

# — Heaven and Hell —

## What Are They Really?

What gives people the ideas of heaven and hell that we see around us today? Are these ideas based upon the holy Scriptures, or are they figments of man's imagination syncretized from ideas in this world's assorted religions and philosophies?

It is nearly impossible to separate heaven and hell into its component parts because in most people's minds they go together. When you die, they think, you go to either one place or the other depending on whether you have lived a good or a bad life ... or, if you have accepted Christ as your Savior, then you automatically go to heaven, just as long as you say a few choice words. They will say that as long as you merely believe in Him you will be given eternal life, forever and ever, citing John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Of course, we know that just “believing in Him” is not all we must do to receive eternal life. Belief involves obedience to Him and doing His will (John 6:38), in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:21), and that is not possible unless one first receives a calling from the Father (John 6:44) and receives the holy spirit (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9).

Many people will contend that all of those who

do not commit to Jesus Christ sometime during their lives will be condemned to an ever-burning, tormenting hell, even those who have never known or heard about Him.

The religions that claim to be “Christian” constitute a curious, syncretic blend of Biblical and pagan ideas. Let us review some commonly held views on heaven and hell in modern-day Christianity.

### Ideas of Heaven

**1. The early Church.** The earliest of the Apostolic Fathers, Clement of Rome, does not mention entry into heaven after death, but instead expresses belief in the resurrection of the dead after a period of “slumber” at the second coming. A fragment from the early second century of one of the lost volumes of Papias, a Christian bishop, expounds that “heaven” was separated into three distinct layers. He referred to the first as just “heaven,” the second as “paradise,” and the third



***While visions and paintings of hell are totally fallacious, images of heaven are also deceptive in that they do not capture the true character of the unseen spirit world that exists in another dimension as revealed in God's word. Here is one such vision.***

as “the city.” Papias taught that “there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce a hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold” ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

According to some views, certain Christians in

the first century believed that the kingdom of God was coming to earth within their own lifetimes. They looked forward to a divine future on earth. When the Kingdom of God did not arrive, Christians gradually changed their beliefs so that they came to look forward to an immediate reward in heaven after death, rather than to a future divine kingdom on earth.

**2. Eastern Orthodoxy.** Eastern Orthodox cosmology perceives heaven as having different levels (citing John 14:2), the lowest of which is Paradise. At the time of creation, paradise touched the earth at the Garden of Eden. After the fall of man, paradise was separated from the earth, and mankind was forbidden to enter, lest he partake of the Tree of Life and live eternally in a state of sinfulness (Genesis 3:22-24). At death, the Orthodox believe that Jesus opened the door of Paradise to mankind again (Luke 23:43), and the good thief was the first to enter. It is only God who has the final say on who enters heaven. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, heaven is part and parcel with deification (*Theosis*), the eternal sharing of the divine qualities through communion with the Triune God (reunion of the Father and the Son through love ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com))).

**3. Roman Catholicism.** Heaven is considered a state or a condition of existence, rather than a particular place somewhere in the cosmos. Pope John Paul II declared, “The ‘heaven’ or ‘happiness’ in which we will find ourselves is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father which takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit.” Those Christians who die while imperfectly purified must, according to Catholic teaching, pass through a state of purification known as purgatory before entering heaven.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church indicates several images of heaven found in the Bible: “This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: ‘No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love

him.’”

The happiness of the union with God that is heaven is called the “beatific vision.” Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man’s immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it.



**Roman Catholics claim that they will gaze upon the Beatific Vision once achieving heaven, and with it the vision of Mary, whom they term the “Mother of God.”**

**4. Protestantism.** According to [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), some denominations teach that one enters heaven at the moment of death (supposing this is taught in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8), while others teach that this occurs at a later time (the Last Judgment). Some Christians maintain that entry into heaven awaits such a time as “When the form of this world has passed away.”

Two related and often confused concepts of heaven in Christianity are better described as the “resurrection of the body” as contrasted with “the immortality of the soul”. In the first, the soul does not enter heaven until the last judgment or the “end of time” when it (along with the body) is resurrected and judged. In the second concept, the soul goes to a heaven on another plane immediately after death. These two concepts are generally combined in the “doctrine of the double judgment” where the soul is judged once at death and goes to a temporary heaven, while awaiting a second and final judgment at the end of the world.

Those who believe in the immortality of the soul generally conclude that the term “heaven” is the realm in which God currently resides. Eternal life, by contrast, occurs in a renewed, unspoiled, and perfect creation which can be termed “heaven,” since God will choose to dwell there permanently with his people, as seen in Revelation 21:3. Then there will no

longer be any separation between God and man. The believers themselves will exist in incorruptible, resurrected, new bodies; there will be no sickness, no death, and no tears.

Some teach that death itself is not a natural part of life, but was allowed to happen after Adam and Eve disobeyed God so that mankind would not live forever in a state of sin, or separation from God.

Many evangelicals understand this future life to be divided into two distinct periods: first, the millennial reign of Christ (the one thousand years) on this earth referred to in Revelation 20:1-10; secondly, the new heaven and the new earth, referred to in Revelation 21 and 22. This millennialism (or *chiliasm*) is a revival of a strong tradition in the early church that was dismissed by Augustine of Hippo and the Roman Catholic Church after him. Not only will the believers spend eternity with God, they will also spend it with each other. Revelation describes a new Jerusalem which comes from heaven to the new earth, which is seen to be a symbolic reference to the people of God living in community with one another. "Heaven will be the place where life will be lived to the full, in the way that the designer planned, each believer "loving the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their mind," and "loving their neighbor as themselves" (adapted from Matthew 22:37-38, the great commandment) — a place of great joy, without the negative aspects of current earthly life.

**5. Seventh-day Adventism.** This group follows the teachings of Ellen G. White, whom they consider a prophetess. Heaven is a material place where God resides. God sent his son Jesus Christ to earth to live as a human being, but who "perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf."

Christ promises to return as Saviour, at which time He will resurrect the righteous dead and gather them along with the righteous living to heaven. The unrighteous will die at Christ's second coming. After Christ's second coming there will exist a period of time of time known as the Millennium, in heaven (the

earth will be uninhabitable), during which Christ and his righteous saints will reign and the unrighteous will be judged. At the close of the millennium, Christ and his angels will return to earth to resurrect the dead that remain, to issue the judgements and rid the universe of sin and sinners.

"On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love, and He shall reign forever." It is at this point that heaven is established on the new earth ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

**6. Jehovah's Witnesses.** They believe that heaven is the dwelling place of Jehovah God and his spirit creatures. Rather than the traditional view that all Christians go to heaven, they believe that only 144,000 chosen faithful followers will be resurrected to heaven to rule with Christ over the majority of mankind who will live on Earth. *M'Clintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia* (Volume IV, 1891, p. 122) comments, "In Isaiah IXV, 17, a new heaven and a new earth signify a new government, new kingdom, new people." In Jesus' illustration of the "ten virgins" (Matthew 25:1-12), Jesus is speaking about spiritual virginity, remaining separate from the world, doctrinally pure (Revelation 14:4; compare with I Corinthians 11:2). Of specific interest is that the foolish virgins are avoided deliberately, even though they thought they were keeping themselves morally and doctrinally pure (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:12). New Jerusalem is believed to be the final abode of souls redeemed by Christ, and an ideal earthly community ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

**7. Mormonism.** The view of heaven according to the Latter-day Saint movement is based on section 76 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, as well as on 1 Corinthians 15 in the King James Version of the Bible. The afterlife is divided first into two levels until the last judgment; afterwards it is divided into four levels (see below), the upper three of which are referred to as "degrees of glory" that, for illustrative purposes,

are compared to the brightness of heavenly bodies: the sun, moon, and stars.

Before the last judgment, spirits separated from their bodies at death go either to Paradise or to Spirit Prison, dependent on if they had been baptised and confirmed by the laying on of hands. Paradise is a place of rest while its inhabitants continue learning in preparation for the last judgment. Spirit Prison is a place of learning for the wicked and unrepentant and those who were not baptised; however, missionary efforts done by spirits from paradise enable those in Spirit Prison to repent, accept the gospel and the atonement, and receive baptism through the practice of baptism for the dead.

After the resurrection and last judgment, people are sent to one of four levels:

**a. *The Celestial Kingdom is the highest level, with its power and glory comparable to the sun.***

Here, faithful and valiant disciples of Christ who accepted the fullness of His gospel, and kept their covenants with Him through following the prophets of their dispensation, are reunited with their families and with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit for all eternity. Those who would have accepted the gospel with all their hearts had they been given the opportunity in life (as judged by Christ and God the Father) are also saved in the Celestial Kingdom. Latter Day Saint movements do not believe in the concept of original sin, but believe children to be innocent through the atonement. Therefore, all children who die before the age of accountability inherit this glory. Men and women who have entered into celestial marriage are eligible, under the tutelage of God the Father, to eventually become gods and goddesses as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

**b. *The Terrestrial Kingdom's power and glory is comparable to that of the moon,*** and is reserved for those who understood and rejected the full gospel in life but lived good lives; those who did accept the gospel but failed to keep their covenants through continuing the process of faith, repentance, and service to others; and those who "died without law" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:72) but accepted the full gospel and repented after death due to the missionary efforts undertaken in Spirit Prison. God the Fa-

ther does not come into the Terrestrial Kingdom, but Jesus Christ visits them, and the Holy Spirit is given to them.

**c. *The Telestial Kingdom is comparable to the glory of the stars.*** Those placed in the Telestial Kingdom suffered the pains of hell after death because they were liars, murderers, adulterers, whoremongers, etc. They are eventually rescued from hell by being redeemed through the power of the atonement at the end of the millennium. Despite its far lesser condition in eternity, the Telestial Kingdom is described as being more comfortable than earth in its current state. Suffering is a result of a full knowledge of the sins and choices which have permanently separated a person from the utter joy that comes from being in the presence of God and Jesus Christ, though they have the holy spirit with them.

**d. *Perdition, or outer darkness, is the lowest level and has no glory whatsoever.*** It is reserved for Satan, his angels, and those who have committed the unpardonable sin. This is the lowest state possible in the eternities, and one that very few people born in this world attain since the unpardonable sin requires that a person know with a perfect knowledge that the gospel is true, and then reject it and fight defiantly against God. The only known son of perdition is Cain, but it is generally acknowledged that there are probably more scattered through the ages.

**8. Swedenborg.** Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) wrote extensively on life after death, and claimed to have traveled widely in heaven and hell. He said his information was received as revelation from Jesus Christ.

Swedenborg states that all angels and evil spirits were once people in the physical world. Angels are not gods. Furthermore, far from being ghostly, the people in heaven and hell appear to each other as real as we do to each other in this world. Swedenborg said he saw cases where the spirits thought they were still in the physical world.

People do not go directly to heaven or hell. After death, they first go to what is termed the World of Spirits, halfway between heaven and hell. In the World of Spirits, everyone goes through a three-stage process that ends with their choosing, in free will, to

go to heaven or hell for eternity. This free-will-choice-based system works because an evil person cannot stand the company in heaven, nor can a good person stand the company in hell.

Angels, Swedenborg says, are male and female in every respect, just like we are here. Marriage between husband and wife is a central and “very good” component of creation. The quality of the relationship between husband and wife starts out the same in the spiritual world as it was at their death in this world. Thus, an angel couple in true spiritual life will live happily every after, to eternity in heaven. A couple in which one or both partners lacks such love will initially live together after death and then separate and find new compatible partners. A person who loved the ideal of spiritual marriage but never found a partner in this world will find one there. An evil spirit receives no such partner.

All children who die go directly to heaven where they are raised by angel mothers.

Heaven is organized into groups, called societies, bound by common affections. The societies range in size from small to large, like towns and cities here. An entire angelic society sometimes appears in the form of an angel, such as Michael and Gabriel. Thus, for instance, Gabriel is not an archangel, but a society in heaven whose ministry is teaching from the word of God. One of the people they taught was Mary in the annunciation.

All in heaven speak the same language, which they know instinctively without learning it.

Angels have power from God. In fact, a single angel can command hundreds of thousands of evil spirits.

There is no time or space as we know it in heaven. Location and movement are determined by mental state. If, for instance, you think about seeing a friend, that friend appears. Neither of you has physically moved, but you have changed your state of mind relative to whatever or whoever you wish to see ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).



***“I don’t think Hell exists. I happen to believe in life after death, but I don’t think it’s got a thing to do with reward and punishment. Religion is always in the control business, and that’s something people don’t really understand. It’s in a guilt-producing control business. And if you have Heaven as a place where you’re rewarded for your goodness, and Hell is a place where you’re punished for your evil, then you sort of have control of the population. And so they create this fiery place which has quite literally scared the Hell out of a lot of people, throughout Christian history. And it’s part of a control tactic” (Episcopal Bishop John Spong, Dateline NBC, August, 2006).***

image-bearer, to be encompassed by the divine presence could only result in unspeakable anguish. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou wrote in their book *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, that for the Orthodox, “Those theological symbols, heaven and hell, are not crudely understood as spatial destinations but rather refer to the experience of God’s presence according to two different modes.” However, some Orthodox theologians do describe hell as separation from God, in the sense of being out of fellowship or loving communion ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

The Eastern Orthodox Church rejects what is

## Ideas of Hell

**1. Eastern Orthodoxy.** The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that heaven and hell are related to, or experiences of, God’s just and loving presence. There is no created place of divine absence, nor is hell an ontological separation from God. One expression of the Eastern teaching is that hell and heaven are dimensions of God’s intensifying presence, as this presence is experienced either as torment or as paradise depending on the spiritual state of a person dwelling with God. For one who hates God, and by extension hates himself as God’s

presented as the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory as a place where believers suffer as their “venial sins” are purged before gaining admittance to heaven. The Orthodox positions on hell are derived from the sayings of the saints and the consensus views of the church fathers, but they are not in agreement on all points, and no council universally recognized by the Eastern Orthodox Churches has formulated a finalized doctrine on hell, so there is no official doctrine to which all the faithful are bound.

**2. Roman Catholicism.** Hell is where souls go after death. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, “And since a place is assigned to souls in keeping with their reward or punishment, as soon as the soul is set free from the body it is either plunged into hell or soars to heaven, unless it be held back by some debt, for which its flight must needs be delayed until the soul is first of all cleansed. Sometimes venial sin, though needing first of all to be cleansed, is an obstacle to the receiving of the reward, the result being that the reward is delayed (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Supplement Q69 A2*).

**Hell as self-exclusion.** The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which, when published in 1992, Pope John Paul II declared to be “a sure norm for teaching the faith,” defines hell as eternal fiery punishment for refusing to love God: “We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor, or against ourselves.”

**Hell as a place or a state.** Various Popes and leaders have stated different opinions. The *Catechism* published by Pope Pius X in 1908 defined hell by using the word “state” alone: “Hell is a state to which the wicked are condemned, and in which they are deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, and are in dreadful torments.”

Pope John Paul II stated on July 28, 1999, that, “Rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy.”

Traditionally in the past, hell has been spoken of or considered as a place. Some have rejected metaphorical interpretations of the Biblical descriptions of hell, and have attributed to hell a location within the earth, while others, who uphold the opinion that hell is a definite place, say instead that its lo-

cation is unknown. Writing in the 1910 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Joseph Hontheim said that “Theologians generally accept the opinion that hell is really within the earth. The Catholic Church has decided nothing on this subject; hence we may say hell is a definite place, but where it is, we do not know.” He cited the view of Saint Augustine of Hippo that hell is under the earth, and that of Saint Gregory the Great that hell is either on the earth or under it ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

**Nature of suffering in hell.** Catholic theologians agree that the teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishment of hell, “eternal fire.” The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created, and for which he longs. Although the *Catechism* explicitly speaks of the punishments of hell in the plural, calling them “eternal fire,” and speaks of eternal separation from God as the “chief” of those punishments, one commentator claims that the Catholic Church is non-committal on the existence of forms of punishment other than that of separation from God. The *Catechism* by no means denies other forms of suffering, but stresses that the pain of loss is central to the Catholic understanding of hell.

Saint Augustine of Hippo said, “Concerning the detailed specific nature of hell ... the Catholic Church has defined nothing.... It is useless to speculate about its true nature, and more sensible to confess our ignorance in a question that evidently exceeds human understanding.” Many Catholics have appropriated Dante’s vision and images of hell ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

**3. Protestantism.** The varying Protestant views of “hell”, both in relation to *Hades* (i.e. the abode of the dead) and *Gehenna* (i.e., the destination of the wicked), are largely a function of the varying Protestant views on the intermediate state between death and resurrection, and different views on the immortality of the soul, or the alternative, conditional immortality. For example, John Calvin, who believed in conscious existence after death, had a very different concept of hell (*Hades* and *Gehenna*) compared

to Martin Luther, who held that death was like sleep.

In most Protestant traditions, hell is the place created by God for the punishment of the devil and fallen angels (cf. Matthew 25:41), and those whose names are not written in the book of life (cf. Revelation 20:15). It is the final destiny of every person who does not receive salvation where they will be punished for their sins. People will be consigned to hell after the last judgment.

**Eternal torment view.** One historic Protestant view of hell is expressed in the *Westminster Confession* (1646): “But the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (Chapter XXXIII, Of the Last Judgment).

According to the Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals, the majority of Protestants have held that hell will be a place of unending conscious torment, both physical and spiritual, although some recent writers such as Anglo-Catholic C.S. Lewis and J.P. Moreland, have cast hell in terms of “eternal separation” from God. Certain biblical texts have led some theologians to the conclusion that punishment in hell, though eternal and irrevocable, will be proportional to the deeds of each soul (e.g., Matthew 10:15 and Luke 12:46-48; [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

Another area of debate is the fate of the unevangelized (i.e., those who have never had an opportunity to hear the Christian gospel), those who die in infancy, and the mentally disabled. Some Protestants agree with Augustine that people in these categories will be damned to hell for original sin while others believe that God will make an exception in these cases.

**View of conditional immortality and annihilationism.** A minority of Protestants believe in the doctrine of conditional immortality, which teaches that those sent to hell will not experience eternal conscious punishment, but instead will be extinguished or annihilated after a period of “limited conscious punishment”. Conditionalists generally reject the idea of the immortality of the soul, and these include Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christadelphians.

**4. Christian Universalism.** Though a theological minority in historical and contemporary Christianity, some holding mostly Protestant views believe that after serving their sentence in Gehenna, all souls are reconciled to God and admitted to heaven, or ways are found at the time of death for drawing all souls to repentance so that no “hellish” suffering is experienced. Christian Universalism teaches that an eternal hell does not exist and is a later creation of the church with no Biblical support. Reasoning by Christian Universalists states that an eternal hell is against the nature, character, and attributes of a loving God, human nature, sin’s nature of destruction rather than perpetual misery, the nature of holiness and happiness, and the nature and object of punishment ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

**5. Christian Science.** Christian Science defines hell as follows: “Mortal belief; error; lust; remorse; hatred; revenge; sin; sickness; death; suffering and self-destruction; self-imposed agony; effects of sin; that which ‘worketh abomination or maketh a lie.’” (*Science and Health with Key to the Scripture* by Mary Baker Eddy, 588:1-4; [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

**6. Jehovah’s Witnesses.** Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe in an immortal soul that survives after physical death. They believe the Bible presents hell, as translated from *sheol* and *hades*, to be the common grave for both the good and the bad. They reject the idea of a place of literal eternal pain or torment as being inconsistent with God’s love and justice. They define *gehenna* as eternal destruction or the “second death,” reserved for those with no opportunity of a resurrection such as those destroyed at Armageddon. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that others who have died before Armageddon will be resurrected bodily on earth and then judged during the 1,000-year rule of Christ; the judgment will be based on their obedience to God’s laws after their resurrection. The Christadelphian view is broadly similar except that they believe the resurrected will be judged on their life before their resurrection ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

**7. Mormonism.** The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that the word hell is used scripturally in at least two senses. The first is a place commonly called Spirit Prison, which is a state of

punishment for those who reject Christ and his atonement. This is understood to be a temporary state in which the spirits of deceased persons will be taught the gospel and have an opportunity to repent and accept ordinances of salvation. Mormons teach that it was for this purpose that Christ visited the spirit world after his crucifixion (I Peter 3:19-29; I Peter 4:5-6). Modern-day revelation clarifies that while there, Christ began the work of salvation for the dead by commissioning spirits of the righteous to teach the gospel to those who didn't have the opportunity to receive it while on earth.

Latter-day Saints believe that righteous people will rise in a "first resurrection" and live with Christ on earth after His return. After the 1000 years known as the millennium, the individuals in spirit prison who chose not to accept the gospel and repent will also be resurrected and receive an immortal physical body, which is referred to as the "second resurrection." At these appointed times of resurrection, "death and hell" will deliver up the dead that are in them to be judged according to their works (Revelations 20:13), at which point all but the sons of perdition will receive a degree of glory, which Paul compared to the glory of the sun, moon, and stars (I Corinthians 15:41). The LDS Church explains biblical descriptions of hell being "eternal" or "endless" punishment as being descriptive of their infliction by God rather than an unending temporal period. Latter-day Saint scripture quotes God as telling church founder Joseph Smith, "I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore — eternal punishment is God's punishment. Endless punishment is God's punishment."

Latter-day Saint scripture suggests that at least Cain will be in hell. Other mortals who during their lifetime become sons of perdition, those who commit the unpardonable sin, will be consigned to outer darkness. It is taught that the unpardonable sin is committed by those who "den[y] the Son after the Father has revealed Him". However, the vast majority of residents of outer darkness will be the "devil and his angels ... the third part of the hosts of heaven," who in the pre-existence followed Lucifer and never received a mortal body. The residents of

outer darkness are the only children of God that will not receive one of three kingdoms of glory at the Last Judgment.

### God's View of Heaven and Hell

It is rather strange to now consider what is God's view on heaven and hell when the supposed "Christian" groups discussed above have voiced their supposedly Biblical truths on these important issues. It will be discovered as we go along that indeed many of the modern Christian beliefs regarding mankind's fate after death do indeed square with the Bible, but we will also discover that not one group has everything correct. Let us begin this search by examining some common fallacies of understanding.

### The Concept of the "Immortal Soul"

The "immortal soul" idea did not originate in Scripture, but harkens back to the beginning of mankind's history just this side of creation, when Satan (the serpent) confronted Eve in the Garden of



***The concept of the immortal soul—an essence of man that can never die but lives on for eternity—is common to most pagan religions worldwide, but is not taught in the word of God. It was initiated by Satan the devil.***

Eden.

"And he [the serpent] said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree in the garden?"' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You shall not surely die.



For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5).

Here we see Satan injecting into Eve’s mind the idea that she would *not* die by making her own choice of eating the forbidden fruit. That idea has been carried on down through the centuries since then to the present in the form of the “immortal soul” concept. This side of the Flood, this idea was taught in ancient Egypt and Babylon according to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Volume VI, 1941, page 564 and 566).

“The belief that the soul continues in existence after the dissolution of the body is .. speculation ... nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture.... The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principle expert, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended.”

Thus, the idea can be traced clear back to the Flood and the Babylonian Mysteries. Plato (428-348 B.C.), the Greek philosopher and student of Socrates, taught that the body and the immortal soul separate at death, a belief that was “... influenced always more or less by the Greek, Platonic idea that the body dies, yet the soul is immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness and is nowhere found in the Old Testament” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Volume 2, 1960, page 812).

Early Christian theologians, like Origen, were influenced by Greek thinkers, such that he and others accepted “... Plato’s doctrine of the preexistence of the soul as pure mind (*nous*) originally, which, by reason of its fall from God, cooled down to soul (*psyche*) when it lost its participation in the divine fire by looking earthward” (*The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1992, page 1037).

The Old Testament Hebrew word for “soul” is *nephesh*, used more than 130 times and applied to all

sorts of living creatures including man, birds, cattle, reptiles, and insects (Genesis 1:20, 21, 24; 2:7; 9:12). Since “soul” refers to all sorts of living creatures, then it is absurd to think that these would also be immortal, but such would be the case if the meaning of soul is to be applied consistently to all living creatures.

The Scriptures reveal the truth of the matter: ***souls can die!***

“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the Father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul [*nephesh*] who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4, repeated in Ezekiel 18:20).

This physical essence of all creatures, the soul, can and will cease and decompose back to the elements (Genesis 3:19). There is a spirit [*pneuma*] in man (I Corinthians 2:11), which is the seat of thought, reasoning, and imagination, and is apart from his physical body, but even it can be destroyed and is not immortal. It does not live on forever, but must have with it the spirit of God, with which it forms an intimate relationship for those whom God calls (John 6:44) and grants this special gift (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9). Note Hebrews 4:12:

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

We see here that, just as the joints (like the soul, the living body principle) are the active articulations of the body, so they are intricately tied to the marrow of the bones to which they are attached (like the spirit, the thoughts and imaginations that direct the body). The marrow produces red blood cells that transport oxygen to every cell of the body to give it life and mobility (“life is in the blood”; Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23). Moreover, in an eternal sense by taking on the blood of Jesus, which was shed for the elect, then one gains eternal life through the resurrection (John 6:53).

Other scriptures, like Romans 6:20-23, show that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is

eternal life through Jesus Christ. This shows that those caught up in sin, if not cleansed of wickedness, will be wiped out of existence, while only God Himself can grant immortality. Only He alone has immortality (I Timothy 6:16), and He alone can give it as a gift to others through a resurrection from the dead (Romans 2:7; I Corinthians 15:53-54; II Timothy 1:10). The dead will come to a complete end and will face “everlasting destruction” (II Thessalonians 1:9).

Note also Matthew 10:28: “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**.”

**body** [*soma*], “the living body of an animal”

**soul** [*psyche*], “breath, or principle of animal life,” similar to *nephesh* in Hebrew

**hell** [*geenna*], “Gehenna, the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem, used as a dump for bodies of criminals, carcasses of animals, and garbage, and was constantly burning”

**destroy** [*appollymi*], “to utterly destroy, to kill”

Here we see that men can kill other men, but they are not to be feared. Rather, God is the one to be feared, who can destroy both the body and its living principle in the fires of Gehenna. This fire is mentioned in Malachi 4:1-3, Matthew 25:30 and 46, Revelation 19:20, 20:10, and 14-15, and in many other places which refer to the “lake of fire,” or similar terms. Once the fire of this place burns up the body and soul, it is gone. The individual is entirely erased, and no “immortal soul” continues to live.

The word of God is plain in revealing that at death there is no continued active life of a spirit essence in man. This fact abolishes the idea of an immortal soul living beyond this physical life.

### No Active Life After Death

Scripture is plain in saying that at death the person is not active, but is in a sleeping state.

- Job 7:21. “And why do you not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity? For now shall I **sleep** in the dust, and You shall seek me in the morning, but I shall not

be.”

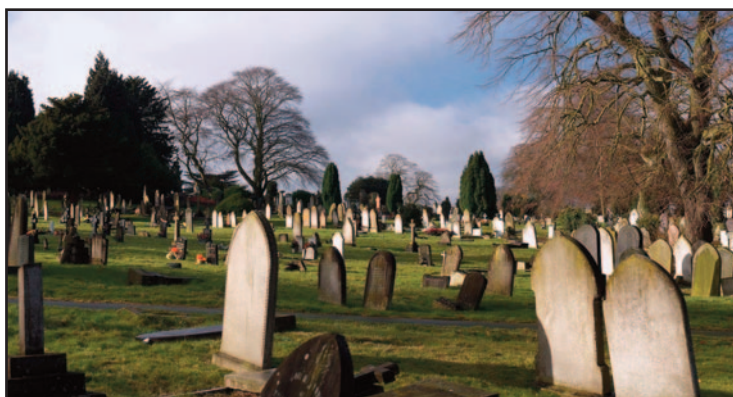
**sleep** = *shakab*, “to lie down (for rest, death, or any other purpose)”

- Job 14:12. “So man lies down, and rises not; till the heaven be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their **sleep**.”

**sleep** = *shenah*, “sleep”; from 3462, *yashen*, “to be slack or languid, i.e. (by implication) sleep”

- Psalm 13:3. “Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; lighten Your eyes, lest I **sleep** the **sleep** of death.”

**sleep** = *yashen* (see above)



**The spirits of the billions of people who have ever lived remain on the earth in some form, but they are not active. They have not ascended to the throne of the Father, but await the resurrection.**

- Daniel 12:2. “And many of them that **sleep** in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

**sleep** = *yashen*, “sleepy”

- Matthew 9:24 [the raising of Jairus’ daughter; see also Mark 5:39 and Luke 8:52]. “He said unto them, Give place, for the maid is not dead but **sleeps**. And they laughed Him to scorn.”

*sleep* = *katheudo*, “to lie down to rest, i.e. (by implication) to fall asleep”

- John 11:11-15. (v. 11) “These things He said; and after that He said unto them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may awaken him out of *sleep*.’” v. 14: “Lazarus is dead.” *sleep* = *koimao*, “to put to sleep, i.e., to slumber, fig. to decease”

- I Corinthians 11:30. “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many *sleep*.”

*sleep*. See 2 above.

- I Corinthians 15:51. “Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all *sleep*, but we shall all be changed ....”

*sleep*. See 2 above.

- I Thessalonians 4:14. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which *sleep* in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

*sleep*. See 2 above.

- I Thessalonians 5:10. “... who died for us, that, whether we wake or *sleep*, we should live together with Him.”

*sleep*. See 1 above.

There are plenty of scriptures that show the dead are not conscious and active after they die. Here are a few.

- Psalm 6:3-5. “My soul is also sore vexed, but You, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul; oh save me for Your mercy’s sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give You thanks?”
- Psalm 115:17. “The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down in to silence.” [Yet, those who say there is spirit life im-

mediately after death claim that these saints are praising God in His presence.]

- Psalm 146:4. “His breath goes forth, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”
- Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10. “For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished, neither have they any

more a portion forever in any thing that is done under the sun .... Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, where you go.”

- Isaiah 38:18-19. “For the grave cannot praise You, death cannot celebrate You: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Your truth. The living, the living, he shall praise You, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known Your truth.”

- Acts 2:29, 34. “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day .... For David is not ascended into the heavens ....” [This is the case even though David was promised a heavenly reward (Ezekiel 34:23-24; Psalm 23:6). Also, we know from Philippians 1:21-24 that the “real person” of Paul was his spirit ... for “he” spoke of either staying with the physical saints at Philippi, or departing to be (at the resurrection) with Christ. Thus, if David is dead, then he is not possibly conscious and active.]



**The Scriptures reveal that the dead in Christ will first be raised from the dead, followed by those who are alive at the time of the resurrection. These are all collected by the angels, and meet Christ in the air.**

## Consciousness Is Restored At the Resurrection



***Following the resurrection, the saints will be brought to the heavenly throne of the Father for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. What a glorious event that will be! Any human depiction of this event defies an artist's renditions.***



***Following the Marriage Supper, the saints and holy angels will return with Christ to earth on white horses to wage battle with the Beast and the False Prophet, and destroy their armies.***

The Scriptures make plain that the consciousness of the saints is revived at the resurrection, which is at the second coming of Jesus Christ. This great event has not yet occurred, so therefore the saints are yet in the grave and are not conscious.

- I Corinthians 15:51-52. "Behold, I show 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." [Here the resurrection of the dead is said to occur at a particular time in the future, at the last trumpet (see Revelation 11:15), so the idea that people are resur-

rected to be with Christ right after death on a continuous basis is untenable.]

- John 11:23-24. "Jesus said unto her, Your brother shall raise again. Martha said unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection **at the last day.**"
- Job 14:14. "If a man die shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change comes."
- I Corinthians 15:22-23. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man [will be made spirit] in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, and afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming."
- Romans 8:29. We will be raised to eternal spirit existence like Jesus Christ was, for He is the "firstborn of many brethren."
- Acts 1:9. "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud [of angels] received Him out of their sight." [The very same things will occur for the saints at their resurrection: Matthew 24:30-31. "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the **clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And **He shall send His angels** with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."]

It is apparent, from these scriptures, that heaven (the spirit realm) is a "mirror-image" of the physical earth, just in a different dimension, for the dead are raised from their graves which are located at various places across the earth and in the sea. That must be where they have been "sleeping," for Jesus dispatches the angels to all parts of the earth to retrieve them.

If the dead saints are raised throughout this age as soon as they die, then what is the purpose of the resurrection at a specific time in the future? Will those raised to eternal life return to their graves on earth to be raised a second time? Does that make sense? Yet, there are some people who actually be-

lieve that.

### What About Hell?

We have already addressed in part the issue of hell in the foregoing discussion. “Hell” is translated in the Old Testament from the Hebrew *sol* [*sheol*], meaning “the grave,” such as in Deuteronomy 32:22, Psalm 9:17, 55:15 and 139:8, Proverbs 5:5, 7:27, 9:18, 15:11, 15:24, 23:14, and 27:40, Isaiah 14:9, Ezekiel 31:15-17 (three places), 32:21, and 32:27, Amos 9:2, and Habakkuk 2:5. In the New Testament, “hell” is translated from the Greek word *geena*, “Gehenna,” the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem, in Matthew 5:22, 5:29, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, and 23:33, Mark 9:43, 9:45, and 9:47, Luke 12:5, and James 3:6. Only in II Peter 2:4 do we find the word “hell” translated from the Greek word *tartaroo*, “to cast or thrust down to Tartarus or Gehenna.” This version of hell is a place of restraint in which the evil angels were cast, where they are held in “chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”

Do any of these definitions and contexts fit the typical version of hell as being a place of eternal torment, of incredible anguish and burning without being burned up? Could a just and loving God be behind such torture for those creatures made in His express image (Genesis 1:26-27; I John 3:2)? The thought is preposterous!

True, scriptures like Revelation 20:10 state that the devil, the beast, and the false prophet are all cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and “they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” The Greek word for “tormented” here is *basanizo*, “to examine, scrutinize, try, either by words or torture.” These individuals and all sinners who refuse to repent, and are not in the Book of Life, will be exterminated in the “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15) forever and ever ... for eons of eons [*aion*, “an era, an age, eternity”]. That is a long time, and forever *aion* likely refers to eternity here.

Being tossed into the lake of fire will consume all of the carbon compounds of which people are composed, as chaff that is burned up with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12); no human can quench it. The Greek word for “burned up” is *katakaio*, meaning nothing of what is burned will remain. This same Greek word is used for the city of Babylon which

will be burned up (Revelation 18:18), and the surface of the earth that will be burned with “fervent heat” (II Peter 3:10). Likewise, the third of the trees that will be burned up by hail mingled with fire in Revelation 8:7 uses the same word (*katakaio*), showing that physical things are destroyed by combustion of the earth’s elements, especially carbon. Once they are burned up the fire ceases; it does not continue for eternity.

### Countering False Proofs of Modern Christianity

Certain scriptural references are sometimes used by theologians to try and prove one’s immediate ascension to heaven at death, and an ever-tormenting hell. Here are a few, with the correct explanations for us.

**Counter the misplaced punctuation of Luke 23:43.** “And Jesus said unto him [the thief on the stake next to him], ‘Verily I say unto you, Today you shall be with Me in paradise.’”

This translation is patently false in its punctuation, because Jesus did not even ascend to heaven the day of the crucifixion. Note John 20:17, which occurred three days later: “Jesus said unto her [Mary], ‘Touch [detain] Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father ...’” How then could He have meant He would be with the thief in paradise (heaven) the very day they hung on the stakes? Jesus would not be in heaven with the Father until three days later!

What happened to Luke 23:43? Many years after the KJV was completed there was punctuation added ... and added in the wrong place. Note how changes in punctuation can seriously change the meaning of a message in these two versions of the same letter, reproduced word for word.

#### Version 1

Dear John, I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men! I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we’re apart. I can be forever happy — will you let me be yours?

Susan

#### Version 2

Dear John, I want a man who knows what love

is. All about you are generous kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me! For other men I yearn. For you, I have no feeling whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours, Susan

**Counter the idea that Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) is a story of two men who speak to each other, one in heaven and the other in an ever-burning hell, after their death and immediate resurrection.**

First realize this is a parable, not an actual event. There is considerable symbolism in this narrative, such as the following:

- “*died and carried to Abraham’s bosom*” (v. 22) => the resurrection of the dead and establishment of the Kingdom of God (see Hebrews 11:8-13).
- “*Lazarus*” (v. 20) => a form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, the name for Abraham’s gentile servant from Damascus who was to be heir of all of Abraham’s wealth until Isaac’s birth. This parable is typical of all gentiles who may inherit salvation, if the Father calls them.
- “*fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table*” (v. 21) => a takeoff on Matthew 15:27, where a gentile Canaanite woman tells Jesus, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs [gentiles] eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”
- The “*rich man*” (v. 22) => related to Abraham, for three times he calls Abraham “father” (v. 24, 27, and 30); he was very rich, clothes with robes of purple and fine linen, and he lived in an exalted position.
- “*I have five brethren*” (v. 28) => does not this sound like he was one of the sons of Leah, Jacob’s wife, who bore six sons, one of whom was Judah? (Genesis 30:20; 35:23) To Judah was given the promise of the Messiah (I Chronicles 5:2; Genesis 49:10).
- “*clothed in purple and fine linen*” (v. 19 => alluding to the Tabernacle, and the clothing of Aaron (as in Exodus 39:2), the choice favor given to Israel (Ezekiel 16:13), and the righteousness of the saints (Revelation

19:8).

- “*dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my [the rich man’s] tongue*” (v. 24) => living water available from God, from the rock at Horeb (Exodus 17:6), to the water given by the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-14), to the living water coming from the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:1), to the water of life from God Himself (Revelation 22:17).
- “*a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot*” (v. 26) => the great rift valley of the Jordan River separated the land of Israel from the land of the gentiles. As this great geological “gulf” divides the “holy land” from the gentile’s land, so there is a great spiritual gulf between believers and non-believers. “... what communion has light with darkness?” (II Corinthians 6:14).

The real meaning of the parable is not about “heaven and hell” at all, but a description of the blessings that will fall on those whom God calls and who believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and the promise of inheriting the Kingdom of God and eternal life, versus those who refuse to believe on Him and reject the promises.

**Counter the idea that the soul is immortal by understanding that this myth originated with Satan (Genesis 3:4), who is terrified at his own fate of eternal death and has been infesting all of civilization since Adam with the belief that a person cannot die. Thus, eat, drink, and be merry without concern for tomorrow, since you cannot die anyway.**

**Counter the thought that, while many scriptures confirm that the individual, in spirit, continues after death (II Corinthians 5:8; Ecclesiastes 12:6-7; Isaiah 26:19; etc.), none of these prove that the individual is alive and active immediately after death.**

**Counter the claim that the souls of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9 are actually in heaven and alive, having been raised at death to the Father’s throne. This vision is idiomatic, and will not be dealt with in this lesson.**

## The Conclusion

Scripture nowhere says that the saints go directly to the Father in heaven at death, nor are they active in any way. Rather, they are in a sleeping state on the earth, their spirits sequestered perhaps like a computer memory card, ready to be activated at the proper time.

At the resurrection the angels will encompass the earth and gather the elect “from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31). This shows that the physical and spiritual realms occupy the same space, and the spirits of the firstfruits elect will be raised with angelic help to meet Jesus Christ in the atmosphere (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). From thence they will go to the marriage

supper for a time before returning on white horses to wage war with the Beast and the False Prophet (Revelation 19).

The fate of the unbelieving and unrepentant people will not be an everlasting torture in “hell,” however that inferno is imagined, but rather complete burning up and annihilation (Revelation 20:15). That is the best thing that could happen to them, considering the alternative of living forever in sin. Those that follow in the footsteps of Satan the devil will experience his same fate, reduction to ashes (Ezekiel 28:18; Malachi 4:3; Revelation 20:10). This destruction is complete once all of the combustibles are burned up; there is no eternal torment, as suggested by some as a separation of the body and soul. It is final and complete.