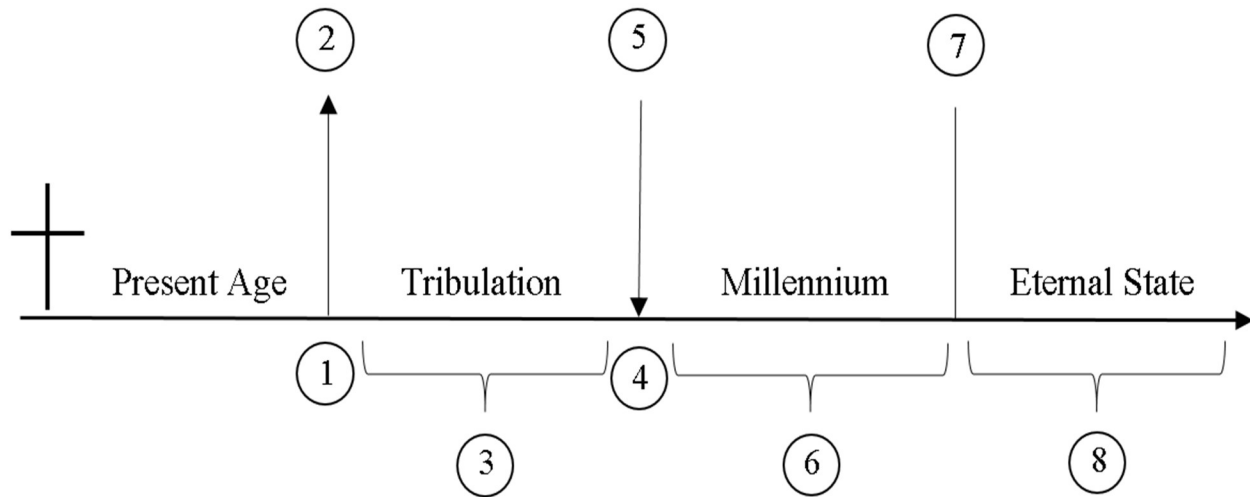


Eschatology timeline



1. The Imminent Rapture of the Church
2. The Judgment Seat of Christ
3. The Seventieth Week of Daniel
4. The Divine Restoration of Israel
5. The Second Coming of Christ
6. The Millennial Reign of Christ
7. **The Final Judgment of Unbelievers**
8. The Final State of Eternity

**I. The Biblical Teaching on Hell**

**A. The Undeniable Reality of Hell**

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus and the biblical writers continually refer to an eternal judgment of the wicked that will be characterized by fire and divine punishment. Although some deny the existence of this final judgment, the reality of hell is undeniable.

## 1. Biblical References to Hell

Although most references to the final judgment of the wicked are found in the descriptions of that judgment (rather than in the use of a single term), the word translated “hell” is used 12 times in the New Testament, 11 of them by Jesus Himself:

Matthew 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

Matthew 5:29-30 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 10:28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. " Matthew 18:9 If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

Matthew 23:15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”

Matthew 23:33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

Mark 9:43-48 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44 where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. 45 If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, 46 where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. 47 If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, 48 where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

Luke 12:5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

### **The Significance of “Gehenna”**

As the primary term for “hell,” gehena (γέεννα) comes from the Hebrew term meaning “Valley of Hinnom,” which has a rich historical background in the Old Testament.

Located on the south and east sides of Jerusalem, the Hinnom Valley was the place where the Jews worshiped the gods Molech and Baal during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh.

As part of this idolatrous worship, some Israelites even sacrificed their children to these Canaanite gods by making them “pass through fire” (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; Ezek 16:20-21; Jer 32:35; cf. 2 Kings 23:10).

By the time of Jeremiah’s ministry, the Valley Hinnom had taken on a metaphorical significance as the place where the bodies of the wicked would be cast (Jer 7:29-34; 19:6-9).

This metaphor continued throughout the Intertestamental Period, and by the time of Jesus the word gehenna was widely used as a reference to the fiery place of judgment where the wicked would receive divine retribution from God. As such, the Valley of Hinnom provided a fitting analogy for the place of final punishment of the wicked in hell.

## **2. Biblical Descriptions of Hell**

- “the fire” (Matt 3:10; 7:19)
- “unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12)
- “the furnace of fire” (Matt 13:42, 50)
- “the eternal fire” (Matt 18:8; 25:41)

- “the outer darkness” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 22:13; 25:30; cf. Matt 13:42)
- “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46)
- “the unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43; cf. Mark 9:48)
- “eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:9)
- “eternal judgment” (Heb 6:2)
- “the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:27)
- “the black darkness” (2 Pet 2:17; Jude 13)
- “the punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 7)
- “the lake of fire which burns with brimstone” (Rev 19:20)
- “the lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev 20:10)
- “the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15)
- “the lake that burns with fire and brimstone” (Rev 21:8)

## **B. The Retributive Nature of Hell**

The punishment of hell is presented in Scripture as divine retribution in which God repays the wicked for their sins as an expression of His perfect justice.

- “judged...according to their deeds” (Rev 20:12-13)
  - note the Greek preposition (“according to”), indicating the individual justice each will receive
- “it is only just for God to repay with affliction” (2 Thess 1:6)
  - note the Greek verb (“repay”), again, indicating the personal justness of hell

### C. The Ultimate Destiny of Hell

The Bible presents the following sequence of events from the death of the unbeliever to his ultimate destiny in the Lake of Fire.

#### **The inescapable sequence of events for all the unrepentant:**

- 1) The Death of the Unbeliever (Heb 9:27)
- 2) The Intermediate State of Torment (Luke 16:19-31)
- 3) The Resurrection of the Unbeliever (Rev 20:13)
  - a resurrection unto “disgrace and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2)
  - “a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29b)
  - “a resurrection of...the wicked” (Acts 24:15)
- 4) The Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-14)
- 5) The Consignment to the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15)
- 6) Eternity in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15)

### D. The Question of Literal Fire

The Symbolic View: Hell will be a place of unspeakable torment, but it will not include literal, physical fire.

The Literal View: The lake of fire contains literal, physical fire that will inflict punishment upon the wicked for all eternity.

#### **1. The Case for the Symbolic Interpretation**

- a. The Incompatibility of Fire and Darkness (Matt 22:13; 2 Pet 2:17; Jude 13)
- b. The Incompatibility of Fire and Eternal Punishment (Matt 18:8; 25:41)
- c. The Relationship between Fire and Spirit Beings (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10)

d. The Imagery of the “Lake” of Fire (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 15; 21:8)

## 2. The Case for the Literal Interpretation

a. The Consistency of the Description

- The word “fire” is used more than 20 times in the NT to describe the torment of hell (Matt 3:10-12, 5:22, 7:19, 13:40, 42, 50, 18:8-9, 25:41; Mark 9:44; Luke 3:9, 16-17; John 15:6; Heb 10:27; Jude 7; Rev 14:10, 19:20, 20:10, 15, 21:8).

b. The Resurrection of the Unbelievers’ Bodies

- The bodies of the unrepentant will be resurrected to withstand the justice they deserve; an eternity of punishment. It seems likely that such bodies would be capable of enduring literal fire.

c. The Lack of Compelling Evidence for the Symbolic View

### CONCLUSION:

- John MacArthur: “If the fire here is symbolic, the reality it represents will be even more horrifying and painful.”<sup>1</sup>
- John Piper: “Suppose fire is a symbol. Do people use symbols of horror because the reality is less horrible or more horrible? I don’t know anyone who uses symbolic language for horrible realities when the literal language would make it sound more horrible. What would be the point of that?... If I say, for example, ‘My wife is the diamond of my life,’ would any of you respond, ‘Oh, he just used a symbol for something valuable. It’s only a symbol, so his wife must be less valuable than a diamond’? That’s why it’s folly to talk like this. It’s folly to say it’s only a symbol.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 12-22* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 256.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gods-wrath/excerpts/is-hell-just-a-metaphor>

## E. The Question of Degrees of Punishment

One commonly asked question about hell concerns the degree of punishment that will be experienced there. Put simply, will everyone suffer equally in hell, or are there varying degrees of punishment? And based on what? Despite the relative lack of detail in Scripture, the following biblical principles help answer this question:

### 1. Greater Light Brings Greater Accountability

- a. Matthew 10:14-15: 14 “And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. 15 Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”
- b. Matthew 11:20-24: Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24 Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”
- c. Luke 12:47-48: 47 “And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”
- d. Luke 20:46-47: 46 “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, 47 who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.”
- e. 2 Peter 2:20-21: 20 For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again

entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them.

## 2. Greater Sin Brings Greater Punishment

- a. Matthew 23:23-24: 23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"
- b. Romans 2:5-6: 5 "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to every man according to his deeds."
- c. Hebrews 10:29: How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?
- d. Revelation 20:12: And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

BOTTOM LINE: God is perfectly just and will punish the wicked exactly as they deserve. Repent and flee the wrath to come.