

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. - Acts 17:11

The traditional view of Heaven and Hell teaches that souls are taken from the body immediately following death and are placed in either Heaven or Hell. This is what most of the Christian church right now believes. One opposing theory is that of annihilation. Annihilation doctrine teaches that eternal life is only experienced in Heaven, that Hell is a place of complete destruction and annihilation. [That Hell is a place there can be no doubt, but how can the wicked be in a “place” if they no longer exist?] There are many scripture passages that seem to clearly teach this, but there are others that admittedly seem to teach the traditional view as well. [In light of the infinitely different outcomes, which is the safer understanding? In light of the greater revelation and light provided on the subject by Jesus, who alone among men as God would be able to speak authoritatively on the subject? The vast majority of our understanding about the torments of hell actually comes from Jesus’ direct teaching on the subject.] The Bible must never be thought to contradict itself, regardless of what simple meanings may be found in certain verses. When two positions seem to come at odds with one another, one must decide which view fits best in the *overall* interpretation of the Bible. [Agreed!] Verses ought not to be taken by themselves but instead cross-checked against other scripture passages to decide what it is that the Lord is actually trying to teach us in His Word.

While some passages might seem to indicate one line of teaching and others seem to hint at a different one, there can be only one correct interpretation. Hell is either eternal or not—there is certainly no middle ground.

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR ANNIHILATION

There are numerous scriptures that seem to clearly indicate that there is no eternal life for the wicked (not even in Hell).

NIV is shown in dark red – KJV is shown in light red italics

Matt 19:16

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

This man spoke of *obtaining* eternal life. It wasn't as if he already possessed it. Preachers today would probably say to him "Son, you already have eternal life; it's just a matter of where you will spend it." But Jesus never said that.

Eternal life is not a state of physical existence, as if everyone has eternal life in either heaven or hell, but a qualitative description of one's being that is marked by having been reconciled to a relationship of fellowship with God his creator. In other words, “life” in the Biblical sense is not

“existence” or “consciousness”, it is relationship, communion, fellowship with God. Jesus came that we might have *life*, and have it to the full (Joh 10:10) by reconciling us to God. He said “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live, even though he dies (physically), and he who lives and believes in me will never die (spiritually).” (Joh 11:25-26). “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” (Joh 17:3). “Immortality” is not to be confused with “eternal life”. “Immortality” translates two Greek words, *ἀφάρσις* which refers to something incorruptible or imperishable, as it is also often translated (see Rom 2:7, 1Co 15:42,50,53,54, Eph 6:24, 2Ti 1:10 for all NT occurrences), and *ἀθανασία* which means literally “not dying” or “without death” (see 1Co 15:53-54 where it is used synonymously with *ἀφάρσις*, as well as 1Ti 6:16, the only 3 NT occurrences). Thus “immortality” does relate more to a physical state of existence, the final state of the righteous after their physical resurrection. In contrast, the physical state of the wicked is described as “corruptible”, “perishable” (*φάρτοις*, see Rom 1:23, 1Co 9:25, 1Co 15:53-54, 1Pe 1:18,23) or “mortal” (*νητοίς*, from the Grk word *νησκω* to die, Rom 6:12, 8:11, 1Co 15:53-54, 2Co 4:11, 5:4).

Biblical death is the exact opposite of life, where man is estranged from his creator because of his sin. Again, it is a state of being, with physical death a graphic reminder of the greater spiritual reality behind it. Man is not just a physical being of flesh but a tripartite being of spirit, soul and body (1Th 5:23). The *body* or flesh is only the “carton” of the real “you”. The real “you” is the inner part of man that we refer to as the *soul*. It is “the ghost in the machine” that we describe as the mind, will, and emotions; think: why does a person who has had a limb or appendage amputated experience “phantom pains” as if it were still there?. The *spirit* is the breath of God that animates the soul, which together animate the body. The near inseparable relationship of the spirit and soul is indicated in Heb 4:12, and how they animate the body and are themselves affected and influenced by the body is a mystery. Nevertheless, it is clear that man’s “life” as God created him consists of all three. But as “the body without the spirit is dead” (Jam 2:26) it is also clear that the spirit is primary in the life of man, as also in the Godhead. God warned man that in the day he ate from the forbidden fruit he would surely die (Gen 2:17), and in that day he did die, spiritually, as his fellowship with God was severed. The inevitable consequence of that spiritual death of separation from God was that he became corruptible so that eventually his spiritual state of death would also lead to a physical state of death. But notice that although he had died spiritually, his spirit did not cease to exist, but continued to animate his soul and body. At physical death, the physical part of man that is such an integral part of his “life” that many come to think of their life only in terms of it, finally gives way to the corruption that has been at work in his spirit and soul, so that he experiences firsthand the awfulness of sin and its corrupting consequences as he is literally separated from physical life, *and yet still aware of it*. For his physical death says nothing about the nonphysical part of man, which from numerous passages of Scripture it is clear continues in a conscious state. See for example 1Sa 28:15-19, and cf. Jesus’ warning about it being better to enter life maimed than to be cast whole into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.(Mar 9:48).

Physical life, and physical death as we know them are temporal events that occur in space-time, but point to spiritual life and spiritual death that transcend temporal space. At the final resurrection, all the physically dead whose spirits and souls have continued to exist since their physical death will be resurrected to a body so that once again they are a complete being as God

created them. We should not suppose that this resurrection body is like our present one that has physical limitations and is prone to perish, for Jesus' was not (see Luk 24:31, 36-43, Joh 20:19,26), and Paul makes clear that our present bodies are but a bare seed of what will be raised up, and what is raised will be an imperishable, spiritual body and not a natural body (1Co 15:37,42,44). Thus "this perishable must put on the imperishable, and the mortal must put on immortality" (1Co 15:54). At that time the righteous will enter into the joy of their master, but the wicked in their resurrection bodies will be cast *alive* into the lake of fire to suffer eternal torments for their sin (see Mat 25:41,46, Rev 19:20, 20:10-15).

Matt 19:29

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother[□] or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

They will *inherit* eternal life. This indicates that not everyone has it already. [Agreed!](#)

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[□] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 6:47

I tell you the truth, he who believes has [\(presently\)](#) everlasting life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

Rom 5:20-21

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: 21That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life (presently, right now), but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

John 5:24

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life (presently, right now) and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Titus 3:7

so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (as an ongoing reality, that whoever believes in the Son may live, even though he dies, and that whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die, Joh 11:25-26).

That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life

The words "eternal life" and "life" are associated strictly with the righteous.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in [b] Christ Jesus our Lord.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The wages of sin is *death* (not eternal life in Hell).

Death is separation from God, the consequences of which are punishment in Hell, not "life" in Hell. Any concept of "eternal life in Hell" is a contradiction of terms, like a square circle.

Galatians 6:8

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature [a] will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

"Eternal life" is from the Spirit and "corruption" is reaped from the flesh.

1 John 3:15

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

No murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Does mainstream doctrine claim that *all* people, saved and unsaved, have eternal life abiding in them? Again this is a confusion of what life means in a Biblical sense. Life in the Biblical sense is not consciousness, but fellowship, relationship, communion with God, and death is separation from God because of sin. Christ reconciles us from death (separation from God) unto life (a restored relationship to fellowship with God).

Matt 25:45-46

"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. ⁴⁶And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

This verse admittedly uses the phrase "eternal punishment," but it is juxtaposed against the phrase "eternal life." Death by annihilation in the Lake of Fire could certainly be called "eternal punishment" because it is eternal in its consequences. Death on earth is only temporal because everyone will be raised again at the resurrection. Death in the Lake of Fire, however, is eternal: there is no reversing it and no coming back from it. If Jesus meant for the punishment to last eternally, he probably wouldn't have contrasted it with the phrase "eternal life" which is clearly meant only for believers. If Jesus had intended what most churches believe he did with this verse, he should have said, "Both the righteous and the unrighteous will go away to eternal life, but the unrighteous will spend it being tortured while the righteous spend theirs in paradise."

No. This is to equate life with consciousness or existence and death with unconsciousness or annihilation, which Scripture nowhere bears out. On the contrary, because "eternal punishment" is juxtaposed against "eternal life" it is clear that whatever eternal life is for the righteous, eternal punishment is for the wicked, and vice versa. Thus to argue that the punishment itself is not eternal, but only the result or consequences, one would also have to allow that neither is the life itself eternal, but only the result or consequences (i.e., they don't *really* live forever, just the

results of their lives live on, such as in the influence they had on others or perhaps in the memories of their children). The language is plain: “eternal” modifies “punishment”, not “consequences”, not “result”, both of which would have been as easy to say in Greek as they are in English. If Jesus had meant for the punishment to last eternally, He couldn’t have been any clearer, for that is the plain meaning of the words and the way the vast majority of Christians have understood them for nearly 2000 years. On the contrary, if He had meant that the punishment the wicked will suffer will *not* be eternal, but only the results or consequences, He couldn’t have been more *unclear* and *confusing*, but God is not a God of confusion (1Co 14:33).

Death

1 Timothy 6:15-16

which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Are all people born with an immortal soul? Does only God have immortality? Does He bless whom He chooses with the gift of eternal life?

Here, “immortality” translates the Greek *athanasia*, which means literally “undying” or “without death”; God alone is immortal, everlasting, undying in the sense of being eternally pre- and self-existent, unchangeable and not prone to corruption, in contrast to man who in his fallen state is corruptible and does die. Again, immortality relates more to physical existence, and is not to be confused with eternal life.

Matthew 10:28

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

If a person’s soul is destroyed do they cease to exist entirely (annihilated)? No. Their soul is destroyed in the sense of suffering irreparable loss of relationship with God and all that constitutes life as a result of that relationship. No sun, no light, no warmth, no joy, no peace, no rest, no health, no pleasure, no fullness, no contentment, etc... Final and ultimate separation from God is spiritual death: darkness, cold, fear, anger, hatred, murder, unforgiveness, regret,

pain, agony. Those who have been delivered from the depths of sin understand that the spiritual torments of hell are real because they began to experience them and are hugely relieved to have been delivered from what cannot compare with a complete separation from God's presence and everything that is good. Why should we be fearful of this fate if no person is ever annihilated? On the contrary, if people are only to be annihilated, why would anyone fear the wrath of God seeing they will but cease to exist without fear of eternal suffering? My experience with the wicked is they are hoping there is no God and they will but cease to exist and never face the righteous judgment of God or suffer torments commensurate with their sins.

Do people immediately go to "heaven" or "hell" after they die? The following verses appear to indicate when people die they remain in the grave until they are resurrected. Jesus Christ spoke of two resurrections, and he was aware of the differences in the first and second resurrections.

The following verses speak of the resurrection of the body, but says nothing about what happens to the soul at the time of death. Paul said that he would "prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2Co 5:8), and while in prison awaiting the outcome of his appeal to Caesar said, "I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better" (Phi 1:23). Paul certainly believed that upon his death he would depart and be with Christ. Some argue that the soul sleeps in the grave until the resurrection so that to the departed it "seems" as if he went immediately into the presence of the Lord; but how then would it be "better" for Paul to depart and be with the Lord, seeing that rather than lie asleep in the grave it would be definitely be better for him to continue on in the flesh ministering. 1Th 4:14 is even more clear. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring *with* Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." If the souls of those who have died are not with the Lord, how will He bring them *with* Him? The passage is clear that at the resurrection the souls of those who have died and gone to be with Christ will return with Him to partake of the resurrection and be united with their resurrection body and so again become the whole, tripartite person God created them to be. Significantly, the Greek preposition *with* that is used occurs only 3 times in 1Thessalonians, the other two times in 4:17 just a few verses later: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together *with* them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be *with* the Lord."

That the wicked go to a place of torment is upon death is clear from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, as well as from 2Pe 2:9: "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment".

Acts 24:14-16

However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: 15And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. 16And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men.

John 5:28-29

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

So....by the time of the second resurrection, everyone who has ever lived will be alive? The just will continue to live forever with God but the unjust will not. The resurrection of the unjust is only temporary for they shall meet a second and final death. The just, "he that overcometh," will not be affected by the second death.

Revelation 2:11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Revelation 20:4-6

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second

death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

The rest of the dead are part of the second resurrection, when the unjust are temporarily made alive. They are judged, and those whose names are not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire and consumed of the second death.

Unfortunately it doesn't say they will be consumed. Rather, it says "Depart from me accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into eternal punishment." Mat 25:41,46. "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Rev 20:10

Revelation 20:14-15

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:7-8

He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. ⁸But 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.

What happens in the second death? Life is terminated again. There is no consciousness [It doesn't say that!], and there is no hope of resurrection [No, the wicked are resurrected at the second resurrection, so they are again spirit, soul and body, and their resurrected being is cast into the lake of fire.]

Therefore these people will no longer exist. [You are reading that in. They exist in the lake of fire, suffering eternal torment. While we cannot conceive of such unending torment or perhaps understand the justice of it being eternal, we dare not ignore the plain reading of the scripture and try to make it say something more pleasing to our flesh or reason with our carnal understanding that it must assuredly mean something else. The consequences are too great, and Scripture warns repeatedly to not be deceived precisely because we are so easily deceived. We must not listen like Eve to the serpent's snare, "Hath God really said... there is an eternal hell of suffering and torment for the wicked?"] The memory of these people will also cease to exist.

Psalms 37:9-10

For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. ¹⁰ A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found.

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. ¹⁰For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

Malachi 4:1-3

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. ³ Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty.

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. ²But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. ³And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

The phrase "they shall be ashes" indicates complete combustion. Psalms also states that they shall "go up in smoke." These verses speak from man's temporal, physical perspective, from which indeed men die and their physical body returns to dust. However, from the plain meaning of many other scriptures it is clear that their soul and spirit continues to live on, somewhere.

Psalms 37:20

But the wicked will perish: The LORD's enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish—vanish like smoke.

But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.

The following passage in Isaiah describes a similar fate for the wicked though it is unclear whether it speaks of this second death of the ungodly or Israel's enemies at the time.

Isaiah 26:14

They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them. There is no memory of them on the earth; a true statement, but it says nothing about their soul and spirit, which is the real person, being annihilated.

They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.

Solomon also speaks of the termination of the name and reputation of the wicked.

Proverbs 10:7:

The memory of the righteous will be a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.

The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

Though addressing the death Israel's Babylonian captors, Jeremiah speaks not of conscious torment and suffering but rather of perpetual sleep with no hope of awaking. Sleep is a euphemism used both for spiritual stupor (see 1Th 5:6-7, Rev 3:2) and for death (Joh 11:11-13); here the context is clearly of spiritual stupor as communicated by the additional word "drunk", which throughout scripture carries the same meaning.

Jeremiah 51:57:

I will make her officials and wise men drunk, her governors, officers and warriors as well; they will sleep forever and not awake," declares the King, whose name is the LORD Almighty.

And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.

Ezekiel 18:4

For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Does "death" mean "eternal life away from God"?

Eternal Support

The following examples used to support an eternal existence in Hell deserve a separate study surrounding the original Greek and Hebrew for basanizo (torment), olam (everlasting), and aionios (eternal). The use of these words varies throughout scripture and their original meaning is debated. The discussion for this study will be limited to contextual meaning of the words.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In hell,^[c] where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 25But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. 27Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Many use the account of the rich man and to support the doctrine of the eternal torment of the wicked noting that the rich man was tormented in flames. However, this account is clearly a parable, not an account of real events. If this were literal teaching about the future life, then all the details of the account would need to be accepted as true. Then, those lost in hell would be visible to the redeemed in heaven and the two groups would be able to communicate back and forth across the gulf separating them. What would eternal life be like if the just had to view this horrendous torture forever and converse with those in such a state.

This argument assumes that hell is not visible to the redeemed, but that is not an established fact. Indeed, Isaiah prophesies something similar in the last verses of that book: Isaiah 66:22-24 ²² "For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "So

your offspring and your name will endure. ²³ "And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the LORD. ²⁴ "Then they shall go forth and look On the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm shall not die, And their fire shall not be quenched; And they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind." Interestingly, in no parable does Jesus use personal names as he does "Lazarus" in this teaching, which would lead us to believe it is more than a parable. But even if it is just a parable, it is still being used to communicate spiritual truths as do all the parables, all the points of which have spiritual meaning (see Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower and the tares in Mat 13). If Jesus' point is not to communicate the torments of hell that the wicked will suffer, what is His point? Just "color" or "filler"? If in fact there are no such torments, would Jesus have used such an illustration that clearly communicates that there is, for the vast majority of Christians throughout history have understood it as such? "Yea, hath God said..." the wicked will suffer torments in hell?

Unquenched Fire/Everlasting Fire

Mark 9:43-46:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.^[a] ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.^[a] ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where " 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

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: ⁴⁴Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. ⁴⁵And 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: ⁴⁶Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

It should be obvious to the reader that these verses are figurative. The very form of these verses magnifies their figurative aspect. The sentence, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" is repeated with similar examples preceding it, each time. These three verses are a hyperbole. It's an overstatement, an exaggeration, to make a point. Jesus is not encouraging people to maim themselves. He is encouraging them to commit themselves and discipline themselves to do what is right.

Such a dismissal does violence to Jesus' words and meaning. Even if Jesus' words about cutting off your hand and plucking out your eye are hyperbole, their force as an illustration derives from the underlying belief that hell is a real place of suffering that is to be avoided at all costs.

Matthew 3:12:

His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Unquenchable means that no one will put it out. It does not mean it will not go out. A fire may be put out before everything combusts, but an unquenchable fire cannot be put out until combustion is complete. The following verses seem to support this assertion.

Jude 1:7

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of "eternal fire" yet that fire was long ago extinguished. The duration of the physical fire was limited, but the effects still endure. "Sodom and Gomorrah... are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

This argument does not take into account that at the time Jude was written, the fires of that great conflagration were in fact not extinguished as they are today. According to Philo [a first-century Jewish writer] `even to this day the visible tokens of the indescribable disaster are pointed out in Syria--ruins, cinders, brimstone, smoke and murky flames which continue to rise from the ground as from a fire still smoldering beneath.' ...Jude means that the still burning site of the cities is a warning picture of the eternal fires of hell."

Jeremiah prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem with unquenched fire.

Jeremiah 17:27

But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses.' "

But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is also recorded in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 52:12-13

On the tenth day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ¹³ He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down.

Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, which served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, ¹³And burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire:

Like the "everlasting fire" that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, the "unquenched fire" that destroyed Jerusalem is not still burning today.

Tormented Forever and Ever

Revelation 14:9-11:

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, ¹⁰The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: ¹¹And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

The phrase "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever" seems to indicate the torment going on endlessly. However, context indicates this is not the case as Christ (the Lamb) will not spend eternity watching the ceaseless punishment. Furthermore, the destruction of Edom in the Old Testament was also described with smoke rising forever. This is clearly figurative language.

Isaiah 34:9-10

Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again.

And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. ¹⁰It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

Throughout Scripture Edom typifies the sons of the flesh, and as such, the prophecy of the destruction of Edom sees past the temporal destruction of the nation to the final destruction of the wicked in hell. The Scripture is very consistent in its message that the wicked will indeed suffer eternal torments for their sin and rebellion.

As we saw with the everlasting fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, this description emphasizes the certain and inexorable judgment of God.

Revelation 20:10

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

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.

This language in Revelation continues to be very figurative (proof texts from the book of Revelation, a book full of metaphors, symbolism, and obscure imagery should be heavily scrutinized). It does say that the torment in the lake of fire will go on "forever and ever." As we have seen before the meaning of "for ever and ever" must be determined by the context. The many clear (?) verses on the subject aid us in determining what this verse actually means. The torment described does not last forever, but the destruction does. **Wow! Be careful! You have just explained why the Bible doesn't mean what it plainly says!**

The lake of fire was prepared for the destruction of the devil and his angels. The wages of sin is death, and Lucifer's rebellion will be rewarded with his extermination.

Ezekiel 28:19 says of the adversary...

All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.' "

All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.

Eternal Damnation

Mark 3:9

But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.

But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.

Hebrews 6:2

instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment

Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Hebrews 9:12

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

"Eternal redemption" does not mean that Jesus will continue the act of redemption forever and ever.

Our redemption has been accomplished by the finished work of Jesus Christ. However the effects of his accomplished works will last eternally for those who are born-again of God's spirit. It is called "eternal redemption" because the effects or results of the redemption are eternal.

Everlasting Burnings

Isaiah 33:14

The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"

The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

Isaiah prophesies of "everlasting burnings," but he says it proceeds from a "devouring fire." That is certainly not what those who preach eternal torment teach. Besides calling it a devouring fire, he also notes that, "no one shall dwell with everlasting burnings."

Punishment

If the second resurrection is only temporary and those resurrected arise only to suffer a second death, what is its purpose? The justice of God demands that the ungodly pay the price for how they have treated God and His people.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Punishment will be administered and rewards will be bestowed or removed accordingly (see below verses in addition to the Parable of the Ten Minas in Luke 19). Some will receive "many stripes" and some will receive "few stripes," but the final judgment of God will be thorough and accurate.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15

his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. ¹⁴If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Matthew 11:23-24

And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.^[d] If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Mark 12:38-40

As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, ³⁹and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, ³⁹And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: ⁴⁰Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

The ungodly rise to appear before the great white throne judgment and receive a judicially administered sentence of death. They rise to shame and rejection and are subjected to differences in the duration and intensity of suffering as justice may demand. The unsaved will be recompensed for their deeds, and the just will be completely satisfied with this justice from God.

The Cross

How does the ultimate annihilation of unbelievers harmonize with the rest of the doctrines of Christianity? Ours is not to reason with our fallen human intellect how all of God's truth fits together so much as to obey what has been clearly revealed. If God is God, we should not expect to fully fathom and understand everything. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." (Deu 29:29).

Death has always been the penalty for wickedness. In the Old Testament, whenever people did what was evil in the Lord's sight, they received the punishment of instant death—not eternal torment. Don't confuse justice meted out in this life with God's ultimate justice. He alone is able to torment eternally, not man. That is Jesus' point when He said not to fear those who kill the body but are unable to destroy the soul, but to fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty that we should have had to pay for our sins.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

...and because all have sinned...

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God

...we all deserve that death. Now that Jesus died on the cross in our place, are we saved from physical death on earth? Of course not. Christians die all the time. What then are we saved from? We are rescued from the second death that takes place in the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:13-15

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

If death is truly the penalty for sin, as the Apostle Paul claims it is, then by dying on the cross, Jesus actually suffered the same consequence that unrepentant sinners will bear. In this way, he truly "took our place" on the cross so that we would not have to face this consequence of our sins. If on the other hand the wages of sin is not death but an eternity spent in Hell is this harmonious with the message of the cross. [There is a vast difference between the physical death of a mortal man and the physical death of the eternal son of God; we should not suppose that they are of equal worth or efficacy in what they accomplish.](#)

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

God is the creator of all things. No one but God has the power to create.

John 1:3

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

If Hell is a place of eternal suffering it is God's design. It is His system. Is this compatible with the nature of God? There is no doubt that it was created for God as a prison and place of punishment for the devil and his angels. If God is just, then justice demands a just recompense. Only God is able to determine what is a just recompense; who would we be to question God's justice?

For years of Christian history, people have tried to find reason for how a loving, merciful God would feel justified in punishing wickedness in this fashion. The most popular explanation for this is accredited to St. Thomas Aquinas who stated that "Sins against an infinite God deserve infinite recompense." Is there any scripture support for this? Does severity of a crime depend on the "different worth and dignity" of the offended person?

The Law of Moses, in part, taught that no matter who a person was, they could not kill another human being without consequence. When a crime is committed, regardless of how unloving the victim might be, the punishment had to be the same—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. All throughout the Bible, God is shown to be no respecter of persons.

He is infinitely holy, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal **and just**. Does God's being infinitely holy mean that even one sin is so offensive to Him that the only thing that can make it right is an eternal sentence of damnation? **Are you certain that you have such a complete understanding of God's nature and what is at stake that you would question his justice?**

He is infinitely loving, merciful, and just. But do we just call Him all of those things because we have to? We do it because we experience the long-suffering patience and genuine love of God everyday. **Which makes it all the more damnable when a person continues in his stiff-necked stubborn rebellion against God. "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to every man according to his deeds: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation."** Romans 2:4-8 **4 What excuse will there be for the wicked in the day of judgment when in addition to all of their sins they have added to them all the rejection of God's mercy and love through the person of His Son whom He sent to redeem them, but they would have none of it? They loved their sins more than they loved God and spurned His mercy and love poured out for them in the blood of His only Son.**

In some cases, people live their whole lives in selfishness, without any regard for the teachings of the Bible. It would be unscriptural to say that these people will spend eternity in paradise with Jesus, but does that mean that they have actually made the choice to go to Hell? Many of them lived their lives sincerely believing that Heaven and Hell did not exist. They were merely ignorant of the truth. Does He not have compassion on those who are not saved as well? [They are without excuse Romans 1:20](#) "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." [Romans 10:18](#) But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world."

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, [not wanting anyone to perish](#), but everyone to come to repentance.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, [not willing that any should perish](#), but that all should come to repentance.

CONCLUSION?

Support can be found through the Holy Scriptures to back up the case for eternity in Hell as well as the case for annihilation in Hell. In coming to a conclusion, therefore, one must take this to heart and study all of God's Word to find which model fits best with the overall thrust of Scripture. Numerous verses use the terminology of life and immortality only when depicting Heaven while reserving words such as death, perishing, and destruction to describe Hell. Instead, it is made very clear that only God has eternal life, and He bestows immortality only to those whom He chooses—not to everyone.

Is belief in an eternal Hell just an extension of Satan's great lie to Eve in the Garden of Eden: "Ye shall not surely die"? [Is belief in annihilation just an extension of the doubt he has always sought to cast upon the truth of God's simple word?](#) "Yeh, hath God said there will be eternal punishment in hell to pay?"

Does it perpetuate and immortalize suffering, sorrow, and pain? How can these things continue when God promised that these things will no longer exist? [He never said they would no longer exist in the Lake of Fire, only in the new heavens and the new earth.](#)

Furthermore, the Bible gives a very clear picture about the nature and character of God the Father and of His Son Jesus Christ. God is love. All His ways are good. [And all his ways are just. His infinite love does not negate His infinite justice. In His infinite love He sent His Son, His only Son whom He loved, to redeem mankind. But in His infinite justice He will by no means leave the wicked unpunished.](#)

Revelation 21:4-5

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.