a coal to warm yourself or any fire at all. (Isaiah 47:14 “Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame:

there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.”) The word literally means “for an age.”

Therefore, the word in the original Greek and Hebrew translated as “forever” is a term that is to be understood in the context of what is being described. Fifty-six times in the Old Testament the term “forever” was applied to someone or something that had a definite end. How important to always study the context around the word “forever” to determine its meaning (a text without a context is a pretext for a proof-text.)

The unrighteous suffer “hell” for a limited time only. However, the results are eternal. Fire destroys completely or devours them. (Revelation 20:9 “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.”)

This is the second death. (Revelation 20:14-15 “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”)

The unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12) cannot be extinguished until its work is done and everything is burned up — Matthew 13:40-42; Jeremiah 17:27 Jerusalem does not burn any longer. (Matthew 3:12 “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; Matthew 13:40-42) “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; 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.”)

Eternal life is available only for those who belong to Jesus. Satan is not the Lord of hell, but will also be destroyed (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; Revelation 20:10 “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.”)

3. Everlasting Fire and Everlasting Punishment

Matthew 25:41-46 “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: 42) For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43) I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44) Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45) Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46) And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

Jude says that Sodom and Gomorrah burned with eternal fire. They are not burning now though. (Jude 1:7 “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, 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.”)

Peter says these cities burned to ashes as an example of what will happen to the wicked at the end of the world. (2 Peter 2:6 “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 punishment is everlasting in its effect or consequences but not in the duration of the time of the burning. Compare the usage of the word “eternal” in Jude 7 with the same word in Hebrews 5:9 and Hebrews 6:2. It is obvious that word “eternal” is referring to the result of the act rather than the duration of the act itself. (Hebrews 5:9 “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Hebrews 6:2 “Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”)

So eternal and everlasting fire turns things to ashes and then goes out. It is everlasting in its effect and not in its duration.

4. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31 “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 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.”

This story is a parable. It begins with the same words with which Jesus began many of His parables, i.e. “a certain man.” It follows in the line of a list of parables. Parables are not meant to be taken literally in every point of detail. (Example, Judges 9:6-15, in Jotham’s parable where the trees and brambles are talking to each other.)

There are always one or more points through which the parable is meant to demonstrate. If every word of the parable in Luke 16:19-31 was meant to be taken literally, it not only would make little sense, but would contradict other passages of Scripture and words of Jesus. This parable cannot be taken literally because:

1. Abraham’s bosom is not the home of the saved (Hebrews 11:10,16). Abraham’s bosom is a figurative representation of heaven. The representation of hell is also figurative. Both must be either figurative or literal. (Hebrews 11:10 “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.... 16) “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”)
2. Those in heaven will not be able to talk with those in hell. Isaiah 65:17 says the former things will not even be remembered, and Revelation 21:4 says the former things are passed away, which includes hell. (Isaiah 65:17 “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind; Revelation 21:4 “And God shall wipe away all tears from

their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”)

3. The Bible indicates that the dead (good and bad), are in their graves (Job 17:13;21:30-32), and that they will hear Jesus’ voice from their graves (John 5:28-29), and not from heaven or hell. (Job 17:13 “If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness; 21:30-32 “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; John 5:28-29 “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29) And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”)

4. It would make Jesus contradict himself. (Matthew 13:38-42 “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; 16:27) “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”)

5. The Bible teaches that men will receive their reward at the second coming, and not at death. (Revelation 22:11-12 “He that is unjust,

let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. 12) And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be; Matthew 16:27) “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”)

Even if taken literally, this parable would refute the idea of disembodied souls going to hell, for it describes the rich man with eyes, tongue, and lips. If taken literally, this parable would prove that men are cast into hell, soul and body at death. Bodies of the dead have been exhumed after having been dead for months and the eyes are still in the body, hence the absurdity of taking the parable literally is further seen. The “eyes” are in the grave, not in hell-fire.

In this parable, Christ was simply using a common belief of the day to illustrate the truth that if a man refuses to be guided by the Scripture, there is no hope for him. (Luke 16:31 “And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”)

Jesus was not threatening us with eternal torment. Rather He was impressing upon His hearers that man’s probation is closed at death and we each determines our eternal destiny in this present life.

