

“Is Hell Real and were the Old Testament Saints told about it?”



Clearing up the confusion on some myths about hell.

Part of the problem with the concept of hell is that the nature of hell has been distorted in our culture and portrayed as something that is far from what we read in the New Testament. Some misconceptions are, but this list is not an exhaustive one: First, Hell is a place to be united with unbelievers. There is widespread belief among non-Christians that hell is a place where they will be united with their unbelieving friends and drink beer all the time in an endless party. Secondly, another false belief is that hell is the place where Satan and his demons exercise their authority to rule and reign. Satan and his demons are inmates in hell, not its warden or guards. Thirdly, which is related to the previous myth, there is the notion that in hell Satan and his demons torment human beings who also are there. These are but a few of the ways culture and Satan has perverted what God has clearly revealed.

First let us define our terms, which is the basis for a lot of confusion,

There are four words in the Old and New Testament, which are translated in English as hell. Those words are: Tartarus, Shoel, Hades and Gehenna. Let us define each of these terms (taken from gotquestions.com).

1) Tartarus: In ancient Greek mythology, Tartarus was a horrible pit of torment in the afterlife. It was lower than even Hades, the place of the dead. According to the Greeks, Tartarus was populated by ferocious monsters and the worst of criminals.

The Greek word “*Tartarus*” appears only **once** in the entire New Testament. **2 Peter 2:4**, “**God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to [*Tartarus*], putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment.**” Most English versions translate “*tartarus*” as “**hell**” or “**lowest hell.**” The word *Tartarus* can be defined as “**the deepest abyss of Hades.**”

According to **Jude 1:6**, some angels “**abandoned their proper dwelling**” in the heavens. For this crime, God cast them into *Tartarus* where they are held “**in pits of gloom**” (AMP) for a later judgment. It seems that *Tartarus* was what the demons feared in **Luke 8:30-31**, “**Jesus asked him, saying, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.**”

Though it is only used once in the New Testament, it is still translated as “**hell.**”

2) Gehenna: The word “*gehenna*” is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew “*ge-hinnom*”, meaning “**Valley of [the sons of] Hinnom.**” This valley south of Jerusalem was where some of the ancient Israelites sacrificed their children to the Canaanite god Molech (**2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:2–6**). The place is called “*Tophet*” in **Isaiah 30:33**. In later years, Gehenna continued to be an unclean place used for burning trash from the city of Jerusalem, this is the picture of what the New Testament word hell is used as an illustration of the continual torment. **Jesus used Gehenna as an illustration of what hell was like**, not that Gehenna was hell..

God despised the false god Molech so much so, that He explicitly forbade the Israelites from having anything to do with him in **Leviticus 18:21**, “**And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.**” He even warned them of the impending judgment He would send their way if the Jews didn’t keep their attention and worship directed toward Him. In another prophetic warning, God re-named the Valley of Hinnom as the Valley of Slaughter (**Jeremiah 19**).

But the Israelites didn't listen, and evil kings of Judah, such as Ahaz, used the Valley of Hinnom for their demonic practices (**2 Chronicles 28:3**). To punish Judah, God brought Babylon against them, and that pagan nation carried out His judgment against Judah's idolatry and rebellion. It wasn't until after 70 years of exile that the Jews were allowed back into Israel to rebuild.

Upon their return the Valley of Slaughter was re-purposed from a place of infanticide to an ever-burning rubbish heap (**2 Kings 23:10**). Child sacrifice and other forms of idol-worship ceased in Israel. Gehenna became a place where corpses of criminals, dead animals, and all manners of refuse were thrown to be destroyed.

The Gehenna Valley was thus a place of burning sewage, burning flesh, and garbage. Maggots and worms crawled through the waste, and the smoke smelled strong and sickening, (**Isaiah 30:33**). It was a place utterly filthy, disgusting and repulsive to the nose and eyes. Gehenna presented such a vivid image that Christ used it as a symbolic depiction of hell: **"a place of eternal torment and constant uncleanness, where the fires never ceased burning and the worms never stopped crawling"** (**Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:47-48**).

Because of Jesus' symbolic use of *Gehenna*, the word *gehenna* is sometimes used as a synonym for hell. In fact, that's how the Greek word is translated in **Mark 9:47**, **"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell (gehenna) fire."** The occupants of the lake of fire/hell are separated from God for all of eternity, it is an ongoing judgment.

3) Shoel: In the Old Testament, "*Sheol*" is the Hebrew word for "hell" which denotes simply as, "place of the dead." It is defined twofold, first as the place of the dead meaning the grave, simply where dead bodies are buried, in Old and New Testament times it usually meant in a tomb or cave. Secondly the place of the dead refers to, a holding place for the conscience souls awaiting the resurrection.

4) Hades: The New Testament Greek equivalent to "*sheol*" is "*hades*", which is also a general reference to "the place of the dead." Which is also used to describe the grave and holding place of the conscience dead.

Those are what the biblical words mean in their context, now it is vitally just as important to define the English word "hell" and where we get it from as it is the Greek and Hebrew words.

Hell: Shockingly, for some, hell comes from a pagan source and not from the Bible. It also has little, if any, resemblance to our modern-day images of hell.

Etymology: is the study of the origin, history, and derivation of words. The New Encyclopedia Britannica confirms this little-known etymology this way: “Hell, the abode or state of being of evil spirits or souls that are damned to postmortem punishment. Derived from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “**to conceal**,” or “**to cover**” Webster’s Dictionary explains that “hell” comes from middle English, old English, and old high German, (hel, helle, helan) and arose during the Anglo-Saxon pagan period (A.D. 400 – 1100).

Our word “**helmet**” is derived from this same etymology, root, and meaning. A helmet covers, conceals, and protects the head. It certainly does not torment or punish one’s head. Similarly, the word “hel” or “helle” was used in Europe during the middle ages when potato farmers would “hel” their potatoes. That is, during the winter they would cover, conceal, and protect their potatoes by digging holes, putting their potatoes in the ground, and covering them with dirt. These farmers referred to this process as “putting their potatoes in hel”—again, for the purpose of care and protection, and not torment and punishment.

Today, most housewives conceal and protect the potatoes they buy at the store by storing them in a dark place so they won’t sprout buds and go soft and bad as quickly as they would in a lighted and open area. In some parts of England it is also said that to cover a building with a roof of tiles or thatch was “to hel the building.” That job was done by people called “helliers.” Therefore, to hel a house meant to cover and protect it with a roof. I believe that the term “heling” a house, is still used in the New England portions of the United States today.

Thus, the origin and basic meaning of the word “hell” had nothing to do with another-worldly, afterlife place or with a place of eternal torment and punishment with no hope of escape. That connotation or derivation had to come later. But the modern-day meaning evolved, or devolved, depending on your perspective, from referring to the common earthly grave of all deceased human beings into its meaning today of being a nether-world place of eternal conscious torment and punishment for only the damned. Consequently, most of our thinking about hell and hellfire today does not come from either the Bible or from its etymology and historical usage. Most of the imagery of hell came from Dante’s Inferno: (taken from the United Church Of God, “Beyond Today” Website authored by Steve Myers).



In the early 1300s, the noted Italian poet Dante Alighieri penned an imaginary description of hell in his work *The Divine Comedy*. The beginning section of that epic poem is known as the *Inferno*—the Italian word for hell. This one story is probably most responsible for the commonly held notions of hell today. How could this one story about hell form and shape what millions believe? In his poem, Dante imagines that the ancient Roman poet Virgil takes him on a guided tour through hell. At the entrance gates to Dante’s hell is an ominous inscription that ends, “Abandon all hope, you who enter here” (*Inferno, A New Verse Translation, Dante Alighieri, ed. Elio Zappulla, Canto III, p. 39*). Virgil tells Dante about the journey through hell: “I’ll be your guide, and you will follow me, and I will lead you through a world of pain where dead souls writhe in endless agony and clamor, as they cry, to die again” (*Canto I, p. 24*). Dante is led through nine circles of hell—various compartments and levels of torturous afterlife. He writes about what he envisions: “So in the ditch, far down below the arch on which we stood, there bubbled viscous pitch . . . I only saw the bubbles rise and burst, the huge mass heave, contract, heave, and contract repeatedly” (*Canto XXI, pp. 189–190*). He looks to see someone condemned to this level: “The sinner plunged into the pitch [and] they pricked the sinner with a hundred prongs” (*Canto XXI, pp. 190–191*). Dante sees souls locked in searing fiery tombs, people boiling in blood and rained on by fire. Malicious demons jab, poke, whip and beat those who are lost. These sinners are buried head first, but suffer even more misery as scorching flames burn their feet. Nevertheless, this isn’t the fate of all. Others are frozen in a lake up to their heads to suffer the agony of stinging, bitter cold—only able to move their chattering teeth.

Dante created stunning, unforgettable visual images that became etched into people's minds. He played on our worst fears. The gripping scenes he imagined captured the attention and horror of the world—we see this expounded in movies and other popular culture centuries later.

Even though Dante's work barely has any reference to actual Bible passages, it became the benchmark of what people would believe about the afterlife. The Catholic Encyclopedia even calls it "**the Sacred Poem.**" Dante's Inferno seemingly became the standard of what hell is like and who would go there.

The issue is not whether the word "hell" should be translated for the original Greek and Hebrew words, but rather, is hell real? The word hell can be used because it describes the actual biblical place now and an actual biblical punishment that will take place in the future. Jesus used the word gehenna, which was the city dump, to describe the eternal punishment that was to come. So the issue isn't whether we should use hell, which we can, the issue is, is there biblical references to an eternal punishment like our modern definition of the word hell? And is it found in the Old Testament?

The Church of God, as quoted from above, does not believe in a literal place of torment for the dead. They believe that the wicked will be destroyed, gone forever. They use scripture like, **Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life."** Also they use Old Testament verses like, **Ezekiel 18:4, "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die."** And **Ezekiel 18:20, "The soul who sins shall die."** They believe that, "Jesus tells us that without His sacrifice, we die—we perish—we do not live forever in separation. To "perish" does not just mean to stop living, but to be destroyed, or "to come to nothing"—to cease to exist. In no way does it mean to have eternal life in torment." The problem with this ideology, is the very essence of the word death, which the bible presents death as separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body and spiritual death is the soul separated from God. God does not annihilate the wicked upon death. In **Matthew 10:28**, Jesus said, **"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."** This word hell is gehenna, remember that was the city dump that the fire never went out but constantly burned always, which is a picture of the eternal punishment to come.

Let's see what the Bible does say in the Old Testament about what we call in modern English hell.

So the word hell or Sheol in the Hebrew, is used like this:

Ecclesiastes 9:6, "Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun."

Solomon says hell has no love, hate, or envy in it.

Ecclesiastes 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave* where you are going.”

Solomon goes on to point out that there is no, work, knowledge, or wisdom in hell.

Psalm 88:6, “You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths.” The psalmist says that hell has no light, also found in, **Job 10:21-22, 17:13; Psalms 88:12; 143:3**

Psalm 6:5, “For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?” there is no remembrance in hell, also found in, **Psalm 88:12; Eccl 9:5**.

Isaiah 38:18, “For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth.” In hell there is no praise of God, also found in, **Psalm 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12; 115:17**; matter of fact there is no sound at all, **Psalm 94:17**, “Unless the Lord had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence.” **Psalm 115:17**, “The dead do not praise the Lord, Nor any who go down into silence.”

Isaiah 14:9-10, “Hell from beneath is excited about you, To meet you at your coming; It stirs up the dead for you, All the chief ones of the earth; It has raised up from their thrones All the kings of the nations. They all shall speak and say to you: ‘Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us?’” All of hells inhabitants are weak and trembling, **Job 26:5; Psalm 88:10-12**, who can never hope to escape from its gates, **Job 10:21; 17:13-16; Isa 38:10**.

Isaiah 38:11, “I said, “Never again will I see the Lord God while still in the land of the living. Never again will I see my friends or be with those who live in this world.” The dead were cut off from God in hell or separated from Him, which is the definition of death. Also found in **Psalm 88:3-5**.

Now, the fact that theology develops within the Old Testament and seems different between the Old Testament and the New Testament does not mean that the Bible is contradictory or contains errors. It only indicates a progressive revelation, that God revealed more of Himself and His plan of salvation as time went on. That some Old Testament saints believed in Sheol, while the New Testament teaches clearly about heaven and hell, is no more of a problem than that the Old Testament containing a system of atonement by animal sacrifice **now made obsolete in Christ**, **Hebrews 10:4-10**, or that the Old Testament teaches God is One, **Deuteronomy 6:4**, while the New Testament reveals a **Trinity**.

In much of the Old Testament period, the concept of Hell as a place of eternal damnation was not yet fully articulated. Rather, an abode of the dead where souls await judgment is mentioned. This is sometimes written as Sheol and at other times as Hades in the OT. The ancient Israelites were convinced that Sheol was physically located deep

within the earth. An example of this is **Numbers 16**, when Moses was faced with a rebellion by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The Lord punished the rebels and their immediate families in view of the other Israelites. And Moses said, **“Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord.”** (**Numbers 16:28–30**) And once Moses finished speaking, **“the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; and the earth closed over them.”** (**Numbers 16:31–32**).

The OT contains many references to God’s wrath. He is often said to be angry at wickedness (see, for example, **Deuteronomy 32:22**, **Psalm 2:12**, and **Psalm 18:7**). **Psalm 7:11** is one of many verses that indicate this indignation or anger is directed toward those who perpetrate this wickedness (**“the wicked”**). The OT prophets repeatedly speak of a time when the Holy One would have His **“day”** — a day of justice in which He would express His anger toward sin and visit judgment on sinners. They referred to this as **“The Day of the Lord.”** (**Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi. 4:5**).

One of the most clearest illustrations about God’s eternal judgment in the Old Testament is, found in, **Daniel 12:2**, **“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.”** Very clear that judgment is eternal, not one time destroyed, never to exist again. The Old Testament people knew God had a judgment, and it was coming in the future, as stated earlier this was known as **“the Day of the Lord.”** Although they knew that there was a future judgment, the Old Testament saints didn't understand all the details. Some of the New Testament clarities are known as mysteries, and the Old Testament saints for sure did not know all of what God had planned. These mysteries that are revealed in the New Testament, are, what was previously stated, part of God’s progressive revelation. A **“Mystery”** in the New Testament sense is not something that cannot be understood, but is some plan or purpose of God that God knew from the beginning, but which He has withheld from the knowledge of men until the time came for God to reveal it to man.

God for sure cleared up most of the confusion in the New Testament.

Some of the mysteries are as follows:

The Mystery of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 4:1, **“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”** This was simply the message of the cross the gospel message. Paul

speaks of this also in, Romans 16:25-26, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the **mystery kept secret since the world began** but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith.”

The Mystery of the Incarnation

John 1:1-14, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Mystery of the Rapture

1 Corinthians 15:51-55, “Behold, I tell you a **mystery**: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

The Mystery of Israel’s Blindness

Romans 11:25, “For I do, not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this **mystery**, lest you should be wise in your own opinion **that blindness** in part **has happened to Israel** until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

There is the mystery of iniquity (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12), the mystery of the church as Christ’s bride (Ephesians 5:22-33), The Mystery of the restoration of all things (Ephesians 1:9-10), there is even a future mystery that we don't know what it is, even though the mystery name has been told to us, which is “**Mystery Babylon**” in Revelation 17-18.

Here is the issue, God judges the wicked, and that is clearly seen in the Old and New Testaments. That judgment is eternal and that is seen in the Old and New Testaments. The final place is the lake of fire revealed only in the New Testament, but the holding cell is revealed in the Old and New Testament, which was Shoel in the Old and Hades in the New. Jesus spoke more about hell than He did heaven. But it is a place clearly to be avoided.

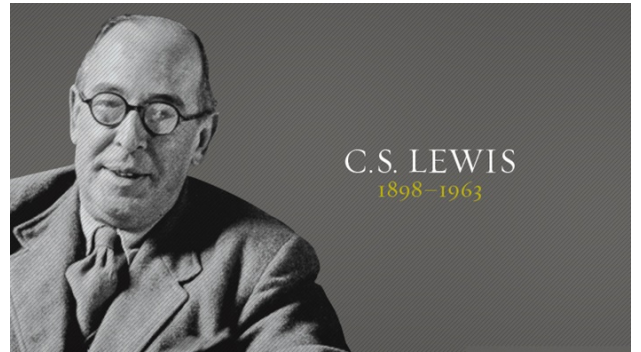
We see the final results and judgment of God in a place of torment day and night, which is not figurative but literal, clearly declared to us by John the Apostle.

Revelation 20:10-15, “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things, which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Jesus even described the holding place for the dead before His, death burial and resurrection in, **Luke 16:22-31**, “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ““No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

Most people don't believe in hell because they say if God is a God of love why would he send someone to hell? But since **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23**, we need redemption which is only found in the blood of Jesus Christ. We don't get to heaven by good works, our righteousness, being a good person, being baptized, church attendance, or through penance in purgatory, which there is no biblical concept of purgatory. It is only through belief in Christ but if by your choice you refuse

Christ, then you are sending yourself into eternal judgment and damnation. Hell is not an easy belief to accept, even **C.S. Lewis** said of it, “there is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has full support of Scripture and especially, of our Lord’s own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason.”



John MacArthur says concerning hell, “Satan continues his efforts to make sin less offensive, heaven less appealing, hell less horrific, and the gospel less urgent. Don’t be ignorant of Satan’s devices. The Word of God leaves no doubt about the existence or nature of hell. With clarity and authority, God has told us everything we need to know about hell, and how to avoid it through the merits of Christ.



Don't believe the Lie, Hell is real!!