

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 10

Lost Forever

The Bible says the wages of sin is death – and in previous lessons we learned the Bible teaches that all people, good and evil sleep the sleep of death, but Jesus has promised He will awaken them all out of that sleep, some at His coming, some at the end of the millennium. However, the Bible says at the final judgment some will face *“the second death.”* What is this *“second death”* – what many people call *“hell”*?

World Book Encyclopedia 2002 Edition says this about the subject of hell.

“Hell, according to many religions, is a place inhabited by demons, in which wicked people are punished after death. In Old Testament times, the Israelites believed that all the dead, both good and evil, went to a dark, unhappy place called sheol. By the time of Christ, some Jews thought that after death the wicked were separated from the righteous and then cast into a foul, burning valley called “gehenna.”

According to traditional Christian belief, hell is a place of unending anguish and pain. However, some Christian theologians have questioned whether a just and loving God would have created such a place. According to these scholars, hell is not a place but a symbol of the anguish caused by the loss of God or goodness. Islam, the religion of the Muslims, regards hell as a vast, fiery crater that the souls of the dead cross on a narrow bridge. The wicked fall off the bridge into everlasting torment.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, a soul may descend into one of many hells as a result of wicked karma (thoughts, words, and deeds). The stay in hell is not eternal. It lasts only until the effects of the evil karma have been removed.”

Obviously there are differences of opinion as to just what hell is. To discover the truth about this issue our question must be this - What does the Bible teach? Remember our rule... *“Don’t say “the Bible says” until you’ve looked at everything the Bible says”*

We begin by looking at the original words of the Hebrew and Greek. In Old Testament Hebrew, “hell” is translated from “sheol” meaning - underworld, grave or pit. It is translated as “hell” 31 times and as “grave” 31 times, and as “pit” 3 times.

In New Testament Greek, “hell” is most often translated from the Greek word “Hades” meaning – 1) the Greek god of the lower regions 2) the realm of the dead, the grave. It is translated as “hell” 10 times and as “grave” 1 time.

In the New Testament sometimes hell is translated from the Greek word “gehenna” meaning the valley of Hinnom, a place south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned. Gehenna is translated as “hell” or “hellfire” 12 times.

In II Peter 2:4, The word “hell” is translated from the Greek word “tartarus” which means the “deepest abyss.” This is the only time this Greek word appears in the New Testament.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary 1993 Edition, the English word “*hell*” came from the old English word “*hele*” which originally meant “to cover over - to hide.” The word hell originally meant the grave, where the dead body is covered over or hidden. However, over the years the word hell has come to mean a place of torment where the wicked suffer in flames for eternity.

In the Bible the word “hell” is used 53 times, but only 12 times does it refer to a place of burning; all the others refer to the grave.

Since the word hell can mean either the grave or a burning place we must look at the underlying Hebrew or Greek word in order to know how it is to be understood. For example, both of the following verses use the word Hades, but in one it is translated “*hell*” and in the other “*grave*”.

I Corinthians 15:55 “O death, where is thy sting? O grave (*hades*), where is thy victory?”

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

Nevertheless, most people think of hell as a burning place, therefore there are three basic questions we want to consider on the subject of hell.

First – when will it burn? After learning the truth about the state of the dead, (lesson 7) that they are asleep in the grave, and are not in heaven or hell, logic will give us but one answer as to *when*. In the parable of the tares Jesus reveals when the wicked will be cast into the fire.

Matthew 13:37–40 *“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. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.”*

In this passage Jesus says the wicked will be burned in the fire *“in the end of this world”* – or judgment day.

II Peter 2:9 says *“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”*

This passage makes it clear the wicked are *“reserved”* (in the grave or “hades”) *“until the day of judgment to be punished.”*

Our next question is *where* does the fire burn? Some say hell is *“down yonder.”* That idea come from the ancient Greeks who believed that the pagan god Hades lived in the center of the earth. But what does the Bible say? Revelation chapter 20 speaks about the final day of judgment at the end of the 1000 year millennium.

Revelation 20:7–10 *“ And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 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. 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.** And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”*

According to this passage, the wicked were on “*the breadth of the earth*” when the fire comes down and devours them.

Now that we know when and where, our third question is - how long will hell-fire burn?

The Bible teaches that man is mortal, saying, “*the soul that sinneth it shall die*” (Ezekiel 20:4). But, if the wicked burn for eternity, that would be eternal life! The Bible says the tree of life is in heaven – not in hell! “*The soul that sinneth shall die,*” it will not burn forever.

But what about those expressions in the Bible like:

“Eternal fire” – 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.**”*

Compare II Peter 2:6, “*And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly;”*

It does say “*eternal fire,*” but is Sodom and Gomorrah still burning today? No, II Peter 2:9 said they were turned to ashes. Therefore the results of the fire were eternal - they are never coming back, but the fire itself has gone out.

“Unquenchable fire” - 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 fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, **and it shall not be quenched.**”*

Compare Jeremiah 52:12-14 *“Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, which served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, And burned the house of the LORD, and the king’s house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire: And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about.”*

Is Jerusalem still burning today? No. It said the fire could not be quenched – meaning that man could not quench it, but when it burned up the city it went out.

“Forever” – I 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”*

Compare verse 28 *“Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD.”*

When Sarah said forever she only meant as long as he lives The word “for ever” in Hebrew is “*olam*” meaning long duration, everlasting, perpetual, or a long time. As you can see, it has several meanings and does not always mean “never ending.”

The Greek word translated “forever” is “*aion*” meaning - an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, period of time, or an age. Here too, this word can mean forever, but it can also mean just a period of time.

In I Corinthians 8:13 Paul writes: *“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”*

In this verse the phrase “*while the world standeth*” is from the Greek word “*aion*,” meaning only as long as the world stands and not for all eternity. More than 50 times the Bible speaks of things lasting forever that have already ended, such as Samuel’s service and King Solomon’s reign. We still use this term in the same way

today. You may hear someone say - "I sat in traffic forever!" We know they only meant what was to them a long time.

In the Bible there are 134 texts that state the wicked will be destroyed, annihilated, – not burned forever. Before we look at those – remember many of us are "programmed" to believe in eternal torment so we will need to look at these passages very thoughtfully. The following are a few examples:

Psalms 37:9-11, & 20 *"For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."* **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."**

When you apply fire or heat to fat it dissipates into smoke.

Psalms 92:7 *"When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever"*

Destroyed forever – they are gone forever.

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**. 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."*

Burned up – root and branch – ashes under the righteous' feet - there is nothing left, it is as though they had never been.

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."*

Note it says, “*Leadeth to destruction*”, not burning forever in hell.

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.”*

“Perish” – destroyed, not burning in the flames of hell for eternity.

Romans 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

The wages, meaning the reward, or the consequences of sin is death – not eternal life in hell.

James 1:15 *“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”*

This verse clearly states that sin results in death. We should be careful not to read more into the Bible than it says.

Mark 9:43 *“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: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”*

This verse says the worm dieth not, and the fire will not be quenched, not the body that is thrown into it, it will be consumed by the worms or the fire.

Compare Isaiah 51:7,8 *“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation”*

Isaiah 66:24 *“And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.”*

Note it says the “carcasses” of the men who have sinned. The fire and worms are devouring dead bodies, not burning people to death.

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.”*

Again, the word used is “destroy.” The unrepentant sinner will be completely destroyed in the end. These texts are not speaking about the “sleep of death”, but the “second death.” The death from which there will be no resurrection - it is an everlasting, forever, eternal, death.

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

The result of the “punishment” is everlasting, but not the “punishing.”

Here’s a final question. What happens to Satan? Is he down there “prodding the wicked in the flames?” Is Satan immortal?

Ezekiel 28:13-19 *“Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; 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. 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.”

This must be Satan, because besides Adam and Eve, he was the only one in the Garden of Eden. In the end, the devil is “*devoured*” by “*fire*” that comes from “*within*.” What kind of fire is that? We will discuss that in more detail in the next lesson.

Now let’s go back and look at one of those texts in Revelation that some use to support an unending fire in hell.

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.”*

Now that we understand “for ever” comes from a Greek word that does not always mean without end, but a certain period of time, and according to the other passages we studied, even though the period of time may be short, the results will be everlasting.

From the beginning, it has been Satan’s purpose to make God one to be feared and dreaded. Which should help us understand how these false teachings got into the church.

From Funk and Wagnalls Standard Reference Encyclopedia by Readers Digest 1958 under the heading “hell” we find when this teaching was adopted by the church in Rome long ago: “The second council of Constantinople, in 533 AD, a belief in the eternity of the punishments in hell became characteristic of both the Orthodox and the Roman churches. It also passed into the creeds of the churches of the reformation.”

In the dark ages, during an age of superstition and ignorance, the medieval church developed a doctrine on hell as a place where the lost would suffer torment for eternity so that people would fear God and the church. (They also taught the world was flat – that’s since been proven wrong too!) Teaching that sinners would be condemned to eternal damnation was a way of gaining power and

control over the people, thus better church attendance and more offerings. Some preachers still use this tactic today.

There are millions of people in church every week, giving their money, saying, "I love the Lord" - when in reality they are afraid of what God will do to them if they don't. The teaching that God will torture in hell forever those who do not do as He wishes or reject Christ, has actually turned thousands of people away from God and the church.

In the next lesson we will continue this most important study on the character of God and how He is involved in the punishment of the lost.

Response Questions –

1. Is it clear to you that there is no one burning in hell now?
Yes ___ No ___
2. Is it clear to you that hell is not a burning place in the center of the earth?
Yes ___ No ___
3. Is it clear to you God will not burn the wicked for all eternity?
Yes ___ No ___