

Hell: Annihilation or Consciousness?

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INTRODUCTION

This is an age old question, “What happens to us when we die?” Most, if not all major religions of the world have views on the state of a person after death. This paper will study the Holy Bible to analyze the scriptures that form the foundation of the biblically based Christian perspective and compare and contrast that with the concept of *Annihilationism*.

Annihilationism¹ is the doctrine that the souls of the wicked will be snuffed out of existence rather than be sent to an everlasting, conscious hell. The existence of the unrepentant will be extinguished, while the righteous will enter eternal bliss.

Most arguments in support of annihilationism vary along the theme of *God's Mercy*. They reason that because God is a God of Mercy (Ex 20:6) it is merciless to allow people to suffer consciously forever. Therefore a Merciful God would not permit an eternal state of torment. After all, we kill horses and other animals to put them out of their misery, so does it not stand to reason that a merciful God would do the same for the lost?

There is, however, a fatal flaw in this reasoning. The very concept of an ultimately merciful God supposes that he is the absolute standard for what is merciful and morally right. Now, with God being the absolute standard of moral righteousness, humans cannot impose *their* standard or concept of justice upon God.

Annihilation demeans both the love of God and the nature of humans as volitional beings created in the image and likeness of God. God did not create humans with volition, the ability to choose only if they choose to do the will of God. We were created in the image of God and with the God given ability to choose, even if those choices are contrary to what a loving and merciful God would desire for us. Eternal torment is the eternal testimony to volition and the dignity of humans in possession of the very image of God, including the unrepentant. To annihilate these people is contrary to the very nature and essence of a merciful God and also contrary to the created “like nature” of God in humans. God is everlasting and we were created in His image and in His likeness as an everlasting creation. God does not destroy His image bearers for to do so is akin to God being contrary to Himself.

Animals are often killed to alleviate their pain. Humans are not killed for that very same reason, we are not animals. As image bearers of God, we need to be treated with the dignity and respect worthy of bearers of God's image. Not to allow them to continue to exist in their freely chosen destiny, painful as it may be, is to snuff out God's image in them. Since volition is created in man by God and declared good, volition is one aspect of the image of God in man and therefore ungodly and evil for man to take it away.

Yet, this is precisely what annihilationism does, it destroys human dignity *forever*. In doing so it also denies the existence of hell. The bible clearly states there is a hell with various degrees of punishment in hell (Mt 5:22, Rev 20:12-14.) Should a just God punish an atheist who has led a

¹ Geisler, Norman L., Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Baker 1998, p22-24

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fairly moral life with the same ferocity as He punishes the crime of genocide? Should Hitler and the petty thief both receive the same punishment for their crimes? Both crimes are an affront to the infinite holiness of God. To annihilate both is gross injustice, but that is precisely what annihilation prescribes. The bible speaks of degrees of punishment in hell but there are no degrees of annihilation. Nonexistence is the same for all.

Annihilationists try to argue the case that nonexistence is a superior alternative to an eternal existence of torment in hell. Non-existence cannot be said to be a better condition than any kind of existence, since nonexistence is nothing. To affirm that nothing is better than something is a huge *categorical* mistake. In order to compare two things, they must have something in common. Existence and nonexistence, being and nonbeing have nothing in common and therefore impossible to compare. They are diametrically opposed. Someone may *feel* like being put out of a life of torment and misery, but such a person cannot even consistently think of nonbeing as a better state of being.

Let's examine the scriptures annihilationists claim to be the basis for their doctrine. When examined carefully and in context we will see that none of the following scriptures prove annihilation. In some points language may permit such a construction, but nowhere does the text demand annihilationism. In context and in comparison with other passages, the concept must be rejected in every case. All scripture New King James unless specified otherwise.

THE SECOND DEATH

Revelation 20:14

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Since a person loses consciousness of this world at the first death (physical death) annihilationists argue that the second death will involve unconsciousness in the world to come.

CONTEXT: Separation, Not Extinction. The first death is simply the separation of the spirit, or soul from the body and not the annihilation of the soul.

James 2:26a

For as the body without the spirit is dead, ...

Scripture presents death as conscious separation. Adam and Eve died temporally, spiritually and eternally the moment they sinned, yet they still existed and could hear God's voice.

Genesis 2:17

"but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, **for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**"

Adam and Eve died the very day they ate of the tree. God defines death as separation from Him. It is clear from scripture that both Adam and Eve retained physical existence after they sinned but will now experience temporal (physical) death, experienced *immediate* spiritual

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death or separation and under sentence of eternal death apart from Redemption and Salvation.

Genesis 3:8-10

- 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
- 9 Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"
- 10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Prior to being saved, a person is "dead in trespasses and sin"... yet he still carries God's image.

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 9:6

"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God he made man.

James 3:9

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. (NIV)

God has placed within all humanity the ability to know His wrath through unrighteousness so all are without excuse...

Romans 1:18-20

- 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,
- 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.
- 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

...Though unable to come to Jesus without divine intervention, the "spiritually dead" are sufficiently aware that scripture holds them accountable to believe and repent. The second death is continued awareness, but with separation from God and the inability to save oneself.

Acts 17:30

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

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Everlasting Destruction

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

- 7 and to **give you who are troubled rest** with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,
8 **in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God**, and on those **who do not obey the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 **These shall be punished** with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

Scriptures speak of the wicked being destroyed and that this destruction is incompatible with a continued, conscious existence.

CONTEXT: Everlasting destruction is not annihilation which takes an instant, then is over. It is also not referring to the time span of nonexistence as everlasting. If a person is experiencing everlasting destruction, then they must by definition have everlasting existence. Cars in a junkyard have been destroyed, but they are not annihilated. They are simply beyond repair or unredeemable. Such is the state of people in hell.

Perdition

2 Peter 3:7

But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

John 17:12

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

The wicked are said to go into perdition or destruction. Judas is referred to as the "son of perdition." The Greek word *apoleia* appears 19 times and is translated as perdition seven times. *Apoleia* means to be ruined, scrapped, destroyed or damned. Use of this word, the annihilationists argue, means that the lost will perish or go out of existence.

CONTEXT: The use and context of the word *apoleia*, (all occurrences listed in Appendix B) is used in the context of a wasted thing, useless, ruined, dead. In 2 Peter 3:7, perdition is used in the context of judgment which clearly implies consciousness.

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 <apoleia>** of ungodly men.

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Returning to our junkyard analogy, ruined cars have perished, but they are still junkyard cars. In this connection, Jesus speaks of hell as a dump where the fire will not die and the resurrected body will not be consumed, "worm will not die."

Like Not Having Been Born?

Mark 14:21

"The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

When Jesus said of Judas who was sent to perdition, that "it would be better for him if he had not been born," the annihilationists presume this to mean to return to the preconception state of nonexistence. Before one is conceived, they do not exist. Thus, for hell to be like the pre-birth condition it must be in the state on nonexistence.

CONTEXT: This is simply a strong expression indicating the severity of Judas' sin, not a statement about the superiority of non-being over being. In a parallel condemnation of the Pharisees in Matthew 11:23-24, Jesus said Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had they seen his miracles.

Matthew 11:23-24

- 23 "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.
- 24 "But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

Jesus is not saying that they actually would have repented, for if they would God would have most certainly shown them these miracles.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Jesus is using a powerful figure of speech indicating that their sin was so great that "it would be *more tolerable*" in the Day of Judgment for Sodom than for them.

The Wicked Will Perish

The Old Testament repeatedly speaks of the wicked perishing. Annihilationists claim perish implies a state of nothingness. Is that justified by the use of Scripture? Let's look at some Old Testament passages and see.

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Psalms 37:20

But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.

Psalms 68:2

As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

Psalms 112:10

The wicked will see it and be grieved; he will gnash his teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked shall perish.

CONTEXT: In the Old Testament the Hebrew word used to describe the wicked perishing is *abad* (Appendix A) It is also used to describe the righteous perishing ...

Isaiah 57:1

The **righteous perishes**, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil.

Micah 7:2

The **faithful man has perished** from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his brother with a net.

Even annihilationists admit that the righteous are not snuffed out of existence. How then is it possible to use this term to conclude the wicked will be snuffed out? The simple answer is it is not especially when one considers the term *abad* is also used to describe things that are merely lost but then later found...

Deuteronomy 22:3

In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost thing of thy brother's, which he hath **lost <abad>** and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself.

The general usage of perish is to **be removed from a place** as in Micah 7:2 above.

Numbers 16:33

They, and all that *appertained* to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they **perished <abad>** from among the congregation.

This is sufficient proof that *abad* does not imply nonexistence. Furthermore, nothing cannot be better than something, since there is nothing in common with which to compare. It is a literal impossibility for nonbeing to be *actually better* than being. To assume otherwise is a huge categorical mistake.

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Many people appear to be more willing to believe in heaven than they do hell. No good person wants anyone to go to hell. However, as Sigmund Freud once said, "it is an illusion to reject something simply because we wish not to believe in it." The existence or non-existence of hell must be based upon *evidence*, not desire. The evidence for the existence of hell is strong as we will examine now.

Hell²

Derived from the Saxon word *helan*, which means to cover; hence the covered or the invisible place. In Scripture there are four words so rendered:

1. Sheol

The Hebrew noun occurs in the Old Testament sixty-five times. (See Appendix A)

07585 שְׂאוֹל sh'owl (sheh-ole') or שְׂאֹל sh'ol (sheh-ole')

from [07592](#); TWOT-2303c; n f; *underworld* (place to which people descend at death; of unc. der.):—

NAS-Sheol (66). AV-grave 31, hell 31, pit 3; 65

This word Sheol is derived from a root-word meaning "to ask," "demand;" hence insatiableness Pr 30:15,16 It is rendered "grave" thirty-one times Ge 37:35 42:38 44:29,31 1Sa 2:6 etc. The Revisers have retained this rendering in the historical books with the original word in the margin, while in the poetical books they have reversed this rule. In thirty-one cases in the Authorized Version this word is rendered "hell," the place of disembodied spirits. The inhabitants of Sheol are "the congregation of the dead" Pr 21:16 It is:

- A. the abode of the wicked (Nu 16:33 Job 24:19 Ps 9:17 31:17 etc)
- B. of the good (Ps 16:10 30:3 49:15 86:13 etc) Sheol is described as:
- C. deep (Job 11:8)
- D. dark (Job 10:21,22)
- E. with bars (Job 17:16)
- F. The dead "go down" to it (Nu 16:30,33 Eze 31:15,16,17)

2. Hades

The Greek word Hades of the New Testament has the same scope of signification as Sheol of the Old Testament. (Appendix B)

86 Ἅδης hades (hah'-dace)

from 1 (as negative particle) and [1492](#); TDNT-1:146,22; n pr loc; *Hades*, the abode of departed spirits:—

NAS-Hades (10). AV-hell 10, grave 1; 11

² Easton's Revised Bible Dictionary

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In Biblical Greek it is associated with Orcus, the infernal regions, a dark and dismal place in the very depths of the earth, the common receptacle of disembodied spirits. Usually Hades is just the abode of the wicked, Lu 16:23; Re 20:13,14; a very uncomfortable place. TDNT. It is a prison (1Pe 3:19) with gates and bars and locks (Mt 16:18 Re 1:18) and it is downward (Mt 11:23, Lu 10:15) The righteous and the wicked are separated. The blessed dead are in that part of Hades called Paradise (Lu 23:43) They are also said to be in Abraham's bosom (Lu 16:22)

3. Gehenna

In most of its occurrences in the Greek New Testament designates the fiery place of the lost (Mt 23:33) and the Final Judgment of both men and angels.

1067 γέεννα *geenna (gheh'-en-nah)*

of Hebrew origin גֵּהֶנְנִים, [01516](#) and [02011](#); TDNT-1:657,113; n f; *Gehenna*, a valley W. and S. of Jer., also a symbolic name for the final place of punishment of the ungodly:— NAS-hell (12). AV-hell 9, hell fire + [3588](#) + [4442](#) 3; 12

Hell is the place of the future punishment call "Gehenna", "Gehenna of fire", "Lake of Fire", and "Second Death." This was originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned; a fit symbol of the wicked and their future destruction. The fearful nature of their condition there is described in various figurative expressions Mt 8:12 13:42 22:13 25:30 Lu 16:24 etc.

4. Abyss

Though not translated as hell, the Abyss is the abode of fallen angels (demons) who followed Satan in his rebellion against the Lord. Deep and bottomless is implied. Some fallen angels are imprisoned or incarcerated in the Abyss and questionable if humans will be sent there as Final Judgment for it is now the exclusive abode of fallen angels.

12 αβυσσος *abussos (ab'-us-sos)*

from [1](#) (as a negative particle) and a variation of βυσσος *bussos* = [1037](#); TDNT-1:9,2; n f; *boundless, bottomless*:—

NAS-abyss (7), bottomless (2).

AV-bottomless pit 5, deep 2, bottomless 2; 9

1) bottomless

2) unbounded

3) the abyss

3a) the pit

3b) the immeasurable depth

3c) of Orcus, a very deep gulf or chasm in the lowest parts of the earth used as the common receptacle of the dead and especially as the abode of demons

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5. Tartaroo

Used only once in scripture, 2Peter 2:4, is used to describe the deepest innermost “darkness” of the Abyss reserved exclusively for incarcerating the fallen angels who left their first abode. This most likely means angels whose crimes are human possession which is a very serious crime and one that God punishes in the deepest and darkest prison in the Abyss ... Tartaroo. Whether the “pits of darkness” or the “chains of darkness” of Tartaroo is the same as the “blackness of darkness” or “chains of darkness” that some humans will be sentenced to in 2 Peter 2:17 and Jude 1:13 are uncertain ... but certainly a possibility. Other verses also describe an “outer darkness” where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth of humans.

5020 τάρταρω tartaroo (tar-tar-o'-o)

from Tartaros (the deepest abyss of Hell); (a Gr. name for the abode of the damned); v;
from Tartarov Tartaros *to cast into hell*:—
NAS-cast...into hell (1). AV-cast down to hell 1; 1

- 1) the name of the subterranean region, doleful and dark, regarded by the ancient Greeks as the abode of the wicked dead, where they suffer punishment for their evil deeds; it answers to Gehenna of the Jews
- 2) to thrust down to Tartarus, to hold captive in Tartarus

Hinnom³

A deep, narrow ravine separating Mount Zion from the so-called "Hill of Evil Counsel." It took its name from "some ancient hero, the son of Hinnom." It is first mentioned in Josh 15:8 and was the place where the idolatrous Jews burned their children alive to Moloch and Ba'al. A particular part of the valley was called Tophet, or the "fire-stove," where the children were burned. After the Exile, in order to show their abhorrence of the locality, the Jews made this valley the receptacle of the offal of the city, for destruction, of which a fire was as is supposed, kept constantly burning there. The Jews associated with this valley these two ideas,

1. That of the sufferings of the victims that were sacrificed there; and
2. That of filth and corruption. To the Jewish mind it had since become popular symbol for the abode of the wicked. It came to signify hell as the place of the wicked. "It might be shown by infinite examples that the Jews expressed hell, or the place of the damned, by this word. The word Gehenna [the Greek contraction of Hinnom] was never used in the time of Christ in any other sense than to denote the place of future punishment." About this fact there can be no question. In this sense the word is used eleven times in our Lord's discourses Mt 23:33 Lu 12:5 Mt 5:22.

Hell has been called cruel, inhuman, and barbarous. Unbelievers in general have questioned both the existence and justice of hell. Scripture and human reason both defend the existence

³ ibid.

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and need for hell. In addition to the lack of any biblical evidence to support annihilationism, there are numerous Scripture to support the doctrine of hell as a place of eternal conscious torment.

Nowhere does the bible describe hell as a torture chamber where people are forced against their will to be tortured. This is a caricature created by unbelievers to justify their reaction that the God who sends people to hell is cruel. This is not to say that hell is not a place of torment because it is. It is just not a place of torture but a place of punishment. The difference is torture is inflicted from without and against one's will while torment is self-inflicted, generating from within. Torment is living with the consequences of our own bad choices. It is the weeping and gnashing of teeth that result from the realization that we blew it and deserve the consequences.

It appears that the gates of hell are locked from within. No human need go to hell unless they choose to be there. We are condemned to our own desired freedom *from* God. Heaven's presence of the divine would be torture to one who has irretrievably set their will contrary to the presence of God and rejects all from God. Just as a baseball player playing in the World Series that makes an error that allows the other team victory experiences the torment of his actions, so it is for those in hell who know the agony they suffer is self-induced.

Jesus Taught the Existence of Hell

Scripture emphatically affirms the existence of hell. Some of the strongest assertions that there is a hell come from Jesus Himself.

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 <apollumi>** both soul and body in **hell <geenna>**.

Matthew 23:33

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the **damnation <krisis>** of **hell <geenna>**?

Matthew 5:22

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of **hell <geenna>** fire.

Matthew 23:15

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of **hell <geenna>** than yourselves.

Jesus warns that those who reject Him will be cast into hell...

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Matthew 13:40-42

- 40 "Therefore as the [tares are gathered and burned in the fire](#), so it will be at the end of this age.
- 41 "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom [all things that offend](#), and [those who practice lawlessness](#),
- 42 ["and will cast them into the furnace of fire](#). There will be [wailing](#) and [gnashing of teeth](#).

Jesus warns of the seriousness and danger of hell...

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 <geenna>](#), into the fire that never shall be quenched:

All will come before the [Judgment Seat <Bema>](#) of Jesus. Those who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior shall be judged for their works. Their salvation is guaranteed, but their reward shall be based upon their works.

Matthew 25:23

"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Those who reject Jesus will appear before Him at the Great White Throne where they will be judged for salvation.

Matthew 25:41

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

The reality of Hades, the place of torment immediately upon death and prior to Final Judgment at the end of the age is illustrated by Jesus in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Those in Hades are destined for hell, the Second Death and the Lake of Fire. What jail is to prison, Hades is to Hell. The Lazarus story concerned the fate after death of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. This story is very different from all the other parables that Jesus gave in that Jesus uses the actual name of a person (Lazarus) and by doing so is revealing actual reality and not a parable that is true in principle. In hell this rich man experienced conscious torment. He begged that his brothers be warned so they not also come to this place of torment and that he, even for the briefest of moments experience a hint of relief. There is not even an inkling of annihilation in this passage. The rich man is suffering constant and conscious torment.

Luke 16:19-31

- 19 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.
- 20 "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

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- 21 "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.
- 22 "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.
- 23 "And **being in torments in Hades**, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.
- 24 "Then 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 in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.
- 26 **'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'**
- 27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,
- 28 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'
- 29 "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'
- 30 "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'
- 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

There is no hint of annihilation in this passage. The rich man is suffering constant and conscious torment and punishment in Hades.

The Bible Teaches There is a Hell

Matthew 8:12

But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into **outer darkness**: there shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.

Matthew 13:42, 50

"and will cast them into the **furnace of fire**. There will be **wailing and gnashing of teeth**."

Matthew 24:51

"and will cut him in two and appoint him **his portion with the hypocrites**. There shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**."

Luke 13:28

"There will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and **yourselves thrust out**."

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Wailing and gnashing of teeth implies conscious sorrow and an angry, unrepentant heart. Those who are not conscious do not manifest torment. Jesus repeatedly said that the people in hell are in continual agony. It is not that people in Hades will be denied repentance ... they simply have seared and hardened their heart to such an extent they refuse to repent. God does not cast into Hades anyone who would or could repent and come to choose life.

A Place of Unquenchable Flames

Matthew 3:12

"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Mark 9:43-49

- 43 "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to [hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched--](#)
- 44 "where '[Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.](#)'
- 45 "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into [hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched--](#)
- 46 "where '[Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.](#)'
- 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 fire--](#)
- 48 "where '[Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.](#)'
- 49 "For everyone will be [seasoned with fire](#), and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.

The language of the above verse is taken from the LXX (Septuagint) from Isaiah 66:24

Isaiah 66:24

"And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

The **worm does not die** is not a figure of speech drawn from the actual valley of Hinnom, where worms were continually at work. It is a picture of the unending torment and destruction of hell. (from Wycliffe Commentary)

Jesus repeatedly called hell a place of unquenchable flames where the bodies of the wicked will never die. It defies all logic and the justice of God to have everlasting flames and bodies without their soul to experience the torment.

Hell: Annihilation or Consciousness?

An Everlasting Place

Matthew 25:41, 46

41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire** prepared for the devil and his angels:

46 "And these will go away into **everlasting punishment**, but the righteous into eternal life."

Isaiah 33:14

The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with **everlasting burnings**?"

Hell lasts as long in duration as heaven, "everlasting." As long as God is, evil must be separated from Him for God cannot and will not eternally endure evil. Both heaven and hell are said to be everlasting. The Greek word used for everlasting is *aionios*. There are absolutely no grounds in scripture to suppose that hell is temporal and heaven is eternal.

Matthew 25:46

And these shall go away into **everlasting <aionios>** punishment: but the righteous into life **eternal <aionios>**.

Hebrews 6:2

Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of **eternal <aionios>** judgment.

Matthew 18:8

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into **everlasting <aionios>** fire.

Hebrews 9:12

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained **eternal <aionios>** redemption *for us*.

Hebrews 9:14

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the **eternal <aionios>** Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hell: Annihilation or Consciousness?

A Place of Conscious Punishment

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

- 7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,
8 **in flaming fire taking vengeance** on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 These **shall be punished with everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

The fact being that the wicked are “punished with everlasting destruction” strongly implies that they must be conscious. One cannot suffer punishment without existence. There is no punishment in beating a dead corpse nor can an unconscious person feel any pain. *Annihilation is not punishment but a release from all punishment.* The punishment of evil men in the afterlife would have to be conscious. If it were not, God would not be just since He would have given less punishment to the wicked than to some of His righteous. For in this life, not all wicked people suffer as much as some righteous people suffer. The sinners in hell are in conscious woe.

Luke 12:4-5

- 4 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.
5 "But I will show you whom you should fear: **Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!**

2 Peter 2:17

These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

A Place for the Beast and False Prophet

Revelation 19:20

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

Revelation 20:10

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.

A clear example of beings that was still conscious after a thousand years of conscious torment in hell. “The two of them were thrown **alive** into the fiery lake of burning sulfur” *before* the thousand years started. Yet, after this thousand year period, Satan the devil was cast into the lake of fire

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and brimstone where the beast and false prophet **are**. Not only were they alive when they entered but they were still alive after the thousand years of conscious torment.

God's Justice Demands There Be a Hell

In addition to direct revelation, scripture offers reasons for the existence of hell. Scripture tells us that justice demands a hell and God is just (Romans 2.) God is so Holy, Pure and Perfect that He cannot bear to even look upon sin:

Habakkuk 1:13

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?

God is no respecter of persons in that He shows no favoritism. Psalm 73 is representative of passages that show us not all justice is accomplished in this life.

Psalms 73:3

For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Because the wicked appear to prosper in this life, the existence of a place of punishment after this life is necessary to maintain the justice of God. Without hell, where would justice be for men like Hitler, Stalin and Osama bin Laden?

God's justice demands eternal punishment. The heinousness of any crime must be gauged according to the worth or dignity of the person it is committed against. The murder of a president or pope is deemed more heinous than that of a terrorist or Mafia boss. Sin against an infinite God is an infinite sin worthy of infinite punishment.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We all commit a multitude of sin in thought, word and deed. This is further compounded by the fact that we reject God's colossal mercy. When man goes even further to try to find fault with God's justice and mercy we have abundant evidence for the need for hell. Rather than seeking to find fault with God and His justice with hell, we should be seeking amazing grace at our own depravity of mind and spirit.

God's Love Demands There Be a Hell

God is love, but love cannot coerce, only persuade. A God of love cannot and will not force people to love Him. Forced love is not love but rape. God gives everyone space and time to come into a loving relationship with Himself. If people continue to resist and reject the love of God and not repent from doing evil, God will not force His will upon them but grant them their wish. If any man desires an existence without God, God will not override their will but grant their will be done. They who will not to be with Him must be granted separation from Him. Hell allows this separation from God. God is patient with all humans, not wanting any to perish:

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2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

1 Timothy 2:4

who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The time for reformation is the here and now. God's grace is available to all who choose to accept it. No human has been created for hell, but chooses hell over God. After the time of reformation is complete, our earthly existence, the time of reckoning commences:

Hebrews 9:27

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

Hell is only for the unreformable, the unrepentant and the reprobate mind. At our Judgment we will either say to the LORD, "Thy will be done," or the LORD will say to us, "Thy will be done."

2 Peter 2:1-22

- 1 But there were also **false prophets among the people**, even as there will be **false teachers among you**, who will secretly bring in **destructive heresies**, even **denying the Lord** who bought them, **and bring on themselves swift destruction**.
- 2 And **many will follow their destructive ways**, because of whom **the way of truth will be blasphemed**.
- 3 By **covetousness they will exploit** you with **deceptive words**; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their **destruction does not slumber**.
- 4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to **hell <Tartaroo>** and delivered them **into chains of darkness**, to be **reserved for judgment**;
- 5 and **did not spare the ancient world**, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;
- 6 and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;
- 7 and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked
- 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)--
- 9 **then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment**,
- 10 and especially those **who walk according to the flesh** in the **lust of uncleanness** and **despise authority**. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,
- 11 whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.
- 12 But these, like natural **brute beasts** made to be **caught and destroyed**, **speak evil** of the things they do not understand, and **will utterly perish** in their own corruption,

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- 13 and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to
carouse in the daytime. They are **spots and blemishes, carousing** in their own
deceptions while they feast with you,
- 14 having **eyes full of adultery** and that **cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls**.
They have a heart trained in **covetous practices**, and are **accursed children**.
- 15 They have **forsaken** the right way and **gone astray**, following the way of Balaam the son
of Beor, who **loved the wages of unrighteousness**;
- 16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice
restrained the madness of the prophet.
- 17 These are **wells without water**, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the
blackness of darkness forever.
- 18 For when they speak great swelling **words of emptiness**, they allure through the **lusts of
the flesh**, through **lewdness**, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live
in error.
- 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are **slaves of corruption**; for by whom
a person is overcome, by him also he is **brought into bondage**.
- 20 For if, after they have escaped the **pollutions of the world** through the knowledge of the
Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the
latter end is worse for them than the beginning.
- 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness,
than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.
- 22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own
vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

Hell is not for anyone who is reformable for if they were still reformable, they would still be alive. God, in His infinite wisdom and infinite goodness does not allow anyone to go to hell that is reformable. Anyone that has a possibility of going to heaven, God grants him that possibility. God would never allow anyone go to hell that He knew would go to heaven if given more time and opportunity.

Human Dignity Demands a Hell

Because human free will precludes God from forcing people into heaven against their will, human freedom of choice demands a hell. As CS Lewis said, "There are only two kinds of people in the end; those who say to God, 'thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'thy will be done.'"

Matthew 23:37

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

God will not force volitional humans to be reformed. Forced reformation is worse than punishment, it is cruel and inhumane. Punishment respects the volition and dignity of the person as does hell. Humans are not objects to be manipulated but subjects to be respected

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because they bear the image and likeness of the infinite God. Human beings are punished for their evil because we are volitional and know better. We are persons to be punished, not patients to be cured.

The suggestion that temporal suffering will lead to repentance is totally unrealistic. People in hell are gnashing their teeth which does not indicate a more godly and reformed disposition but a more rigid and stubborn rebellion. Thus it appears that the longer people are in hell the more justification of God's punishment of them, not less. If hell had a reformatory effect on people, then Jesus would not have pronounced woe upon those who reject Him and are headed for hell.

Matthew 11:21-24

- 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.
- 22 "But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.
- 23 "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.
- 24 "But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

If hell were able to reform the wicked sinners, then they could be saved without Jesus, who is the sole means of salvation. Is it possible that a place devoid of God's restraining grace could accomplish what no efforts of His grace could accomplish on earth, namely a change of the heart? I think not. Suffering has no tendency to soften a hard heart, but harden it even further. Prisons no more reform prisoners than hell reforms a hardened heart.

God's Sovereignty Demands a Hell

Without a hell there is no final victory over evil, for it is evil that frustrates good. The wheat and tares cannot grow together forever. There must be an ultimate separation; otherwise, good does not triumph over evil. It is true in society that punishment for evil is necessary for good to prevail as it is in eternity also. If good prevails not, then God is not in ultimate control.

God is the ultimate remedy for evil and must be for His sovereignty to prevail.

1 Corinthians 15:24-28

- 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.
- 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.
- 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

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- 27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.
- 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

The Cross of Christ Implies Hell

The Cross of Christ is the centerpiece of Christianity. Without the cross there is neither reconciliation nor salvation. This is the reason Christ came into the world. Only through Jesus and His work on Calvary can we find salvation through the forgiveness of sins through the washing of His blood. Jesus suffered great physical and greater spiritual agony on the cross. Jesus, in anticipation of His crucifixion, sweat as it were drops of blood. Why then the agony and suffering of crucifixion if there is no hell? Christ's death is robbed of its eternal significance unless there is an eternal separation from God that all need to be delivered from.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

- 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.
- 18 For the [message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing](#), but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Hebrews 10:11-14

- 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- 11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.
- 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,
- 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.
- 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

All humanity is bound to hell due to our depravity and sinful evil nature. No good works can ever deliver us from the grasp of hell and eternal condemnation. There is not one righteous among us, not one. Only through the eternal, perfect sacrifice of God on the cross can we be saved from the fires of hell that await us. May God's saving grace deliver us from eternity in hell.

AMEN.

APPENDIX LINKS

- A – OLD TESTAMENT EXEGESIS <http://www.thelordschildren.org/hell-ot.htm>
B – NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS <http://www.thelordschildren.org/hell-nt.htm>
B – DEATH EXEGESIS http://www.thelordschildren.org/bible_study/pdfs/death.pdf