

## There Is No Hell

*Note: I made the Underline and Bold in this article.*

Does "Hell" really exist? Is there a "Hell" in the Bible? Hell no! There is no "Hell" in the Bible!

What is "hell" like, really? Is "hell" located here on earth, below the earth, or in some other dimension? Is "hell" real, or just an ancient myth? Can the Bible lead us to the truth? Where is "hell" first mentioned in the Bible, and why is it so hard to find in the more accurate modern translations? Why was "hell" never mentioned to the original sinners—Adam, Eve and Cain—nor to unbelievers like the Pharaoh who defied God repeatedly? Are there Bible verses that clearly describe "hell," explaining its origins and purpose?

HELL NO! THERE IS NO "HELL" IN THE BIBLE!

If you look for "hell" in the Bible, you're in for a long, fruitless search for facts, definitions and explanations. Why? Because the Hebrew prophets never mentioned a place where human beings would writhe in eternal torment, gnashing their teeth forever. Nor did the Hebrew prophets ever mention even the slightest possibility of suffering after death. Isn't that extremely odd, if there really is a hell and God wanted us to know how to avoid it? The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) mentions a place called Sheol, but as I will demonstrate below—quoting book, chapter and verse—the Hebrew word Sheol clearly means "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead, good and bad." The same is true in the New Testament, where the Greek word Hades also clearly means "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead, good and bad." Nor does Gehenna mean "hell," as I also explain. So "hell" is not a biblical teaching at all, but a harrowing mistranslation now being used by charlatans to brainwash believers into forking over their hard-earned money while obeying commandments they never bothered to observe themselves. (It seems hell hath no fury like a hypocritical moralist out to control other people's behavior.) Unfortunately, the innocents who suffer most from this hellish dogma are highly impressionable young children who trust their parents, pastors, youth directors and Sunday School teachers to guide them to the truth ... when the simple, honest truth is that there is no "hell" in the Bible!

Hell is child abuse, pure and simple. We simply must put an end to the emotional, psychological and spiritual abuse of children, today. There is absolutely no reason for adults to threaten children with hell via the thinly-veiled but terrifying threat that "Jesus saves, but only if you believe Christian dogma." Children grow up, a fact that eludes Christian theologians who insist that Jesus loves the little children, and yet will inexplicably turn his back on them when they reach the mysterious "age of accountability," which ironically was never mentioned by Jesus, Peter, Paul, or any other apostle or prophet in regard to salvation. If the God of the Bible never condemned anyone to "hell" at any age, isn't it blasphemy to threaten people with hell in God's name? I intend to prove "beyond a reasonable doubt" that from beginning to end the Bible is entirely and absolutely silent about either the pre-existence or creation of "hell."

Here is a simple, logical proof that there is no reason to believe in "hell," according to the Bible itself:

- There is no mention of "hell" or any possibility of suffering after death anywhere in the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament (OT).
- The Hebrew word Sheol clearly means "the grave," not "hell." This can easily be confirmed because if Sheol is translated as "hell" the Christian dogma of hell as an inescapable place of suffering apart from God is immediately refuted. This is true because: (1) in Psalm 139:8, King

David said that if he made his bed in Sheol, God would be there with him; (2) in Job 14:13, Job asked to be hidden from suffering in Sheol; (3) in Psalm 49:15, the sons of Korah said that God would redeem them from Sheol; and (4) the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle Paul agreed that all Israel would be saved, and yet in Genesis 37:35, Israel himself said that he would be reunited with his son Joseph in Sheol. How can all Israel be saved if Israel himself is in "hell"? In each case Sheol clearly means "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead" and cannot be interpreted as "hell" unless "hell" is heaven!

- This has been confirmed by conservative Bible scholars because there is no mention of the word "hell" in the OTs of the NIV (the best-selling Bible), the NABRE (published by the Roman Catholic Church), the HCSB (published by the famously literal Southern Baptist Convention), and most other modern translations of the Bible.
- Furthermore, in biblical chronologies spanning thousands of years, the God of the Bible and his Hebrew prophets never mentioned any possibility of punishment after death. Nothing like "hell" was even remotely suggested to Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, Daniel, et al.
- In fact, "hell" was never mentioned even to the worst people at the worst of times. "Hell" was never mentioned to Cain (the first murderer), nor to the people guilty of the wickedness that led to the Great Flood, nor to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, nor even to the Pharaoh who enslaved the Hebrew tribes and defied God repeatedly.
- We can further verify this because there are also no OT warnings about the need to repent in order to avoid suffering after death. In the OT, people were being warned about the need to repent in order to avoid suffering and death here, on this planet, in this life.
- Of course it makes absolutely no sense to only warn people about temporal (earthly) punishments if they are in danger of eternal suffering. Therefore according to the Bible, "hell" clearly did not pre-exist.
- But there is no mention of the creation or purpose of "hell" in the New Testament (NT) either. Nor is there any verse in the entire Bible that ever announced that the penalty for sin had changed from death to "hell." Why would God clearly announce the penalty of death before it was enacted, but then fail to mention the far more serious penalty of hell before it was enacted? That makes absolutely no sense.
- A loving, compassionate, wise, just God could not create an "eternal hell" and fail to immediately warn the whole world about it. But obviously the whole world was not warned about the creation of "hell." American Indians knew nothing about "hell" before 1492. Billions of people have lived and died, never having heard a word about "hell" or Jesus Christ. Would anyone who had never read the Bible consider God to be just if he died and woke up in hell? Of course not!
- An eternal hell would make God monstrously unjust, if he created it or knew about it and didn't immediately warn the entire world, but according to the Bible "hell" did not pre-exist and was never created because from beginning to end the Bible is absolutely silent about either the pre-existence or creation of "hell."
- Furthermore, the Greek word Hades does not mean "hell" either. As with Sheol, everyone went to Hades when they died: both words clearly mean "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead." Hades contained heavenly regions such as the Elysian Fields and Blessed Isles.

- Gehenna is not "hell" either, but a physical location in Israel known in Hebrew as Gehinnom, or the Valley of Hinnom. Today Gehenna is a lovely park and tourist attraction. Wonderful archeological discoveries have been made there, such as the healing pool of Siloam and the oldest Bible verses ever discovered, inscribed on small silver amulets. Those verses are the benediction "The LORD bless thee and keep thee; the LORD make his countenance to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee." Those are wonderfully comforting words to have been discovered in "hell," don't you think?

- What does all this mean? If you believe in a loving, compassionate, wise, just God, you may conclude that "hell" has always been either an error of translation or an outright human fabrication. Why would human beings invent hell? Well, as the ancient Greek philosopher Celsus pointed out to the early Christian father Origen, "hell" was a good way to control the behavior of the unwashed masses, but no wise man believed in it. **And "hell" has always been a handy way to increase conversions (perhaps we should call them "coercions"), church attendance and revenues.** But what about the emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being of little children? Surely their innocent hearts, minds and souls are vastly more important than the head counts and coffers of churches!

But perhaps the best reason not to believe in hell is this: If at any time God, Jesus, the Hebrew prophets, or any of the apostles were aware of the existence of an "eternal hell," they should have immediately warned human beings never to have children, because the risk of giving birth was too terrible to imagine. But of course there are no such warnings in the Bible. Rather, Hebrew prophets like Ezekiel confidently predicted that all Israel would be saved in the end, along with Sodom and other Gentile nations that were historically enemies of Israel, such as Samaria. Samaria is now home to millions of Palestinians, many of them either enemies or fierce critics of Israel. Most Jews and Palestinians have never believed in Jesus, so how can all Israel and Samaria be saved, if only Christians are saved? Jesus applauded the compassion of the Good Samaritan, a man of the wrong religion who practiced compassion. Will all the good Samaritans go to "hell"? Will Jesus fail to practice what he preached and not be a good Samaritan himself? Will he condemn the saints of other religions to eternal torture: Gandhi, the great man of peace, for instance? As Saint Paul used to say, "Heaven forbid!"

And here's another very good reason not to believe in hell: infant baptism and the "age of accountability" were never mentioned by Jesus, Paul or any other apostle. These bizarre non-Biblical teachings were only needed after the early Christian church was infiltrated by the Cult of Hell. If Jesus loved children and they were in danger of going to "hell" once they reached a certain age, or if they weren't splashed with water by a priest, how could he have failed to tell his disciples exactly what needed to be done to save them? But of course there was no "hell" at the time Jesus and Paul were preaching. "Hell" was clumsily cobbled into the Bible after Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 and the Christian church re-centered in Greece and Rome, where people believed in the hell of pagan mythology. By that time Jesus and Paul were no longer here in the flesh, to contradict the witchdoctors of the Cult of Hell.

Another good reason not to believe in "hell" is very easy to understand. A God who is able to create a heaven where suffering and death are impossible does not need a hell. After all, when suffering and death are impossible, evil acts are also impossible. This could explain why Hebrew prophets like Ezekiel and the apostle Paul spoke of everyone being saved in the end. If God can create a dimension where the lion lies down in peace with the lamb, there is no need to punish lions for killing lambs here on earth. If no human being was perfect here on earth, what is the need to punish some of them unnecessarily, once none of them can do any harm? It seems to me that many Christians actually want there to be a hell, so that people they despise can suffer for all eternity. But surely no loving, truly enlightened being could agree with them. And according to Hebrew prophets

like Ezekiel, Saint Peter in his second sermon after Pentecost, and Saint Paul in a number of passages, everyone will be saved in the end.

So how did "hell" enter the Bible? Ironically, the only people who believed in "hell" at the time of Jesus were the Pharisees. We know this from the Jewish historian Josephus, a contemporary of Paul. The Pharisees probably "borrowed" the concept of "hell" from the pagan Greeks after Alexander the Great conquered the Middle East during the "silent" period between the writing of the OT and NT. Like the ancient Greeks, the Pharisees undoubtedly found that the threat of "hell" increased their power, revenues and profits. Later, when the pagan Roman emperor Constantine demanded that Catholic bishops "come together" and agree on what became known as the Nicene Creed, he commissioned fifty Bibles, a huge and very expensive undertaking in those days. It seems possible that the more hellish verses may have entered the Bible at that time, **as "hell" was a great way to scare up money and put even more power in the hands of church and state.** The verses about slaves obeying their masters and citizens obeying unjust rulers could have been added at the same time, for similar reasons. Can any Christian believe that Jesus Christ would have endorsed slavery, or people blindly obeying rulers like Stalin (or Constantine)?

But in any case the Greek hell was Tartarus, not Hades. And as we will see, there is only one verse in the entire Bible containing a word that actually means hell, but that hell is not for human beings, nor is it eternal.

This is the end of my "simple proof" that there is no reason to believe in hell, according to the Bible itself. But if the subject interests you, I will be glad to cite book, chapter and verse, so please feel free to continue reading ... and I certainly hope that you will, for the sake of the children.

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Chad Holtz is a Methodist pastor who was asked to resign by members of his rural North Carolina congregation after he questioned the Christian dogma of an "eternal hell." Holtz had made positive remarks about the bestseller book *Love Wins*, written by Rob Bell, another pastor who questions the existence of "hell." (Bell was the focus of the cover of the April 25, 2011 issue of *TIME Magazine*, captioned "What If There's No Hell?")

Holtz agreed to leave his church in what he termed a "divorce." In an interview published online Holt said, "We do these somersaults to justify the monster god we believe in ... Am I really going to be saved just because I believe something, when all these good people in the world aren't?"

Mind you, Holtz is not saying that God is a monster. Rather, he's simply pointing out that orthodox Christianity makes God seem like a monster by claiming he'll condemn billions of people to an "eternal hell" for not "believing" in Jesus, when he could have saved them by grace. But how can a God who chooses to remain hidden demand human belief? That is patently unfair. If a man refused to introduce himself to other people, then started torturing them for not "believing" in him, we'd lock him up and throw away the key. But as I intend to prove, if you will bear with me, the Bible itself contradicts the idea that God ever said that anyone would go to an "eternal hell." In fact, if we read the Bible chronologically from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the book of Acts (the self-recorded history of the early Christian church), we will not find a single verse in which God or any Hebrew prophet or Jesus or any apostle ever mentioned a place called "hell."

This is true because the words Sheol, Hades and Gehenna do not mean "hell." The Hebrew word Sheol clearly means "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead, good and bad." The Greek word Hades also means "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead, good and bad." Gehenna is a physical valley in Israel, not "hell."

According to the Bible "hell" clearly did not pre-exist and just as clearly was never created. Did evil-minded men begin damning other people to "hell" in the name of God? Yes, they did. But they cobbled their hellish verses into the Bible so clumsily that they forget to insert fictitious verses announcing the creation of "hell"! Such a colossal blunder could only have been made by fallible men, not an all-wise God.

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If we consider the Bible as a whole, from multiple angles, it becomes obvious that "hell" was created by human beings, not God. Where is there any verse in the Bible that clearly announced the creation or purpose of "hell"? There are no such verses anywhere in the Bible. The Bible is completely, absolutely silent about the most important event in human history (if it actually occurred): the creation of a place called "hell" and the change of the ultimate penalty from death to eternal damnation.

How could a loving, wise, just God create an "eternal hell" yet never once mention its creation and purpose to any of his prophets or apostles? How could God cause or allow billions of people to suffer for all eternity when they died knowing nothing about the Bible, Jesus or "hell"? Why would God save "the chosen few" by grace, but deny any chance of grace to billions of people who never heard of Jesus?

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At the time of Jesus and Paul, "all the world" meant the Roman Empire: a narrow strip of cities, towns and villages fringing the Mediterranean Sea. The early Christians knew nothing about vast continents that wouldn't be discovered and explored for another 1,500 years, or longer: North America, South America and Australia. They knew nothing about China, Japan, Southeast Asia, Central and Southern Africa, Russia, or thousands of faraway islands. When they vowed to preach the gospel to "all the world," they had no idea what that really entailed. So what happened to the billions of human beings who lived and died in the meantime, knowing nothing about the Bible or Jesus? If God condemned them all to "hell," that would make God horrendously unjust, and therefore unqualified to judge human beings. But if people who hadn't heard about Jesus didn't go to "hell," while people who heard about Jesus and rejected him did, it would be a terrible crime for Christians to ever mention the name "Jesus" to non-Christians, much less their own children. Furthermore, through the centuries Christians have so defamed and blasphemed the name of Jesus by raping, enslaving and murdering people of other religions that it makes no sense to expect non-Christians to "believe" in Jesus. Should a atheist girl who was raped, tortured and murdered by a Jew during the Christian Holocaust be punished eternally for not converting to their religion? Heaven forbid!

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I believe Holtz made a very important point: one that is seldom voiced by Christians. If an all-knowing God created human beings foreseeing in advance that many (or any) of them would suffer for all eternity, wouldn't that make God a monster? And if Christian mothers believe in "hell," how can they give life to babies who might end up in "hell" — wouldn't that make them monsters?

**This is the horror of hell-based Christianity: it turns God, Jesus and Christian mothers into monsters willing to play eternal roulette with the souls of innocent children.**

And what about all the mothers who would be forced to choose between Jesus and their own

children? Could good mothers live happily in heaven with Jesus, knowing that their children were suffering forever because Jesus refused to save them, when he was able to save the thief on the cross with a nod of his head? Surely only the bad mothers would remain in heaven! All the good, loving mothers would curse Jesus and storm out of heaven to be with their children. They certainly wouldn't worship or praise the petty egomaniac who demanded belief without ever bothering to introduce himself to their children personally!

Please keep in mind that I am not calling Jesus a petty egomaniac. It's the "Bible believing" fundamentalists who turned Jesus into a monster with their bizarre theology, not me. I'm a recovering fundamentalist who no longer blasphemes the name of Jesus by accusing him of saving Christians by "grace" while condemning the saints of other religions and non-religions to an "eternal hell." Ironically, most atheists, agnostics and other non-Christians have much higher opinions of Jesus than Christians who accuse him of being so petty, unjust and inhumanly cruel. Gandhi and Einstein both admired Jesus, while not "believing" in him in the orthodox Christian sense. But at least they didn't accuse him of causing or allowing billions of souls to suffer for all eternity. Most Muslims believe in Jesus and have a high opinion of him, but they don't believe he sends people to "hell" for not "believing" in him.

Ironically, the people with the lowest, basest opinions of Jesus are the Christians who pretend to "love" and "admire" him in order to "save" themselves, while in effect telling the rest of the world that he's the Devil. How can anyone "love" a being capable of causing or allowing their loved ones to suffer for all eternity? That would be like me pretending to "love" and "admire" Stalin during the Christian Holocaust, in order to escape torture at the hands of the Jewish control Communist. **But of course the driving impulse would be fear, not love.** The Bible says that perfect love casts out fear because fear produces torment. Should I believe in the perfect love of God, or in a hell that produces nothing but torment? As we will see together, there are many Bible verses that completely contradict the idea that God will punish anyone for all eternity, or fail to save anyone in the end. Here are just a few of them (there are more at the bottom of this page):

Truly I say unto you, the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of heaven before the self-righteous. (Matthew 21:31) Think about it: Jesus had table fellowship with the outcasts of society, drank wine and partied with them, and reserved virtually all his criticism for the "religious experts" who failed to be hospitable to "sinners." Today conservative Christians despise prostitutes, homosexuals, and anyone else who doesn't meet their "high moral standards," while their self-righteousness makes the rest of us gnash our teeth. But Jesus clearly said that love and compassion were the real moral standards. Jesus also said that the first would be last, and the last first. Was he just whistling Dixie, or did he mean what he said? The verse above doesn't say that anyone will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven in the end, but it certainly doesn't make moralists the "chosen few" who inherit heaven at the expense of the people they despise.

**He will swallow up death in victory;** and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. **(Isaiah. 25: 8)**

Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell [more actually, death] shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18) Most of the estimated hundred billion people who have lived here on earth died without reading the Bible or knowing anything about Jesus. If most of mankind ends up going to "hell" then the gates of hell will have prevailed and Jesus will be just another inept, failed Messiah. How can Jesus be the Savior of the World unless all the world is saved?

For unto this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially believers. (1 Timothy 4:10) This is only one of many Bible verses that say all men will be saved, and that God will be all in all (not "all in some" or all in the self-

proclaimed "chosen few"). Paul said that all Israel would be saved, agreeing with the prophet Ezekiel, who also said that the Gentile nations, including Sodom, would be saved in the end, linking their salvation to Israel's. Paul said that different people would be saved at different times, in stages, with Jesus being the First-fruits of the resurrection. Orthodox Christians ignore the best verses in the Bible to focus narrowly on the worst. Why is that? If we can't believe the best verses, why believe the worst?

**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)** We know that all human beings die; this verse clearly says that the same "all" shall be made alive, in Christ. There are many such verses in both the Old and New Testaments.

**All flesh shall see the salvation of God. (Luke 3:6)**

I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38-39)

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. (Jeremiah 31:3) In his epiphany on Divine Love in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul said that Divine Love never gives up, endures all things, and never fails, which sounds like the love of the best human mothers. But the Bible insists that the love of God exceeds human love, so how can human mothers exceed God in loving unconditionally?

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! (Isaiah 49:15) This verse compares the love of God to the love of a human mother. Would any compassionate mother torture her child for a second, much less all eternity? No, the only suffering she might permit would be remedial suffering, such as surgery to correct a birth defect. And even then she would agonize with her child.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

[Jesus Christ] whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:21) In his second sermon after Pentecost, Saint Peter claimed that the resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies of all the prophets who spoke since the beginning of the world. What was their message, according to the first great preacher of Christianity? That God would reconcile all things to himself, and thus be all in all.

Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the Sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. (Mark 3:28)

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. (Romans 5:18)

... they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. (Jeremiah 31:34)

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The word "heaven" appears over 600 times in the Bible. But as we will see together, a word that

actually means "hell" appears only once in the Bible, and that hell (Tartarus) is for fallen angels awaiting judgment and thus is not for human beings and is not "eternal."

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Chad Holtz is not the first Christian pastor to lose his job after expressing the hope that God will not allow anyone to suffer for all eternity. One of the most interesting cases is that of Carlton Pearson, a charismatic minister who once appeared on national television, where he reached large audiences on a weekly basis. His program was one of the most-watched shows carried by the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Pearson pastored one of the largest churches in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was made a bishop of his denomination, and served on the board of regents of Oral Roberts University, his alma mater. He campaigned for George W. Bush, was invited to the White House, and met with and counseled former presidents Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush. Pearson was also a talented gospel singer who won two Stellar Awards and was nominated for a Dove Award. When Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah building in nearby Oklahoma City, Pearson appeared on the Larry King show. He was a rising star — a shooting star — in the televangelical heavens.

And yet he was far from a "happy camper." Like many Christians, Pearson harbored deep resentment in his heart for God because he believed that when his grandparents died, they went to "hell" (his grandmother had "backslidden" by drinking and his grandfather was a "womanizer"). Then one day while watching the terrible suffering of Rwandan refugees on TV, Pearson's resentment and anger boiled over and he cried out, "God I don't know how you're gonna call yourself a loving God and allow those people to suffer so much, then just suck them into hell!" According to Pearson, he heard God reply, "Is that what you think we're doing?" and he received the understanding that "hell" exists here on earth, not in the afterlife.

Pearson then began to preach a "gospel of inclusion" (universal salvation) and was soon ostracized by other Christian pastors, who called him a "heretic." His congregation, which had averaged around 6,000 in weekly attendance, quickly dwindled to a few hundred souls. He couldn't make the rent and his church eventually lost its building to foreclosure. Gospel singers who had once clamored to appear with him now shunned him. Before long, he was churchless and out of a job. Why? All because he expressed the hope that a loving, compassionate God would show grace to everyone.

Are pastors like Holtz, Bell and Pearson "heretics"?

Perhaps not. As I mentioned previously, "hell" has vanished almost entirely from modern translations of the Bible. You can verify this by clicking this link [www.biblegateway.com/keyword](http://www.biblegateway.com/keyword), then searching for "hell" in modern translations of the Bible such as the NIV, NASB, RSV, NCV, ASV and HCSB. If you do this and ignore the contraction "he'll" or select only exact matches, you'll find only around ten verses that contain the word "hell" (and some of those are duplicates). This is true even for the HCSB, a recent translation produced by conservative Bible scholars and published by the famously literal Southern Baptist Convention. But as we will see, even the few remaining occurrences of "hell" are still inaccurate translations, except for one. And that single verse (2 Peter 2:4) describes a "hell" that is not eternal nor for human beings!

And if you want know specifically what Jesus said himself, here is a link to a systematic, comprehensive discussion of What did Jesus teach about Hell?

Why is "hell" disappearing from the Bible? Primarily for the following reasons:

(1) The Hebrew word Sheol clearly means "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead, good and bad,"

not "hell." The Hebrew language doesn't have a word that means "hell" (a startling omission if there really is a "hell" and an all-knowing God spoke to Moses and the other prophets who gave us the Bible).

(2) Like Sheol, the Greek word Hades means "the grave" or "the abode of all the dead, good and bad," not "hell." (The words are equivalents; the Septuagint, quoted by Jesus Christ and the apostles, uses the Greek word Hades to translate the Hebrew word Sheol.) Everyone went to Sheol/Hades, not just the "wicked." To condemn a person or nation to Sheol/Hades was to say that they would die, be destroyed or vanish from this earth, not suffer eternal punishment. Therefore most of the occurrences of "hell" in the King James Version (KJV) are blatant mistranslations. This can easily be confirmed because if "hell" is substituted for Sheol, the Christian dogma of "hell" is refuted. After all, King David said that if he made his bed in Sheol, God would be there. Job asked to be hidden from suffering in Sheol. Ezekiel and Saint Paul both said that all Israel would be saved, but Israel himself said that he and his son Joseph would be reunited in Sheol when they died. The sons of Korah claimed in a Psalm that God would redeem them from Sheol. In each case, the men speaking were clearly talking about dying and going to the grave, not "hell." If "hell" is substituted for Sheol, then according to the Bible, God will be in "hell" with human beings when they die, "hell" is a place to go to escape suffering, Israel himself will be in "hell" (refuting the prophecies of Ezekiel and Paul), and human beings can be redeemed from "hell."

(3) Anyone who has studied the Hebrew Bible (our OT), knows that a place called "hell" and suffering after death were never mentioned to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Lot, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jacob/Israel, Joseph, Moses, the Pharaoh who defied God, or a long line of Hebrew prophets. If an all-knowing God was speaking to human beings and their souls were in danger of suffering after death, surely he would have given them instructions about avoiding "hell." But there are no such instructions in the OT. It makes absolutely no sense that God and the Hebrew prophets spoke constantly about the temporal consequences of sin, if there were infinitely more onerous eternal consequences. Therefore, it is obvious that "hell" did not exist at the time of the prophets, if they were in communication with an all-knowing God.

(4) Bible scholars know these things; therefore most conservative Bible scholars no longer translate Sheol and Hades as "hell." For instance, the word "hell" appears in a scant ten verses of the HCSB, primarily in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, and six of those verses are duplicates. Since Matthew and Mark obviously draw from the same original text, it seems that only one major Bible writer knew anything about a place called "hell." But ironically even this "hell" is a mistranslation ...

(5) With the exception of a single verse from 2nd Peter (discussed below) even the few verses in the HCSB and other modern translations that contain the word "hell" are mistranslations of "Gehenna," with some being duplications (the same verses appear twice in the parallel gospels of Matthew and Mark). So the list of unique verses that mention "hell" has been culled down to around seven, depending on the translation in question (and none of those verses actually say that anyone will go to "hell"). Bible scholars generally agree that the gospels were written after the epistles of Paul, and Paul never mentioned a place called "hell," so it seems obvious that this place named as "hell" was introduced at a very late date in the development of the Bible. But Gehenna is a physical location in Israel, not an "eternal hell." At the time of Jesus, Gehenna was a fiery landfill and a good metaphor for a place to avoid at all costs. But today Gehenna is a lovely park. You can find pictures of it on the Internet. There have been some wonderful archeological discoveries in Gehenna, such as the healing pool of Siloam and the oldest extant verses from the Bible, recorded on silver amulets. The Bible verses discovered in "hell" are the priestly benediction: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his countenance to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee ..." So there is no reason to believe that Gehenna is "hell."

(6) The Greek word for "hell" is Tartarus, a word which appears in only a single verse in the entire Bible (2 Peter 2:4). But that verse is about fallen angels awaiting judgment, so its "hell" is not eternal and is not for human beings. Jesus Christ himself mocked the idea that human beings would go to Tartarus in his parable of Lazarus and the rich man, which clearly describes the afterlife of the pagan Greeks, called Hades. Hades was not "hell" because everyone went to Hades when they died. In Hades the heavenly regions (the Elysian Fields and Blessed Isles) were separated from the fiery pit of Tartarus (the Greek "hell") by an impassable abyss. The dead could chat with each other across this abyss, but no one could cross it. Thus the "blessed" were unable to help the "wicked." But of course this bizarre place was the invention of Greek poets like Homer and such a place had never been described anywhere in Hebrew scripture. When the Pharisees claimed that they would inherit heaven simply by being descendants of Abraham, Jesus ridiculed their absurd belief by putting the Gentile beggar Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, and a rich Pharisee in the fiery Tartarus. But this does not mean that Jesus believed in "hell." What he did is like me telling a flat-earther, "Be sure not to fall over the edge!"

(7) If a loving, just, all-wise God had wanted human beings to believe in "hell," he could have mentioned its name, its purpose, and how it might be avoided, as soon as it was created. Indeed, in order to be considered just, it would have been incumbent upon God to do so. But there are no such verses anywhere in the Bible.

(8) Perhaps the best reason not to believe that early Christians were condemning human beings to "hell" has to do with marriage and childbirth. If an all-knowing God had spoken to Paul and informed him that human children were in danger of growing up and being condemned to an "eternal hell," surely Paul would have warned Christians about the terrible dangers of having children. How could any Christian woman play God by bearing a child who might end up suffering for all eternity? And of course present-day Christian women should ask themselves the same question. If there is an "eternal hell," and people will go there for such common things as having sex and not believing in Jesus, then it would be an act of incredible wickedness to bring any child into the world.

But there is no reason to believe in "hell," if we consider the Bible as a whole, and accept the fact that all palpably evil, error-riddled and/or contradictory verses in the Bible must have human origins.

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Although many Christians don't yet realize it (why haven't their pastors told them?), "hell" is vanishing from the Bible. The latest translation published by the Roman Catholic Church, the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE) does not contain a single mention of a place called "hell." The Bible published by the famously conservative and literal Southern Baptist Convention, the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), has no verse in its entire Old Testament in which God or the Hebrew prophets ever mentioned a place called "hell" and its New Testament contains only a handful of verses that mention "hell" (all mistranslations of Gehenna). The New Testament published by Dr. Ivan Panin, who discovered patterns of the number seven in Bible verses, has no mention of a place called "hell." Thanks to the Internet and online search tools, it is now a matter of a few mouse clicks to search modern versions of the Bible for the word "hell." A few minutes online will verify that a place called "hell" is hard to find in accurate modern Bibles such as the NABRE, HCSB and NIV (the best-selling Bible). And the few remaining "hell" verses, other than a single verse that mentions Tartarus, are all mistranslations. How is it possible that God and the prophets completely forgot to mention "hell," if there really is a "hell"?

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The idea that God demands human belief when he chooses to remain hidden is absurd and unjust. If God wants me to "believe" he exists, why doesn't he just say "hello"? Since God never said "hello" to me or to billions of other human beings, I can only conclude that God doesn't require human belief. And of course the Hebrew prophets never said that God required human faith or works in order to reconcile all things to himself. In fact, they said just the opposite: that God would save human beings despite their lackluster faith and works.

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Is there any way to reconcile Paul's gospel of salvation by grace, through faith, with a loving God? Yes, there is a very simple solution. Due to the nature of the Greek language, when Paul spoke of Jesus and faith, he could have been speaking of the faith of Jesus in God the Father, not the faith of Christians in Jesus. Christians could simply trust in the faith of Jesus to save everyone. This simple solution reconciles Paul's gospel with a God who is loving, compassionate, wise and just. There is no "justice" if God saves Christians whose actions cause other people not to believe in Jesus, while sending their victims to "hell." If the only way human beings can be saved is by the grace of God, and if faith is required to activate that grace, then the perfect solution is for the perfect faith of Jesus to activate the grace of God. That would be like the faith of a son in his father, or like the faith of God in himself.

If Jesus is able to save human beings with a nod of his head, why wouldn't he just save them all? If he is unable to save human beings, why call him the Savior? Is Jesus a sovereign Savior, or an inept "helper" who can't save anyone unless they do all the hard work? Does Jesus save human beings sovereignly by divine grace, or do they save themselves by doing all sorts of difficult things to earn the right to enter heaven? How can his yoke be light unless he does all the heavy lifting?

If no Christian achieves perfection in this life, how can any of them enter a perfect heaven unless God perfects their natures? I know many Christians who would make heaven just like earth if they entered heaven as they are today. I'm sure you do too. But if their natures can be perfected because God is able to save them, why should I object? But if God can perfect human nature, he obviously doesn't need "hell." If he can't perfect human nature, how can anyone be saved?

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If Jesus loves children, it's hard to imagine him treating children and their mothers so cruelly, if all he has to do is nod his head to save them. (Most children grow up, a fact Christian theologians seem unable to grasp.) Is it easy for Jesus to save, or supremely difficult? Did Jesus tell the thief on the cross, "After an immense struggle I will attempt to save you by the skin of your teeth, since you haven't reformed and become perfect in this life"? No, Jesus didn't make it sound as if he was barely able to save. The Bible never says that it is difficult for God or Jesus to save. But if it is easy for God to save human beings, he would be a monster to turn his back on them, if they are unable to save themselves.

The idea that God allows billions of babies to be born, knowing that most of them will end up suffering in an "eternal hell" turns God into the Devil and Christian mothers into heartless, unfeeling monsters. Can this be a true religion? Can this possibly be what Jesus and Paul taught? I submit that it is not, for the following reasons:

- There is no reason to believe that Jesus believed in "hell," since "hell" was not a Biblical teaching, but a pagan Greek myth.

- Jesus mocked the pagan Greek view of the afterlife (which had been adopted by the Pharisees) in his parable of Lazarus and the rich man.
- The Greeks had a myth that heaven (the Elysian Fields) and hell (Tartarus) were separated by an abyss which the "blessed" and "damned" could chat across.
- This is clearly the bizarre place Jesus ridiculed in his parable (just as I might mock a flat-earther by saying, "Be sure not to fall off the edge!").
- But how can heaven be a joyful place if the people there can see and hear other people suffering?
- Why should Gandhi and Einstein to go to hell, when so many Christians fall far short of their good works?
- Shouldn't we suspect other people when they claim to be the "chosen few" who are "predestined" to inherit heaven at other people's expense?
- That was the religion of the Pharisees, according to Jesus's parable and the Jewish historian Josephus!
- The largest denominations condemning human beings to "hell" in the US are pharisaic cults which routinely blaspheme the names of God and Jesus.
- The last hymn in the hymnal published by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is hymn number 666.
- The Bible published by the SBC, the HCSB, contains no verse in which God or any Hebrew prophet ever mentioned "hell."
- The few verses in the HCSB that mention Gehenna (mistranslated as "hell") never say that anyone will actually go there.
- If God and the Hebrew prophets never mentioned "hell" is it not blasphemy to condemn human beings to "hell" by invoking the name and authority of God?
- The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has recently admitted (after 1,800 years of waffling) that there is no "Limbo."
- This means the RCC, which claims to be able to speak "infallibly" on matters of theology and salvation, has no idea what happens to unbaptized babies when they die. But the pope and church routinely condemn children to suffer and die by calling it a "sin" to use condoms, in a world where unprotected sex is highly dangerous and often deadly. This makes the pope and RCC liars, frauds, blasphemers, child abusers and murderers.
- The pope is aptly named Ratzinger/Benedict, a plague-carrying rodent and a traitor, if there are no accidents with God.
- As Mark Twain and other wise men have pointed out, "hell" is used by charlatans to fleece the gullible. The Greek philosopher Celsus pointed out to Origen and other early Christians that the Greeks had invented "hell" to control the masses. Celsus also pointed out that no wise man believed in "hell." Should Christians be as gullible and undiscerning as the dupes of Celsus's day?

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Jesus said we can know people by the fruit they produce. What is the fruit of churches like the SBC and RCC but bigotry, intolerance and the brainwashing of innocent children via emotional, psychological and spiritual torture, when they are told that God has cruelly condemned billions of human beings to "eternal damnation" when he could save them by grace, with a nod of his head?

I will give other reasons why no Christian should believe in an "eternal hell," in due course. But for now one of the best clues can be found in the first recorded sermon of Jesus, in Luke 4:14-21. According to Luke, when Jesus preached his first sermon he quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2, but stopped reciting when he reached the part about God's vengeance. The God of the OT was often arrogant, petulant, jealous, unjust, vengeful and full of murderous "wrath." He and his cohorts (Moses, Joshua, Caleb, et al) commanded racism, slavery, sexism, matricide, infanticide, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Is it possible that Jesus — a compassionate man and a man of peace — didn't believe these depictions of God were accurate? If so, pastors like Chad Holtz and Rob Bell are imitating Jesus when they suggest that love and compassion are God's true nature, rather than wrath and vengeance. If human beings are instructed not to let the sun go down on their anger, should God harbor his anger for all eternity? Wouldn't that make him a hypocrite, if he is able to save human beings by changing their nature?

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The horrific idea that God will burn billions of human beings in an "eternal hell" has led Christians to burn "heretics" and "witches" here on earth. After all, if God plans to burn people forever, what did it matter if Christians "help" God by burning them here? How much fear, anger, bitterness and rage has the dogma of hell instilled in Christians, over the ages? The result has been a series of bloody Crusades, Inquisitions and witch hunts. Today conservative Christians do the same things spiritually, when they condemn homosexuals and non-Christians to "hell" in the name of God and Jesus. As other people grow more enlightened and choose to believe that God is good, or not to believe in God at all, orthodox Christians seem increasingly primitive and grotesque in their beliefs. Are God and Jesus intolerant bigots, or has orthodox Christianity devolved into another stone-age religion?

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In the OT, "hell" was never mentioned as a possible punishment to even the worst people at the worst of times. "Hell" was not preached to Cain at the time of the first murder. "Hell" was not preached at the time of the great wickedness that led to Noah's Flood. "Hell" was not preached to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Hell" was not preached to the people of Nineveh by Jonah. "Hell" was not preached by any of the Hebrew prophets even when Israel went wildly astray and was threatened with dire temporal catastrophes. Nor was "hell" preached to the Pharaoh who enslaved the Hebrew tribes and refused to let them go, defying God time and time again. So more than obviously, according to the Bible itself, "hell" did not preexist, nor was it created during the thousands of years covered by the chronologies of the books of the OT.

But neither is there any verse in the New Testament in which God, Jesus or any apostle ever announced the creation and purpose of "hell." These are curious omissions, to say the least, if any part of the Bible came from God.

If a loving, wise, just, all-powerful God had decided to create a place of eternal punishment because for some unfathomable reason he was unable to save human beings, it would have been incumbent

on him to not only inform his prophets and apostles, but all the people of the earth. But anyone who has studied the Bible and history knows this didn't happen. Billions of people have now lived and died without having read the Bible or knowing anything about Jesus or the existence of "hell." How could God be considered "just" if human beings died and woke up in a place they knew nothing about, for not believing in someone they had never heard of?

Conversely, if people who never heard of Jesus don't go to "hell" when they die, the worst thing anyone could possibly do is tell anyone else about Jesus, if hearing his name and not believing in him flings wide the gates of "hell." And how can it be "good news" to tell people about Jesus, if the only way they can go to "hell" is to hear his name?

Obviously, there is something very fishy about the "hell" thing. If "hell" doesn't really exist, how did it worm its way into the Bible? The answer is quite simple and amazingly ironic (I would add humorous, but there is nothing funny about billions of people being terrorized by the dogma of "hell," especially children.)

Ironically, it seems "hell" entered the Bible via the sworn enemies of Jesus — the Pharisees, the Jews!

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, a contemporary of Paul, the Pharisees were the only sect within Judaism that had a dogma of "hell." Josephus was born in Jerusalem in AD 37, a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus. As a young man Josephus studied the beliefs and teachings of the major Judaic sects: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. Here, according to the testimony of Josephus, is the most likely origin of "hell" in the Bible: "Their [the Pharisees'] belief is that there is an undying power in souls and that, under the ground, there is an accounting to reward and punish those who were righteous or unrighteous in [this] life. Eternal punishment is offered to the latter, but re-creation in a new life to the former. Because of these ideas, they [the Pharisees] are the most persuasive among the citizens. And all the sacrifice and prayer offered to God happens to be according to their exegesis [of scripture]."

Why were the Pharisees the "most persuasive"? Josephus said they were the most persuasive sect specifically because of their teachings about the afterlife and "hell." Of course "hell" is a powerful weapon that can be used to terrify gullible people into doing whatever they're commanded, and turning over their money to charlatans. Today Catholic and Protestant churches receive billions of dollars yearly from the people they condemn to an "eternal hell" in the name of God and Jesus. "Hell" is, and always has been, a highly profitable scam.

The phrase "under the ground" is important, because the ancient Greeks had a dogma of pit deep underground where the souls of the "wicked" were perpetually tormented. This deep, dark, fiery pit (Tartarus) was a region within Hades. According to Greek mythology, the souls of the blessed went to the heavenly regions of Hades, while the souls of the damned went to Tartarus, which we now call "hell." But there is absolutely no reason to believe this mythological place really exists. After all, the Greek "hell" was guarded by monsters, contained giants and defeated gods (the Titans) and was ruled by three gods, not a single omnipotent God. According to Plato, Rhadamanthus judged Asian souls, Aeacus judged European souls and Minos judged Greek souls. Tartarus was clearly a place of myth, and was cynically used by the rich and powerful to establish a reign of terror over the poor and gullible. Today the Pope and his cronies terrorize Catholics with the threat of "hell," while Protestant "ministers" rake in billions of dollars by threatening people with "hell," then pretending to "save" them with an irrational combination of faith, grace and works. But a God capable of saving by grace doesn't need human faith or works, and when did the God of the Bible or his prophets ever say that anyone was in danger of "hell" or that God needed human faith and works in order to save?

Our English word "hell," the Hebrew word "Sheol" and the Greek word "Hades" all have ancient connotations of an underground region that is covered, hidden, dark and unseen. This makes perfect sense because graves are underground, hidden, dark and unseen. But it was the pagan Greek poets who created the myth of eternal damnation and punishment. Christian poets like Dante and Milton would later add vivid, disturbing, terrifying pictures of the torments of "hell." But there is no evidence in the Bible to support the idea that a supreme, all-knowing God ever mentioned such a place. The only books of the Bible that mention "hell" are the ones that were written in Greek. None of the books written in Hebrew or Aramaic say anything about "hell." This makes perfect sense, because the Jews have never believed in an "eternal hell," but the pagan Greeks did — or, more correctly, the gullible masses did.

How did this mythological place, "hell," worm its way into the Bible?

Between the writing of the last books of the Old Testament and the first books of the New Testament, there is a "dead spot" in time of several hundred years. During this dead spot, Alexander the Great invaded and conquered the Middle East. This invasion introduced Aryans to the ideas and myths of the pagan Greeks. The most powerful and far-reaching Greek concept to enter the Bible was that of an "eternal hell." The combination of an "eternal hell" and an all-powerful God who was able to save anyone, but who for some unfathomable reason chose not to save billions of people, would ultimately transform orthodox Christianity into glorified Devil worship. (I do not mean that God is the Devil, only that the dogma of hell makes God seem like the Devil.) Why should Christians praise a God who is able to save anyone with a nod of his head, but chooses not to save billions of people out of sheer pettiness? But this was not the message of the Hebrew prophets, and the evidence of the Bible is that this was not the original belief of the earliest Christians either, as we shall see.

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How can Saint Paul's gospel of salvation by grace through faith, be reconciled with the Old Testament, which never said that human faith or works were required for God to save? I've read two contemporary Greek translators who made the point that, due to the nature of the Greek language, when Paul spoke of faith, he could have been speaking not of believers' faith in Jesus, but of the faith of Jesus in God (which would be like the faith of a son in his father, or the faith of God in himself). Paul spoke of all Israel being saved, as did the Hebrew prophets, who said that even Sodom would be restored. Sodom was not part of Israel and none of the inhabitants of Sodom were Hebrews, other than Lot and his family (and they fled the city before it was destroyed). So Sodom was a Gentile city. And yet according to the Bible, Sodom and other non-Hebrew nations such as Moab, Elam, Ammon and Samaria will be restored along with Israel. Ezekiel 16:53 says, "I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters, and your fortunes along with them." So the restoration of Israel was linked to the restoration of Gentile nations and people.

How was this restoration to take place?

In Ezekiel chapter 37, in Ezekiel's famous vision of the "valley of the dry bones," God showed Ezekiel that he would resurrect the entire house of Israel, "an exceedingly great host," and God said that the Israelites would believe in him after he gave them new life, not before. This contradicts the orthodox Christian dogma that human belief in God is required in this life. Nowhere in the OT did God or any prophet ever say that God is limited by human faith. If Christians want their faith to be in agreement with the OT, they should consider the fact that the same prophets who spoke of the Messiah also spoke of the reconciliation and restitution of all things to God as being entirely the

work of God, not of man. The Hebrew prophets said God would save human beings despite man's lack of faith and works, not because of his faith and works. The God of the OT clearly did not need the faith or works of man to reconcile all things to himself.

Saint Paul agreed with Ezekiel that all Israel would be saved. But there are verses in the Bible that link the restoration of Israel to Gentile nations, including Sodom. And there are many verses in the Bible that clearly describe universal salvation. For instance, in his second sermon after Pentecost, while speaking to the same men who had recently demanded the crucifixion of Jesus, Saint Peter spoke of "The restitution of all things to God, spoken of by all the Holy Prophets since the world began." And there is no mention of anyone being condemned to "hell" in the entire book of Acts (the self-recorded history of the early Christian church). If the men who murdered Jesus weren't being threatened with "hell," why are so many Christians condemning people to "hell" today for having sex or being gay? Does that make any sense? In what dimension is making love a reason for anyone to suffer for all eternity? If God can forgive the men who murdered Jesus, why can't he forgive young lovers for following their hearts, if indeed having sex before marriage is a "sin"?

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If the book of Acts is authentic and accurate, it seems the earliest Christians weren't condemning anyone to "hell." When Saint Stephen was murdered by the same men who had murdered Jesus just a few weeks earlier, he repeated the words of Jesus, asking that his murderers be forgiven because they didn't know what they were doing. Were the murderers of Jesus and Stephen forgiven, despite their unbelief? If so, why should anyone go to "hell" for having sex, regardless of what they do or don't believe? If not, did God ignore the dying requests of Jesus and Stephen?

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There's another very good reason to doubt that the early Christians were condemning other people to "hell" — the lack of any recorded debates about the existence of "hell." The Bible mentions several disagreements between Jesus and Jews who were not his disciples. Jesus debated the Pharisees and Sadducees on various topics, some of them rather trivial, such as matters of diet and Sabbath observance. Paul also entered into debates about matters of diet, Sabbath observance and circumcision. But there is no debate recorded in which Jesus or Paul said that people would go to "hell" and they responded by asking, "How can you condemn us to a 'hell' that was never mentioned in Hebrew scripture by God or any prophet! Who are you to condemn us to this 'hell' which God and the prophets knew nothing about?"

Ironically, Jesus ridiculed the Jews' concept of "hell" in his parable of Lazarus and the rich man. The vision of the afterlife that Jesus ridiculed was clearly the pagan Greek Hades, with its "heaven" and "hell" lying side-by-side, separated by a chasm which the dead could chat over, but which no one could cross. Such a bizarre place had never been discussed in Hebrew scripture. Jesus was obviously mocking the idea that some people (the Pharisees) would inherit heaven simply by being "sons of Abraham" while other people (Israel in Dispersion) ended up in a fiery pit. (Even more ironically, Christians eventually borrowed the religion of the Pharisees and replaced Abraham with Jesus!) If Jesus and his apostles had been condemning other people to "hell," those people who were familiar with Hebrew scripture would have been livid with rage. I know this, because I feel the same anger today, when I hear Christians condemning people of other faiths to a "hell" that I know the God of the Bible and his prophets never even mentioned. But there are no heated debates about "hell" recorded in the Bible, even though Jews who had read the Hebrew Bible would have known that it never mentioned "hell." The best explanation is that the "hell" verses were inserted later, after Jesus and Paul were no longer alive; the people making the additions were not Jews like Jesus and the apostles, but Greeks who already believed in "hell" (or didn't believe themselves but cynically

used "hell" to defraud and control other people).

Also, it is important to note that "infant baptism" and "the age of accountability" are both non-Biblical doctrines never mentioned by Jesus, Paul or the other apostles. These bizarre dogmas were only needed after Christians began to condemn people to "hell" for not believing in Jesus, which left them with the problem that babies condemned to "hell" due to "original sin" could not be saved. The idea that babies had to be baptized in order to avoid "hell" (later softened somewhat to "limbo") was the brainchild of guilt-plagued Catholic "theologians" like Saint Augustine. But the early Catholic church wanted "salvation" to lie in the hands of priests, and of course not every baby could be splashed with magical water by magical priests before dying, so over time multitudes of Christian mothers were led to believe that their unbaptized babies went to "hell" or "limbo." Just think of how they must have suffered, and so needlessly! When Martin Luther came up with his reformations of Christianity, priests and infant baptism went out the window, but Luther was another guilt-plagued theologian, so the mysterious "age of accountability" was soon ushered in to keep God from sending babies to "hell" for not believing in Jesus. But of course no one knew what the "age of accountability" was, because God, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles never defined it. Without "hell," there is no need for infant baptism or the "age of accountability." Once "hell" had been created by human beings, suddenly no Christian theologian knew how children could be saved, because being descended from Adam or stealing a cookie could cause them to go to "hell" at some indeterminate age. But in what dimension is being born or stealing a cookie a reason for anyone to suffer for all eternity?

Why should anyone believe such evil, irrational, terrifying nonsense? Here are a number of reasons not to believe in "hell," even if you believe that the Bible or parts of it came from God:

- There is no mention of "hell" in the entire OT.
- Suffering after death were never mentioned to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Moses, et al.
- The Hebrew word Sheol clearly means "the grave," not "hell."
- The Greek word Hades clearly means "the grave," not "hell."
- Therefore, to condemn someone to Sheol/Hades was to simply to say they would die.
- There are only a handful of verses in the New Testament that discuss a place called "hell," and all but one are mistranslations of Sheol, Hades and Gehenna. The only verse that discusses a place that might actually be translated as "hell" (Tartarus) is about fallen angels awaiting judgement and thus this "hell" is not for human beings and is not eternal.
- The early Christians were not condemning people to "hell," if Acts is authentic and accurate.
- Paul never mentioned a place called "hell" in any of his thirteen epistles, even though he said that he received his gospel directly from God, not man.
- If Jesus and the apostles had condemned other Jews to "hell," there would have been heated debates, since "hell" had never been mentioned by the Hebrew prophets. But no such debates are recorded in the Bible.
- If the early Christians had believed their children might go to an "eternal hell," Paul and the other apostles would have warned them not to have babies. But there are no such warnings in the Bible.

- An eternal "hell" would cause mothers to have to choose between God and their children grandchildren and great-grandchildren; thus the only mothers who would choose to remain in heaven would be the bad mothers!
- Infant baptism and the "age of accountability" were never discussed by the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, Paul or any of the other apostles. They were only needed after evil-minded men had clumsily cobbled "hell" into the Bible, as a means of robbing people and controlling their behavior.
- According to Josephus, "hell" in Judaism originated with the Pharisees, the sworn enemies of Jesus.
- While there are a few verses in the Bible that seem to describe suffering after death, the question is whether such verses are credible. If God, the Hebrew prophets, Jesus and the early Christians never mentioned a place called "hell," and someone else cobbled in a few nonsensical verses at the last minute, in order to defraud and control other people, should anyone believe those verses? Why not look at the Bible as a whole, and discount the verses that make no sense and are unworthy of human belief? No one "believes" the verse that allowed fathers to sell their daughters as sex slaves with the option to buy them back if they failed to please their new masters (Exodus 21), or the verse that commands parents to stone their daughters to death if they're raped (Deuteronomy 22), or the verse that allows "men of God" to slaughter mothers and their infant sons, keeping only the virgin girls alive as sex slaves (Numbers 31). No sane person believes the Bible verses that command race-mixing, slavery of your own kind, matricide and infanticide. So why "believe" the horrendous verses about eternal punishment or the ones that condemn homosexuality?

Jewdeo-Christians (notice the spelling) acknowledge that people who physically attack, harm and torture others should be punished. But it's OK for God to do that. It seems fine by judeo-Christians to hate dictators who murder millions of people (Stalin, Mao Zedong ) because of their evil deeds, but still think of a God of love that would do more than any mass murderer can do on Earth.

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Today men who claim to "know the truth" and to "speak for God" ecstatically proclaim that Jesus saves. But what do those seemingly simple words mean? Do they mean that a loving Savior will save everyone because he is able to save people who can't save themselves? Or do they mean that Jesus is able to save everyone, but is so petty that he will only save the "chosen few"? Or do they mean that Jesus is unable to save people by himself, and thus needs the help of human beings? Is Jesus a loving sovereign Savior, a petty egoist who has hissy fits if people don't believe in him even though he deliberately remains hidden, or an inept helper who leaves the hardest part of salvation up to human beings and loses most of the people he loves to the flames of an "eternal hell"?

Are Christians who claim to be the beneficiaries of God's sovereign grace being saved by their evil-minded faith that would turn God and Jesus into monsters if their beliefs were true, or are they being saved by the faith of Jesus in God? Which is the superior faith?

Curiously, Christians who claim to "know the truth" and to "speak for God" don't seem to know the answers to the simplest questions about salvation. They confidently proclaim that salvation is by grace, not works, because no human being is able to "earn" heaven. But then they insist that once people are saved, they have to continually repent, confess and strive to become perfect.

We should exclude homosexuals from churches and minding our children; we should exclude the murderers and other criminals from our daily life but that does not mean that they will be in the earthly Kingdom – Eventually. However, when the time comes that they do enter, they will be an

entirely changed person. As we read in Scripture that every knee shall bow to Christ.

How can these charlatans speak for God, if they tell human beings that they need to be saved from an "eternal hell" which the God of the Bible and his prophets never even mentioned? Should we believe people who blaspheme the names of God and Jesus, or challenge them to prove that there is a "hell" as a clear teaching of the Bible from beginning to end? If they can't prove that there is a "hell," shouldn't they repent and change their blasphemous beliefs?

Why do Christians who profess to believe in the love, grace, compassion and forgiveness of God have such a hard time being tolerant of other religions, and even of their own sects and sub-sects? Why did Catholics once burn Protestants at the stake, as heretics?

Parents especially fear "hell" for their children. If you believe that God may torture your daughter in "hell" for all eternity, or allow her to be tortured, over incorrect beliefs in obscure articles of religious dogma, how can you truly believe in God's love, grace, justice, forgiveness and compassion? Isn't this fear the root cause of "saints" burning other Christians at the stake during the Dark Ages over points of religious dogma, and accomplishing the same thing today, spiritually, by damning them to "hell"?

Why did the Catholic church burn "heretics" at the stake? Primarily for two reasons: (1) Catholics distrusted God and assumed that if God was going to burn people in "hell" for all eternity for not having the "correct" beliefs, they were only doing what God would do, on a lesser scale; and (2) the Catholic church was far more interested in preserving its temporal power and ability to generate revenues than it was with the message of Jesus and the Hebrew prophets, which was to practice compassion and social justice. Obviously there is nothing "compassionate" or "just" about burning someone at the stake for any reason, much less for not believing that God and Jesus are the petty demons orthodox Christianity portrays them to be.

Today Protestant churches continue to teach predestination along with salvation by a combination of faith, grace and works. **But obviously if one's fate is predestined before birth, there is no need for either faith or works.** Christians try to believe so many evil, absurd, contradictory things that they end up being small bundles of wild confusion. What on earth are they teaching their children, and how are those teachings affecting their children's development?

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How can anyone be predestined to eternal damnation, if the God of the Bible never mentioned an "eternal hell" to Adam and Eve (the original sinners), nor to Cain (the first murderer), nor to Noah (at the time of the great wickedness that resulted in the Flood), nor to Abraham (the father of Judaism, Islam and Christianity), nor to Jacob (who became Israel), nor to Moses (even at the time of the giving of the Law and its punishments), nor to any of the Hebrew prophets? After he clearly announced that the penalty for sin was death, when did God ever clearly announce this new, far more drastic penalty? Why did he wait thousands of years to announce the existence of "hell," and yet still forget to inform the great preachers of early Christianity — Peter, Stephen and Paul — of when "hell" was created, and why? If there was a "hell," why didn't Peter and Stephen warn the men who murdered Jesus that they were in danger of an "eternal hell"?

If Jesus was the son of God and there is an "eternal hell," why didn't Jesus explain the creation and purpose of "hell," and how children could avoid it, if there was an "age of accountability" or the need for infant baptism?

Where in all the Bible is the verse that says the penalty was changed from death to "hell," on such-

and-such a day, for such-and-such a reason? There is no such verse. How can God be considered "just," if he created an eternal "hell," but never mentioned that it had been created, or why, or how it might be avoided? Does it make any sense to say "You must believe in Jesus to be saved from a terrible place that I forget to mention to anyone for thousands of years, and which I still have never mentioned to billions of people now who must die, then wake up in an eternal torture chamber they never dreamed existed"?

Of course anything like this would be the height of evil and injustice. But if people who never heard of Jesus don't go to "hell," then the worst thing anyone could possibly do is mention the name "Jesus" to them. Is this the wisdom of God, or the evil lunacy of man?

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The Christian concept of predestination would be the height of all evil, unless God predestined a happy end for every creature that ever lived, suffered and died. What sort of monster would allow anyone to be born, suffer and die only to wake up in an "eternal hell" where unremitting suffering would serve no purpose whatsoever? What sort of being causes or allows unremitting punishment, without purpose, if he is able to prevent it? If God is able to save me, when I cannot save myself, but God chooses to turn his back on me, isn't that like a doctor who allows a patient to writhe in pain rather than administer an antidote that costs him nothing to provide? If Jesus was able to save the thief of the cross with a nod of his head, why doesn't he just nod his head at everyone? Is salvation easy for a supreme God, or almost impossibly difficult?

Earthly judges hand out prison sentences because they are unable to change human nature. But Christians claim that God is able to perfect human nature, so that human beings who were imperfect in this life can enter a perfect heaven. But a God who is able to perfect human nature by grace obviously does not need an eternal torture chamber. Nor would any good human judge sentence anyone to be tortured for a second, much less for all eternity. The purpose of incarceration is remedial and protectional, not mindless incessant punishment. So the pertinent question becomes: how can any human being enter a perfect heaven? If human beings can enter a perfect heaven only by being perfected by the grace of God, why wouldn't God show the same grace to everyone? And indeed the Hebrew prophets claimed that in the end God would save everyone — all Israel along with the people of Sodom, Samaria and other Gentile nations. Long before the birth of Jesus, King David said that God could simply not impute sin. If people like Moses, Joshua and David will be in heaven — as most Christians believe — then why can't everyone?

If God is able to save by grace, and if no human being can save himself, it would be the greatest injustice imaginable for any human being to go to "hell." Conversely, if God is not able to save, no one should call him the Savior.

Obviously we create "hell" on earth when we practice terrible injustices against defenseless innocents. If God will save them by grace, I see no reason why he wouldn't save me by grace, not to mention far more deserving people like Gandhi. If God saved me by grace, but refused to save a saint like Gandhi, that would be the height of injustice, and I would rather cease to exist than have Gandhi suffer interminably. Is it possible for a mortal man to be more compassionate than God, or to have a more highly developed sense of justice than God?

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How can a God who chooses to remain hidden demand human belief? If God is able to save by grace, why does he need human belief? Why can't God have faith in himself, even if human faith

falls short of perfect faith? If Jesus had perfect faith in God, why can't God be satisfied with the faith of Jesus, even if my faith falters in the face of God's perpetual silence and hiddenness?

How could Jesus applaud the Good Samaritan — a man of the "wrong" religion who showed compassion to a man of the "right" religion — if Jesus refuses to be a Good Samaritan himself? Wouldn't that make Jesus a hypocrite? How could Jesus criticize Jewish priests for turning their back on the man the Good Samaritan helped, if Jesus is going to turn his back on the Good Samaritans of other religions and non-religions — good men like Gandhi and Einstein?

How could Jesus criticize the Pharisees for practicing hypocrisy, then practice the cruelest, most vile hypocrisy imaginable? The Good Samaritan put religious dogma aside, to help a man in need. If Jesus was able to save the thief on the cross with a nod of his head, and if he is able to save newly converted Christians on their deathbeds, when they don't have time to reform — as most Christians believe — then why would he fail to show compassion to people of other religions? Is Jesus a hypocrite and a monster, or are there terrible, blasphemous flaws in orthodox Christian dogma?

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Fortunately the God of the Bible and his Hebrew prophets never said that anyone would go to "hell." Nor is there any mention of a place called "hell" in any of the epistles of Saint Paul, the great Evangelist, or in the book of Acts, the self-recorded history of the early Christian church. "Hell" was a very late (and very clumsy) addition to the New Testament. "Hell" was added to the Bible for a very simple, very obvious reason: to force the poor, ignorant, unwashed masses to obey the whims of Roman emperors while making evil Christian "ministers" rich. But the men who clumsily cobbled "hell" into the Bible are the Keystone Kops of theology because they forgot to have God or any prophet or apostle ever announce the creation or purpose of "hell"!

The men who added "hell" to the Bible so clumsily were evil morons. Why should anyone believe evil morons?

How can God be considered loving, compassionate, wise and just, if he sends people to a "hell" he forgot to mention for thousands of years and still to this day has never announced? There is no verse in the Bible that announces the creation of "hell," or its purpose, or how to avoid it without believing that God and Jesus are petty demons. Does that make any sense?

Most Jews have never believed in an "eternal hell." Nor did the early Christians seem to know anything about "hell." The book of Acts records the word-for-word sermons of Peter, Stephen and Paul. But even when Peter and Stephen were speaking directly to men who demanded the crucifixion of Jesus, a mere forty days after his resurrection, they never mentioned an "eternal hell." In the entire book of Acts, even according to the inaccurately-translated King James Version, there are only two occurrences of the word "hell," both of them quotations of David saying that God would not leave his soul in "hell" (by which he clearly meant Sheol, the grave). Nor did Paul ever name a place called "hell," or explain when, where or why it came into existence, even though he said he received his gospel directly from God.

If Peter, Stephen and Paul didn't believe in "hell," why should any Christian? Peter was the chief apostle and first spokesman of Christianity. If Peter didn't know about "hell," having been in Jesus's inner circle, then how can there be a "hell," if Jesus was the son of God? If Jesus had believed in an "eternal hell," surely he would have told Peter about it.

"Hell" is the clue. "Hell" is the key. Either man made up "hell," or somehow God unaccountably announced all sorts of temporal consequences of sin, while invariably forgetting to mention the

infinitely more important eternal consequences. That would be like me telling my son that the consequence of a failing grade is no TV for a week, then torturing him day and night for the rest of his life for failing a pop quiz. For God to go on and on about the temporal consequences of sin would be bizarre, if there were eternal consequences as well. So what happened? Where did the dogma of "hell" originate? How is it that the prophets never described an "eternal hell," and yet Christians are terrorized by the fear of their own children suffering for all eternity?

"Hell" is an error of translation, and a very clumsy error, at that. The Hebrew word "Sheol," which was incorrectly translated as "hell" in the King James Version of the Bible, quite obviously means "the grave," not "hell" as we think of it today. For lovers of the KJV, if "Sheol" is correctly translated as "hell," the orthodox Christian concept of an inescapable eternal "hell" is incontrovertibly refuted, for the following reasons:

In Psalm 139, King David said that if he made his bed in Sheol, God would be there. Orthodox Christianity claims that "hell" is the absence of God. But how can both be true? Obviously, David was saying that if he made his bed in the grave (i.e., if he died), God would be there. That would be a comfort, not torture, if God is Love.

In Job 14:13, Job cried out to God, "Oh, that you would hide me in Sheol!" Job was suffering terribly. He saw the grave as a place where God could hide him from the suffering of life in this world. But no man in his right mind would ask God to "hide" him in a place of eternal suffering.

Psalm 49:15 says, "But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah." If Sheol is "hell," this refutes the orthodox Christian dogma of a "hell" that cannot be escaped.

If Sheol is "hell," then 1 Samuel 2:6 says that God "brings [down] to 'hell,' and brings up." This again contradicts the dogma of an inescapable "hell."

Perhaps the best evidence that Sheol cannot be "hell" is found in the first verse in the Bible that mentions Sheol, Genesis 37:35. When Jacob heard that his beloved son Joseph was dead, he said that he would be reunited with his son in Sheol. Jacob became Israel, "a prince with God," and the namesake of the nation that gave us the Bible. Both Ezekiel and Saint Paul said in no uncertain terms that all Israel will be saved (something Christians choose to ignore, since most Jews have never believed in Jesus). Surely no Christian believes that Israel himself is damned to an "eternal hell," nor his son Joseph, one of the few truly sterling characters in the Bible. So if Israel knew what he was talking about, Sheol cannot be the Christian "hell." If the men mentioned above were wrong about what they said, the Bible can hardly be "infallible."

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Why then are young, highly impressionable children taught to believe in the most sordid of all human creations — an eternal "hell" — while they are simultaneously led to ignore the best, most hopeful, most glorious verses in the Bible? What about these Biblical concepts and teachings: God will be all in all. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should have eternal life. Jesus will draw all men to himself. God will restore all things to himself, even Sodom and the Gentile nations that warred with Israel. The lion will lie down with the lamb. Chesed [mercy, compassion, lovingkindness] will triumph over judgement. All men have life in Christ. Jesus Christ is the savior of all men, especially of believers. God makes it to rain on both the righteous and unrighteous here on earth — if he is the same yesterday, today and forever, why would he be less gracious in heaven? The Bible instructs human beings to love and forgive their enemies — can God do any less and not be considered a raging hypocrite? The Bible instructs human beings not to let the sun go down on

their wrath — so how can God harbor his wrath forever and not be considered a raging hypocrite?

What did the foremost apostle and first speaker after Pentecost, Peter, mean when in his second sermon he spoke of the "reconciliation of all things to God, foretold by all the holy prophets since the world began"? Orthodox Christianity is hopelessly out of synch with the testimonies of the Hebrew prophets. Yes, they spoke of temporal woes in this world, and who can contradict them? But when they spoke of the end times, they spoke of Sodom being restored, of the lion lying down with the lamb, and of chesed [mercy, compassion, lovingkindness] triumphing over judgement. And when did they ever say that God was limited by human faith, or the lack of it? When did they ever say that anyone would suffer for all eternity? Or that God couldn't save to the utmost?

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Many of the early Christians seem to have been universalists. They believed that God would save everyone, and reconcile all things to himself, even Satan. In the early days of the Christian church, from the letters we have by and about early church fathers like Origen, there is no indication that such a belief was considered heretical. Origen and other universalists were accused of heresies, but universalism was not one of them. Therefore, universalism seems to have been an accepted doctrine of the early Christian church. After several hundred years, the tide seems to have turned and the dogma of an eternal "hell" became firmly established. But it has always had very shaky foundations. If God ever spoke to any human being, and if any of his words were ever recorded in the Bible, surely he would have warned men in no uncertain terms about an "eternal hell," if one existed. Conversely, if God didn't speak to the Hebrew prophets, how can their prophecies proclaim Jesus as the Messiah? Surely the two must go hand in hand. Could the prophets have been right about Jesus and yet wrong about God, salvation, the ability of God to act without man's faith or works, and man's eternal destiny?

Either God spoke to the Hebrew prophets, and there is no reason to fear a place of eternal suffering, or the Bible is the opinion of man, in which case there is no reason to fear a figment of his overactive imagination. But how can the Bible be the word of God and yet be silent on the weightiest matter of all: the fact that a child could be born and after some undetermined span of time (the never-explained "age of accountability") be consigned to an "eternal hell," without God so much as identifying the place, or explaining its purpose, or clearly explaining how it might be avoided?

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Today orthodox Christianity claims a number of contradictory things. It avows that God can save the thief on the cross, or a man on his deathbed, entirely by grace. That means God can save anyone at any time. It says that God is the only savior. It says that no man can save himself. It says that God is not a respecter of persons. But it also says that God will save only the "chosen few" while billions of souls end up being "chaff" on an eternal bonfire. But if these things are true — that no man can save himself, and yet God can save anyone with a nod of his head — then why would God save the thief on the cross, but not Gandhi? If salvation is by grace, a gift, then why would God give the gift freely to one person, but not to another? That would make him not only a respecter of persons, but a cruel, unjust monster.

It seems to me that Christians must make a choice. Do they believe that God is Love, that salvation is by grace, and that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the World? Do they truly believe in the Grace of God and the Karma of Christ? Then they can proclaim the good news without evangelizing, because all men will be saved.

Or do they believe that God is a cherry-picking Monster, who bestows eternal bliss on one imperfect human being, while tossing away another like worthless chaff? Yes, there are verses like that in the New Testament, but who wrote them? Did God, or did man? Do we want to believe in a God who calls any human being — our mothers, our fathers, our brothers, our sisters, our children — "chaff"?

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The Bible is quite clearly not "infallible," which doesn't mean that certain parts of it aren't inspired. But can we take every word of it literally, when it tells us to stone children for being stubborn; to commit genocide, killing even babies; and to kill mature women then take their virgin daughters as sex slaves? In the New Testament, Jesus himself misnamed the high priest who gave the shewbread to David. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus prophesied that not a stone of the temple would be left standing, and this came about in 70 AD when the Romans did not leave one stone on top of another. What we see today as 'The Whaling Wall' are the remains of an old Roman fort of that era.

Other stones of the temple have also been uncovered by archeologists and they too stand on top of each other today. According to the New Testament, Paul didn't allow women to talk in church. But he quite obviously did, because elsewhere he named women as deaconesses, said that a woman, Junia, was foremost among the apostles, and advised women to keep their heads covered while praying and prophesying in church. How did they pray, prophesy and act as apostles if they weren't allowed to speak? In one account of the census taken by David, God hardened David's heart to take the census. In another account of the same census, Satan hardened David's heart. Unless God is Satan, two different writers of the Bible had very different beliefs. One writer believed that God created "weal and woe," since thousands of people died after David took the census. The other writer reasoned that God is good, and therefore could not be responsible for causing innocent people to die, so he changed the account by introducing a never-before-named fall guy, Satan. (The account of the census in 1 Chronicles 21 contains the first mention of a being called Satan in the Bible, after chronologies covering thousands of years in which he was never named.) The Bible is full of such contradictions and conundrums. It tells us that it's a shame for a man to have long hair (how long?), and yet the men consecrated to God, the Nazarites, never cut their hair. How did such blatant contradictions enter the Bible? The answer is quite simple. The Bible was written and copied by many men over a long period of time. The person who wrote the bit about not a stone of the temple standing was probably writing somewhere in Greece. He had heard that all Jerusalem had been leveled, which was very nearly true because the destruction had been massive. But he couldn't see Jerusalem for himself. So he made a mistake, because beneath the rubble some of the temple stones still stood on top of each other, and still stand to this day. The person who said it was a shame for a man to have long hair had probably never heard of Nazarites like Samson and Samuel because he was writing thousands of miles from Israel. It's quite possible that John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus, was a Nazarite. Jesus himself is usually depicted with long hair. But in any case, if God is disgusted by men having long hair, wouldn't it make sense for him to at least give us something precise to go on, lest we offend him? Who can possibly know if "long hair" means six inches, or twelve, or eighteen, etc.?

Perhaps the biggest conundrum for Christians is deciding which verses to believe, and which ones to ignore. Should I put fear aside, since perfect love casts out fear, or should I work out my salvation in fear and trembling? Should my son be circumcised, as most boys born to Christian parents are, or should I follow Paul's advice to shun circumcision, since it places Christians back under the law? Should I baptize for the dead, which the New Testament mentions in passing but doesn't describe or explain? If it's important, why aren't there more specific instructions? I'm told that my wife should keep her hair covered "because of the angels." Don't angels like women's hair? My wife Jayne has very nice hair; I rather think they would like it.

The simple truth is that no one lives by every letter of the Bible, because we can't. It says all sorts of contradictory things. Christians pick and choose which verses to heed, because they have to. How can I overcome evil with good, if I stone my son to death for being stubborn, or cursing me? How can I believe that God is Love and also believe that he commanded the murder of women and children? How can I believe that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, when at various times in the Bible he demands compassion and justice, yet also commands or condones slavery, ethnic cleansing and genocide, drowns all the earth's animals for the sins of men, hardens men's hearts to sin so that thousands of deaths result, and flies into rages when people complain that they're hungry and thirsty? How can I reconcile Jeremiah 48:10 — "Cursed is he who keeps his sword back from bloodshed" — with Ezekiel 22:13, where I am commanded to hate bloodshed, or it will pursue me?

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I would like to close by mentioning a few things about two churches that claim to "know the truth."

The first church is the Roman Catholic Church, which claims to be able to speak infallibly on matters of theology, salvation, etc. After around 1,700 years of vacillating wildly on the subject of what happens to unbaptized babies when they die, the RCC seems to have finally admitted that there is no place called Limbo. This means the RCC has no idea what happens to unbaptized babies when they die. The RCC routinely condemns children to terrible suffering and death by telling them that using condoms is a "sin" in a world where they can easily contract deadly diseases like AIDS if they have unprotected sex. The current pope's name is Ratzinger/Benedict. He looks like a rat and is a traitor to the human race, so he is appropriately named. If this lying murderer of innocent children who sits on a throne and brandishes a scepter like a medieval king can go to heaven, why can't anyone?

I was baptized in a Southern Baptist church. The Southern Baptist Convention publishes the HCSB version of the Bible and the Baptist Hymnal here where I live, in Nashville, Tennessee.

The HCSB version of the Bible has only seven unique verses containing the word "hell," but they are all mistranslations of Gehenna. And yet the Southern Baptists, like most Christian fundamentalists, routinely condemn billions of non-Christians (and even non-heterosexual Christians) to an "eternal hell." But their own Bible, which they praise for its accuracy on their website, has no credible explanation of "hell" as a revelation of God or any prophet or apostle. How is this not blasphemy?

The Baptist Hymnal my ex-church used ends with hymn number 666. (I kid you not!) My mother gave me a copy of the hymnal that a friend of hers had found at a garbage dump, and I keep it in my office to remind me of my childhood suffering at the hands of the "garbage men." On the flip-side of hymn number 666 is the standard orthodox Christian version of salvation. It says "God loves you" and that he loves "all persons." It says "You can't save yourself" and "You can't earn salvation." It says that "Jesus died for your sins, taking your punishment on Himself." The logical conclusion of all this would be that Jesus did what I was unable to do, and since he bore my punishment, I am saved and free to live without fear of the punishment Jesus bore in my place. But of course this is not what most orthodox Christians really believe. They do not believe in "salvation by grace" because they will not allow people who "live in sin" or homosexuals to be members of their churches. It makes no sense for any earthly church to bar anyone that God would welcome in heaven. It makes no sense that God would save heterosexuals by grace, but not homosexuals. No one who attended any church that I ever attended was perfect, or claimed to be close to perfect. So how can these imperfect people claim that they will be able to enter heaven, but other imperfect

people won't?

The religion makes no sense, and never will as long as imperfect human beings insist on condemning other imperfect human beings to "hell." In order to enter a perfect heaven, one of two things must happen: either (1) human nature must be perfected, or (2) the nature of heaven must be such that no one can cause anyone else to suffer. In either case, there is no need for an eternal "hell." The question for Christians who consider faith essential for salvation becomes whether it is their faith in Jesus that saves them, or Jesus's faith in God. Since human faith seldom if ever results in miracles here on earth, I would suggest that Christians who want to believe in a perfect God, a perfect Jesus and a perfect heaven should put their trust in the faith of Jesus in God, and give up the pretense that any earthly church can bottle and sell Divine Love and Grace like cheap perfume.

#### Other Verses of Interest

The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. All thy works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you! (Psalm 145:9-10) How is it possible that Christian mothers will bless God if he could have saved them with a nod of his head, but allowed them to suffer for all eternity out of petty egotism?

All flesh shall see the salvation of God. (Luke 3:6)

He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. (Isaiah. 25: 8)

When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. (John 12:32)

I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38-39)

For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. (1 Cor. 15:21-22)

Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the Sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. (Mark 3:28)

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. (Romans 5:18)

For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. (Romans 11:32)

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. You who hear prayer, to you all men will come. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. (Psalm 65, a psalm of David)

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love ... (Psalm 103:8-11)

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! (Isaiah 49:15)

"I am merciful," declares the LORD, "I will not be angry forever." (Jeremiah 2:11)

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh ..." (Joel 2:28 )  
This passage was quoted by Peter in his first sermon after Pentecost.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (Luke 2:10)

For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him. (Luke 20:38)

And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. (John 4:42) Can Jesus Christ be the Savior of the World if most human beings go to an "eternal hell"?

[Jesus Christ] whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:21)

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness." (Jeremiah 31:3) In his epiphany on Divine Love, Saint Paul said that Divine Love never gives up and never fails.

"... they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34 )

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him ... For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. (Lamentations 3:22-32)