

Hell

(Rev. 05/25)

Do you get to see who goes to Hell?

This is a tough question; the Bible doesn't exactly say and I've heard good arguments for both sides. I CAN say that in every example I know of, it does seem to imply we will all be around at the time of Judgment:

“But when the Son of Man [Jesus] comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.’” “Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.’” - Matthew 25:31-34, 41 (NLT)

If this is a literal picture of Heaven, then we will see people split between “saved” and “not saved”. If that was the end of the story, then the answer has to be “yes”. Unfortunately, that's NOT the end of the story... The problem is this:

1. These verses are stuck in the middle of a bunch of stories that Jesus is telling to help people get an idea of Heaven; they aren't actual descriptions, they're more like “stories with a purpose”. Because of that, we need to be very, very careful about assuming this is what will actually happen.
2. People are referred to as “sheep” and “goats”. While that works really well for a story, it may not be the best way to describe humans.
3. According to this, the only reason you get sent to Heaven because you give to the poor...which goes against everything else God says in other places.
4. According to this, the only reason you get sent to Hell is because you do NOT give to the poor...which goes against everything else God says in other places.

Because of all of these reasons, we can't be 100% sure this describes what really happens; it may be a story, instead. There's another place we can find something like this, and it's found in the Book of Revelation:

I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. - Revelation 20:12 (NLT)

This still has some questions that go along with it. If everyone who has ever lived is before the throne of God, does that mean we'll be able to tell who everyone is? Will we be able to hear the sentence passed? Will we be more focused on God than on what's happening? Will we worry more about our turn than we do about the other people who are there? I'm not really sure.

The one thing I am pretty certain of, as far as the afterlife goes, is that when we see God, we will realize that His judgment, whatever that is, is fair; that His standards of “right” and “wrong” are better than ours. I think we'll also be able to respect God for allowing other people to choose NOT to follow Him and will agree that if they want to choose Hell, it's their choice.

Does God punish us every day for our sins and when we die?

Quick answer? No! Let me show you:

For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else. They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty. These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for! They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others. They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words.

"What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?" Look at these wicked people—enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply. - Psalm 73:3-12 (NLT)

So, according to this, do people get punished every day for their sins? No. Sometimes the wicked thrive and everything goes well for them! Seems unfair, right? But we need to remember that it's only for a time. Let me show you how that Psalm ends:

Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you. But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do. - Psalm 73:27-28 (NLT)

In the end, though, the wicked people die...just like the good people. Then everything they've gained, everything they've built, every benefit they had...ends. You don't get to take your toys with you and God isn't impressed by how successful you were on earth!

At that point, there IS a judgment:

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to those who were following him, he said, "I tell you the truth, I haven't seen faith like this in all Israel! And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. But many Israelites—those for whom the Kingdom was prepared—will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." - Matthew 8:10-12 (NLT)

Hell isn't a punishment for sins; it's a recognition of the right of humans to choose to reject God. You don't want God in your life on earth? Then why would God force you to spend eternity with Him in Heaven?

These people aren't punished by God, they chose to reject God; and God respects them enough to let them go their own way for all eternity... It's our choice.

If God created us with a future from our beginning, why would He plan for most of the

world to go to Hell?

All right, this one needs a little explanation, because it depends on the theology – the beliefs about God – that you have. If you come from what is called “Calvinism”, you believe in five main points – the acronym is “TULIP”:

- Total Depravity / Original Sin
- Unconditional Election
- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace
- Perseverance of the Saints

For the sake of our discussion, we need to deal with the middle three:

Unconditional Election – The belief that God picks who He will save.

Limited Atonement – The belief that Jesus died only for those God picked, not for “the world”.

Irresistible Grace – The belief that whoever God calls to be saved WILL be saved.

If you believe in Calvinism – especially the strict “Five Point Calvinism” I described above – then that means that God made most of the people in the world specifically to go to Hell. They have no choice. Before they were born, God condemned them to an eternity in Hell. Why would He do that? I don’t know. And, unfortunately, that’s the end of this answer for people who subscribe to Calvinist theology.

But, there are other viewpoints out there. Another theological view says that we have a choice – the term used is “free will”. Does anyone know what the most well-known verse in the entire Bible is? (John 3:16) In John 3:16, we’re told:

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son.” - John 3:16-18 (NLT)

In this passage, there is a cool word that most people overlook: “everyone”. In the Greek, the word is “pas” or it’s root “pan”. That word means “all, without exception, no exemptions”. In other words, the Greek verse tell us that ANYONE who does what... (Believes.) Believes in what? (In Him – the Son, Jesus Christ.) Will be what? (Saved.)

If Jesus is right, then salvation is open to anyone who believes. At that point, salvation isn’t based on God’s decision, it’s based on our acceptance of Him, by faith.

The cool thing is that Hell is no longer just a place of punishment! (Does that sound strange?) Instead, it’s God honoring our ability to either choose or reject His Son, Jesus. If we say we want no part of God, then God honors that right throughout eternity. Hell is the logical outcome to a loving God who will not force us to be with Him if we don’t want to.

So, long answer, but this question depends entirely on your theology...

What does the Bible say about Hell?

This one is going to require you to do some research on your own, because if I put all of the verses in here, the NDQ document would jump up another 50-60 pages! So, here's what we know about Hell:

Hell is a place of eternal punishment for those who don't follow God (Matthew 25:45); it's a place of destruction (Matthew 10:28); it's the price for our sins – the times we look away from God (Romans 6:23); we choose it when we choose not to follow God (Revelation 20:15); it's away from the presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:9); and, in the end, even Satan and Death will be thrown into Hell (Revelation 20:14).

Our goal, though, should NOT be to run away from Hell – although that's always a good place to stay away from! – but, instead, to run toward a God who loves us enough to send His Son, Jesus, to keep us out of there!

Why would God send anybody to Hell if he loves them? Wouldn't an all-powerful, all-loving God be able and willing to save ALL his children, even if they didn't believe in Him?

Okay, I'm going to do a “short answer” here! If you want/need more, let me know. To answer this, I need to break this down into smaller pieces:

All right, let's begin at the beginning...literally. If there is a God and if God created the universe, then that God would be able to set the rules and laws for the universe, right? If that God said that gravity was 20 times more powerful, we wouldn't get to argue with Him; we'd just be as flat as a pancake. Why? Because that God would have the right – since He created everything – to decide how everything worked.

The same rules would apply to the definitions of “good” and “bad”, “right” or “wrong”. Whatever that God liked or approved of would be “good” and “right”; whatever He said not to do would be “bad” or “wrong”. Again, if that God created us, it would be His right to define reality. We could argue with Him, but it's His universe, we're His creation, and we don't get to set the rules, He does.

Hopefully that makes sense so far. Now, it's going to get a little...sideways...

This same God would then have a choice to make, and that choice is “choice” itself. Let me explain. God could make beings that either always had to obey Him, or He could make beings that could choose to NOT obey Him. Unfortunately, you can't have it both ways.

If you want beings who always only ever do what you want, then they cannot have a choice to do otherwise. They are robots, pre-programmed with responses from the very beginning! Now, can beings like that love you? Not remotely! They have no choice NOT to love you! Oh, you could program them to SAY they love you, but it wouldn't be real! Without choice, it's not love. (To use a more direct analogy, if someone held a gun to your head and said, “Marry me or die!”, would you marry them out of “love” or out of “force”?)

If you want beings that are capable of love, they MUST be capable of choice. In fact, one of the

greatest – and most terrifying – parts of love is when you extend love – true love, not “sex” like our world defines it – and you are accepted by the other person! They don’t have to, but for some reason they do! When you KNOW that the other person loves you, the feeling is...incredible!

If God creates beings that are forced to love Him, is He good? Is He loving? Or, is He the puppet-master, pulling the strings? Would you love a God like that if you knew that you had no choice BUT to love Him? Most of us would reject a God like that...

So, if God gives us an actual choice – a choice to love Him or not – then we have three possible outcomes:

First, everyone loves and accepts God. Everyone wants to be nice to each other, to help their fellow humans, and to serve God. Take a look at the news. Is this the option we chose?

Second, some people love and accept God...and others reject Him. Everyone is free to make their own choices – some for good and some for bad. But, even if we choose to reject God, He shows up, slaps a gun to our head, and drags us off, kicking and screaming, to spend eternity with a God that we never wanted in the first place. How loving is He then? (In my mind, this would be the equivalent of calling “rape” the same thing as “love”.)

Third, we encounter the same scenario as the second outcome: some people love and accept God...and others reject Him. Everyone is free to make their own choices – some for good and some for bad. And God honors our ability to choose by either accepting us home or by allowing us to walk away.

If the third outcome is correct, Hell isn’t a place that we’re “sent to”; it’s God honoring our ability to walk away. We chose, and God honors that choice!

By the way, C. S. Lewis talked a lot about Heaven and Hell in his writings. (Yes, he wrote more than The Chronicles of Narnia!) In one of his books, Lewis asks us to picture a man who has gained great wealth and power but is mean and abusive. He paints the picture of a really cruel man who doesn’t care about how he treats others. He then says:

“The demand that God should forgive such a man while he remains what he is, is based on a confusion between condoning and forgiving. To condone an evil is simply to ignore it, to treat it as if it were good. But forgiveness needs to be accepted as well as offered if it is to be complete: and a man who admits no guilt can accept no forgiveness.” (The Problem of Pain, by C.S. Lewis – quoted on cslewis.com)

By the way, I don’t necessarily subscribe to the medieval views of Hell. Yes, Jesus describes Hell in a story – not a technical description – as being a place of flames. (Luke 16:19-31.) If you read it from a Jewish perspective – the audience Jesus was speaking to – He isn’t teaching about Hell, but He’s condemning the Nation of Israel for its sins.

But, Jesus also teaches Hell is a place of “outer darkness”, a place where people “gnash their teeth” in emotional anguish, not necessarily physical pain. (Matthew 8:12) We’re also told:

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns where he had done so many of his miracles, because they hadn't repented of their sins and turned to God. "What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. I tell you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on judgment day than you.

"And you people of Capernaum, will you be honored in heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in wicked Sodom, it would still be here today. I tell you, even Sodom will be better off on judgment day than you." - Matthew 11:20-24 (NLT)

In other words, people are judged not just by whether they have accepted God or not; but also by how much they had the chance to know God. Hell isn't a "one-size-fits-all punishment"; instead, God extends mercy, even in Hell.

In my view – and I would never teach it from the front of a church – is that Hell is a place where we can sit and think. We can think about the God we rejected. We can think about what we missed out on. We can think of the mistakes we've made. We can think of our faults and failures.

And to me, I would choose fire and flames ANY day over the idea of being trapped inside my head, alone with my thoughts, for all of eternity...

Why would God send people to Hell?

This is probably THE most asked question I get! (Or at least the Top 5!) The problem is, it's not the right question to ask... Let me explain what I mean:

I love my wife and my wife loves me – at least she tells me she does. Now one day, let's say that my wife decides that she doesn't love me anymore and wants to go out with someone different. I have two choices at that point: I can let her go and hope that she will return to me; or I can get a sharpened piece of paper and a lemon and threaten her with nasty paper cuts if she leaves me.

Which one of these shows love? The fact that I am willing to let her walk away if it makes her happy and she thinks it's what's best for her, or forcing her to stay with me when she doesn't want to? If she only tells me she loves me because she doesn't want a paper cut, does she really love me?

God lets us walk away from Him because He will never force us to spend time with Him if we don't want to. If God will let us do that on earth, then why would He force us to spend all of eternity with Him? If we choose to walk away, He will never force us to come back.

But, if we do WANT to come back, God has made a way for us:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. - Romans 5:6-9 (NLT)

So you see, the question isn't why would God send people to Hell? The better question is, "Why would someone not want to go to Heaven?" And that's a question that only you can answer for yourself...

Table Of Contents

Hell.....	1
Do you get to see who goes to Hell?.....	2
Does God punish us every day for our sins and when we die?.....	3
If God created us with a future from our beginning, why would He plan for most of the world to go to Hell?.....	3
What does the Bible say about Hell?.....	5
Why would God send anybody to Hell if he loves them? Wouldn't an all-powerful, all-loving God be able and willing to save ALL his children, even if they didn't believe in Him?.....	5
Why would God send people to Hell?.....	7
Table Of Contents.....	9