

What the Hinnom?

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Just as a heads up, this Bible study is a heavily edited excerpt from my (much longer) Bible study titled: “*What the Bible really says about heaven, hell, judgement, death, evil, sin, and salvation*” (and I’d highly recommend reading that one all the way through from beginning to end if you’re able to, in order to get the full picture of what the Bible is talking about when it comes to salvation; but for those who don’t have the time to read that one right now, please do read this Bible study carefully).

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. — Matthew 18:8–9

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. — Mark 9:43–48

These two parallel passages are among the most commonly quoted in order to prove the popular doctrine of never-ending torment in hell. There are a couple factors here that almost nobody ever considers when reading these two passages, however. First of all, there’s nothing in the text which tells us anyone will actually *remain* in the hell fire Jesus warned about in those passages. Yes, they say that the *fire* is “everlasting” in less literal Bible translations such as the

KJV, but they don't say that the time *spent* in said hell fire will be never-ending, and insisting that these two passages mean any humans will be trapped in said fire without the possibility of ever leaving it requires one to read their doctrinal presuppositions about never-ending punishment into the text (it's also important to know that the words "everlasting" and "eternal" are generally figurative terms in these less literal Bible translations which use the words, and that they rarely ever actually mean "never ending," as I demonstrated in my aforementioned longer Bible study, as well as in my shorter study titled "*How long does 'for ever' last,*" so please read one of them if you aren't already aware of the passages in Scripture which prove this fact). That's not all, though. Jesus also didn't say that anyone would even be conscious or suffering while in this hell fire. Of course, the fact that He didn't say anyone would be conscious or suffering doesn't necessarily mean they won't be. It simply means we can't determine these things based on these two passages alone, since they just don't say one way or the other, but we can look to other passages in Scripture to find out. And this is where the passage in Mark comes in handy, because it gives us the key to finding the answer to this question (the mention of the "undying" worm and unquenchable fire gives it away). You see, these warnings by Jesus were actually referencing a prophecy in Isaiah 66:23-24, which said: *"And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."* Few people who read this prophecy ever seem to notice it, but there's a word in there which tells us that Jesus wasn't talking about ghosts who are suffering consciously in an ethereal afterlife realm. Why do I say that? Because, in that prophecy, Isaiah wrote about carcasses — meaning corpses, or dead bodies — being looked upon with abhorrence (meaning contempt or aversion) by all flesh (meaning any living human, since ghosts

wouldn't have flesh, so this can't take place in some sort of afterlife realm) that sees them either being consumed by worms or by fire on a physical planet in the future.

Of course, the fact that Jesus was referencing a passage from Isaiah about carcasses also tells us that these passages aren't talking about anyone who is alive or suffering consciously, at least not if we're taking the passage in Isaiah that Jesus was calling back to in that warning at all literally (and I see no reason not to, especially since there wouldn't be new moons and sabbaths¹ in the ethereal afterlife realm that most Christians assume this "hell" is referring to, nor would there be anyone with flesh in an afterlife realm, as Isaiah said there would be in the location this punishment takes place in, as I already mentioned), which means we have no reason to believe that anyone suffers in this particular hell fire at all (since dead bodies don't have functioning nervous systems). And while it's said that there will be "worms" that won't die there, there's little reason to believe these "worms" are a reference to anything other than maggots — especially when you consider the fact that Isaiah wrote "carcasses," not "ghosts" or "souls," as well as the fact that he didn't say any *humans* in that location would never die, which makes sense when you remember that carcasses are *already* quite dead — and maggots are simply larval flies which go through a process known as pupation and grow into adult flies, so they won't die while still in their larval, "worm" form, but will instead grow up and lay eggs so that there are then more "worms" to consume more of the dead bodies in this location (although, since worms do burn up and die when they're set on fire, this would mean that the entire location won't be on fire, but will have portions which will burn corpses alongside portions where corpses that aren't on fire will instead be eaten by worms). So if there actually is a place

¹ And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. — Isaiah 66:23

called “hell” that people end up in as conscious beings after they die, we have no good reason to look at passages which talk about *this* particular “hell” to describe or defend its existence (yes, there’s more than one “hell” referred to in the KJV; remember, the same English word doesn’t always mean the same thing every time it’s used in the Bible, and the word “hell” in the KJV is, in fact, translated from four different words in the original Hebrew and Koine Greek Scriptures, most of which refer to different locations or concepts from one another, with the particular “hell” we’re talking about right now being translated from the Greek word γέεννα/“gheh'-en-nah,” which is why it’s often referred to today as Gehenna, as it’s also sometimes transliterated, depending on your Bible version). And neither can we look to these passages to prove that anyone will remain in any version of “hell” without end either, since these two passages just don’t claim anything of the sort.

Now, I have heard it claimed that, while the majority of the passage in Isaiah 66 actually *is* referring to what happens on earth (although verse 22 suggests that this might actually take place on the New Earth after the Great White Throne Judgement rather than on our current planet after the Tribulation²), the passage all of a sudden begins talking about an afterlife state of souls when we get to the part about the worm and the fire (or, perhaps, that the worm and fire part of the prophecy have a double-fulfilment, both on a physical planet *and* in an afterlife realm), and that this means whoever ends up in this particular “hell” will be dead, but will then continue on as a conscious soul in an afterlife realm to be tormented by “fire” of some sort (however that’s supposed to work without matter to combust), and by a “worm” (whether referring literally to an actual spiritual being that will somehow gnaw on their soul, or perhaps referring figuratively to simply being tormented by guilty memories of past sins,

² For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. — Isaiah 66:22

as I've heard it asserted by some who want to pick and choose for themselves which parts of this prophecy are literal and which parts are figurative rather than interpret the whole passage consistently) in another "hell" one enters in the afterlife. But since there's absolutely nothing in the text that anyone reading it at the time it was written could possibly have interpreted as meaning it isn't simply physical carcasses being consumed by actual fire and worms (especially since there hadn't been anything written in the Hebrew Scriptures — meaning the books of the Bible generally referred to as "the Old Testament" — that outright spoke of a conscious afterlife punishment), this is clearly an assumption they've read into the passage based on a pre-existing doctrinal bias, and so to insist that this is what the passage definitely has to mean without first considering everything else Scripture says about the state of the dead would be pure eisegesis (and, if you read the longer Bible study I already mentioned, or even just my shorter "*What is death?*" study, you'll see why it couldn't possibly mean what they're assuming it does there anyway, so please do read one of those two studies carefully sometime, all the way to the end).

But what *was* Jesus warning us about, then? Well, He wasn't warning *us* about anything, because He wasn't talking to *us* to begin with (unless, perhaps, you're Jewish). His death for our sins, burial, and resurrection on the third day aside,³ Jesus' earthly ministry and messages were technically to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," as He told His disciples in Matthew 15:24,⁴ and not to Gentiles (yes, He did help certain Gentiles on rare occasion, but that was the exception

³ Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: — 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

⁴ But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. — Matthew 15:24

rather than the rule), although to learn more about this scriptural truth, I have to once again direct your attention to my aforementioned longer Bible study — or to my shorter one titled *“Things that differ”* — both of which go into great detail regarding the many passages demonstrating this fact (as well as an explanation of why the term “the kingdom of heaven” can refer only to the thousand-year period of time that the kingdom of God will exist in Israel in the future). But even if we’re keeping that truth in mind, we still have to ask what Jesus was warning about in those passages, and the answer is that He was warning His Jewish audience about the possibility of missing out on enjoying something figuratively referred to in the KJV as “everlasting life” (again, please read *“How long does ‘for ever’ last”* or my aforementioned longer Bible study for proof that that “everlasting” is indeed a figurative translation in the KJV and other less literal Bible versions) for a thousand years in Israel, pointing out that they might instead end up as a corpse in a valley outside Jerusalem, known as the Valley of the Son of Hinnom⁵ (more often referred to today as Gehenna, as already mentioned), to be burned up and devoured by worms in rather than being buried under the ground as all Israelites would prefer to be the way they’re interred (although, because Israel largely didn’t accept Jesus as their Messiah and as the Son of God, the kingdom coming fully into effect at that time has been delayed, so His warnings are now more applicable to the

⁵ Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place. — Jeremiah 7:32

generation of Israelites who will be alive at the time of the Tribulation,⁶ with it turning out that Jesus' audience was more at risk of ending up in "hell" after the Great White Throne Judgement instead, presuming this "hell" and the lake of fire are the same thing, of course, but nobody Jesus spoke to could have known

⁶ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand;) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 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. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. —
Matthew 24:3-34

their type of salvation would be put on hold prior to Paul revealing it was being removed from them,⁷ at least until the final Gentile enters the body of Christ, at which point the prophecies about Israel's salvation will begin coming into effect again, and, in fact, will finally be fulfilled).

I should also say, I've heard it suggested that "unquenchable fire" is actually always used figuratively in the Hebrew Scriptures as a symbol of destruction referring to a form of national judgement (but even if it isn't *always* used that way, it's definitely *sometimes* used that way, such as in 2 Kings 22:17;⁸ 2

⁷ And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. — Acts 28:17-28

⁸ Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. — 2 Kings 22:17

Chronicles 34:25;⁹ and Isaiah 1:31,¹⁰ to name just three of *many* such examples — and just as a quick but relevant aside, it's also important to know that something being said to “not be quenched” in Scripture doesn't mean it never stops “burning,” whether it's a literal or a figurative “burning,” but just means that it won't stop “burning” until the appointed time, as those passages should make obvious). This interpretation would seem to include the 587 BC fall of Jerusalem, if it is indeed the case that the fire which is not quenched is referring to a national judgement (if you aren't familiar with what I'm referring to there and are curious, you will have to look that one up for yourself, since I don't have the time to go into detail on it here), but it would have then also found a more literal fulfillment in AD 70, at least as far as Jesus' warnings using the term go, considering the fact that the whole city of Jerusalem was burned, and the corpses in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom outside the city apparently ended up incinerated in that fire or consumed by worms in the valley at that time as well, or so I've been told by certain Christians. And if that is the case, it means that Jesus' warnings about “hell” might not even be relevant to anyone alive today. That said, the lake of fire after the Great White Throne Judgement is still something to be concerned about, of course, even if this is what Jesus meant in His warnings, and also presuming there isn't a double fulfillment for certain people after the Tribulation ends as far as that warning goes (which is what I believe would actually have to be the case if that is the case, since it's easy to see that all the prophecies related to the Day of the Lord were *not* fulfilled around AD 70 as some claim, although that's too big a tangent for this study so I'll leave it at that). And for those who aren't familiar with the concept, *many* prophecies in Scripture had multiple fulfillments, with the most famous

⁹ Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched. — 2 Chronicles 34:25

¹⁰ And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them. — Isaiah 1:31

example probably being Isaiah 7:14, which said, *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”* This prophecy had its first fulfillment when a woman who was likely a virgin at the time the prophecy was given¹¹ — although obviously no longer a virgin by the time she was pregnant — gave birth to her prophesied son, while the second fulfillment would have obviously been Mary giving birth to Jesus,¹² and the prophecies related to “hell,” along with other “end times” prophecies, could very well have multiple fulfillments as well (and definitely do if they *did* have an earlier fulfillment back in AD 70, considering the fact that the nation of Israel is not currently ruling the world from the land of Israel as Scripture says they will).

Either way, though, it’s important to remember that Jesus wasn’t speaking English, so when He gave these warnings, His listeners didn’t hear the English word “hell” come out of His mouth (which is a word with uncertain etymology,

¹¹ Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. — Isaiah 7:10-16

¹² Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus. — Matthew 1:18-25

but it basically just means “hole,” or “a place where something is hidden or unseen,” to put it really simply, and has absolutely no inherent meaning of “inescapable torture chamber” at all, even though that’s how it’s come to be used by most people today), but rather literally heard Him say the words “the Valley of Hinnom” in their own language (translated as “hell” in many of the less literal English Bible versions at least partly because a valley is a long depression, or elongated, uncovered “hole” in the ground, although perhaps also partly because the translators had their own theological assumptions regarding soteriology, likely leading them to use that particular English word, which is why those who don’t read the more literal Bible translations, or at least who don’t consult their concordances, might not be aware of this fact, making it extremely important for those who only use the KJV or other less literal Bible translations to dig deeper into the meaning of words — studying to shew themselves approved¹³ — if they want to actually understand the meaning of Scripture), specifically the Greek word γέεννα, as already mentioned (which itself is a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase גֵּיאַת בֶּן־הִנּוֹם/“gah'-ee bane hin-nome” — literally meaning “the Valley of the Son of Hinnom” in English — or, more precisely, of גֵּיאַת־הַנּוֹם/“gah'-ee hin-nome” — literally meaning “the Valley of Hinnom” in English — which is what the phrase had been shorted to by the time Jesus walked the earth; and even if Jesus was speaking Aramaic rather than Hebrew or Greek, they still would have simply heard Him say “the Valley of Hinnom” in that language), and they would have — or at least should have — known this is referring to a place that Jeremiah said would be a place of future judgement¹⁴ (although at the time I wrote this study, the “hell” Jesus primarily spoke about is a pleasant place you could enjoy a picnic in), and those who

¹³ Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. — 2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁴ Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter. — Jeremiah 19:6

understood Scripture would have realized that Jesus was connecting the warning of judgement in the book of Jeremiah to the warning about corpses in the book of Isaiah, letting them know where Isaiah's prophecy would take place (at least prior to the creation of the New Earth). This all means that the English word "hell" in the KJV and other less literal Bible versions is strictly a figurative translation in passages talking about γέεννα, since it only contains the first half of γέεννα in it (the "hole," or "valley," half), and is missing the second half (the "of Hinnom" half).

I should also say, some people claim that Jews refer to the Valley of Hinnom in a figurative manner to speak of a realm in which people will be tormented consciously after they die, so as to support their argument that Jesus was using this particular "hell" as a warning about what those who don't get saved before they die will experience while dead, but there are a couple problems with using this argument. First, whether or not the Valley of Hinnom was actually sometimes used figuratively to refer to a negative afterlife realm during Jesus' time on earth (and I'm not familiar with any proof that it actually was used in this manner at that time; and I did look for proof prior to writing this), there's nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures to indicate it should be used that way, so to claim Jesus meant it that way wouldn't be an argument based on what Scripture actually says so much as it would be an argument based on extrabiblical Jewish mythology, which isn't something anyone should be basing their theology on,¹⁵ nor does it seem like something that the One who corrected people for teaching unbiblical theological concepts as truth by

¹⁵ This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. — Titus 1:13-14

saying things like “have ye not read...?”¹⁶ and “it is written...”¹⁷ would do. And secondly, we already know that the only humans who end up spending time in this particular “hell” will be carcasses, which means it has to be referring to that actual valley in Israel, so it really wouldn’t matter if some Jews in Jesus’ time were ignoring the Hebrew Scriptures and referring to the valley figuratively in that manner anyway, since this fact tells us that Jesus wouldn’t have meant it that way at all.

Everyone Jesus spoke to desperately wanted to enjoy living in Israel when the kingdom of heaven finally begins there, and the idea that Jesus’ audience members might be dead during that thousand-year time period, or that they might even have ended up weeping and gnashing their (quite physical) teeth because they’d been forced to live in figuratively “darker” parts of the world instead,¹⁸ if the kingdom had fully begun on earth while they were still alive, would have been a grave threat for them indeed (the fact that Jesus said many will be coming from the east and the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven confirms that the kingdom of heaven will be on earth, after those patriarchs have been resurrected from the dead, rather than in an afterlife realm called “heaven,” as does the fact that one could “*enter into the kingdom of God with one eye*,” as Jesus stated,¹⁹ so the “outer darkness” will obviously have to be on earth too). And the “outer darkness” can’t be referring

¹⁶ But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; — Matthew 12:3

¹⁷ But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. — Matthew 4:4

¹⁸ And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. — Matthew 8:11-12

¹⁹ And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: — Mark 9:47

to hell, at least not the hell we're discussing now, because that particular hell will be within the borders of the kingdom of heaven since it will be in a valley inside Israel (at least, based on everything we've covered, we have no scriptural basis for assuming otherwise at this point, especially since that's what the Greek word that "hell" in these passages is translated from literally means), so it makes sense that being cast into the outer darkness would simply refer to being exiled from Israel, if one happens to be alive at that time, and missing out on getting to live in the kingdom of heaven during those thousand years. However, for those who are somehow still sceptical, if Jesus *was* trying to get all of the above across, I'd like you to tell me what He would have needed to have said differently in order to convince you of this.

Before moving on, though, I also need to ask, if we're to believe that encountering a fiery judgement means being tortured, or even just punished, without end, why did Jesus then wrap up this warning with a statement that *"every one shall be salted with fire,"*²⁰ and why do so many of the references to fiery judgements throughout the Hebrew Scriptures refer to fire purifying Israel and making things right, and never to any Israelites being tortured without end in said fire, as well? (And the odd passage which could theoretically be interpreted as referencing individuals being burned up don't say they'll be suffering, but rather that there won't be any part of them left after the fiery judgement is complete,²¹ also contradicting the most popular doctrine of salvation.)

²⁰ For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. — Mark 9:49

²¹ For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. — Malachi 4:1

But still, if this “hell” is a reference to the lake of fire, as most Christians believe it to be, wouldn’t that mean the people who end up in it will have to be suffering in it without end, contrary to what Isaiah wrote? I mean, the Bible says that unrighteous sinners will be tortured consciously in the lake of fire, and that none of them can ever leave that location, doesn’t it? Well, let’s take a look at what the Bible says about the lake of fire to determine whether that’s actually the case or not.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. — Revelation 20:7–10

This is the *only* passage in the Bible which suggests that anyone will suffer without end in a location specifically referred to by name as the lake of fire (I know, there are other passages you’re assuming are referring to suffering in the lake of fire without end, but none of those passages actually use that name in them, and as you’ll soon learn, are actually referring to something else altogether), and I trust you noticed that it’s only the devil, the beast, and the false prophet who are said to be tormented there “*for ever and ever.*”

Yes, Revelation 20:15 does say “*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*” too, but you’ll notice that it doesn’t say how long *these* people will remain in it for, or even that they’ll be alive while they’re in it (much less that they’ll be suffering), and to insist that the humans who are said to be cast into it in that verse will “*not surely die,*” as mortal humans

normally would when set on fire (remember, this takes place after they've been resurrected for the Great White Throne Judgement, and they won't be resurrected with immortal bodies at that time since immortality for humans is always connected with salvation in Scripture, as I demonstrated in my longer Bible study — as well as in my shorter study titled *"Immortality and the second death"* — so please read one of them if you aren't familiar with this fact, or at least read 1 Corinthians 15:53-55 which tells us that anytime someone is made immortal it can then be said for them, *"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"*²²), but that they'll somehow remain alive, even though there's nothing in the text which even implies this will happen, is the epitome of eisegesis. This also means that "the beast" and "the false prophet" in this passage can't be references to humans, since the beings who will go by those titles will be cast *alive* into the lake of fire,²³ which means the lake of fire is going to exist here on earth, not in another dimension that ghosts exist in, and there's nothing anywhere in the Bible to indicate that any humans who might go by these titles will be immortal (which they couldn't be anyway since, again, immortality for humans is always connected with salvation in Scripture), so the reference to "the beast" and "the false prophet" who are being tormented in the lake of fire pretty much have to be talking about spirits who possessed certain humans rather than talking about the actual humans who will also go by those titles (presuming "the beast" and "the false prophet" who deceive the world during the Tribulation aren't simply spiritual beings the whole time, and that no humans will actually go by those titles at all). Simply

²² For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? — 1 Corinthians 15:53-55

²³ And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. — Revelation 19:20

put, presuming there are humans who will go by those titles, they'll be cast alive into the lake of fire, at which point they'll die and burn up, leaving behind only the evil spirits who empowered them during the Tribulation, to be bound to the lake of fire for a very long time (similar to the way other spirits are currently bound²⁴ in another version of "hell"²⁵ translated from the Greek *ταρταρόω*/"tar-tar-o'-o" rather than from *γέεννα*, and which is sometimes instead transliterated as Tartarus, depending on your Bible version). And if they're simply spiritual beings the whole time, with no possessed humans involved, then they themselves will be cast alive into the lake of fire.

This also means that if the warnings by Jesus about the hell we covered *were* a reference to the future location of the lake of fire (which I actually agree that those passages were indeed referring to), since Isaiah told us that only dead bodies would be spending time in there (at least as far as its human inhabitants go), we can say with quite some certainty that no humans in the lake of fire will be alive or suffering in there, at least not for any longer than it takes for someone to die after being set on fire (and this would fit perfectly with what we know anyway; the lake of fire is called the second *death*²⁶ for a reason — if the "second death" could somehow be interpreted as being a reference to some form of never-ending torture, with one's supposed "spiritual death," whatever that means, actually being a prior "death" to this one, it should actually be called the "third death" since everybody who ends up there will have also died physically at some point prior to experiencing this fate, and if one's "first death"

²⁴ And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. — Jude 1:6

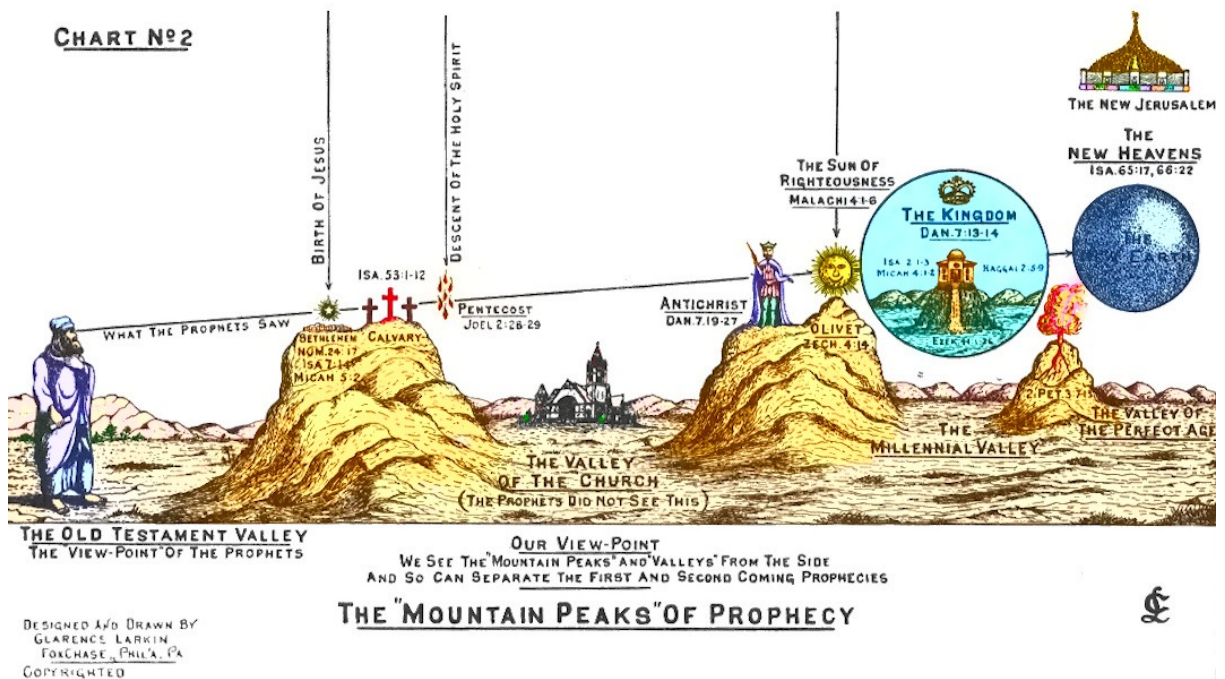
²⁵ For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; — 2 Peter 2:4

²⁶ But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. — Revelation 21:8

is actually a reference to their biological death prior to being physically resurrected for the Great White Throne Judgement, the second death would just be more of the same as the first death, which is biological death — which tells us there's no good reason at all to interpret the "second death" as referring to being tortured in fire, but rather that it should simply be interpreted as meaning to literally die a second time in said fire).

As for *why* I personally believe that the lake of fire will be located in the Valley of Hinnom in Israel (at least during the thousand-year period of time that the kingdom of heaven exists in Israel), there are a couple reasons. The first is because I've noticed that the passage almost immediately prior to the reference in Isaiah to the "undying" worms and unquenchable fire is a statement that implies this will probably take place at least partly on the New Earth²⁷ (although we do have to keep the "Mountain Peaks" of prophecy in mind here as well, since we know that Jesus' warnings were about the period of time when the kingdom of heaven will exist in Israel on our current planet, even if Isaiah himself may not have been aware of that fact), and it seems unlikely that there would be two places for burning corpses on the New Earth (a place called "hell" and a place called the lake of fire) after the Great White Throne Judgement takes place. And similarly, we know that "the beast" and "the false prophet" will be cast into the lake of fire at the end of the Tribulation, 1,000 years before the New Earth is created, and the similar point that it seems unlikely there would be two places for burning corpses in the kingdom of heaven when it's located in Israel on our current planet would apply here too, and so it does make sense that the valley referred to as "hell" in the KJV will indeed be the future location of the lake of fire. (Speaking of valleys, for those who aren't familiar with the "Mountain Peaks" aspect of prophecy, it refers to how there can be prophetic

²⁷ For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. — Isaiah 66:22



“valleys,” meaning events taking place within the same timeframe of a part of a specific prophecy, but which were not explicitly mentioned within said prophecy and which the prophet himself is not necessarily even aware of, yet which are later revealed to us in *other* prophecies, with these prophetic “valleys” being situated between the prophetic “mountain peaks,” meaning the events that the prophet actually *did* foresee and foretell within said prophecy; for example, while Jesus’ earthly ministry and reign as King of Israel was foreseen and foretold in various prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures, the church called the body of Christ and the current dispensation of the grace of God were entirely unknown to the prophets recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures — from their perspective, all they could see was one unbroken ministry of a Messiah coming to save and lead Israel during one unbroken period of time on earth, because they couldn’t see the “valley of the church” hidden between the “mountain peaks” of Jesus’ first and second time on earth, with those “mountain peaks” even seeming like one “mountain” to them from their “vantage point” — and this can even happen within a single sentence in a

prophecy, as demonstrated in Luke 4:14–21²⁸ where Jesus stopped reading Isaiah 61:1–2²⁹ before the end of the sentence in verse 2, because the part of that prophecy about “*the day of vengeance of our God*” hadn’t begun at that time yet, since it won’t happen until around the time of His Second Coming.)

Before moving on, however, I should also point out that, in addition to the fact that we have no basis for believing any humans will be conscious or suffering in the “hell” (again, simply meaning “hole,” or valley, in this case) that the lake of fire will be located in, or even for believing they’ll never be resurrected from their second death to go live on the New Earth at some point (which is also not a reference to an afterlife state, since nobody going to live on the New Earth will die a second time the way those cast into the lake of fire will, but is just a reference to a whole new planet to replace ours after our current planet is destroyed³⁰), there’s good reason to believe that not every human judged at the Great White Throne will even end up in the lake of fire to begin with. This

²⁸ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. — Luke 4:14-21

²⁹ The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; — Isaiah 61:1-2

³⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. — 2 Peter 3:10

might sound odd to some Christians, but John's statement about those whose names aren't written in the book of life ending up in the lake of fire would seem to be entirely unnecessary if there weren't going to also be some people judged at that time whose names *are* written in the book of life, especially if the judgement itself were going to prove that they deserved to end up in the lake of fire, as most Christians assume will happen. And remember, this judgement isn't about whether one has "gotten saved" or not. Instead, John tells us that the judgement people will face at the Great White Throne is going to be solely about their works³¹ (this also means that they'll be judged based on whether their evil acts "outweighed" their good deeds rather than whether their actions were sinful or not, since not only are "evil" and "sin" two entirely different things — unless you believe that animals can sin³² — but also because all sin was taken care of some 2,000 years ago by Christ), saying, *"but the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death,"* in Revelation 21:8. Of course, most Christians will claim that "the unbelieving" being the second category of people who are said to end up there proves that anyone who doesn't "get saved" before they die will end up in the lake of fire, but since John said this judgement is based on works, if "the unbelieving" referred to those who didn't "get saved," it would also mean that believing is a work, which I doubt most Christians agree is the case. The fact that "the unbelieving" is the *second* category rather than the first — *in a list* of different categories of people who end up there — also tells us just how unlikely it is that John was simply referring to those who didn't choose to "get saved" before they die,

³¹ And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. — Revelation 20:12

³² And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. — Genesis 37:33

since if everyone who fails to “get saved” is guaranteed to end up in the lake of fire, the rest of the list would seem to be entirely unnecessary to begin with (although it’s true that, while those in the body of Christ can’t lose their salvation — since Paul told us that anyone God calls for this type of salvation *will* be glorified (although the KJV translators rendered this promise in a more proleptic manner,³³ as they were often wont to do; prolepsis being a figure of speech meaning “the representation or assumption of a future act or development as if presently existing or accomplished,” calling what is not yet as though it already were, in other words, as God Himself often does in Scripture³⁴) — those Israelites who are given the sort of salvation Jesus and His disciples preached about while He walked the earth do seem to be able³⁵ to

³³ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Romans 8:29-39

³⁴ Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. — Romans 4:16-17

³⁵ For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. — Hebrews 6:4-6

lose their type of salvation,³⁶ so perhaps the rest of the list technically applies strictly to them, but either way, “the unbelieving” can’t simply refer to those who didn’t get saved prior to their death, because otherwise it wouldn’t even need to be included on the list to begin with, since it would go without saying based on the fact that they were being judged at the Great White Throne in the first place, and the rest of the list would then be quite redundant). The fact that he also says “all liars” will end up in the lake of fire, when every single human who has made it to the age where they can communicate has lied at some point in their life, also makes the rest of the list entirely superfluous, I should add, if it means that everyone who has ever told a lie will end up in the lake of fire, as most Christians claim (it stands to reason that this simply refers to those who make a lifestyle out of habitual lying, such as politicians and religious teachers, for example, since otherwise the rest of the list just wouldn’t have been necessary at all). Anyway, at least as far as Gentiles go, Jesus Himself seemed to imply that certain non-Israelites will be resurrected for this judgement yet not end up condemned themselves, but rather will condemn certain Israelites who missed out on the resurrection of the just³⁷ (and they won’t have been saved the way the body of Christ or the Israel of God are, or else they would have been resurrected much earlier and missed this particular judgement altogether). And so, I would suggest that it’s probably only the worst of the worst who will end up in the lake of fire, with everyone else, likely including most of your loved ones, continuing on to live on the New Earth, even if not in immortal bodies (at

³⁶ For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. — Hebrews 10:26-27

³⁷ The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. — Matthew 12:41-42

least to begin with). But don't worry, this interpretation isn't teaching salvation by works for those who might get to avoid the lake of fire after being judged at the Great White Throne (especially not as far as the sort of salvation Paul taught about goes), because those who would avoid the lake of fire at this judgement wouldn't actually get saved at that time, since A) they missed out on the type of salvation which involved enjoying "eternal life" in Israel during the thousand years, and B) they aren't going to be made immortal when they go live on the New Earth — at least not right away — so this isn't the sort of salvation which Paul taught isn't by works either, because that particular salvation is all about being made immortal (and please go read my longer Bible study for the scriptural proof of this fact). All that being said, even if everyone who gets judged at the Great White Throne *does* end up in the lake of fire, we already know that it's only the spiritual beings known as the devil, the beast, and the false prophet who are said to remain in the lake of fire "*for ever and ever,*" or who are said to be tormented in it, so there's no reason to believe that any human whose name isn't written in the book of life will be alive or suffering in the lake of fire, or even that they can't ever eventually be resurrected from their second death the way they were from their first death, and then go on to live on the New Earth (whether in an immortal body or otherwise).



A picture of the Valley of Hinnom/Gehenna, which is the “hell,” or “hole,” that Jeremiah and Jesus warned about (and which is where the lake of fire will be located in the future, at least to begin with), as it exists in Israel today. [Photograph of “hell” taken by Deror avi (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valley_of_Hinom_PA180090.JPG). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/en:Creative_Commons).]