

Hell: the temporary abode of suffering or a place of eternal punishment

What happens to us after we die?

Copyright©2011 Mormon Outreach Ministries, Sydney

Both Bible believing Christians and Latter-day Saints (members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) believe in the Great White Throne of Judgement (Revelation 20:11-15). Everyone will stand before the judgement seat of God. Each one of us shall give an account of him/herself to God (Romans 14:10-12, 2 Corinthians 5:10). While the Bible teaches hell is a place of eternal punishment, the Mormon Church teaches that hell *per se* exists eternally as an institution, but is a temporary condition of suffering in the spirit prison before the Judgement and only a limited number will remain in hell eternally. Is the "hell" taught by the Mormon Church the same as hell taught by the Bible? To explore the truth about hell, we have studied Mormon Church scriptures and official teaching and compare them with biblical teaching. We will start with (1) Mormon teachings about our afterlife, then move to (2) their teachings about hell and (3) finally see if *the Book of Mormon* contains the current Mormon authoritative teachings on afterlife. (See our article, "What happens to those who have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel message?")

I What happens to us after we die?

The Mormon Church teaches that after death our spirits will go to the spirit world, which is divided into two; "paradise" and "spirit prison." (*Gospel Principles*, 2009, pp.242-244- an official teaching manual of the Mormon Church). "Paradise" in Mormonism is a temporary place and the section of the spirit world where the spirits of righteous people will go after death. The "spirit prison" is (1) for the spirits of those who have not yet received the Mormon gospel (all the teachings, laws, and ordinances of the Mormon Church) and (2) for the spirits of those who have rejected the Mormon gospel on earth or in the spirit prison (*Gospel Principles*, Chapter 41). Spirits of Latter-day Saints in the spirit world will continue to work all the way to exaltation/godhood (*Gospel Principles*, p.243, *Doctrine and Covenants* 138:30-D&C is one of LDS scriptures). They will do a missionary work, preaching the Mormon gospel to those who are in the spirit prison. If a spirit accepts the Mormon gospel and a Latter-day Saint on earth goes through *all* the ordinances, including baptism, priesthood for men, endowments and sealings for him or her, he or she will enter "paradise." (*Doctrine & Covenants Student Manual*, p.446, 447- an official Mormon Church teaching manual)

The Mormon Church also teaches that there are four levels of final destiny. At the Final Judgement people will inherit a place in one of three kingdoms in heaven: the celestial kingdom (the highest kingdom), the terrestrial kingdom (the middle kingdom) and the telestial kingdom (the lowest) and only the sons of perdition will go to outer darkness (*Gospel Principles*, p.271-273). After the resurrection most people eventually leave spirit prison and go to the telestial kingdom (*Gospel Principles*, p.244). (See our article, "Heaven").

By contrast, the Bible teaches that there are only two final destinies: eternal heaven or eternal hell (Daniel 12:2, Matthew 25:31-46, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9). Jesus himself taught the two destinies: to spend eternity in *the kingdom of heaven* or in *outer darkness* (Matthew 8:11-12), in *life eternal* with God or in *everlasting punishment* (Matt.25:46), in the *kingdom of God* with God or in *hell fire* (Mark 9:47), having *everlasting life* or *perishing* (John.3: 16). ¹ Jesus had more to say about hell than about heaven (Matt.10:28, 13:40, 25:41b).

Secondly, the Bible teaches that those who die in the Christ of the New Testament immediately go into God's presence and enjoy fellowship with him there (Luke 23:43, Philippians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:8).² The judgement of believers will be a judgement to evaluate and bestow various degrees of reward, not to eternally condemn (John 5:24, Luke 19:17,19, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 4:10,11).

The souls of those who die without the Christ of the New Testament immediately go to a state of eternal punishment(Luke 16:24-26), **their bodies will not be raised until the day of final judgement** (John 5:28-29, Acts 24:15).³ On that day their bodies will be raised and reunited with their souls, and they will stand before the throne of the great judgement, then they will be cast out into the lake of fire and experience eternal condemnation (Rev. 20:11-15). This includes moral, honourable non-Christians, who reject God's free gift of eternal life, or those who attempt to achieve God's demand for perfection other than by trusting in Christ's righteousness. Those people await eternal separation from the Heavenly Father.

II What is the truth about hell?

The Mormon Church defines hell in three ways :

(1) The "temporary abode in the spirit prison" for wicked spirits before Judgement (*Gospel Principles* ,p.244,The "BIBLE DICTIONARY" in *The Holy Bible*, 1979 Mormon Church edition, p.700). **Hell, as thus defined, will have an end.** After their debts are paid, the majority will go to the telestial kingdom.

(2) People's experience, in lower kingdoms of heaven, of regret at failing to enter the celestial kingdom (*The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ and His Apostles*, p.66-an official LDS teaching manual). Eternal punishment in Mormonism is a **punishment imposed by God who is eternal**, not a punishment that lasts for eternity (D&C 19:4-12)

(3) Outer darkness, the permanent habitation of the devil and his angels including the sons of perdition after the resurrection and judgement (*Gospel Principles*, p.273, *LDS BIBLE DICTIONARY*, p.700). After the resurrection, the devil, his angels and sons of perdition will remain in "hell"/ outer darkness. Outer darkness in Mormonism is the concept closest to the Biblical teaching on hell (*Gospel Principles*, p.273, *Alma* 40:13-14 in the *Book of Mormon*). Who are the sons of perdition? They are apostates, ex-Mormons, but not all ex-Mormons are sons of perdition.⁴

By contrast, the Bible teaches that hell is the destination of those who pass under God's judgement. Hell is described as "everlasting fire" (Matthew 25:41), as "fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8), as "the bottomless pit" (Rev. 9:1-2), and a place which is characterised by "wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.13: 42). He teaches the seriousness of hell in Mark 9:43. " *And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched*" (See Matt. 18: 9)

The Bible teaches that hell will last as long as Heaven does. The parallel between eternal life and eternal punishment shows that both states will be without end (Matthew 25:46). **The Bible teaches that there are degrees of punishment in hell** (Matt.10:5, 11:21-24, Heb.10:29, Rev. 20:11-15). God will judge the wicked according to the things they have done in this life (Ecclesiastics 12:14).

The Bible does not speak about people leaving hell (Revelation 21:8, Luke 16:23). **The Bible does not support a second chance to accept Christ after death** (Hebrew 9:27, Proverbs 11:7, Luke 16:26, John 8:24). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus teaches that there will be no second chance to repent after death if we do not respond to the message God has already revealed in the Bible in this life (Luke 16:19-31).

In Revelation 21:8, the "unbelieving" are among those who will be cast out to the lake of fire. The unbelieving includes moral and honourable people who died without having a saving faith in the Jesus of the New Testament. Their lives demonstrated opposition to the God of the Bible.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorceries and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

God says, "Behold now is the day of salvation" in 2 Corinthians 6:2. Even *The Book of Mormon* agrees with 2 Cor.6:2 (Alma 34:32, Mosiah 15:24-27). Alma 34:31 says, "this life is the day for men to perform their labor."

III What does the *Book of Mormon* teach about the afterlife?

The Book of Mormon teaches two destinies after death (2 Nephi 28:22, 1 Nephi 15:35, Alma 42:16). Alma 34:32-35, 42:16 says that upon death our fate is either eternal punishment or its opposite, the plan of eternal happiness. In verse 31 note, "now is the time and the day of your salvation."

See the following passages in the Book of Mormon.

The devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell and behold others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell. (2 Nephi 28:21-22)

There is a place prepared, yea, even that awful hell of which I have spoken, and the devil is the preparator of it; wherefore the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out because of that justice of which I have spoken. (1 Nephi 15:35)

The Book of Mormon also teaches never-ending torment (Mosiah 2:39-41). Mosiah 2: 39 says, "And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment." This teaching agrees with the Bible, but not with current Mormon authoritative teachings.

The Mormon Church claims that the *Book of Mormon* contains the fullness of the gospel (Introduction to the Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants 20: 8–9, 27:5). Joseph Smith said, "I told the brethren that *the Book of Mormon* was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book" (Introduction to the Book of Mormon). How can the Mormon Church claim the *Book of Mormon* to be the most correct book on the earth when important Mormon teachings such as three heavens, hell being temporary, men progressing to become gods, are not taught in it?

Conclusion: The Bible teaches that there are *only* two destinies after death: heaven and hell. This is based on whether or not each person has accepted the free gift of eternal life during his/her time on earth (John 3:16-17, Acts 16:31). Nowhere does the Bible say hell is a temporary purging, preparatory to the celestial kingdom. The Bible does not support a second chance to accept Christ after death (Hebrew 9:27). Our nature and choice are sinful and none of us deserves God's grace or the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ – these are entirely unmerited, gifts from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). The *Book of Mormon* also teaches *two destinies after death* (2 Nephi 28:22, 1 Nephi 15:35) *and* never-ending torment (Mosiah 2:39). Jesus himself warned about the horror of *hell*, using graphic description: unquenchable fire (Matt.3: 12), *damnation* of hell (Matt.23: 33) furnace of fire (Matt.13: 42,50) a place prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt25:41). Do you think Jesus was lying when he taught the horror of hell?

1 M.W.Cowan & S.R.Doty, "Are there Three Heavens?" (Utah Christian Publications, <http://www.utahchristianpub.org/publications/track01.htm>)

2 *Some Christians think that OT saints went to the underworld, but since Christ's ascension, those who are in Christ have directly gone to God's presence. But the Old Testament teaches that OT saints went immediately into God's presence upon death* (Genesis 5:24, 2Kings 2:11, Proverb 14:32, Luke16:25). Matthew 22:32 implies that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living and having unbroken fellowship with God. [Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, IVP, 1994) p.821-822]

3 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.824

4 A friend of mine who once was a Mormon, now a Christian and runs a Christian outreach ministry to Latter-day Saints, has been told that he is a son of perdition, as he had the truth and rejected it and is now working against it. (See *Teachings of Joseph Smith*, p.358, quoted in *The Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, p.161)