

Does God Send People to Hell?

Is there life after death? And if there is, what should we expect? Most people sense that physical death does not end their existence. They also feel that they will have to give an account for their earthly lives. But is there really a heaven and a hell? What did Jesus Christ teach about the afterlife?

In her award winning book, *Just Give Me Jesus*, Anne Graham Lotz correctly observed that, “Jesus spoke more often about hell than he did about heaven. But no one talks much about hell today. No one likes to think about hell. No one seems to be informed about hell. Few really even believe in hell. But the Bible teaches that hell is a real place, prepared for those who refuse God’s gracious offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”

What does scripture teach about this place called hell? Lotz suggests that the Bible reveals at least seven truths about hell:

1. Hell is a place of physical agony, mental suffering, and emotional sorrow. Jesus described it as a place where there is gnashing of teeth and weeping.
2. Hell is a place of insecurity and fear. The Bible describes it as a bottomless pit, an abyss. Imagine the terror of constantly falling, trying desperately to grab onto something—anything—to stop the fall. Hell is a place where one lives with the constant, conscious awareness of imminent danger.
3. Hell is a place of instability. It is described as a lake of fire. A lake changes, fluctuates, with no firm surface on which to stand. Hell is a place where every moment is lived in uncertainty.
4. Hell is a place of darkness. It is totally devoid of light. Have you ever heard people quip that they want to go to hell to be with their friends? You might want to point out that while their friends may be in hell, they will never be seen. It’s pitch black in hell; there’s nothing to distract people from their suffering and sorrow and fears and insecurities and instability. When we are sick, our suffering seems to intensify in the middle of the night. We long for the daylight to come. Somehow just the light of day makes us feel better. But in hell the dawn never comes.
5. Hell is a place of loneliness. Each person is there alone. He or She may be able to hear the weeping and gnashing of teeth of others, but there is no one to talk to, no one to cry with, no one to even yell at. Each person is isolated in hate and bitterness and jealousy and pride and selfishness and meanness.
6. Hell is a place of dissatisfaction. Jesus described it as fire. It may be a literal fire that creates a physical sensation of burning or just an overwhelming yearning for God, for love, for joy, for peace, for life that will never be. It must be the equivalent of being intensely thirsty yet never having a drop of water. Or intensely hungry with never a crumb to eat.
7. Hell is a place of eternal separation from God. Each person who goes to hell will be separated forever from the source of life, the heart of love, the very One for Whom he or she was created.

Admittedly, the thought of a place called hell is emotionally difficult (if not impossible) to understand. However, we cannot ignore the facts because we find them emotionally disturbing. If we choose to reject the teaching of Jesus Christ, we better have compelling reasons for rejecting it.

In one sense, Lotz is right, “God doesn’t send anyone to hell. You send yourself there when you refuse His gracious offer of salvation.” Scripture says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “But,” as Lotz states, “if you refuse to believe, you will perish. You will go to hell. The choice is yours. Our desperate need for eternal life is met in Jesus Christ. All you and I need to do is receive Him.” (See: John 1:12).

To add perspective, “the Bible does not present us with a God who chances upon neutral men and women and arbitrarily consigns some to heaven and some to hell. He takes guilty men and women, all of whom deserve his wrath, and in his great mercy and love he saves vast numbers of them. Had he saved only one, it would have been an act of grace; that he saves a vast host affirms still more unmistakably the uncharted reaches of that grace. Hell stands as a horrible witness to human defiance in the face of great grace” (D. A. Carson).