

Hell / Lake of Fire

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We all know that Hell is the place where the lost go. Everyone pretty much agrees on that point. However, there are two other points about Hell that are much debated.

1. Is Hell eternal, or do those sent there eventually get totally eliminated, meaning they no longer exist? This is called “annihilationism.”
2. Are there degrees of hell, meaning some suffer worse than others?

We will attempt to address these two questions in this study, so buckle up.

The introduction here is taken from my earlier study, “The Doctrine of the Underworld,” found under the section called “Christian Life Support” in my little corner of The Homebased Bible Fellowship. You will find the video and class notes at the link below under “Christian Life Support.” Its inclusion here is to re-establish some basic facts about our subject.

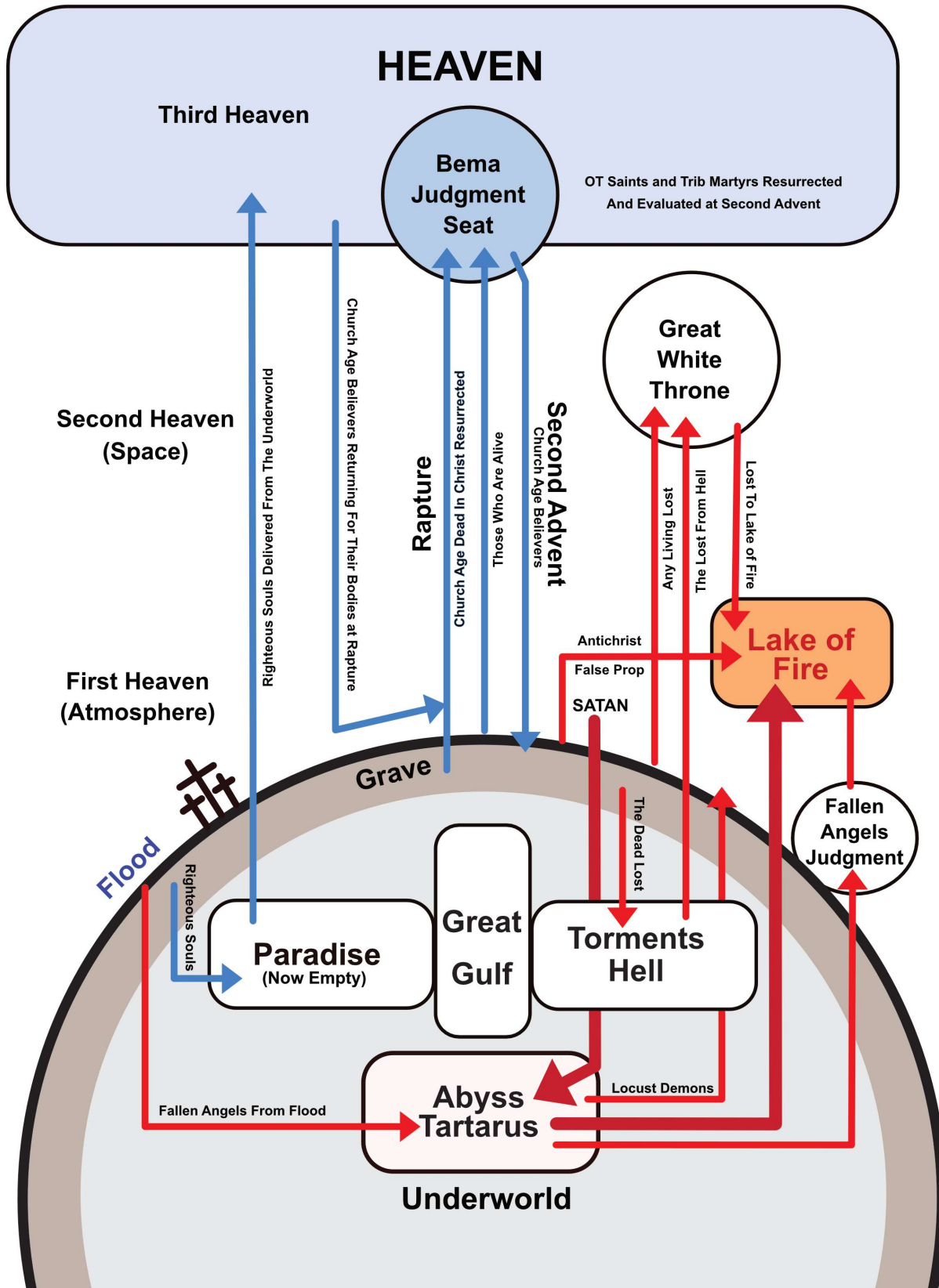
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The Underworld

The “Underworld” is a term coined by Clarence Larkin, who was well known for the many drawings and charts he created to illustrate Bible truths. I have used his chart of the Underworld to create a simplified version of my own that better suits this study. It is called the “Underworld” because it refers to things located in the bowels of the earth.

The Underworld consists of three main compartments, each serving a specific purpose in God’s design. Some argue there is a fourth compartment, but I disagree. The three compartments of the Underworld are Paradise, Torments, and the Abyss. The fourth would be the Lake of Fire, which some say is part of the Underworld, but I believe the Lake of Fire is not in the Underworld. We will explore that later. In the illustration of the Underworld below, there is also a part called the “Great Gulf” that I

don't count as one of the compartments, because it's really just a barrier between Paradise and Torments.



In our illustration, the large round object at the bottom of the page is Earth. The brown outer ring, colored to resemble dirt, represents Earth's outer crust. The "dirt" is labeled "Grave" because that is where we bury the dead. The black outer ring is the surface. The inner gray part is the Underworld itself. There, you will notice the three compartments, plus the Great Gulf barrier between Paradise and Torments.

You will also notice many "spaghetti" lines with arrowheads that indicate the direction of travel. Those are not part of this study, so for now, you only need to understand that the blue lines represent the good guys and the red lines represent the bad guys. Details on these can be found in the linked study mentioned above.

Paradise and Torments (and The Great Gulf)

We will consider these three together because they are connected. Luke offers the most complete picture of them in Jesus' story of Lazarus and the rich man, found in Luke 16:19-31. Our interest in this passage centers on three elements of the Underworld: Paradise, Torments (also called Hell), and the Abyss.

In this story told by Jesus, the two main characters are a "rich man" and a "poor man," identified as a crippled beggar named Lazarus. The story suggests that the rich man is not a believer, while Lazarus is. When they both died, Lazarus went to a place called "Abraham's side," sometimes rendered as "Abraham's bosom." It is also called "Paradise." The word "paradise" is typically used as a synonym for Heaven because it is described as a place of peace, tranquility, and blessing. Verse 25 states that Lazarus was "comforted" there. It is also used to denote a place of honor at a meal.

In comparison, the rich man is in Hades and in "torment," evidently because of its fiery environment. That is where we get the name "Torments."

Note that the rich man in Hades (Luke 16:22-23) can see and speak to Abraham, who is in Paradise (v. 24). Torments and Paradise are separated by "a great chasm ... fixed" (v. 26). The word translated as "chasm" is the Greek term *chasma*, which also means a "gaping opening." It is an impassable void between Paradise and Torments (Luke 16:26), where neither side's occupants can cross over to the other.

The rich man begged Abraham for “Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame” (v. 24). But crossing over was impossible because of the Great Gulf that separated the two compartments (v. 26).

Failing that, the rich man begged Abraham to send someone back to the living to warn his brothers. Apparently, they are not believers either. Abraham replied, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (v. 31). Abraham’s point was that it was enough for the hearers to find salvation in the testimony of the prophets.

We find another reference to Paradise in Luke 23. This conversation was between Jesus and the repentant thief as they hung on the Cross.

Luke 23:42 And he (the thief) said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Because of his faith, Jesus promised the thief that he would be with Him in Paradise that very day. We conclude that this Paradise is the same one referenced in Luke 16, involving Lazarus and the rich man, and that it is in the Underworld rather than in the Third Heaven, because neighboring Torments would not be in Heaven.

It is clear that Torments or Hades is the place we have been calling “Hell,” and Paradise is what we have been calling Heaven – but here Paradise is seen as part of the Underworld, not a place where God lives. What’s going on?

At this point in human history, *when Jesus tells this story*, the Cross has not yet occurred, and sin has not yet been judged. This Paradise in the Underworld serves as a temporary resting place for believers until sin is judged, fully cleansing them of any trace of it. After the Cross, after sin is judged, and after the tearing of the veil in the Temple, which symbolizes the judgment and forgiveness of sin that separated man from God, the occupants of Paradise are transferred to the Third Heaven as Jesus ascends.

Ephesians 4:8 Therefore it says, “**When he ascended on high he led a host of captives**, and he gave gifts to men.” ⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) (Emphasis added)

After the Cross and before Christ could ascend to Heaven, He had to descend to the lower, earthly regions, or, more literally, “into the lower parts of the earth.” What does that mean? It refers to His soul descending to Paradise, as all souls would have done at death before the judgment of sin at the Cross and the Ascension.

Christ “descended” and then “ascended on high,” leading a host of captives. He led those held “captive” in Paradise in the Underworld, awaiting the judgment of all sin, so they could be taken to Paradise in the Third Heaven. This would have included people like David, Abraham, and Lazarus, among all other Old Testament saints. He did this when “He ascended on high” and went to take His place on the right hand of the Father.

With sin judged at the Cross and Christ ascending to Heaven, the occupants of Paradise were taken with Him to the Third Heaven, the abode of God. All who die in Christ since then go directly to Paradise (Heaven) to be “at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). This means Paradise in the Underworld is now empty. Torments, however, is still active and adding souls daily. The rich man is still there, and when he looks across the Great Gulf (chasm), Abraham, Lazarus, and the other righteous souls are no longer there. They are in the Third Heaven.

Paul confirms this in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was **caught up to the third heaven**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man **was caught up into paradise**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. (Emphasis added)

Paul recounts being stoned and his apparent death. He states that he went to Paradise, which is shown here to be connected with the Third Heaven. He was “caught up to the third heaven.”

We conclude from all this that Paradise in the Underworld is empty, and Torments (Hell) is the current abode of the lost throughout human history and continues to take on new tenants.

Abyss / Tartarus

The third compartment in the Underworld is called the Abyss. Two Greek words are used to refer to this place. In 2 Peter 2:4, it is called “Tartarus,” but that is the only place it is so named. The Greek word is *tartaroo*, which refers to the deepest part of the Underworld and is translated as “hell” in this passage. The ancient Greeks considered it the home of the wicked dead, where they suffer punishment for their evil deeds; it corresponds to Gehenna of the Jews.

The second, more commonly used Greek word is *abussos*, transliterated as “abyss.” It means bottomless or unbounded and refers to a chasm or deep pit used as a receptacle for the dead, especially as the abode of demons. It is possible that the Abyss is also the Great Gulf or Chasm, but I do not see any text that supports that beyond the similarities in the meanings of the names. The fact that the Abyss is called *abussos* and the Great Gulf is called *chasma* in Greek suggests that they are not the same.

Peter speaks of this place somewhat cryptically.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which **he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,** ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. (Emphasis added)

My focus is on verse 19. What does Peter mean by the statement, “He (Christ) went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison?”

While Christ was in Paradise in the Underworld and before He led its occupants to Paradise in the Third Heaven, He proclaimed the strategic

victory of the Cross to those in the Abyss. But who are they? He describes them as those who “formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah.” The spirits described in verse 20 are fallen angels—spirits imprisoned for committing a grievous sin before the flood in Noah’s time. Peter does not tell us what Jesus proclaimed to the imprisoned spirits, but it could not have been a message of redemption, since fallen angels cannot be saved. What Jesus proclaimed was likely a declaration of His victory at the Cross over Satan and his hosts.

Genesis 6:1 When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. ⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

The Hebrew verb *laqach* (“took” in verse 2) means to seize violently, to take by sheer strength, to overpower and seize these women against their will for sexual relations. Their offspring were called “giants” or the Nephilim. This is the main reason for the Flood: human DNA was so corrupted that only Noah and his seven family members remained untainted and righteous (v. 8; 1 Peter 3:20).

Satan and the fallen angels understood that the Savior would come in the line of Adam as true humanity through the woman. Therefore, Satan knew he had to break that line from Adam to Christ. In the first generation, Satan inspired Cain to murder Abel, a believer. But the line continued through Seth, and Satan realized that murder wouldn't work to cut it off. He changed tactics and attempted to destroy all true humanity by having

fallen angels invade the earth and impregnate human females, producing half-angel, half-human beings, as documented in Genesis 6:1-6. According to Genesis 6, these angels saw that human women were beautiful and took them as wives. They “did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling” (Jude 6). Had all true humanity been tainted in this way, Jesus Christ could never have come into the world.

What do we have?

Paradise once held the souls of the righteous dead from the Garden until the time of the Cross and the ascension of Jesus. It served as a temporary holding place until sin could be judged at the Cross and Christ could escort the souls there to Paradise in the Third Heaven. It has been empty since the Ascension and remains so today.

Torments/Hell – Holds the souls of the lost from the Garden to the end of the Millennium.

Great Gulf is an impassable chasm created to separate the souls of the righteous dead in Paradise from those of the lost in Torments/Hell.

Abyss/Tartarus is a compartment of the Underworld currently inhabited by the fallen angels from the Genesis 6 incident, in which angels mated with human women, producing a corrupted human race that was judged by the Flood. Although Scripture does not explicitly state this, the *Abyss might also* contain the Nephilim from the Flood, the descendants of that illicit union between angels and human women (Genesis 6:1-8).

Lake of Fire

The Lake of Fire is the final destination for Satan, the Antichrist, the False Prophet, all fallen angels, the spirits of the Nephilim, and all humans who reject the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. It is eternal (Revelation 20:10). It is not the same as Hell/Hades, which is only a temporary holding place in the Underworld until the Last Judgment.

Where is it? The Lake of Fire does not exist in the Underworld, as some suggest. It appears in Scripture after the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), which occurs in a scene where “heaven and earth flee away” (v. 11). This suggests that the judgments associated with it take place in a cosmic or transcendent realm rather than within the current physical universe. Some theologians propose that the Lake of Fire exists outside the renewed order—the New Heavens and Earth—and represents eternal exile. It lies in another realm as far from God and Heaven as possible. That is a key point, as we will see later.

When was the Lake of Fire created? That isn't clearly stated, but there are hints. The Beast (Antichrist) and the False Prophet are thrown into it immediately after the Second Advent, so it must have existed before the Second Advent.

Matthew 25:41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

Jesus made this statement during the judgment of the sheep and the goats at the end of the Tribulation. “Prepared” is in the past tense, indicating it already exists. Since it was prepared “for the devil and his angels,” it was created either before, at, or soon after Satan’s fall. That takes us back well before the creation of mankind.

Being sentenced to the Lake of Fire is known as the “second death.”

Revelation 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **This is the second death, the lake of fire.** ¹⁵ And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Emphasis added)

The statement “death and hades gave up the dead” simply means that the physical bodies of the unsaved will be reunited with their souls and spirits, which have been in Torments. The mention of “the sea” giving up its dead makes it clear that, regardless of how far a body has disintegrated, it will still be resurrected for this judgment. God is fully capable of finding all the displaced molecules that were once part of someone and reassembling them into a physical body.

Who ends up in the Lake of Fire? Anyone whose “name was not found written in the book of life” (v. 15), namely those who have rejected the free gift of salvation.

Revelation 21:8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

The first death is physical death. The second death is eternal separation from God in a place of burning sulfur.

Is Hell Eternal?

Yes, it is according to Scripture.

Daniel 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and **some to shame and everlasting contempt.** (Emphasis added)

Matthew 25:46 And **these will go away into eternal punishment,** but the righteous into eternal life.” (Emphasis added)

Annihilationists hold that hell is not eternal. After the final judgment, the wicked will be completely destroyed or cease to exist rather than suffer eternal conscious torment. They cite Romans 6:23, which says, “For the **wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” They argue that this refers to a complete termination of existence. They also point to words like “perish,” “destroy,” and “death” (John 3:16, Matt 10:28) as indicating cessation of being.

- **Matthew 10:28:** Jesus warns to “fear him who can **destroy both soul and body** in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Annihilationists argue this implies a literal end to existence, but “destroy” refers to eternal existence in Hell.
- **John 3:16** states that those who believe shall not “perish.” Proponents argue that “perish” (Greek: *apollymi*) means to be destroyed utterly, in contrast to “eternal life,” and implies that those not saved do “perish.”

- **Romans 6:23:** "For the wages of sin are death." They argue that death is the cessation of life, not an eternal life of suffering. The trouble is that the passage refers to spiritual death, not physical death.
- **2 Peter 2:6:** God condemned Sodom and Gomorrah by "burning them to ashes... making them an **example** of what is going to happen to the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:6). They argue that "ashes" signifies total destruction rather than a literal reading of being burned with only ashes remaining.
- **Malachi 4:1-3:** Describes the day of judgment as a furnace in which evildoers will be "**stubble**" and burned up so that neither root nor branch is left (Malachi 4:1-3). This would leave only ashes. See above.

In contrast, advocates of eternal conscious torment argue that "eternal" and "unquenchable" denote an unending process of conscious suffering.

- **Matthew 25:46:** "And these will go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into eternal life." Traditionalists argue that if "life" is unending, "punishment" must be as well.
- **Revelation 14:11:** "And the **smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever**, and they have no rest, day or night" (Revelation 14:11). This verse is often cited as the strongest evidence for conscious, ongoing pain.
- **Revelation 20:10:** Describes the devil, the beast, and the false prophet being "tormented **day and night forever and ever**" in the Lake of Fire.
- **Mark 9:48:** Quotes Isaiah 66:24, referring to a place "where **their worm does not die** and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). Traditionalists interpret this as a symbol of perpetual suffering.

For How Long?

"... Forever and ever." As Revelation 20:10 points out, this punishment is eternal. There is no suggestion that it is temporary or that it is followed by some process of execution that some see in the term "second death." This punishment is eternal, as confirmed in Revelation 20:10. For it to somehow cease after a period of time determined by the Judge would actually be a welcome relief from the punishment in the Lake of Fire.

It is called the “second death” in Revelation 20:14, 2:11, 21:8, and 20:6 because **it signifies total separation from God**. That alone conveys a sense of complete and utter hopelessness.

Degrees of Punishment

Some argue that, while the punishment may indeed be eternal, there are degrees of punishment, with some experiencing much harsher punishment than others, citing Luke 12 as proof.

Luke 12:47 And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

They use this passage out of context. It speaks not of eternity or even Hell. Context! Jesus was primarily talking about the nation's leadership at that time. The religious leaders were supposed to manage the nation for God until He brought in the Kingdom. However, they failed in that task; they were not looking expectantly to the Kingdom. Jesus seems to have been referring to the nation’s leaders who would be present at the time of the coming of the Son of Man. The “servant who knew his master’s will” (v. 47) will be judged more severely than those who, though wicked, do not know about the coming of the Son of Man (v. 48a). Unbelievers with a great knowledge of God’s revelation will have to answer for their lack of response to that revelation.

There can be no degrees of punishment if your understanding of Hell is the Lake of Fire, as described thusly:

Revelation 20:15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and **they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.** (Emphasis added)

Revelation 19:20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into **the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.** (Emphasis added)

Who Goes There?

The Lake of Fire is the final destination for Satan, the Antichrist, the false prophet, and all who are not saved. At the end of human history, those in Hell in the Underworld are cast into the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:14 says, “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”

What Is This Place Like?

First of all, it is very hot. In Luke 16:23-24, in the story of Lazarus and the rich man, the latter “...called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for **I am in anguish in this flame.**’”

In Jude 7, the evil inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah are “undergoing punishment of **eternal fire.**”

In Matthew 25:41 at the judgment of the sheep and goats at the end of the Tribulation, Jesus says of the “goats” (the lost), “Depart from me, you cursed, into the **eternal fire** prepared for the devil and his angels.” Here, “eternal fire” refers to the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:15 says, “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the **lake of fire.**” In Revelation 21:8, the Lake of Fire is described as “the **lake** that **burns with fire** and sulfur.”

I think we can safely draw two conclusions from these verses: First, this punishment is eternal. It does not end. Second, both Hell in the Underworld and the later Lake of Fire are very hot.

Outer Darkness and Gnashing of Teeth

Some passages describe the Lake of Fire as “outer darkness,” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 25:30 And cast the worthless servant into the **outer darkness**. In that place, there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth.**'

Matthew 22:13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the **outer darkness**. In that place, there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth.**'

Matthew 8:11 I tell you, many will come from the east and the west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the **outer darkness**. In that place, there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"

Matthew 13:49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and **throw them into the fiery furnace**. In that place, there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.

First, it seems incongruous that a place filled with the flames of burning sulfur would be dark. I would expect it to be well illuminated. Then maybe "darkness" is not the darkness we associate with the absence of illumination? I think the answer is found in John 8 and similar passages.

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "**I am the light of the world**. Whoever follows me **will not walk in darkness**, but will have the light of life." (Emphasis added)

I believe the "darkness" of the "fiery furnace" refers to complete separation from God. I think the adjective "outer" enhances this meaning. It is the Greek *exoteros*, meaning outward or away. With the two words combined, "outer darkness" seems to refer to complete and utter separation from the light of God, as far away as possible. It is understandable that those who find themselves in this situation might weep and gnash their teeth because of the utter hopelessness of their situation. They know they had a chance at another, much more positive outcome, but rejected it, and now they are in a miserable place of pain and forever exiled from any hope of recovery.

Regular or Extra Crispy?

Some argue that not everyone sentenced to the Lake of Fire will experience the same level of severe punishment—the regular-versus-extra-crispy argument. One passage they cite to support this view is Revelation 20:12.

Revelation 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And **the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.** ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and **they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.** ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ **And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

This passage describes the Great White Throne judgment of the lost at the end of the Millennium. Some assume that “works” or “what they had done” refers to sin, and that the lost will be judged for their sins. Obviously, some are indeed greater sinners than others, so why should all be treated the same? There is a problem with that.

1 John 2:2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and **not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.** (Emphasis added)

The **sins of the entire world, past**, present, and future, were imputed to Jesus on the Cross, and He was judged for those sins—all of them. Listen carefully: Jesus was judged in our place. He took the punishment we deserved. Our sins were judged 2000 years ago and forgiven, and that forgiveness is offered to all who will receive it by faith. Since Jesus has already been judged for all our sins, we can never be judged for them. So, if Jesus was already judged for all our sins, what are the “works” that the lost will be judged for at the Great White Throne?

Short answer: Human good.

Having rejected the free gift of salvation by faith, their names were not found written in the book of Life. They have only one defense to present, namely their “righteousness.” They must argue that something in their lives — “works,” or what we call “human good” — is good enough to exempt them from this eternal punishment. The problem is that their righteousness, their human good, can never compare with the perfect righteousness of Christ, a righteousness that we believers are credited with at salvation.

Isaiah 64:6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.** (Emphasis added)

Some translations render it “filthy rags” rather than “polluted garment,” but the Greek refers to used menstrual rags. Yes, that is the value of our human good to God. But believers have the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Philippians 3:9 and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God** that depends on faith. (Emphasis added)

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** (Emphasis added)

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.** (Emphasis added)

God looks at believers and sees the righteousness of Christ. He looks at the lost and sees human good and nothing that even approaches His perfect standard.

At the Great White Throne Judgment, the determining issue is not sin. Sin was judged 2000 years ago. It is human good that ultimately condemns the Christ rejectors to the Lake of Fire. The conclusion was foreknown: They are not found in the Book of Life, and any claim they might have to

righteousness by their “works” is rejected because it does not meet God’s perfect righteousness.

The only reason “regular or extra crispy” could apply is if the “works” in question were indeed sins, which they are not. If it were a question of the severity of the sins committed, it might be appropriate to punish some more severely than others. Even if that were the case, how do you differentiate pain and suffering in boiling, flaming sulfur? Are the blisters any less painful for some than for others?

No. The Lake of Fire is eternal. It is a lake of flaming sulfur that burns forever. It’s gonna hurt—a lot—and forever. That should motivate us to spread the Gospel to all.

Perhaps the most agonizing part of the process for the lost is not the physical pain but the knowledge that, in their arrogance, they rejected the free gift, the chance to avoid it all. That should well and truly induce “weeping and the gnashing of teeth.”

Eternity is a long time to experience buyer’s remorse.