

*The Sure Word Bible Studies*  
*Lesson 10*

## **Lost Forever**

The Bible says the wages of sin is death. We have learned the Bible teaches that all people, both good and evil, will sleep the sleep of death, but Jesus has promised He will awaken all of them out of that sleep. Some in the first resurrection at His coming, and the rest in the second resurrection at the end of the millennium. But then the Bible says at the final judgment some will face the “*second death*.” What is the “*second death*,” that many people refer to as “*hell*”?

According to traditional Christian belief hell is a place of unending anguish and pain reserved for the wicked. Islam, the religion of the Muslims, regards hell as a vast fiery crater that the souls of the dead cross on a narrow bridge. As they do the wicked fall off the bridge into everlasting torment. In Hinduism and Buddhism, a soul may descend into one of many hells as a result of wicked karma (thoughts, words, and deeds) but the stay in hell is not eternal. It lasts only until the effects of the evil karma have been removed.

In modern times, some Christian theologians have questioned whether a just and loving God would have created such a place as hell. According to these scholars hell is not a place, but a symbol of the anguish caused by the loss of God or goodness.

Obviously there are differences of opinion as to just what hell is. To discover the truth about this issue our question must be as always - What does the Bible teach?

Remember our rule... “*Don’t say “the Bible says” until you’ve looked at everything the Bible says.*”

We begin by looking at the original words of the Hebrew and Greek. In the Old Testament Hebrew, “hell” is translated from

“sheol” meaning - underworld, grave or pit. In the King James Version Bible (KJV) it is translated as “hell” thirty one times and as “grave” thirty one times, and as “pit” three times.

In New Testament Greek, “hell” is most often translated from the Greek word “hades” meaning – the Greek god of the lower regions or the realm of the dead, the grave. In the KJV it is translated as “hell” ten times and as “grave” once. Twelve times hell is translated from the Greek word “gehenna.” Gehenna was commonly known as the Valley of Hinnom, a place south of Jerusalem where trash and the bodies of executed criminals and dead animals were cast out and burned.

In II Peter 2:4, The word “hell” is translated from the Greek word “tartarus” which means the “deepest abyss.” This is the only time this particular Greek word appears in the New Testament.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary 1993 Edition, the English word “*hell*” came from the old English word “*hele*” which originally meant “to cover over - to hide.” It is evident that the word hell in all these languages originally meant primarily the grave, where the dead body is covered over or hidden.

However, over the years the word hell has come to mean a place of torment where the wicked suffer in flames through the endless ages of eternity.

In the KJV Bible the word “hell” is used 53 times, but only 12 times does it refer to Gehenna, the place of burning; all the others refer to the grave.

Since the word hell can imply either the grave or a burning place, when using the KJV we must look at the underlying Hebrew or Greek word in order to know how it is to be understood. For example, both of the following verses use the word Hades, but in one it is translated “*hell*” and in the other “*grave*.”

**I Corinthians 15:55** *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave (hades), where is thy victory?"* (KJV)

**Acts 2:31** *"He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in **hell (hades)**, neither his flesh did see corruption."* (KJV)

This may not be the case in many modern translations such as the New King James Version which translates these verses as follows-

**I Corinthians 15:55** *"O Death, where is your sting? O **Hades**, where is your victory?"*

**Acts 2:31** *"He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in **Hades**, nor did His flesh see corruption."*

This version does not translate "hades" but leaves the original word in place, which assumes the reader is familiar with the meaning. (A good reason to keep those dictionaries handy.)

**In any case, the majority of people think of hell as a burning place, therefore there are three basic questions we need to consider on the subject of hell.**

**First – when will it burn?** After learning the truth about the state of the dead in a previous lesson, that the dead are not in heaven or hell, but asleep in the grave, logic will give us but one answer as to when they meet their final destiny and that is after the resurrection.

Then in the parable of the wheat and tares Jesus reveals when the wicked will be cast into the fire.

**Matthew 13:37- 40** *"He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.*

*Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age."*

In this passage Jesus says the wicked will be burned in the fire "*in the end of this age*" or "*the end of this world.*" Then Peter adds to this these words -

**II Peter 2:9** *"Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,"*

This passage makes it clear the wicked are "*reserved*" (in the grave) "*for the day of judgment.*" So from these verses we can conclude that no one is burning in hell now.

**Our next question is where does the fire burn?**

Some say hell is "*down yonder.*" That idea came from the ancient Greeks who believed that Hades was in the center of the earth. But what does the Bible say? Revelation chapter twenty speaks about the final day of judgment and the "lake of fire" at the end of the 1000 year millennium.

**Revelation 20:7 - 10** *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. **They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.** 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."*

According to this passage, the wicked were on "*the breadth of the earth*" when the fire comes down and devours them.

**Now that we know when (end of this world) and where (on the earth), our third question is - how long will hell-fire burn?**

The Bible teaches that man is mortal, saying, "*the soul who sins shall die*" (Ezekiel 18:4), but, if the wicked burn for eternity, that would be eternal life! The Bible says the tree of life is in heaven – not in hell. It seems clear that "*The soul who sins shall die,*" it will not burn forever.

**But what about those expressions in the Bible like -**

*"Eternal fire" - Jude 7 "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."*

The text does say "*eternal fire,*" but is Sodom and Gomorrah still burning today? No, the Bible says they were turned to ashes.

**II Peter 2:6** *"Turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;"*

According to this we understand that the results of the fire was eternal not the fire itself. Those destroyed in that fire are never coming back, but the fire itself has gone out.

*"Unquenchable fire" - Jeremiah 17:27 "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."*

**Jeremiah 52:12 - 14** *"Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of*

*the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire."*

Is Jerusalem still burning today? No. It said the fire could not be quenched – meaning that man could not quench it, but when it burned up the city, the fire went out.

**"Forever" - I Samuel 1:22** *"But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "Not until the child is weaned; then I will take him, that he may appear before the LORD and remain there forever."*

**Verse 28** *"Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD."*

The Hebrew word Hannah used translated “for ever” is “*olam*” which means either a long duration, everlasting, perpetual, or a long time. As you can see, it has several meanings and does not always mean “never ending.” When Hannah said “forever” she only meant as long as he lives.

The Greek word translated “forever” is "*aion*" meaning - an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, period of time, or an age.

This word too can mean forever, but it can also mean only a period of time, whether long or brief as we see in the following verse -

**I Corinthians 8:13** *"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."* (KJV)

In this verse the phrase, "*while the world standeth,*" is from the same Greek word, "*aion,*" here meaning only as long as the world stands, or at the most as long as he lives, and not for all eternity.

More than 50 times the Bible speaks of things lasting forever that have already ended, such as Samuel’s service or King Solomon’s reign. We still use this term in the same way today. You may hear

someone say - *"I sat in traffic forever!"* We know they only meant that it was to them a long time.

In the Bible there are 134 texts that state the wicked do not burn forever, but will be destroyed or annihilated. Before we look at those, remember, many of us are "programmed" to believe in eternal torment so we will need to look at these passages very thoughtfully. The following are a few examples:

**Psalm 37:9 - 10** *"For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more."*

**Verse 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."*

**Psalm 92:7** *"When the wicked spring up like grass, And when all the workers of iniquity flourish, It is that they may be destroyed forever."*

Destroyed forever – meaning they are gone forever.

**Malachi 4:1 - 3** *"For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch."*

Burn them up - leave neither root nor branch - there is nothing left, it will be as though they had never been.

**Matthew 7:13** *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."*

Note it says, *"Leads to destruction,"* not burning forever in hell.

**John 3:16** *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

"Perish" – destroyed, not burning in the flames of hell for eternity.

**Romans 6:23** *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

The wages, meaning the reward or the consequences of sin is death – not eternal life in hell or any other place.

**James 1:15** *"Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

This verse clearly states that sin results in death.

**Mark 9:43** *"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--where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'"*

This verse says *"the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched,"* NOT the body that is thrown into it. The body will be consumed by the worms and the fire with nothing left.

Jesus probably had the following text in mind when He made the previous comment -

**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."*

Note it says the *"corpses"* of the men who have sinned. The fire and worms are devouring dead bodies, not burning living people to death.



**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."*

Again, the word used is "destroy." The unrepentant sinner will be completely destroyed in the end. These texts are not speaking about the "sleep of death," but the "second death." The death from which there will be no awakening, no resurrection. The second death is an everlasting, forever, eternal, death.

**Matthew 25:46** *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

The result of the "punishment" is everlasting, but not the "punishing." We should be careful not to read more into the Bible than it says.

Now let's look at one of the key texts in Revelation that some use to support an unending fire in hell.

**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"*

Now that we understand "for ever" comes from a Greek word that does not always mean without end, but a certain period of time, and according to the other passages we studied, even though the period of time may be short, the results will be everlasting.

**But then what happens to Satan? Is he down there "prodding the wicked in the flames?" Is Satan immortal?**

**Ezekiel 28:13 - 19** *"Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I*

*have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; **therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth** in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.” (KJV)*

This must be Satan, because he (disguised as the serpent) and Adam and Eve were the only ones in the Garden of Eden. In the end Satan is “*devoured*” by a “*fire*” that comes from “*within*” him. What kind of fire could that be? We will discuss that in more detail in the next lesson.

From the beginning it has been Satan’s purpose to make our gracious Heavenly Father one to be feared and dreaded. A fact that should help us understand how these false teachings got into the church where Satan does his most deceptive work!

From Funk and Wagnalls Standard Reference Encyclopedia by Readers Digest 1958 under the heading “hell” we find this teaching was adopted by the Roman Church long ago:

“The second council of Constantinople, in 533 AD, a belief in the eternity of the punishments in hell became characteristic of both the Orthodox and the Roman churches. It also passed into the creeds of the churches of the reformation.”

In the dark ages, during an age of superstition and ignorance, the Roman Church developed the doctrine that hell was a place where the lost would suffer eternal torment so that people would fear God and the Church. It was a way of gaining power and control over them in hopes of better church attendance and more offerings. It appears some preachers still use this tactic today.

There are millions of people attending church every week, giving their money and saying, "I love the Lord," when in reality they are afraid of what God will do to them if they don't. The teaching that God will torture in hell forever those who do not do as He wishes or reject Christ, has actually turned thousands of people away from God and the church. But learning the truth about God will set them free of that fear.

In the next lesson we will continue the study on the punishment of the lost.

**Response Questions:**

- 1. Is it clear to you that there is no one burning in hell now?  
Yes \_\_ No \_\_
  
- 2. Is it clear to you that hell is not a burning place in the center of the earth?  
Yes \_\_ No \_\_
  
- 3. Is it clear to you God will not burn the wicked for all eternity?  
Yes \_\_ No \_\_

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