

Fidelity In Friendship

Derived from the Latin word *fidēlis*, fidelity is the quality of being faithful, loyal, accurate, or true. And it's a quality essential to all authentic, interpersonal relationships.

By One Man

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I like the Apostle Paul.

I like his ability to 'call a spade a spade', the unrelenting pursuit of his faith, and his bold assertion to "preach nothing but the cross of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:2). No doubt he ruffled more than a few feathers at times, with his unapologetic directness and refusal to tolerate any other gospel than that of being [saved by grace through faith alone](#).

He doesn't shy away from telling it how it was; the reality that his zeal for God had been seriously misplaced early on, and that he had been a violent persecutor and destroyer of the very faith he was now thankful to call his own.

He doesn't downplay the facts of his former life; that not only had he been zealous for the traditions of his fathers, he had also been considered an 'up and coming' amongst his peers, his upward trajectory in Judaism eclipsing many of those his own age (Galatians 1:13).

Yet he also doesn't state this just for effect or from a place of pride, but rather as facts relevant to advancing the true

gospel narrative he now endeavors to preach. He states that he counts all those things of his former life as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord.

He has a particularly warm and fatherly relationship with Timothy, his 'son in the faith' and he shows deep regard for several fellow workers whom he commends by name: Epaphroditus, husband-and-wife team, Priscilla and Aquila, Barnabas, Titus, Silas, Luke, Lydia, and Onesiphorus.

He demonstrates tenderness and genuine love and concern for all those of the "household of faith" and he is a passionate evangelist to those who are yet still "strangers and foreigners" to the gospel of grace. His letters to the early churches are full of pastoral advice and authoritative direction. Yet he is also unapologetically direct and is prepared to meet and name injustice or falsity head-on, as in the situation that he writes about in 2 Corinthians 7 (see also 2 Corinthians 11, Galatians 1:6–9, Galatians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 11:26).

"Paul's letters reveal a remarkable human being: dedicated, compassionate, emotional, sometimes harsh and angry, clever and quick-witted, supple in argumentation, and above all possessing a soaring, passionate commitment to God, Jesus Christ, and his own mission." | [Britannica.Com](https://www.britannica.com)

Paul's influence, passion, and commitment enabled the gospel of Jesus Christ to take root and flourish throughout Asia Minor, and its spread continued long after his death, reaching even to the ends of the earth.

Paul wrote several letters, one of which was the letter to the church at Rome. In chapters 5 and 6 of Romans, he covers some significant theological territory by dealing with the themes of death, life, and resurrection, which came about, he states, 'by one man'...

By One: Death In Adam

The need for our forgiveness and reconciliation with God sits at the heart of the gospel. Paul recounts in Romans 5 how humanity found itself in the dismal state of being sinning, dying creatures and why we need forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal.

He makes his first point in Romans 5:12 where he teaches that Sin came into the world *by one man* and that death followed swiftly on Sin's heels, enslaving all of humanity in a dominion of darkness and, ultimately, separation from God.

The word he uses for 'man' is the Greek word ἄνθρωπος (anthrōpos) meaning *human*. We get our English word anthropology from the combining of *ánthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος, "human") and *lógos* (λόγος, "study"). It's therefore strictly more accurate to say that *by one human* Sin entered the world and death spread to all.

While Adam becomes the representative of us all, the focus, I think, is not primarily on his gender (as a man) but on his humanity. In fact, scripture elsewhere confirms that Eve was complicit in sin alongside Adam (Genesis 3:6,12, 1 Timothy 2:14). Together, they were responsible for the catastrophe that unfolded.

"The narratives of Genesis focus on conflict and resolution. God's purpose from the beginning is to have His presence fill the earth; humans are to image God and subdue the earth, i.e., bring about order and fruitfulness in creation (Genesis 1–2). Conflict enters the story when humans rebel against God (Genesis 3). Shalom is shattered, and the earth is cursed. Further degeneration takes place (Genesis 4–6) until God brings judgment and mercy (Genesis 6–9). Humans then attempt to restore God's presence (Genesis 11) before God launches His own initiative to re-establish His presence on Earth (the covenant). Genesis 1–11, then, is the founding story of

humanity, ending in crisis. These narratives give a real and true assessment of God's initial purposes and the human plight. Genesis 12–50 is the founding story of the nation with whom the covenant is eventually made at Sinai. The covenant establishes the relationship to Abraham and his descendants, provides the structure for living in God's presence, and lays the foundation for God's presence to be established on earth." | [BioLogos](#)

The consequence of the fall in Eden – mortality – flowed from Adam and Eve to all of humanity; a literal reality and a core theological truth embedded within the Genesis record. Dying became hard-coded in our DNA.

Not only that, Paul comments later in Romans 7, Sin is a powerful and destructive force that humans find impossible to resist. Humanity has been *sold under sin*, constantly battling against the pull of our own self-will, which is invariably in opposition to God. Despite having the desire to do good, more often than not, we lack the ability to do what is right, so powerful is Sin's hold and influence over us. There is no one in all the world who has not fallen prey to Sin's insidious, whispering temptation* (Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:21).

The introduction and continued presence of Sin in the world is what gives death its power over humanity. We die because we're mortal and death now reigns supreme and we remain dead because of the power that Sin gives death.

In Adam, all die. This is Paul's first point and the incontrovertible theological teaching of Romans 5.

By One: Life In Christ

Yet, says Paul in Romans 5:21, and here he makes his second point, in Christ, there is life. There is another theological truth embedded within the Genesis record, a promise "that new life would be delivered out of death."

“And I will put enmity (open hostility) Between you and the woman, and between your seed (offspring) and her Seed; He shall [fatally] bruise your head, And you shall [only] bruise His heel.” | Genesis 3:15, AMP

Humanity was promised that a descendant of Eve – [another human](#) – would arise to wage war against Sin and to overthrow death. Yet in waging this war, death would deal him a powerful blow, a seemingly mortal wound. But out of his death would flow life.

This promise would be affirmed countless times throughout scripture, and, particularly, by Jesus himself during his ministry, who stated the reason for his coming was that “they [humanity] may *have life*, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]” (John 10:10, Amplified Bible).

Unable to wage the war for themselves, God’s promise and gift to the world would go into battle on humanity’s behalf. He would wage war for all those who were weak, utterly helpless, and hopelessly enslaved to Sin. Those who were living in darkness, far from the eternal life God had intended for them. Those whose greatest enemy was death itself.

In fact, this hero’s [redemptive work](#) on behalf of humanity would be deeply connected to *his own humanity*. He had to be human, like us, in order to make atonement for the sin of humanity (Isaiah 53:6, Hebrews 2:17)

As a human, he would still feel keenly the pull of Sin’s seductive promise, the desire and temptation, as *the first Adam* had, to undertake this battle on his own terms. He would wrestle with the terrifying but necessary reality of confronting death up close; not just any kind of death but the painful and humiliating death of a traitor.

He would face the world’s great enemy alone, rejected by all, even by those who were closest to him, in the moment of his

greatest need. Defenseless, *like a lamb led to slaughter*, he would cling to the words of the Psalmist that, though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, God would be with him still. He would choose to suffer according to God's will, committing his soul to a faithful Creator.

This war would be brutal and bloody and seemingly fatal for our hero.

And yet, there would be an extraordinary twist...

Where *the first Adam* had been a living being; *the last Adam* would be a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). This hero would be human *but not merely a human*. He would be the "Word-Made-Flesh" – the 'one and only of his kind' and in him would dwell 'the entire fullness (completeness) of God's nature (Colossians 2:9).

Written into the very fabric of our reality was a powerful promise that Sin *could be* defeated by the willing sacrifice of one who had committed no sin and who had lived a perfect, moral life according to God's will. The sacrificial death of such an individual, on behalf of all of humanity, would heal the division between God and humanity, reopening the way to the eternal life God had always intended for His creation.

Scripture could not be any clearer that the victory over Sin and death was going to be God's, accomplished through the sending of His Son, the Word-Made-Flesh. Sent in the likeness of all of humanity, but in whom dwelt all the fullness of God, only the Son of God would be able to overcome and defeat our greatest enemy.

Not only that, in meeting death head-on, he would deal it a fatal blow, overturning and destroying its claim on him. Sin's power to command death would be vanquished. Jesus himself would now hold the keys of death and the grave. On the third day, at the break of dawn, he would rise from the silence, *Life* himself having swallowed up death in victory (Acts 2:24,

Romans 6:9, 1 Corinthians 15:54).

One act of righteousness, Paul says, led to justification and life for all humanity. By one man's obedience, many would be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).

"As sin has exercised kingly sway in inflicting death, so grace, too, may exercise kingly sway in bestowing a righteousness which results in the Life of the Ages through Jesus Christ our Lord." | Romans 5:21, Weymouth New Testament

Deeper Magic

I love how C S Lewis writes about this epic moment in his fictional work, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*:

At that moment they heard from behind them a loud noise—a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a giant's plate...The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan. "Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?" "Yes!" said a great voice from behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself. "Oh, Aslan!" cried both the children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad... "But what does it all mean?" asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer. "It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward." | C S Lewis

This “deeper magic” is an immutable law of consequence, as certain as the law of gravity or the rising of the sun. Jesus has brought life and all those *in him* will live. This gift of grace has been given, the work has been finished and the end has been written. *“While we were still enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and, further, now that we are reconciled, we will also be saved by his life.”*

In Christ, all will live. This is Paul’s second point and the incontrovertible theological teaching of Romans 5.

The Resurrection: Proof + Promise

One of the great theological truths of the Christian faith, as taught by Paul and, indeed, written into the earliest Christian creeds is the necessary and factual reality of [the resurrection](#), particularly, the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, Paul asserts that resurrection underpins the entire gospel narrative, without which all of Christian life is rendered futile.

*“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even **Christ has been raised**. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.” | 1 Corinthians 15:17, NIV*

He actually summarised the gospel by affirming three statements, one of which is a declaration of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus:

“Remember Jesus Christ [the anointed], raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.” | 2 Timothy 2:8 | NIV

The Christian faith asserts and teaches that resurrection is a

historical reality; Jesus Christ really did live, die, and was raised again to eternal life.

The resurrection is not only relevant to the gospel narrative, it's essential. Author Craig Blomberg comments, *"As wonderful as Jesus' life and teachings and miracles were, they were meaningless if it were not historically factual that Christ died and was raised from the dead and that this provided atonement, or forgiveness, of the sins of humanity."* Embedded in this reality is the proof that what was begun in Jesus, God intends to do for all creation.

"The most startling characteristic of the first Christian preaching is its emphasis on the resurrection. The first preachers were sure that Christ had risen, and sure, in consequence, that believers would in due course rise also. This set them off from all the other teachers of the ancient world...Nothing is more characteristic of even the best thought of the day than its hopelessness in the face of death. Clearly, the resurrection is of the very first importance for the Christian faith" – The New Bible Dictionary 1996, p. 1010, "Resurrection".

Jesus didn't just overcome death, his death also made reparation for all the sins of the world. Sin, in its entirety, was dealt with, once and for always** (Romans 6:10). His resurrection was both proof and promise that the war against Sin had been waged and won. Death has lost its power. Those in Christ *will live*, no longer be held by death but merely passing through it. They too, like him, will be raised to life, never again to experience death.

"I assure you: Anyone who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life." | John 5:24

Life, and life abundantly – the same life that Jesus now

has [awaits them on the other side](#).

It's no wonder Paul concludes his thoughts on this subject with these inspiring words: *"In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!* (Romans 8:7-39, CEV).

This is indeed good, good news!

***apart from Jesus, of course.**

****This, of course, doesn't mean that we don't still struggle with sin – this is the challenging reality of the Christian life – but rather that the penalty that sin inflicts, death, has been absolved for those in Christ (Isaiah 53:6, 1 John 2:2, John 1:29). We eagerly wait, with all of creation, to be completely set free from the bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:22).**

A large part of the inspiration for this article came from the worship song 'This My Soul' By The Gray Havens. It's truly worth a listen and captures Paul's sentiments from Romans 5 and 6 perfectly. This song is one of my personal favourites.

Three Reasons I Don't Believe In Hell

Before beginning, I would like to acknowledge that discussing this particular topic may appear to be controversial and that you, the reader, may not share the views I express. This article is not intended to be offensive or divisive in nature, but rather to open a channel of respectful conversation about a subject that is deeply important to many people.

I have chosen some time ago to abandon a rigid position on issues or topics which are non-essential to the gospel, from which there is no possible room to move or breathe, and allow my questions and convictions to sit in tension with one another while my Christian life continues to grow and deepen.

What this means, in practical terms, is that I'm genuinely interested to hear from you, that I welcome engagement and even difference on many biblical subjects, including this one, and, while I express this to be my currently held position on this topic, I would hope I am still open to learning new things as scripture speaks to me and as I hear from others.

The following thoughts are expressed in that light:

The subject of *hell* has popped up in a few different conversations recently, and, while I tend to try to avoid speaking from a position of a negative ('*what I don't believe...*'), this doctrine is one that's never rung true for me.

I genuinely doubt the validity of the doctrine of hell or that it's an actual teaching of scripture. For many Christians, a requirement to believe in hell has been a deal breaker in their faith and, I think, for good reason. It's hard to reconcile the many elements of this doctrine with the picture the Bible paints of a good, good God.

In this article, I'd like to share three compelling reasons why I think the doctrine of hell doesn't biblically add up and why I think it's actually in opposition to the truth of the gospel narrative.

But Firstly, What Do I Mean By *Hell*?

Well, I'm referring to the (assumed to be) biblical teaching about the destination of the soul at the moment of death; either to heaven if you've 'done okay' or, alternatively, to hell, if you 'haven't quite measured up'. *Saints* go up. *Sinners* go down.

The parameters for 'not quite measuring up' can differ greatly depending on who you might be talking to. Some would say that *anyone* who hasn't [received Jesus as Lord and Saviour](#) is outside God's salvation. Therefore, either by ignorance or purposed willfulness, they have rejected God and earned themselves a one-way ticket to hell.

This includes, for example, people living deep within the Amazon jungle (who have had limited contact with the outside world and may never have heard the Christian message of Jesus Christ), those who may have been Christian once but have turned their back on Christ, those who have heard the message of Jesus but decided *no thanks*, as well as those who have engaged in various horrors such as rape, torture and mass murder during their lifetime.

Others are more uncomfortable with the thought of Adolf Hitler rubbing shoulders with good and sincere people (who, while they might not have been Christian, could hardly be described as having lived a 'wicked life'). Or those who, through no fault of their own, had never even heard of hell, let alone Jesus. It does seem a little heavy-handed a response towards people who were essentially clueless about the rules but were punished anyway. Hell, they therefore conclude, is only for the truly wicked; surely [God makes concessions for nice people?](#)

The traditional teaching of hell is that it's a place of both psychological and physical torment; an 'eternal lake of fire' where the wicked are perpetually burned for all eternity

(decide for yourself who qualifies). This imagery was further elaborated on during medieval times by the artists who graphically displayed vile creatures eating flesh and devouring sinners in the place of torment. (These images, together with fragmented texts of the Scriptures, and the circulation of [apocryphal](#) books, led the medieval church into some strange and grotesque doctrines).

The period of history known as The Great Awakening (1730-1740) placed particular emphasis, as a method of conversion, on the horror that awaited the unrepentant sinner. Jonathan Edwards, a famous American congregational preacher of the time, described hell as a place where “God holds men over the flames in the way that one holds a loathsome spider over a candle. He speculated on how it would feel to have the searing agony of a burn drawn out through eternity. He told listeners that the ground beneath their feet was a rotten flooring over a blazing pit, ready to give way in seconds.” (Bruce Shelley, Church History In Plain Language)

What Does Scripture Teach?

Psychologists today would no doubt have a field day with the profoundly damaging psychosocial and spiritual effects of this kind of preaching, dubbed ‘fire-and-brimstone’, but, more particularly, what does the Bible preach? Is this kind of reality really found in scripture?

Here are three reasons why I don’t think scripture teaches this at all:

1. Hell Doesn’t Fit The Gospel Narrative

One of the amazing aspects of the Bible is the consistency of its message and theme, from start to finish. It’s remarkable, given the reality of its varying authorships and the different time periods during which it was written, that the major theme of God’s sovereignty, rule, and purpose remains intact. In

fact, affirming God's sovereignty throughout the biblical record gives shape and purpose to the role for which humanity was created.

[The gospel narrative](#) is one that tells the story of Jesus, God's only Son, and announces that he is both Lord and King. In him, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose (Acts 2:36, Romans 8:19-21).

But what is He saving people from?

The first book in the Bible, Genesis, tells us something important about our own history, and it sets the stage for the drama that subsequently unfolds throughout the rest of [God's story](#).

It tells us, firstly, that we were created with purpose, designed to be like God, to image Him throughout His good world and rule wisely and well on His behalf (Genesis 1:26).

Secondly, it tells us that instead of partnering with God in this purpose, we chose our own will, introducing the evil of sin into God's good world. The terrible consequence for the first humans, Adam and Eve, is that they were banished from the garden and from God's presence. Furthermore, humans became 'dying creatures', subject to disease, aging, and mortality. Dying became hard-coded into our DNA.

"You will sweat all your life to earn a living; you were made out of soil, and you will once again turn into soil." | Genesis 3:19, CEV

"Adam sinned, and that sin brought death into the world. Now everyone has sinned, and so everyone must die." | Romans 5:19, CEV

We are subject to mortality. **Death is our great enemy; this is**

the consequence of disobedience, passed on Adam and Eve and received by all those who came after them.

“So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone.” | Romans 5:18

The gospel narrative tells of humanity hopelessly enslaved to sin and at the mercy of mortality (Romans 6:15-23). Far from the spiritual life God intended for us, we're incapable of saving ourselves or of overcoming death (Acts 4:12). The gospel, however, offers good news! : rescue, redemption and eternal life – God's own life, by the simple act of [giving allegiance](#) to His Son, Jesus, as Lord and Saviour (Romans 10:9-10).

The gospel confirms the biblical reality of a just but loving God who is for His creation, who is not willing that any should perish, and who has actively worked to reconcile and transform us so that we can live the life of purpose for which He created us (2 Peter 3:8-10, John 3:16).

Hell – further punishment after death – simply doesn't fit the gospel narrative.

2. Hell Doesn't Fit The Character Of God

God is the God of promise, at whose Word the universe came into being and whose Word will never return to Him void, not accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent ([Genesis 1:3](#), [Isaiah 55:11](#)). His loving devotion endures forever. He is faithful, true, just, and all glorious ([Psalm 136:3](#), [1 Timothy 1:17](#)).

The Psalmist declares the wonder and worthiness of this Eternal God, who is clothed in light, who stretches out the heavens like a tent, and who walks on the waves of the sea ([Psalm 104:2](#), [Job 9:8](#)). All of creation bows in obeisance to

His majesty, for all things, owe their existence to Him ([Psalm 104:30](#), [Psalm 6:4](#), [Psalm 96:11](#), [Luke 19:40](#)).

God proclaimed both His Name and character to Moses, the great deliver of Israel [during the Exodus](#), stating:

“The Lord – the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.” | Exodus 34:5-9, ESV

The Psalmist also writes often and extensively about the innate goodness of God:

“For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” | Psalm 100:5, ESV

“The LORD is good and upright; therefore He shows sinners the way.” Psalm 25:8, CSB

“The LORD is good to all; His compassion rests on all He has made.” | Psalm 145:9, BSB

There’s a lot to unpack in all those verses. Yet perhaps the overwhelming take-home point is this: God is just. He’s not vindictive or biased and He [doesn’t show favoritism based on our social status, gender, or nationality](#). In fact, He is generous-hearted and gracious, even to those who are His enemies.

Jesus demonstrates this in His famous sermon on the mount, where he sets out the characteristics of those who would be children of the kingdom. He shows that choosing to behave in this way is simply imitating the characteristics of their

Heavenly Father:

“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” | Matthew 5:45-48, CSB

This aspect of God’s graciousness – His undeserved love and favour to humanity – permeates every aspect of the gospel narrative, giving it weight and power. Because He is just, He wouldn’t overlook the sin of the world. But because He is also gracious and good, God sent His Son into the world, to suffer under the hands of wicked men, so that humanity could be rescued from the curse of sin and death (Matthew 16:21, Isaiah 53:4-6). In His goodness and in His justice, He made arrangement for sin to be absorbed and absolved, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

God is not a vindictive sadist. It simply doesn’t fit the character of a good and gracious God to punish people by “holding them, like a loathsome spider, over a flame for all eternity.” I would have serious concerns about other aspects of God’s character if I truly believed He is capable of sustaining such indefinite torture, even to those I might consider deserving of such a fate.

Interestingly, during the time when kings ruled the nation of Israel (926BCE – 586BCE), Israel engaged in the practice of child sacrifice by fire to the pagan god Molech, a practice they had absorbed from the nations they had previously

conquered. God considered this to be a great evil; it was completely abhorrent to Him and something which he had expressly forbidden (2 Chronicles 33:6, Jeremiah 32:35, 2 Kings 21:6).

The doctrine of hell, in its many terrifying forms, perhaps tells us more about the capability and cruelty of human imagination than the reality of what occurs at death.

Hell – as a place of fiery, eternal torture for the wicked – simply doesn't fit the character of God.

3. Hell Isn't Found In The Bible

Well, it is. But not in the way you think.

While the word *hell* is certainly found in some of our English translations, it's usually a translation of the original Hebrew word *she'ol* (שְׁאוֹל), and on the remaining occasions, three other Greek words (*hades* (αἴδης), *gehenna* (γεέννα) and *tartarus* (ταρταρώ).

It's translated by the King James version as *hell* 54 times, however more accurate translations like the NASB or NIV show the word *hell* only occurring between 13–14 times, all of which are found in the New Testament. The Hebrew word *she'ol* is translated in other places as 'grave' and 'the pit' and the more accurate translations tend to translate it in this way ([Genesis 37:35](#), [1 Kings 2:6](#), [Job 17:16](#), [Isaiah 14:11](#), [Ecclesiastes 9:10](#))

The English word *hell*, comes from 'helan', meaning 'to conceal'. It conveyed no thought of heat or torment but simply of a 'covered over or concealed place.' In the old English dialect, the expression "helling potatoes" meant, not to roast them, but simply to place the potatoes in the ground or in a cellar (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged).

Here's a brief overview of the original words:

She'ol

She'ol was understood, by Jewish writers, as a place of stillness and darkness to which all the dead go, both the righteous and the unrighteous, regardless of the moral choices made in life. In *she'ol*, one is cut off from life and from God.

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun” | Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, ESV

“Humans and animals come to the same end—humans die, animals die. We all breathe the same air. So there's really no advantage in being human. None. Everything's smoke. We all end up in the same place—we all came from dust, we all end up as dust.” | Ecclesiastes 3:19–20, The Message

She'ol is used throughout the Old Testament and is derived from a word meaning *hollow*, the place under the earth where all previously living things rest in eternal, silent repose, without knowledge, consciousness, or reward.

*“Since she'ol in the Old Testament times referred simply to the abode of the dead and suggested no moral distinctions, the word ‘hell,’ **as understood today**, is not a happy translation.” – Collier's Encyclopedia (1986, Vol 12, p.28)*

Hades

In the [Septuagint](#) (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and throughout the New Testament, the translators used the Greek word **hades** (ᾍδης) in place of the Hebrew word *she'ol*, translating with the Jewish concepts of *she'ol* in mind

– a place where there is no activity – rather than the mythology of Greek concepts. This can be shown to be the case as they expressly use *hades* as an equivalent for *she'ol*, both in the Greek translation and also where they are quoting passages from the Old Testament (Hebrew text). One example appears below comparing [Psalm 16:10](#) with [Acts 2:27](#) (where the former is being quoted by Peter the Apostle):

“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” – [Psalm 16:10, ESV](#)

“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.” – [Acts 2:27, ESV](#)

With one exception, mentioned further below, the word *hades*, in all appearances in the New Testament has little, if any, connection to afterlife rewards or punishments.

The best equivalent understanding, which most modern translations use is *‘the grave’*. The context of the verses in which this word is used support the Jewish understanding of *she'ol* as a place of silence and inactivity to which all those who die are consigned.

The exception, as noted above, is Luke’s parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), in which the rich man finds himself, after death, in *hades*, and “in anguish in this flame”, while in contrast the angels take Lazarus to “the bosom of Abraham”, described as a state of comfort.

A parable is a type of analogy – a succinct, didactic story written in prose or verse, designed to illustrate one or more instructive lessons or principles, and is never intended to be interpreted literally. Additionally, it would be problematic for an entire theology to be built around one specifically non-literal section of scripture; or even from several parables put together. *“Parables should never be used as*

sources of doctrine, but rather we take doctrine as a norm for interpreting the parables” (Tertullian).

This passage, in my opinion, therefore shouldn't be considered to be literally describing aspects of an afterlife, including hell: that is, a place of eternal fiery torment *because this is not what scripture teaches elsewhere* Nevertheless, it is certainly an fascinating passage, intended to illustrate some lesson or principle and therefore requires an interpretation of some sort.

Gehenna

Another Greek word that has been translated as *hell* in some translations is 'Gehenna'. It appears twelve times in the New Testament and is actually a Greek compound, derived from the Hebrew words *ge* and *hinnom* or the “valley of Hinnom”; a proper name which literally means valley of the son of Hinnom. Gehenna is actually the word that Jesus uses in the New Testament and [you can read more about what Jesus really said about heaven and hell here](#).

The valley of Hinnom is a deep narrow slice of earth just outside the city of Jerusalem. Also called Tophet, or ‘the valley of dead bones’, it already had a long and disturbing history by Jesus' time. Firstly, as mentioned earlier in this article, in the early days of Israel's kingdom, it was the place of idolatry and child sacrifice, by burning alive with fire to the pagan god Molech (2 Kings 23:10).

Later it was used as a place where rubbish, filth, and the carcasses of beast and men alike were disposed of. Fires were kept constantly burning to consume the valley's refuse and to prevent contamination. In the days of Jesus, the highest mark of ignominy that could be inflicted upon a person was a criminal's burial in the fires of Gehenna.

Gehenna is a literal place of perpetual burning; *but it was in Israel, not in a subterranean underworld*. Therefore Jesus'

meaning when warning of Gehenna was quite different to what might be understood by *hell* today. The theological implication of Jesus' words is likely this: that the consequences of unrepented sin in our life will lead to the finality of death and, by inference, the complete and utter annihilation of existence.

Just as the fire of Gehenna burned indefinitely, completely obliterating any trace of whatever was cast into it, so is our existence in death, without the salvation that is to be found in Jesus. Extinction of not just of our physical body, but of our life, our soul, our spirit, the very thing that makes us *us*. *All of us*.

Again, the theological implications point to the need for and provision of [a saviour, the hope of the world](#); the very core of the gospel narrative.

The translation of Gehenna to *hell* is actually a mistranslation. More correctly, it should have been transliterated into English (ie it should read 'Gehenna' on every occasion) and left in its proper form for the reader to interpret.

Tartarus

Used in 2 Peter 2:4, this Greek word actually occurs nowhere else in scripture.

"For if God did not spare messengers having sinned, but having cast [them] down to Tartarus with chains of deepest gloom, delivered [them], having been reserved to judgment..." 2 Peter 2:4, LSV

Tartarus was considered in Greek mythology to be the great abyss, situated far below *hades* (the grave). Together with the context of this verse, the use of this word suggests a particular and specific meaning. Some kind of *imprisonment* is

implied, certainly, but no sense at all of fiery torment or torture. In fact, the verse suggests that judgment (of who and what kind isn't stated) is still yet to come.

Certainly, there are questions raised by these passages – the parable of Lazarus for example. What does it mean? What lesson are we intended to take from it?

And what is Peter referring to in his letter? Who are the messengers He refers to? What was their crime? And why is this Greek word found here, yet used nowhere else in scripture?

It's not my intention to discuss these at any length in this particular article, only to comment that I don't believe these single instances are compelling enough evidence for the doctrine of hell, particularly when compared alongside all of scripture as discussed earlier in this article.

Again, as with Gehenna, *Tartarus* should have been transliterated into English and left in its proper form for the reader to interpret.

What I've Concluded

While scripture certainly has much to say about what happens *after life* and why, it's a markedly different story than perhaps we've been led to believe.

Scripture tells us that we're all bound by mortality, a one-way, downhill journey from cradle to grave, where life – all aspects of *living* – cease. This situation is permanent and final (Genesis 3:19, 2 Samuel 14:14, Psalm 103:15-16, Romans 5:12, Romans 8:20-28).

Death is not just the enemy of life itself, but also thwarts the purpose for which humanity was created. Even the noblest of men or women soon pass from the world's stage, their personalities and achievements more often than not fading from memory. *"No wisdom of man or rebellion can deliver new life*

out of death."

But the perfect human was promised to come, one who would bear the sin of the world and who would wage war against sin and death in his own body (John 1:29). Through his perfect life, his willing sacrifice, his dishonorable and painful death, and his glorious resurrection, all of humanity were promised that rescue would come and that death would be overturned. Jesus was going to build his church and not even the *gates of the grave* would prevail against it (Romans 8:3, Matthew 16:18).

"He [God] has revealed this grace through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the gospel" | 2 Timothy 1:10, BSB

The gospel narrative is the story of God, in Jesus, saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose. Those who believe in Jesus will live, even if they die, for Jesus promises that he is not just the light and life of humanity but the resurrection itself (John 11:25, John 3:16).

The traditional doctrine of hell finds no place in this narrative, nor does it fit the character of a good and gracious God, nor can it actually be found in scripture.

Instead, the final pages of the Bible close with the great conclusion promised as part of Jesus's reign, once He has put all His enemies under His feet, that the last enemy to be destroyed will be death itself (1 Corinthians 15:26): *"Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. **Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more because the previous things have passed away.**"* (Revelation 21:3-4, CSB)

“The angel showed me a river that was crystal clear, and its waters gave life. The river came from the throne where God and the Lamb were seated. Then it flowed down the middle of the city’s main street. On each side of the river are trees that grow a different kind of fruit each month of the year. The fruit gives life, and the leaves are used as medicine to heal the nations.

God’s curse will no longer be on the people of that city. He and the Lamb will be seated there on their thrones, and its people will worship God and will see Him face to face. God’s name will be written on the foreheads of the people. Never again will night appear, and no one who lives there will ever need a lamp or the sun. The Lord God will be their light, and they will rule forever.” ([Revelation 22:1-5, CEV](#))