

Hell & God's Character – A Summary of the Key Texts

Preliminary considerations:

Jeremiah 31:3 – God's character is one of love.

2 Peter 3:9 – God is not willing that any should perish. This text does not say, “suffer eternally.”

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Several ideas undergird the popularized view of hell as eternal. These include:

- Eternal Fire – Jude 7
- Everlasting Punishment – Matthew 25:46
- Unquenchable Fire – Matthew 3:11,12
- Torment forever and ever – Revelation 20:10

Preliminary considerations:

- **1 Timothy 6:16** – God alone is immortal.
- **1 Corinthians 15:52—54** – Humans are mortal and only receive immortality at the second coming (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18). There is no indication in this passage that a form of immortality is granted to the wicked.
- **2 Peter 2:4, 9** – The evil angels and all the wicked are reserved unto judgment when the day of judgment comes (future).

Consider also the following texts:

- **Jude 7** – Sodom and Gomorrah are also examples of everlasting punishment and eternal fire. These cities lie in ruins today underneath a portion of the Dead Sea.
- **2 Peter 2:6** – The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are turned to ashes. They are not eternally burning.
- **Matthew 25:46** – The punishment will be everlasting. Note that the text does not say "everlasting punishment." It is a single punishment with effects that last forever.
- **Psalms 37:10** – The wicked will be no more.
- **Psalms 37:20** – The wicked perish, they shall vanish.
- **Isaiah 47:14** – The fire will burn itself out, and there will not even be a coal to warm at.
- **Ezekiel 28:17, 18** – Satan himself will be consumed to ashes.
- **Obadiah 16** – The wicked shall be as they had not been.
- **Matthew 3:11,12** – The fire cannot be quenched or put out until it completes its work of totally eradicating sin.
- **Matthew 10:28** – Fear him who can destroy both the soul and body in hell.
- **Jeremiah 17:19–27** – Jerusalem was destroyed by an unquenchable fire that human hands could not extinguish. It completed its work of totally destroying Jerusalem, yet Jerusalem is not burning today.
- **Revelation 20:9** – Fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours the wicked. They are completely destroyed.
- **Revelation 20:10** – The wicked shall be destroyed forever. Forever does not always mean endless existence but is translated as "until the end of the age."

What about “Forever”?

As illustrated above, a surface reading of the term “forever” does not consider the context of the rest of Scripture. In other passages, "forever" is delimited by the length of life. See Exodus 21:6, where a slave who freely decided to give himself "forever" to his master would only be such for the duration of life.

Jesus not only taught the reality of hell (see Matthew 13:42 and 25:41), but He also indicated that it would lead to the total destruction of the entire person (compare Malachi 4:1, 3; Rom. 6:23; 2 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 20:14).¹

1 Sam 1:22,28 – Hannah presented Samuel before the Lord “forever,” which meant for as long as he would live.

2 Pet 3:12,13 – The old world where hellfire falls shall be dissolved, but God shall create a new heavens and earth.

A weak doctrine of hell includes only a few Biblical texts promoting an endless duration where the penalty eventually exceeds the crime, raising concerns regarding God's fairness and love (cf. Ezekiel 33:11).. A stronger doctrine of hell based on the broader witness of Scripture eventuates in the final destruction of the wicked. The stronger doctrine of hell, though still awful, is just and finishes the job of purging the universe of sin rather than quarantining it with perpetual suffering.

¹ Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., *Andrews Study Bible Notes* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 1,263.