

# *What the Bible Says about Hell*

*“There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you have now a real body.”*

*--Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

- I. What is Hell?—Four New Testament Terms
  - A. Tartarus (II Pet. 2:4)—translated “Hell”
    1. This word is used only in II Pet. 2:4. This single Greek word is translated with four English words, “cast...down to hell.”
    2. The specific context states that Tartarus is a temporary place reserved for the judgment of fallen angels.
    3. These “angels that sinned” have been confined to Tartarus since the time of their fall, and they will be there until their final judgment. [Note: Not all fallen angels were so confined. Many roam the earth today as demons.]
  - B. Hades (Luke 16:22-23)—translated “Hell”
    1. This word occurs 11 times in the New Testament.
    2. Hades is the fiery destination of the immaterial (soul) part of man rather than his material part (body). In Luke 16 the body of the rich man was “buried” but in hell “he lift up his eyes.” Though the body had been buried, the soul was alert in hell.
    3. Hades is a temporary place of punishment. Rev. 20:13 indicates that those in Hades will be resurrected with new bodies to face the final Great White Throne Judgment.
  - C. Gehenna (Mark 9:43, 45, 47)—translated “Hell”
    1. Gehenna is referenced 12 times in the New Testament.
    2. In every instance of its use, Gehenna refers to the “final destination of both the body and soul of the damned” [Dr. Mark Minnick, *Eternal Punishment*, p. 11].
    3. Matthew 10:28 explicitly states that Gehenna is a place where both “body and soul” suffer destruction.
    4. In the New Testament times the word Gehenna was applied to a dump outside Jerusalem where the refuse of the city was continuously burned. Thus, the literal burning dump of New Testament times served as a vivid illustration of the fiery destination of the lost.
  - D. The Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14, 15)
    1. The Lake of fire is mentioned 5 times in the book of Revelation.
    2. The lake of Fire is a place where people are sent in their bodies to suffer eternal punishment after the Great White Throne Judgment.
    3. Both the Lake of Fire and Gehenna are spoken of as being the ultimate destinies of the lost, and are therefore equivalent expressions referring to the same place. The fire in each is said to be eternal.

- II. What, then, do we mean when we preach about “hell?”
- A. If we are referencing the place of confinement and punishment for some of the fallen angels, then we mean Tartarus, the hell of fallen angels.
  - B. If we are speaking of the hell to which the unsaved dead are confined immediately upon their deaths, we are referring to Hades. Remember, in Hades the lost await their resurrection bodies—only their souls suffer in fiery judgment.
  - C. If we are speaking of the final destination of the lost to which both the bodies and souls of the unsaved dead shall ultimately be confined, we are speaking of Gehenna—also known as the Lake of Fire.
  - D. It is important to note that the term “hell” accurately translates all three different Greek words mentioned in this study. The nuances of these differing terms are readily seen in their contexts. From a practical standpoint, hell for human beings always involves misery in a fiery torment.
- III. The Nature of the Fire in Hell
- A. Some evangelicals question the literal nature of Hell’s fire:
    1. Dr. Billy Graham  
I have often wondered if Hell is a terrible burning within our hearts for God, to fellowship with God, a fire that we can never quench. Could it be that the fire Jesus talked about is an eternal search for God that is never quenched? Is that what it means? That, indeed, would be Hell. To be away from God forever, separated from His Presence. [Billy Graham, *The Challenge: Sermons from Madison Square Garden* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), p. 75.]
    2. Kenneth Kantzer, former editor of *Christianity Today*:  
The Bible makes it clear that Hell is real and it’s bad. But when Jesus spoke of flames...these are most likely figurative warnings. [Jerfrey L. Sheler, “The Rekindling of Hell,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 25 March 1991,63.]
  - B. The Bible teaches the literal nature of Hell’s fire.
    1. Luke 16:19-31 emphasizes the literal nature of Hell’s torment and fire (v. 24, for example). Remember the hell of Luke 16 is Hades, the temporary place for the torment of lost souls.
    2. The soul is described as having eyes (v. 23), a tongue (v. 24), sensory perception (v. 25) and hearing (vv. 25-31).
      - a. These features of the soul are literal, though they may not be material. Since we do not understand the composition of the soul, we refer to it as immaterial. These features, then, are literal though immaterial.
      - b. The fires of hell are literal fires. Apparently literal fire exerts a tormenting effect upon the immaterial soul. The fires of hell are literally felt by man’s soul, and the sensation that is felt is torment.
  - C. The Bible teaches the literal and material nature of the fire in the lake of fire, Gehenna.
    1. While the fires of Hades afflict the immaterial soul, the fires of Gehenna (The Lake of Fire) afflict the resurrected body of the damned. It is physical, real fire afflicting a physical, real body and soul.

2. It must be remembered that while only souls go to Hades, the physical, resurrected bodies of the lost go to Gehenna, the Lake of Fire (Mark 9, Revelation 20, Matthew 5:29-30, 10:28, 18:9).
3. The fires of Gehenna, therefore, have a material aspect and are capable of afflicting the material part of man—his physical, resurrected body. The lost dead had been resurrected to face the Great White Throne Judgment prior to being cast into the Lake of Fire.
4. The fuel of Gehenna's fire indicates the fire is material:
  - a. Gehenna's fires are fueled by "brimstone" (Rev. 14:10, 19:20, 20:10, 21:8).
  - b. Brimstone is sulfur, a yellowish nonmetallic substance that is a major component of gunpowder. Much of today's sulfur is extracted from oil or natural gas.
  - c. Brimstone (sulfur) melts at 248 degrees Fahrenheit. At 482 degrees, it turns a fierce red. At 832 degrees it boils and turns to a pitchy dark brown.
  - d. Charles H. Spurgeon, Britain's Prince of Preachers, stated the following regarding the literal, material fires of the Lake of Fire:

Now, do not begin telling me that that is metaphorical fire: who cares for that? If a man were to threaten to give me a metaphorical blow on the head, I should care very little about it; he would be welcome to give me as many as he pleased. And what say the wicked? "We do not care about metaphorical fires." But they are real, sir—yes, as real as yourself. There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you have now a real body.