

The Spectrum of Christian Faith

*What happens at the end of the
world? (Part 1 - Hell)*

Key Questions

- What happens after you die?
- Does hell last forever?
- What about the unevangelized?
- Did Jesus descend to hell? (Apostles' Creed)

Hell in the Bible

Four words in Hebrew or Greek have traditionally translated as hell in English. (sheol, hades, Gehenna/Ge Hinnom, Tartarus)

In the Authorized/King James Version the word *hell* appears 54 times.

In the RSV/NRSV/ESV the word *hell* appears 13 times. Same for the NIV and NASB.

The word *hell* appears 12 times in the Lexham English Bible.

The word *hell* does not appear in the Complete Jewish Bible or Young's Literal Translation.

The word *hell* appears over 90 times in the Message but often as an idiom like hell-raisers.

Hell in the Bible

- Sheol (Hebrew) = grave, pit, unseen – 64 times in the Hebrew Bible
- Hades (Greek) = grave, pit, unseen – 11 times in the New Testament
- Gehenna (Greek) = Ge Hinnom (Hebrew) = Valley of Hinnom – 21 times in the Hebrew Bible, 12 times in the New Testament
- Tartarus (Greek) = Prison for Greek Titans/New Testament fallen angels – 1 time in 2 Peter 2:4 similar to Tehom (Hebrew) = Abussos (Greek) = depths, bottomless pit, Abyss – 34 times in the Bible
- Lake of fire/brimstone/sulfer – 13 times in the Bible

Three.14159... Options

All three of these views agree that hell exists, they differ in the purpose and duration of hell.

- Eternal Conscious Torment – the unrepentant will spend eternity being consciously tormented in hell.
- Annihilationism – the unrepentant will spend time being punished in hell until the final judgement where they will be annihilated.
- Christian Universalism – the unrepentant will spend time in hell as a purgative process until they repent and enter God's presence.

Eternal Conscious Torment

The Biblical Argument

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

-Revelation 20:10

The Hebrew Bible speaks very little about the afterlife. Two passages are Daniel 12:2 and Isaiah 66:24. Here some/the rebellious experience *everlasting* contempt and fire that shall not be quenched. In the New Testament, hell is most often mentioned in Jesus' parables – the sheep and goats, Lazarus and the rich man, etc. (the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth)

Eternal Conscious Torment

Supporting Arguments

- Church tradition – This is dominant teaching of the church throughout her history.
- Anslem – Sin against an infinite God is an infinite crime deserving infinite punishment.
- Satisfies God's justice.
- Other views do not fit the dire warnings of hell found in the New Testament.

Eternal Conscious Torment

Objections

- A person's finite sins do not deserve everlasting punishment. Eternal hell is cruel and unusual.
- There seems to be more scriptural evidence for annihilationism.
- Dismisses the scripture passages in favor of Christian universalism.

Eternal Separation

a.k.a. the C.S. Lewis View

Lewis popularized the view, echoing John Milton, that “the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.” - *The Problem of Pain*. See also *The Great Divorce*. Lewis believed hell to be eternal but the references to fire and brimstone as metaphorical (as did John Calvin). Lewis thought the descriptions of hells as separation (2 Thessalonians 1:9) in a prison (Matthew 18:30) in darkness (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30) of our own choosing.

Annihilationism

The Biblical Argument

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will *consume* the enemies of God.

– Hebrews 10:26

This view seems to be more inline with the Hebrew Bible's picture of the faithful being granted access to the tree of life but the rebellious have their name being blotted out (Psalm 9:5, etc.). Annihilationists read the verses about unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12, etc.) as referring to fires totally destructive nature and its duration.

Annihilationism

Supporting Arguments

- Vast scriptural support
- The idea of an eternal soul is from Greek philosophy and not Biblical.
- Unending punishment is inconsistent with the love of God.
- Unending torment is inconsistent with God's victory.

Annihilationism

Objections

- Revelation speaks about the lost being tormented day and night (Revelation 14:10-11, Revelation 20:10).
- This view undermines fear of hell.

Christian Universalism

The Biblical Argument

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam *all* die, so in Christ *all* will be made alive.

– 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For God was pleased to have *all* his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself *all* things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

– Colossians 1:19-20

...at the name of Jesus *every* knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and *every* tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:10-11

Christian Universalism

Supporting Arguments

- God's sovereignty. The other views see God and people as moral peers where God must respect human choices. Universalism views God more like a parent protecting humans eternal destruction.
- God is infinitely patient.
- Eternal bliss (heaven) is incompatible with eternal hell.

Christian Universalism

Objections

- Christian Universalists have to contend with the same objections as annihilationists on the verses in Revelation on eternal punishment.
- The path to heaven is narrow.

What about Purgatory?

In Catholicism purgatory is a process and not a place. The purgatory process in which “all who die in God's grace and friendship but still imperfectly purified” undergo a process of purification, which the church calls purgatory, “so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven”. (CCC 1030). “This final purification of the elect . . . is entirely different from the punishment of the damned” (CCC 1031).

If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

1 Corinthians 3:14-15

The Eastern Orthodox View

The Orthodox church has a unique view of hell (and heaven) Everyone ends up in the presence of God after death. How we experience this revelation depends on the orientation of our heart. The repentant will experience God's love in joy for eternity. Those who have rejected God will experience God's presence as searing pain as they are enveloped in God's righteousness. The Orthodox church leaves the door open as to whether this pain is eternal, annihilating or purgative, trusting God to do the right thing.

Meet the Bruderhof

- <https://www.bruderhof.com/>
- Plough Quarterly: <https://www.plough.com/en>

Further Reading and Watching

- *Four Views on Hell* by Denny Burk, John G. Stackhouse Jr, Robin A. Parry and Jerry L. Walls, Zondervan Counterpoints, 2016
- *Hellbound?* A documentary by Kevin Miller
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-J6NgKnWAo>
- *Love Unrelenting*: A documentary that explores the three major views on hell and God's judgements. <https://loveunrelenting.com/>
- Eclectic Orthodoxy – Alvin F. Kimel's blog:
<https://afkimel.wordpress.com/>
- See also *Destined for Joy* by Alvin F. Kimel, 2023

Further Reading and Watching

- *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* by Brian Zahnd, Waterbrook 2017
- *Hell: A Final Word* by Edward William Fudge, Leafwood Publishers, 2012
- *The Evangelical Universalist: Second Edition* by Gregory Macdonald (Robin Parry), SPCK, 2012
- *Grace Saves All* by David Artman, Wipf and Stock, 2020
- *Razing Hell* by Sharon L. Baker, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010
- *That All shall be Saved* by David Bentley Hart, Yale University Press, 2019
- *Her Gates Will Never Be Shut* by Bradley Jersak, Wipf and Stock, 2009