



The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Proverbs 18:15

Would God send someone to Hell?

General question: Is God fair in sending someone to Hell?

Also asked as:

How could a merciful God send someone to Hell?

Isn't Hell just a fictional threat created by Christians?

How could God do something to His children that I would not do to my own?

Is there a second chance beyond the grave?

Isn't Hell really just annihilation?

What about Purgatory?

Similar questions answered separately:

Is Jesus the only way to God?

Why do innocent people suffer?

What happens to good people who do not believe in Jesus?

What happens to children who die young?

What about the heathen?

A caution: This question can be very personal and emotionally charged if a friend or family member has died after a life of rejecting Christ. In the Bible, multiple words are used for the place of torment beyond the grave where a person is eternally separated from God. In this eSeeker answer, the word *Hell* is used generically for those words.

The short answer:

An unrighteous and unjust God would not have a Hell ... a righteous and just God would. A merciful God would offer a way to escape Hell. God did that through the death of Jesus on the cross ... paying for our sins and offering salvation to us. Hell is a fact described by Jesus as an awful and terrible place of eternal punishment. It is the fate of those who reject Him. However, Hell does not need to be our fate ... we can escape that fate by believing in Jesus in this life.

The longer answer:

Imagine there's no Hell. John Lennon (of Beatle's fame) wrote the song *Imagine* with the opening lines, "Imagine there's no heaven ... it's easy if you try ... no hell below us ... above us only sky." In that song, he proclaimed to his ardent fans that religion, Heaven and Hell, geographically defined borders, and possessions were the source of the world's evils. On the night of December 8, 1980, murdered outside the Dakota on the upper Westside of New York City at age 40, his philosophy and theology changed. Without God and eternity, man is nothing but an insignificant and meaningless cog in the disease-death survival-of-the-fittest slow grinding wheel of an animal kingdom. Life with no God would be chaotic. Nothing by which we define or judge good and evil would make any sense without God. And what if, using Lennon's lyric, there was "no Hell below us"? *To have no Hell* would dictate that there was no just God. A holy God of pure righteousness must not allow evil in His presence. For man to be in His presence requires that the penalty for his sin be paid and removed. Only that can purify a sinful man to be in God's presence ... by satisfying His justice. For God to do anything less would be to condone evil and thereby prove Himself to be less than righteous. God provided the solution for man's sin in the death of Jesus on the cross ... paying for his sin. That solution is offered to mankind. If a person rejects that solution, it would be unjust for God to overlook his sins. Someone must pay the penalty for our sins ... either Jesus on the cross or us for eternity in Hell. If God offered no solution to man, He would be unmerciful. If God overlooked evil, He would be unrighteous. If He did not punish evil, He would be unjust. The reality of Hell is frightening. However, it is more frightening to imagine there is no Hell and therefore, no just God.

The Bible's description of Hell. The concept of Hell was not created by the church to frighten people into conversion. Jesus spoke of Hell often. He described it as a real and awful place. The Bible vividly describes what Hell is like in the verses excerpted below.

Hell is a place of darkness. This may be a literal darkness ... or it may figuratively mean separation from God, hopelessness, meaninglessness, or lostness. *Outer darkness* indicates separation from God. *Black darkness* indicates the hopelessness and total despair of being in Hell.

"Cast out into the outer darkness," Matthew 8:12.

"Into the outer darkness," Matthew 22:13 & 25:30.

"For whom the black darkness has been reserved," 2 Peter 2:17.

Hell is eternal. There is no indication in the Bible that Hell is finite in duration. The contempt, punishment, judgment, and torment of it are described as eternal rather than temporal. Hell is a place of consciousness rather than a place of unconscious sleep, annihilation, or extinction. The term *sleep* is used euphemistically for death in the Bible ... however, it is never used to describe the state of one's consciousness in Hell.

"Disgrace and everlasting contempt," Daniel 12:2.

"Cast into the eternal fire," Matthew 18:8.

"These will go away into eternal punishment," Matthew 25:46.

"Eternal judgment," Hebrews 6:2.

"For whom the black darkness has been reserved forever," Jude 1:13.

"The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever," Revelation 14:11.

There is fire in Hell. This may be a visible literal fire ... or it may be a fire similar to burning alcohol with no light. Hell has a fire that burns but does not consume. I had a painful medical experience that damaged a nerve in my left arm. Immediately, my hand felt like boiling or burning oil had been poured over it. It was painful agony. It was a burning that did not consume ... 24/7 for a full month. However, that was nothing compared to the fire of Hell. Hell is an eternal, burning, unquenchable agony.

"Guilty enough to go into the fiery hell," Matthew 5:22.

"Thrown into the fire," Matthew 7:19.

"Burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age," Matthew 13:40.

"Will throw them into the furnace of fire," Matthew 13:50.

"Cast into the fiery hell," Matthew 18:9.

"Into the eternal fire," Matthew 25:41.

"To go into hell, into the unquenchable fire," Mark 9:43.

"And the fire is not quenched," Mark 9:48.

"The fury of fire," Hebrews 10:27.

"This is the second death, the lake of fire," Revelation 20:14.

The anguish of Hell causes gnashing of teeth. This gnashing means grinding, clenching, and grating of one's teeth. That physical manifestation of great emotional despair and distress adds trauma rather than reduces trauma.

"In that place there will be ... gnashing of teeth," Matthew 8:12, 13:50, & 22:13.

It is a place of God's judgment and condemnation. The idea that Hell is under the control of Satan, and that he and his demons poke people with pitchforks and shovel burning coals around their feet, is fiction. Hell is under the control of God rather than Satan. It is the place of God's wrath executed against those who have sinned and rejected Him. Satan will himself be confined to that Lake of Fire under God's judgment. John prophetically spoke of a day when, *"The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever,"* Revelation 20:10.

"A resurrection of judgment," John 5:29.

"Eternal judgment," Hebrews 6:2.

"A terrifying expectation of judgment," Hebrews 10:27.

There are no second chances in Hell. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that someone in Hell gets a second chance to become a child of God. The Bible definitively states that there is an uncrossable chasm between Heaven and Hell that *none may cross over*. The Bible states that we die once ... not multiple times as in the false concept of human recycling through reincarnation.

"And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us," Luke 16:26.

"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him," Hebrews 9:27-28.,

Hell is a place of punishment. A person who is not truly God's child can expect an eternal prison sentence of severe punishment in Hell ... especially for the sin of rejecting God throughout a lifetime. A person who has rejected Jesus from age 13 until death at 83 has rejected God for 80 years ... that is over 29,000 days of rejecting God. There is a principle of graduated punishment in the Bible ... greater punishment for greater sin, Luke 12:45-48. The greater sins would include spreading false religion, fighting against the Gospel message of Christ, and heinous crimes against mankind.

"The sentence of Hell," Matthew 23:33.

"These will go away into eternal punishment," Matthew 25:46.

"Recompensed for his deeds," 2 Corinthians 5:10.,

"Much severer punishment," Hebrews 10:29.

Hell is final separation from God. Some people imagine a Heaven of white-robed people floating about on clouds. Such a picture of Heaven is not found in the Bible. The best description of our eternal lives with God was given by Jesus. In His prayer to the Father He said, *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent,"* John 17:3. The most wonderful attribute of Heaven is knowing God ... i.e., being in a personal intimate relationship with Him. Therefore, the most awful attribute of Hell would be eternal separation from God.

"I never knew you; depart from me." Matthew 7:23

"Depart from Me, accursed ones." Matthew 25:41

"Away from the presence of the Lord." 2 Thessalonians 1:9

Hell is a place of great sorrow. The Greek word for *weeping* used in these verses means to cry out remorsefully, to wail, to lament, to grieve, and to mourn.

"In that place there will be weeping," Matthew 8:12, 13:50, 22:13, & 25:30.

Residents in Hell will have bodies. Hell is more than a place of spirits. Those who reject Christ will be there in bodily form.

"Your whole body to be thrown into hell," Matthew 5:29.

"Your whole body to go into hell," Matthew 5:30.

"Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell," Matthew 10:28.

They will continually be worm-eaten. This is one of the most disgusting descriptions of Hell. The worm referred to in Mark 9 is the variety that feeds on the decaying flesh of dead people. That this worm never dies indicates continuous and unrelenting torment.

"Where their worm does not die," Mark 9:48.

A detailed picture of Hades. Jesus told the following story of two men. One is in Hades and one is in Paradise. In this story, we see a vivid picture of the conditions in Hades ... and of the state of a suffering occupant. The [blue words] are commentary added to the verses.

Luke 16:19-22 *"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. [Human success in life does not ensure eternal success beyond the grave.]"*

23 *In Hades he [the rich man had a personal existence] lifted up his eyes [he could see] being in torment [he had severe physical and emotional pain], and saw Abraham far away [he recognized someone he had never met ... a man who also had a personal existence] and Lazarus in his bosom [he recognized the beggar who sat at his gate and ate the crumbs from his table].*

24 *And he cried out and said [he could speak], 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me [he knew what mercy was ... and knew that he needed it], and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue [he had thirst], for I am in agony [sorrowful and painful distress] in this flame [Hades includes fire].'*

25-26 But Abraham said [the rich man could hear], ‘Child, remember [in death we will have memories from life] that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony [Hades is a place of agony]. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us,’ [there is no second chance beyond the grave].

27-28 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house — for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment,’ [he had remorseful concern for his family’s eternal destiny. Special note: no loved one would want us to join them in Hell.]

29-31 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

The Biblical words for Hell. The words used in the Bible for Hell include the words Sheol, Hades, Tartarus, and the Lake of Fire and Brimstone. The word *purgatory* is not in the Bible.

Sheol is the Old Testament Hebrew-derived equivalent of *Hades*.

Hades is the New Testament Greek-derived word for the place of the unbelieving dead. It is occasionally used of the place of the believing dead ... in comfort rather than in agony. Believers, before the sacrifice of Christ, were temporarily in this Paradise (Abraham's Bosom) until their sins were paid for on the cross. Then they could enter God's presence.

Tartarus is a word taken from ancient Greek culture for the deepest recesses of Hell. It is used only once in the Bible of the place for fallen angels (demons), 2 Peter 2:4.

Gehenna is the *Lake of Fire and Brimstone*. In the future, the unbelieving dead will be consigned to the Lake of Fire at the White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:10-15. This is final condemnation without a second chance.

There is no judgment at the gates of Heaven. Every person, without Christ, is already judged, condemned, and waiting for execution. We are living on death row. Without Christ, we are already on the road to eternal Hell. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," John 3:18. "To those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power," 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. However, if a person believes in Jesus so that His payment for sin becomes his or her payment, then that person "has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life," John 5:24.

Purgatory? The Catholic Church, some Anglicans, and the Eastern Orthodox Church believe in the possibility of improving one's spiritual condition after death. This happens through one's suffering in Purgatory and/or through the prayers and liturgical activities of living friends and family. Such beliefs come from church traditions rather than from a consistent interpretation of the Bible. Purgatory is contradictory to many of the Biblical references in this eSeeker answer.

Not temporary. The Bible states that Hell is eternal. It is not a temporary place from which you can move on to Heaven. The concept of Purgatory is contradictory to what Jesus taught about the uncrossable chasm between Hades and Paradise, Luke 16:26.

Not purification. Purgatory is taught as after-death purification from forgivable sins ... but not from essentially unforgivable sins. However, the Bible teaches that all sins are forgivable. *"Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins,"* Acts 10:43. A differentiation between forgivable (venial) and almost unforgivable (mortal) sins is not from the Bible. The Bible teaches that, *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all,"* James 2:10. One sin makes me a sinner. One imperfection makes me imperfect. To be guilty of one sin is to be guilty of all.

Not payment. Purgatory is taught to be a place of our own partial payment for our sins leading to salvation. However, the Bible teaches that Jesus took the full punishment for our sins. Jesus paid the full price for sin. *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed,"* 1 Peter 2:24. *"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,"* 1 Peter 3:18. Jesus did more than make the down payment for our sins. He paid the full price. We can add nothing to the price He paid for our salvation. The Bible teaches that, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast,"* Ephesians 2:8-9.

Hell is avoidable. Hell is the place of God's wrath and judgment against sin. Each of us, without individually believing in Jesus, will spend eternity in Hell separated from God. However, if we believe in Christ, we are safe from the agonies and torment of Hell. Hell is a real place. It is an avoidable place. It does not have to be our place.

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