

# Hell

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The word hell conjures up a multitude of thoughts and visions—both spiritual and metaphorical. In the Divine Comedy, Dante depicts hell as a complex and haunting place. Hell is often synonymous with fire, torture, demons, and death, a place of eternal punishment. Hell is often misunderstood, hence the many definitions and descriptions of hell from any number of religions.

## Two Different States of Hell

The scriptures outline the existence of two different states of hell: one is temporary before the resurrection, and the other is eternal after the final judgment.

### *The Temporary State of Hell in the Spirit World*

The Foundation's essay on the spirit world identifies a division of the spirit prison called hell, or temporary hell. Those who die in a serious state of sin, without a testimony of Jesus Christ, will be relegated to spend their time in temporary hell until the second resurrection (of the unjust) at the end of the millennium (John 5:28-29). In a revelation given to the prophet Joseph Smith the Lord said, "These are they who are cast down to hell and suffer the wrath of Almighty God, until the fullness of times, when Christ shall have subdued all enemies under his feet, and shall have perfected his work" (D&C 76:106).

The Lord describes these individuals as "liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers, and whosoever loves and makes a lie" (D&C 76:103). These

spirits will be resurrected, and because of God's infinite mercy, they will inherit the telestial kingdom (the third [lowest] level of heaven), be saved, and experience the presence of the Holy Ghost and the ministering of angels—but not the presence of God nor of Jesus Christ (D&C 76:88). They are damned because they can progress no further.

### *The Hell That Has No End in Outer Darkness*

The second state of hell is the one most popularly thought of among Christians—the hell that has no end. It is the hell that involves endless torment and separation from God, a place eternally without hope. This hell is also referred to as outer darkness. There is no mercy attending to these spirits because they are lost as the "sons of perdition" (John 17:12). The prophet Nephi further describes these sons of perdition and their grievous states and sins, and even those who become "like" the sons of perdition (3 Ne. 27:32 and 3 Ne. 29:7):

The apostle Bruce R. McConkie writes of the sons of perdition: "Lucifer is Perdition. He became such by open rebellion against the truth, a rebellion in the face of light and knowledge...In rebellion with him were one-third of the spirit hosts of heaven. These all were thus followers (or in other words sons) of perdition. They were denied bodies, were cast out onto the earth, and thus came the devil and his angels—a great host of sons of perdition" (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 746).

The Lord declared that there will be those who will not receive any degree of glory (D&C 88:24), stating: "...And they shall go away into everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment, which is eternal punishment, to reign with the devil and his angels in eternity, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, which is their torment—And the end thereof, neither the place thereof, nor their torment, no man knows" (D&C 76:44-45).

Besides the sons of perdition, these are individuals who have "sinned against the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 12:32), making it impossible to "renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:6).

### Few will be cast into Outer Darkness

The prophet Joseph F. Smith taught, "How fortunate it is that in the mercy of God there will be comparatively few who will partake of this awful misery and eternal darkness" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 1:49).

It is surprising to many Christians when they hear that very few will end up in the eternal hell that most are familiar with, but instead many will end up in the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms. Although the laws of mercy and justice must be satisfied in the final judgment of all mankind, our Father in Heaven desires that none of his children to suffer for all eternity, and will provide a way for them, even to the last, to avoid eternal suffering.

For those who may doubt this theology, and have children of your own, consider the following question: "how much evil must your own paternal children commit on earth before you would relegate them to a state of endless torment and suffering?" The scriptures say that our Father in Heaven loves us infinitely more than we love our own children. If we then find it difficult, if not impossible, to relegate our own children to endless torment for their actions on earth, how much more difficult is it for our Father in Heaven to relegate even one of his spirit children to endless suffering and torment?

Thus the Christian doctrine that provides for the children of God to be given as many opportunities as possible to be spared the horror of outer darkness. One must understand that life in the telestial kingdom is one of being *damned*, although there is no endless torment and suffering, there is a spiritual separation.

### Understanding the Term Damnation

Christians often misunderstand the term "damnation," which means to be condemned. Damnation literally means to have no more progression, or to be damned in the same sense that water is held back by a dam. We as children of a loving Heavenly Father want to progress and return to live with him in Heaven, and therefore our progression must include having faith in Jesus Christ, receiving the ordinances of salvation, and living a

righteous life on earth. If we fail to one degree or another, we will be held back—or damned. This is different than what is often taught as an "all or nothing" judgment.

### Conclusion

Understanding the concept of damnation, one can better grasp the doctrine that there is a temporary state of hell that exists immediately after death in the spirit world to punish those who have lived unrighteous lives on earth; and a permanent state of hell (outer darkness) that exists for those whom our Father in Heaven designates as deserving an eternity of suffering and pain following the final judgment. This concept of two states of hell is consistent with the scriptures and the knowledge that our Father in Heaven is all loving and powerful and desires not to lose even one soul to the adversary. In the end there will be many who will not choose the right and will place themselves outside of God's presence—but not necessarily a place of endless suffering.

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