

The doctrines of Purgatory and Hellfire are taught and believed by many. But are they in the Bible?

“The dead no longer know anything”—Ecclesiastes 9:5 NAB

“Those who contend with you shall be as nothing and will perish . . . Those who war with you will be as nothing and non-existent”—Isaiah 41:11,12 NASB

The Bible teaches that death is non-existence. Purgatory is a Catholic doctrine which teaches there is an intermediate state after physical death in which some of those ultimately destined for heaven must first undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven, holding that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come. But what does the Bible teach? Let’s compare some Catholic claims about the doctrine of Purgatory to the Scriptures.



Catholics claim:

Those that build their foundations on wood, grass or straw will be burned when we are purified to go to purgatory. Yet they will be saved though only as men are saved by passing through fire. All people who go to purgatory will be saved though suffering (fire).

THE BIBLE SAYS:

Paul was using word pictures, such as metaphors, in the account at [1 Corinthians 3:10-17](#). He uses simile in verse 15 saying “the person will be saved, but ONLY AS THROUGH FIRE.” (Catholic New American Bible [NAB])

Is the doctrine of Purgatory a true Biblical teaching?

The fire is figurative for spiritual cleansing and difficulty prior to death, not after! Even the Catholic New American Bible (NAB) footnote on this verse admits: "THE TEXT OF V 15 HAS SOMETIMES BEEN USED TO SUPPORT THE NOTION OF PURGATORY, THOUGH IT DOES NOT ENVISAGE THIS."

Catholics claim:

1 John 5:16 gives us the idea that there are sins "unto death" and sins that "are not unto death." Sins that are unto death are those sins committed that kill the soul. Those sins that are not unto death are those sins that injure the soul but do not kill it. These are the sins that are forgiven in purgatory. We see purgatory all over the Old Testament sometimes called the bosom of Abraham or Sheol.

THE BIBLE SAYS

When you actually look at the scriptures, such as **1 John 5:16**, you'll see that it says: "**IF ANYONE SEES HIS BROTHER SINNING, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God.**" (NAB) This is obviously talking about a brother that is sinning who is still alive, not someone who is dead in "purgatory."

Purgatory is a "**myth**" that "**does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" (**1 Timothy 1:4; 1 Timothy 6:3 NAB**) There are ZERO OCCURENCES OF PURGATORY IN THE BIBLE. Sheol is the Hebrew word, meaning the symbolic common grave of mankind. It is not literal, so there is no literal fire, or burning, there.

Catholics claim:

These are places where the Old Testament Fathers await Christ to come and preach to them

to set them free.

THE BIBLE SAYS:

Not according to the Bible — **“For Sheol cannot praise you, nor Death celebrate you; those who go down to the pit can hope no longer in your constancy. The Living, the living are the ones who praise you as I do today.” (Isaiah 38:18 Catholic NJB)**

Catholics claim:

What possible reason would Christ have to go to Hell to preach to the damned? The Damned will not get any consolation from it. It would be more likely that he went to the righteous to show them that He was the messiah and that it was time for them to follow Him to heaven.

THE BIBLE SAYS

The Bible says that Jesus: **“WENT TO PREACH TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON, WHO HAD ONCE BEEN DISOBEDIENT WHILE GOD PATIENTLY WAITED IN THE DAYS OF NOAH.” (1 Peter 3:19-20 NAB)** This, along with **Genesis 6:4; 2 Peter 2:4** and **Jude 7** makes clear that these “spirits” Jesus preached to were demons. Jesus went to inform them of their upcoming destruction **(Luke 4:34 NAB)**.

Catholics claim:

You are saying that Jesus went to the underworld to preach to demons. Because of this, the Demons could be saved? Was Jesus just telling them, “Ha! Ha! You guys are going to fry here in hell for all time?”

THE BIBLE SAYS

No, he simply preached a message of judgment. As the demons asked Jesus at **Luke 4:34**

(NAB), “Have you come to destroy us?” Jesus confirmed that he would indeed eventually “destroy” or obliterate them – not “fry” them in a hot roasting hell for eternity.

Catholics claim:

Hades and Purgatory are the same thing. Hades is Greek and Purgatory is Latin.

THE BIBLE SAYS:

Hades is in the New Testament 22 times. The so-called “Purgatory” is in the New Testament zero times. The New Testament was written originally in Greek, not Latin. The meaning Catholics assert for their myth “Purgatory” is in stark contradiction with the meaning the Bible attaches to Hades.

Catholics claim:

There is a problem with the Greek because Hades means both a temporal place of punishment or a permanent place of torment, Hell.

THE BIBLE SAYS:

It means neither.

The New Testament Greek uses *Hades* in place of the Old Testament Hebrew, *Sheol*. The Bible uses these words to mean one thing only, that is, the symbolic common grave of mankind, or nonexistence, until resurrection.

“For you will not abandon me to Sheol, you cannot allow your faithful servant to see the abyss.” (Psalm 16:10 Catholic NJB)

“He spoke with foreknowledge about the resurrection of the Christ: he is the one

who was not abandoned to Hades, and whose body did not see corruption.” (Acts 2:31 Catholic NJB)

We can see from the verses above that the terms *Sheol* and *Hades* are interchangeable – they mean the same thing in the Bible. People who will receive a resurrection are said to go there, even righteous people, such as Jesus when he died.

Catholics claim:

Purgatory will be emptied in the final days. That means it exists now. Remember, you are saved if you are in Purgatory.

THE BIBLE SAYS:

You’d better read it again. It says Hades will be emptied. It says nothing about Purgatory.

“The sea gave up its dead; then Death and Hades gave up their dead. All the dead were judged according to their deeds”—Revelation 20:13 NAB. Purgatory is a nonexistent myth.

“Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life”—Romans 4:17 NLT. The Bible teaches that the dead are dead, not alive, and that God will resurrect some *“back to life.”*

How About “The Lake of Fire”?

Protestants claim that hell is a literal fire where wicked people are literally tortured forever. The Bible says that hell is temporary: **“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death” (Revelation 20:14 NIV).** Death, which all humans inherited from Adam (**Romans 5:12**), and **“Hades”** both come to an end.

Is **“the lake of fire”** “hellfire,” as is commonly claimed? No, the Bible makes clear

that **“the lake of fire is the second death.”** What is **“the second death”**? **“This refers to the eternal death, when sinners will receive their final punishment” (Catholic NAB note on [Revelation 2:11](#)).**

Protestants also cite [Mark 9:47,48](#) as “proof” that hell is a fire. **“If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (NAB).** “[9:44,46] These verses, lacking in some important early manuscripts, are here omitted as scribal additions. They simply repeat [Mk 9:48](#)”—NAB footnote

The Greek word “Gehenna”, transliterated in the just quoted NAB, means eternal death, eternal non-existence, not eternal life in “hellfire”. In Jesus’ day, his listeners were very familiar with the fact that **“Gehenna” was “the rubbish dump of Jerusalem, with its perpetual fires” (Catholic New Jerusalem Bible [NJB] note on [Mark 9:48](#))**, and the fires were kept going continually by adding sulfur, or brimstone, to them. The dead bodies of animals, and even hard-core criminals who had been executed by stoning, whose bodies no one claimed for a decent burial, and were viewed as unworthy of resurrection were also thrown into this huge garbage dump called “Gehenna”. Jesus’ listeners were very familiar with these facts, and he built his metaphor about the eternally dead state of the wicked upon it.

On the edges of this huge dump site located in the Valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem’s south wall, however, were ‘worms’ or maggots, which ate the refuse, where the fires did not reach. Those who use these verses to “prove” hellfire, are, in effect, claiming there are ‘worms’ burning eternally in hellfire. How ridiculous!

CONCLUSION

Every human has choices to make about their beliefs and actions.

“Choose today whom you will serve”—Joshua 25:15

“Choose life”—Deuteronomy 30:19

“Hellfire” and “Purgatory” are pagan myths, **“false doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3,4)**, that were fused into Christianity by **“false teachers” (2 Peter 2:1-3)**.

God does not torture anyone, nor does he threaten anyone with torture. **“The dead do not know anything . . . there is no . . . knowledge . . . in Sheol” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10 NASB)**.

“To burn . . . in the fire . . . a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind” (Jeremiah 19:5 NASB), God said.

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:33), not eternal life in hellfire.

Nonexistence is the future for all who do not serve God. **“The wicked, enemies of Yahweh, will be destroyed, they will vanish like the green of the pastures, they will vanish like smoke” (Psalm 37:20 NJB)**

As we can see from the Bible, the doctrines of Purgatory and Hellfire are false teachings, and do not hold up to what the Bible says about what happens to a person after they die.