



The Good News

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Hell

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Sheol, in the Old Testament, is used to describe the abode of the dead, the grave, the place where all souls go when they die. Hades is a New Testament term that, like Sheol, describes the intermediate state of waiting for judgment for those who have died, and is described—among other places in the scriptures—by Jesus in Luke 16: 19-31 while telling of Lazarus. The Greeks spoke of a place called Tartarus, a place where the evil and wicked were punished for their evil deeds during their lives. Peter used it in concert with this description in 2 Peter 2:4 and it is the only place in the New Testament where we find *Tartaroo*, the Greek form of the word. Gehenna is a translation of the Jewish “ge Hinnom,” meaning the valley of Hinnom. In the Old Testament, that valley was used as a location to bury the bodies of evildoers, of burning the refuse created by the Jewish settlements and may have been the same place where the sacrificing of humans at Topheth was performed for the god Molech by forcing them to walk through fire (which was eventually destroyed by Josiah, as told in 2 Kings 23:10). It was a place of wretchedness, fire, waste and destruction. Gehenna is mentioned by Christ and is used to describe the place of eternal punishment for those who disobey the will of God.

Regardless of what term you use to describe it, the Word of God makes it unmistakably clear that a place of eternal punishment exists. Take, for example, the end of Mark 9: in verses 44, 46 and 48, Christ speaks of Gehenna as a place into which evildoers will be thrown and describes it thus: 43 “...into the *unquenchable fire*, 44 *where their worm does not die and the fire is unquenched.*” The imagery alone is horrifying: the constant destruction not only by fire but by the creatures that dispose of death: worms, maggots, grubs, beetles, flies, etc. The condemned will be continually consumed because their soul will *eternally*

feed the entities that are best represented, in Christ’s words, by those creatures mentioned above.

The most common image conjured in our minds when contemplating the hell created by God is, of course, fire. Any individual who has ever suffered a significant burn from an open flame will likely tell you that it is the most painful experience they have endured. It is a debilitating, scarring, physically devastating process that happens in mere moments because of the destructive properties of intense heat and open flame when applied to living tissue. The sheer volume and intensity of pain suffered is one of the most difficult aspects to overcome. It is this pain and utter destruction that Christ brings to our minds when he speaks of the unquenchable, *unending* fire that will burn alive those souls who choose not to follow the will of God. If the Lord wills, we will spend years upon this earth and we will create memories that will give us a perspective that makes life appear to be long. Life is, in fact, a brief moment, a fleeting breath in the wind, compared to eternity. For many, many souls, that eternity will be spent in sheer anguish, pain, misery, suffering and complete absence from God as they are thrown into the lake of burning fire and are consumed by destruction forevermore. That judgment is as real as the paper on which this article is written. It IS the fate that awaits those who choose themselves over God. Let’s make sure we stay motivated to enter into the wonderful place God has prepared for the saved.