



# THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

or

**The Significance  
of Luke 16:19-31  
for  
Christian Apologetics**

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## OUTLINE

Thesis Statement: It is the intent of this paper to present sufficient evidence to conclusively substantiate that hell is a literal place as presented in Luke 16:19-31: being a real place, with literal fire, and severe torment, from which those who reject Christ will never escape.

### I. Introduction to the Controversy Surrounding the Subject of Hell in Luke 16.

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- B. A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament.
- C. A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the book of Luke.
- D. A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the context.

E. A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the text.

**IV. Doctrinal Evidence Calls for a Literal Interpretation of Hell.**

A. Because the Bible is 100% trustworthy, its teachings on hell should be believed as they were intended to be understood.

B. The veracity of Christ supports a literal hell.

C. Human beings were created by a direct act of God and are thus accountable to Him.

D. Because God is holy He can justly expect men to be holy.

E. The sinfulness of people is absolutely repulsive to God thus igniting His wrath.

F. The justice of God demands that He punish men when they come short of His standard of holiness.

**V. Expository Evidence Calls for a Literal Interpretation of Hell.**

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B. Expository evidence from Christ's vivid description of hell, Luke 16:23-24.

C. Expository evidence from the description of hell's permanence, Luke 16:25-26

D. Expository evidence drawn from the Rich Man's concern for those still living, Luke 16:27-31.

**VI. Conclusion**

# Introduction to the Controversy Surrounding the Subject of Hell in Luke 16

## A Brief Description Of Our Text And Its Controversy

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus told a story about two men. Lazarus, presumably a god-fearing believer, was described as a beggar of the most pathetic sort. The other man, a very rich but godless unbeliever, is unnamed in the account, though he is commonly referred to as Dives. In the process of time both men died, probably about the same time. Lazarus went directly to Abraham's bosom (paradise) and was comforted. The Rich Man on the other hand went to hell where he suffered great torments.

The remainder of the story reiterates the conversation between the Rich Man and Abraham. Their conversation depicts hell as a real place where people are conscious, where they can remember, and where they experience pain. The Rich Man begged for a drop of water to cool his tongue due to the torment that he was experiencing in the flames of hell. He was told by Abraham that his petition could not be granted since there was a great gulf between hell and paradise. Realizing his own hopelessness, he then begged for Lazarus to be sent back to witness to his lost brothers.

This story, when taken literally, presents a vivid picture of the torments of a literal hell. Those who oppose such a view of hell have cunningly devised theories to sidestep its reality. These theories generally attack the reality, literality, or severity of hell. For this reason this text becomes a very significant passage in the light of Christian Apologetics on the subject of the hell.

## Arguments against a literal interpretation of hell followed by a brief refutation.

There are many arguments against a literal interpretation of hell as found in Luke 16:19-31. It would be impossible to include all such arguments, but several of the most common will be discussed.

**The Theory Of Universalism Eliminates Hell Altogether.** "Universalism, also known as the doctrine of *apokatastasis* (restoration), emphasizes that one day the bad dream of sin will be over and we shall all rise and go back to our Father and home" (Dixon 26). This is a doctrine which says that "*all* without exception will be redeemed" (Dixon 26). Pinnock claims that the teachings of universalism can be traced back through the centuries to Origen (141).

Universalists base their theory in part on 2 Peter 3:9 which states that God "*is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" They claim that because of His unwillingness that any should perish, God will insure that all people will be brought to Himself. Colossians 1:19-20 is sometimes used to support this reasoning as well, since it states that through Christ, God will "*reconcile all things unto*

*himself."*

Other universalists argue that the love of God demands that He save all men. Ferré is quoted as saying, "The final resurrection can mean nothing less than the victory of Christ over all his enemies; the final victory of universal Love is universal salvation" (Qtd. in Dixon 49). This argument is prevalent among liberals of our day.

Fudge describes the modern face of universalism as slightly different from that of the old universalism. This new universalism leans more toward the purgatorial view of the afterlife. "It sees sin and wrath as *temporary*, on the ground that God's wrath and punishment are aimed at salvation of all men" (Berkouwer qtd. in Fudge 200). Though evil men may suffer some punishment for their sin, all men will ultimately be saved.

There are several biblical problems with the universalist view. First, God may want everyone to be saved, but this fails to take into account the fact that some men do not want to love God and be saved. Will God force them to love Him and be saved? (Pinnock 142). According to John 3:36, salvation is conditional—those who do not believe will suffer God's wrath. God will not force anyone to be saved.

Second, universalism does not adequately address the sinfulness of man in relation to the holiness of God. God hates sin, and His holiness demands that He punish sin eternally (cf. Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 25:40-41).

Third, universalism contradicts the clear teaching that the wicked will be eternally separated from God (cf. Daniel 12:2; Matthew 2:21-23; 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Fourth, universalism is based more on philosophical and logical assumptions than it is on Scripture. When the Scripture is believed to be inspired by God and is taken literally, universalism has no leg to stand upon as Bancroft points out. "When Scripture further asserts that the unbeliever shall not see life (John 3:36), and that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46), it assuredly does not suggest that . . . all mankind will eventually attain salvation" (Bancroft 227).

**The Purgatorial View Of Hell Offers Sinners An Escape.** The purgatorial view of the afterlife is commonly held by Catholics. In defending this position, Hayes states, "we need to point out that for some Christians, hell is clearly a fact, while for others it is a possibility, and for yet others, it is a situation that will eventually be overcome" (92). Hayes goes on to define purgatory as, "the state, place, or condition in the next world between heaven and hell, a state of purifying suffering for those who have died and are still in need of such purification" (93).

In response to the question, "Is purgatory Scriptural?," Hayes admits, "Whether the doctrine of purgatory can be defended as having any basis in Scripture will depend on how one approaches the Bible and understands revelation" (101).

When the Bible is approached as the inspired Word of God without the confusion of church creeds and tradition, it is found to teach an eternal hell with no mention of purgatory. The following passages of Scripture address the endlessness of such punishment. This punishment will consist of *eternal* burnings, Isaiah 33:14; *eternal* contempt, Daniel 12:2; *eternal* fire, Matthew 18:8, 25:41; *eternal* punishment, Matthew 25:46; *eternal* destruction, 2 Thessalonians 1:9; and torment for *ever and ever*, Revelation 20:10.

Since Biblical references do not teach the doctrine of purgatory, the Catholic Church has relied upon church tradition and to a small extent the Apocrypha to support this belief. This view of hell offers little genuine argument against the literal view of an eternal hell, and is totally unfounded when the Scripture alone is called to its defense.

**The Conditional View Of Hell Declares God To Be Too Merciful To Inflict Eternal Punishment.** Supporters of this view (also known as conditional immorality) argue that a God of great mercy would never stoop so low as to torture men. This view does not ignore the reality of hell, but presents hell as annihilation. Conditionalists believe sinners will be condemned, but that this condemnation will come to a swift and merciful end. Pinnock argues, "How then can we project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness? Torturing people without end is not the sort of thing the 'Abba' Father of Jesus would do" (140).

The Jehovah's Witnesses vehemently cling to this doctrine of annihilation. In their book *Let God Be True*, page 79 they state, "Imperfect man does not torture even a mad dog, but kills it; and yet clergymen attribute to God, who is love (I John 4:16), the *Wicked Crime* of torturing human creatures merely because they had the misfortune of being born sinners" (Qtd. in Martin 49).

The Seventh Day Adventists echo this erroneous belief. "This 'second death' (Revelation 21:8) that the wicked suffer means their total destruction. What then of the concept of an eternally burning hell? Careful study shows that the Bible teaches no such hell or torment" (Adventists 369).

Those who hold the conditional view use several passages of Scripture to support their thinking. They often capitalize on the Old Testament teachings concerning the afterlife, of which Psalm 37 is one of their favorites. Verse two states that the wicked "*shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*" Verse nine says that "*evildoers shall be cut off.*" Verse 20 continues this thought, "*But the wicked shall perish . . . they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.*" Malachi 4:1 and other passages of Scripture continue this theme which they have interpreted as annihilation (Pinnock 145).

New Testament passages used to support this theory include, Matthew 3:10, 12; 10:28; 13:30, 42, 49-50; 1 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 6:8; Philippians 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; and 2 Peter 3:7. These passages refer to the judgment of the wicked as destruction, corruption, and burning up.

Pinnock sums up the conditional view in the following manner. "The real choice is between universalism and annihilationism, and of these two, annihilation is surely the more biblical" (166).

Though conditionalists attempt to use the Scriptures to support their view, many passages are misinterpreted and passages that contradict their view are often ignored (Walvoord, *Four Views* 168). Verses that present an *eternal* judgment are often not mentioned (cf. verses listed under Purgatorial View above). One of the most powerful of these verses is found in Revelation 20:10. This verse records that the beast and the false prophet had been in the lake of fire for 1,000 years prior to Satan joining them to be tormented day and night for ever and ever. They had not burned up, nor would they.

In their attempt to emphasize the mercy of God, the conditionalists fail to adequately address the holiness and justice of God (addressed more fully under Doctrinal Evidences below). Their reasoning is also based upon human logic rather than on divine sovereign omniscience. It must not be forgotten that God makes no mistakes.

**The Metaphorical View Of Hell Reasons That Hell's Torment Is Only Symbolic.** Those who hold this view of hell believe there is a hell, but that the terrible descriptions of its torment are not to be taken literally.

In his response to John Walvoord's literal view of hell, William Crockett counters, "Walvoord is mistaken when he argues that hell is a place of intense heat, material fire, and smoke akin to the fires of an earthly furnace" (29). Crockett seems to be making contradicting statements when he states, "we must get back to preaching the whole counsel of God, and this includes warning the wicked of impending judgment . . . hell is *pictured* as a flaming pit, but . . . it is simply unwarranted to describe hell in the detail given above" (54).

Crockett appears to be questioning the veracity of Jesus's statements when he declares that "no one thinks hell will involve actual beatings or is a place where the maggots of the dead achieve immortality" (60). Jesus presented these descriptions as fact with no indication that they were to be understood symbolically.

Summing up the metaphorical view of hell, Crockett outlines the following conclusions. First, the biblical writers do not intend for their readers to take their writings literally. Second, the fire of hell could not be literal as literal fire as we know it would not hurt a spirit being. Third, the New Testament descriptions of heaven and hell are only symbolic pictures. Fourth, symbolic stories were common in ancient times. Fifth, extra-biblical pictures of hell in Jewish literature are mostly symbolic (30).

Crockett's synopsis is based primarily on assumption and not on the Scriptures. No one can say dogmatically that the biblical writers did not intend their writings to be taken literally, especially when that is the implication, nor can his theory of a symbolic heaven and hell be substantiated. The very fact that fire is



consistently used to describe the torments of hell and *gehenna* rather than some other form of suffering (e.g. drowning, crucifixion, stoning) is an indication that fire was literally intended by the writers. It is true that no one can possibly know how literal fire can torment spirit beings in *hades*. Following the resurrection (Revelation 20:13) when the dead will receive eternal bodies in preparation for *gehenna* it is more conceivable to the human mind that they could be tormented in literal fire. Pentecost believes, "The resurrection body of the unsaved, evidently, will be of such character that it is indestructible even in the midst of such a lake of fire" (561). Nonetheless, since no one has returned from *hades* with proof that God cannot use literal fire to torment the spirits of the departed unsaved, there is no credible reason to believe otherwise.

The metaphorical view of hell is one of the most widely accepted views of hell. It gains much of its strength from an emotional objection to literal torment. It also relies heavily on logic rather than on "thus saith the Lord." In so doing, it calls into question the inerrancy of the Scriptures by insinuating that God did not mean what He said. If the Biblical record concerning the afterlife is not to be taken literally, then how can one be sure that any of the Bible can be taken literally?

### **Is there conclusive evidence of a literal hell?**

No doubt many have asked this question. Yet Jesus clearly said that the Rich Man in Luke 16 was tormented in the flames of hell. Was Jesus telling the truth? Was He using a hyperbole? Is there substantial evidence to conclusively declare that such a place truly exists in the literal sense of the Word? This writer believes that there is as he shall point out.

## **Exegetical Evidence Calls for a Literal Interpretation of Hell**

"Trying to determine what the life is like after this life, one is shut up to the Scriptures, as there is no other statement that is worthy of belief" (Walvoord, *Four Views* 78). Men can argue their philosophical, theological, and emotional theories and support them with the writings of others of their persuasion, but in the end they are still unfounded theories if they are not based on faithful exegesis of the Scriptures.

### **Notice First, the Exegetical Evidence from Terms within Luke 16.**

**Abraham's Bosom:** This phrase (*κόλπον τοῦ Αβραάμ*) is not found elsewhere in Scripture, and is here used synonymously with paradise (cf. "paradise" below). Abraham was very highly esteemed by the Jews of Jesus' day. Unger states that, "Father Abraham was, to the Israelites, in the corrupt times of their later superstitions, almost what the virgin Mary is to the Roman church" (16). To be in one's bosom comes from the practice of reclining at the table so that his head is

almost in the bosom of the one reclining next to him (Barnes 234). Thus Abraham was often "pictured standing at the gate of paradise to receive and embrace his children as they entered, and the whole family of his faithful descendants was gathered to his arms" (Unger 16).

**Hades (ᾍδης):** The etymology of the word *hades* is uncertain. The Authorized Version translates *hades* ten times as "hell" (Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14) and once as "the grave" (1 Corinthians 15:55). "In the LXX *hades* occurs more than 100 times, in the majority of instances to translate Hebrew *sheol*, the underworld which receives all the dead" (Brown 2:206). As to its meaning, Brown states, "*hades* is the temporary abode of the dead, to which they are banished" (2:205). Thayer defines it as "the nether world, the realm of the dead, a dark and dismal place in the very depths of the earth, the common receptacle of disembodied spirits" (11).

Of the eleven references to *hades* found in the New Testament, all but four clearly refer to a negative place antithetical to heaven. Even the unclear references need not refer to the grave. Acts 2:27, 31 seem to speak of *hades* as having compartments like *sheol*. 1 Corinthians 15:55 translates *hades* as "grave" but actually refers to the place of the departed dead. The use of *hades* in Revelation 6:8 is somewhat unclear as it is presented as a personification. The claim that *hades* is nothing more than the grave is simply not supported by Scripture.

The Scriptures paint a variety of pictures of *hades*. It is contrasted with heaven (Luke 10:15). It is like a prison to which Christ holds the key (Revelation 1:18). And it is a temporary place for the wicked dead (Revelation 20:13). But Luke 16 paints the clearest picture. It is a place of conscious torment in flames of fire with a great gulf placed between it and heaven which can never be crossed.

Because *Hades* is said to be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14) it is critical that this final destination, also known as *gehenna*, be examined as evidence of a literal hell as shall be pointed out below.

The exegetical evidence is irrefutable that the intent of the Lord Jesus and other New Testament writers was that *hades* refer to the abode of the dead, usually to be understood as a place of torment for those who reject God's plan of salvation.

## **Notice Second, the Exegetical Evidence From Scripture Terms Related To Luke 16.**

**Sheol:** Thirty-one times the Authorized Version translates *sheol* as "grave," thirty times as "hell," and three times as "the pit." Harris claims that the etymology of the word is uncertain. "The word does not occur outside the O[ld] T[estament], except once in the Jewish Elephantine papyri, where it means 'grave'" (Harris 983).

Because the Old Testament records that both good men and wicked men went to *sheol*, some scholars believe it contained two compartments. Representing this theory, Scofield claims that prior to the ascension of Christ this place contained two

divisions, one for the saved and another for the lost. He thus concluded that the *sheol* of the Old Testament and *hades* of the New Testament were identical (957, 1098). According to Harris, some men believe that *sheol* simply had two meanings. Originally it meant "grave" and later it became specialized to mean "hell." Still others claim that *sheol* is the place where the body goes and not the soul (Harris 893).

This writer favors the two-compartment theory, finding it more consistent with the Old Testament use of the term. A careful exegesis and hermeneutical study of the word will show that it almost invariably represents the abode for the dead, and often an unpleasant abode when used to describe the place of the deceased wicked (discussed in more detail under "Hermeneutical Evidences" below).

To translate *sheol* as "grave," in an attempt to keep it from representing a place of punishment, is not called for nor is it consistent with its use in Scripture. Of the thirty-one times in the Old Testament that *sheol* was translated as "grave," the writer found that only Psalm 49:14 presented difficulty in rendering it as the "abode of the dead."

When *sheol* is understood as the place of the dead, irrespective of its occupant's relationship with God, it coincides very well with the existence of a real hell and does nothing to discredit a literal interpretation of hell.

**Paradise (παράδεισος):** The word paradise is found only three times in the Scriptures. The Authorized Version translates it as "paradise" all three times. It does however occur often in the Septuagint to translate the word "garden" (Barnes 902). Paradise is "an Oriental word . . . denoting the parks of Persian kings and nobles" (Vine 840). Scripturally speaking, it is often referred to as "the part of *hades* which was thought . . . to be the abode of the souls of the pious until the resurrection" (Online). As alluded to above, Scofield believes that prior to Christ's ascension, paradise (also called "Abraham's bosom") was a compartment of *hades* where the blessed dead abode in comfort, but at His ascension paradise was moved to the immediate presence of God. He supports this view with 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 which clearly indicates that paradise is synonymous with the third heaven where God abides. He believes Ephesians 4:8-10 indicates that the change took place when Christ "led captivity captive" (1099).

The assumption that paradise was originally a compartment of *sheol* or *hades* seems likely to be true, yet not conclusive; but the belief that it is now in the presence of God is clearly supported by the New Testament. Jesus said to the dying repentant thief, "*today thou shalt be with me in paradise,*" yet it is certain that He did not remain in a compartment of *hades* because He prophesied that He was going to His Father, not to the abode of the dead (John 16:10). Likewise, at the moment of death, believers are "*absent from the body, and . . . present with the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Paul spoke of being caught up into paradise (the third heaven) as previously

pointed out. John also referred to heaven as "the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

The reality of a paradise for those who know the Lord, calls for the reality of a hell for those who reject the Lord. Luke 16 presents paradise as a place of literal existence, consciousness, feeling, and permanence. Does this not demand the same literal explication of hell?

**Gehenna (γέεννα):** This term originally referred to the Valley of Hinnom on the southeast side of Jerusalem. During an era of idolatry, the Israelites dedicated the valley to the worship of Moloch (Barnes 23). 2 Kings 23:13-14 records that King Josiah converted the valley into a place of abomination, where dead bodies were thrown and burned (Unger 550). "It is found twelve times in the N[e]w T[estament], eleven of which are in the Synoptists, in every instance as uttered by the Lord Himself" (Vine 552). Each of the times Christ used the term, He was warning of the terrible place of judgment which men should do all to avoid.

*Gehenna* never refers to a temporary place as does *hades*. It refers to "the place of eschatological punishment after the last judgment, punishment of eternal duration (Matthew 25:41)" (Brown 2:208). The writer agrees with Unger when he states that *gehenna* is identical with the "lake of fire" and with the "second death" (462).

Whether Jesus used the valley southeast of Jerusalem as an illustration of the eternal destination of the damned or the name was coincidentally the same, has no bearing on the literality of the terrible place. The context of these references makes it clear that He was not speaking solely of the Valley of Hinnom. For example, Mark 9:43 and 45 both state that the fires of *gehenna* will never be quenched. Also, Matthew 10:28 differentiates the physical death from the "second death" of body and soul in *gehenna*. Matthew 23:33 identifies *gehenna* as a place of damnation.

When the term *gehenna* is studied free from biased presuppositions, the conclusion will be forthcoming that it is a place of eternal torment distinct from the Valley of Hinnom. Again this strengthens the argument for a literal interpretation of hell.

**Tartaros (ταρταρόω):** This word is found only in 2 Peter 2:4. It is a place where God has confined some of the angels who fell from heaven. It is not the same as *sheol* or *hades* (Vine 553). The existence of such a place adds to the necessity of a literal rendering of hell in Luke 16.

### **Notice Third, the Exegetical Evidence From Descriptive Synonyms Of Gehenna as Related to Luke 16.**

**Lake of Fire:** This phrase and a similar "lake which burneth" are found five times in the book of Revelation. The first mention of the lake is found in Revelation 19:20 when the beast and the false prophet are cast into it (Walvoord *Revelation* 280). It appears that they are the first to inhabit this lake of fire. This

coincides with Jesus' use of the term *gehenna* as He warned of the terrible place, but never said it was presently occupied. After the 1,000 year Kingdom, the devil will be cast in with beast and the false prophet. At that time they will have already suffered for 1,000 years and are still suffering—no annihilation! Following the final judgment, those who have rejected God's offer of salvation, and have been suffering in *hades*, will join the devil and his cohorts to be tormented for ever and ever (Revelation 20:15).

Revelation 21:8 also speaks of this lake, "*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*" This verse not only identifies the occupants of the Lake of Fire, but it describes the torment as that of fire and brimstone.

Since the Lake of Fire is so described, the fact that *hades* will be cast into it (Revelation 20:14) is evidence which strengthens the argument for a literal interpretation of hell.

**Unquenchable Fire:** This synonym of *gehenna* is only used one time in Scripture (Matthew 3:12). The word "unquenchable" simply means "unquenched, inextinguishable, or unquenchable" (Perschbacher 56). There is no indication that this fire is not literal; either exactly like, or similar to the material fire known to man. From this the student may see that the fires of *gehenna* will never go out.

**Eternal Fire:** This synonym, like the former, is only found one time in the Bible (Jude 1:7). It emphasizes both the duration of punishment and the kind of punishment. The term eternal (αἰώνιος) may mean "without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be," or "without beginning" or "without end, never to cease, everlasting" (Thayer 20). This word is frequently used to describe the duration of the afterlife for both saved and lost.

**Everlasting Punishment:** Again this phrase only appears once in Scripture (Matthew 25:46). Everlasting is the same as "eternal" (cf. eternal fire). Punishment (κόλασις) simply means to be punished. It does not distinguish as to the kind of punishment.

**Other synonyms:** The following is a list of other descriptive synonyms of *gehenna*. "black darkness" (Jude 1:13), "furnace of fire" (Matthew 12:42, 50), "fire and brimstone" (Revelation 20:10; 21:8), "the smoke of their torments" (Revelation 14:11), "where the worm dieth not" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48), "outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12, "flaming fire/everlasting destruction" (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), and "everlasting fire" (Matthew 18:8; 25:41).

## **Hermeneutical Evidence Calls for a Literal Interpretation of Hell**

**A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the Old Testament.**

It has been pointed out that most references to *sheol* in the Old Testament refer to the "abode of the dead." This abode of the dead frequently refers to a literal place of judgment for the wicked. Deuteronomy 32:22 speaks of a fire in *sheol*. Isaiah 14:9-11 describes *sheol* as a place of conscious misery. *Sheol* was a place for the wicked (Psalms 9:17). It was a place of pain (Psalms 116:3). It is contrasted with heaven (Proverbs 15:24). Jonah said he went to *sheol*. He may have died in the belly of the fish, but it is certain that he was not in the grave (Jonah 2:2).

Assuming *sheol* and *hades* are synonyms, these descriptions of the wicked suffering literal misery in *sheol* support the fact that the wicked are suffering literal misery in *hades* today.

### **A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament.**

A vast portion of Jesus' teaching warned of judgment to come. This damning judgment is so terrible that He willingly gave His life as an atonement for sin that all who place their faith in Him might escape this great damnation (John 3:15-18). He did not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

At least seven of the eleven New Testament references to the word "*hades*" clearly refer to a place of judgment (cf. Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Revelation 1:18; 20:13, 14), while the other four references can easily fit that context (cf. Acts 2:27, 31; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 6:8).

Eleven times Jesus spoke warnings concerning *gehenna*, *hades'* eternal counterpart; indicating that it was a place of terrible judgment for the wicked.

None of the references to *hades* or *gehenna* even suggest that they are to be understood in a symbolic way. Thus they should be interpreted literally.

### **A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the book of Luke.**

*Hades* is found twice in the book of Luke. "*And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell*" (Luke 10:15). In this verse, hell is contrasted with heaven with a definite negative tone. The other example is found in verse 23 of our text. Both verses, when read without non-literal presuppositions, speak clearly of a literal hell of torment which is the opposite of heaven.

*Gehenna*, the subsequent and eternal abode of *hades'* occupants, is only used one time in the book of Luke and that in chapter 12 verse 5. "*But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*" Here Jesus was warning men to fear God who had the power to cast men away from Him into *gehenna*. This Scripture does not even imply that any of Jesus' listeners thought He was talking about the rubbish pit called *Gehenna*. If *gehenna* was not to be taken literally as the lake of fire, what was Jesus saying men should fear?

### **A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the context.**

Fudge, who has been mentioned earlier as a proponent of the metaphorical view of hell, claims that those who take the story in Luke 16 literally have taken it out of context. "Even taken literally (no one really does) and out of context, this story offers no hint of how long the Rich Man's suffering will last, but portrays at most the intermediate state of a pre-Christian Jew" (126). "The parable's interpretation must include its context and nothing in the context remotely suggests concern with the final state of the wicked" (Fudge 128).

It is inconceivable how Fudge could make such a statement as this since the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man occupies nearly half of the chapter. In the context of the chapter, Jesus was teaching on values: human contrasted with divine. The thesis of the chapter seems to be verse 15, the key phrase being the last. "*And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*" This statement, followed by the story on hell, certainly does indicate that the context of Jesus' message dealt with the final state of the wicked.

### **A literal hell is in harmony with the teachings of the text.**

Read by an unbiased person, the events of the afterlife described in the text would clearly be understood as literal. The descriptions of the two men are clearly literal. Death was certainly literal. Abraham was a historical person. Fire is literally hot and stimulates thirst. Those who have been burned will concur that it produces real tormenting pain. To understand this passage in any way other than its literal sense is reading into the passage something that is not there.

## **Doctrinal Evidence Calls a Literal Interpretation of Hell**

### **Because the Bible is 100% trustworthy, its teachings on hell should be believed as they were intended to be understood.**

Though the Bible was written by approximately 40 men over a period of 1600-2000 years, it is 100% God's Word. "*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost*" (2 Peter 1:21). "It is inconceivable that God would give His people a book they could not trust" (Wiersbe 2:252). The teachings of the Word of God will never lead men astray. They are correct in every point. Wiersbe further points out that "whatever the Bible says about itself, man, God, life, death, history, science, and every other subject is true" (2:253). Even if secular history or science appear to prove the Bible inaccurate, one need not fear this illusion as the truth will eventually be made manifest that the Bible was right all along.

However, not every Scripture was intended to be interpreted literally. When Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" He was not saying that He was a loaf of bread.

When He said, "take eat, this is my body which is broken for you," He did not take a knife and cut a piece of his flesh and pass it around to be eaten. Biblical writers used hyperbole, simile, parables and many other literary forms to convey their messages. For example, many of the statements in the book of Revelation have symbolic meanings. "By literal meaning, the writer refers to the usual or customary sense conveyed by words or expressions" (Mickelsen 179). Mickelsen continues, "By figurative meaning, the writer has in mind the representation of one concept in terms of another because the nature of the two things compared allows such an analogy to be drawn" (179). All Scripture must be kept in context and interpreted literally unless there is clear evidence that it should be understood otherwise. This includes Scriptures on hell.

### **The veracity of Christ supports a literal hell.**

Christ's deity is being attacked on every side. Cults deny it, and liberals pick it to pieces. Yet unless one believes Christ is the second Person of the Trinity an inaccurate interpretation of His teachings will be forthcoming.

The Apostle John proclaimed, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ was God. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (John 1:1). *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

If Christ were not God in the flesh, the creditability of His stories could be taken into question. However, as God, Christ's words were absolutely authoritative. He was not heralding secondhand information, but the very words of God. Throughout His ministry the Jews attacked His deity knowing that if they could reduce Him to a mere man they would destroy the authority and consequences of His proclamations. Repeatedly Christ countered their attacks by declaring His coequality with Jehovah God (e.g. John 8:58 with Exodus 3:14; John 10:33).

If hell were not real, Jesus was a liar. If it were not a place of literal torment, He was a deceiver. However, as God, Jesus could not lie (Titus 1:2); therefore His veracity demands a literal interpretation of hell.

### **Human beings were created by a direct act of God and are thus accountable to Him.**

If men evolved as many theorize, then they would not be answerable to a creator God. Consequently, they could set their own rules, and there would be no norms nor absolutes. All would be relative. However, such an origin is only theory.

Thankfully God did not leave the history of the origin of humanity to the distorted theories of man's imagination. Cobb points out that, "it is the clear and distinct teaching of the Scriptures that man is the result of an act of immediate divine creation" (182) (cf. Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7). Genesis one and two



describe God's creative week consisting of six 24 hour days of work during which all things were created, including the first man and woman. Therefore, man is accountable to his Creator.

### **Because God is holy, He can justly expect men to be holy.**

God never has and never can do anything that is wrong. He is absolutely holy. His every action is perfect. Thus "He is the source and standard of right" (Bancroft 78).

In the midst of a rebellious world which clings to relativism, God's holiness is the supreme absolute standard by which all right and wrong will be judged. Relativism is a farce. Thus God was unconditionally just when He established for mankind the following standard by which to live: *"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy"* (1 Peter 1:15-16).

### **The sinfulness of mankind is absolutely repulsive to God, thus igniting His wrath.**

Scriptural examples of God's attitude toward sin demonstrate His hatred of it. When Adam and Eve sinned, God discontinued His intimate fellowship with them and expelled them from the Garden of Eden. When Israel sinned, God made them wander in the wilderness for forty years. When Nadab and Abihu rebelled, God opened up the earth and swallowed them up. When Achan sinned, God allowed Israel to be defeated in battle. When Uza sinned, God struck him dead. When Judah sinned, God sent them to Babylon for seventy years.

The fact that God sacrificed His Son to atone for sin, indicates His abhorrence of sin (John 3:16). The word propitiation describes the work of Christ which appeased the wrath of God enabling mankind to once again be reunited in fellowship with God.

Because of his abhorrence of sin, God must separate Himself from the sinner. That in itself demands a terrible hell as all that is good comes from God. If anything, hell will be much worse than depicted in Scripture, not less severe.

### **The justice of God demands that He punish men when they come short of His standard of holiness.**

"Justice is the execution of righteousness" (Cobb 44). Therefore, one may see God's justice in His holy dealings with sinful man. God's "treatment of His creatures conforms to the purity of His nature" (Bancroft 84). *"He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he"* (Deuteronomy 32:4). Because God is holy, He demands that all people conform to His moral perfection. When such conformity is neglected, God's justice requires punishment through loss or suffering (Bancroft 84).

God would not be just if he allowed people to disobey His perfect will without a balance of negative consequences. A non-literal hell is simply unsatisfactory.

## **Expositional Evidence Calls for a Literal Interpretation of Hell**

### **Expositional evidence from the setting for the story, Luke 16:19-22.**

The story of Lazarus and the Rich Man is the only story told by our Lord in which He used a proper name. From this it has been concluded that it was more than a parable—a historical account. McGee believes, "The Lord would not have given the name of someone who did not exist" (4:320). Why then was not the rich man named? Rice surmises that the name of the rich man was not mentioned to avoid offence to the loved ones and friends (397).

This argument does not budge men like Fudge. He simply ignores the name and calls the story a parable because "the basic plot was well-known folklore" (127).

Whether this story was a parable or a historical event makes little difference in the light of the fact that Jesus told the story as though it were true. He gave absolutely no indication that it was anything but fact.

The aorist indicative, used in the phrase "*carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom*," indicates that the angels were not just inactive observers. "The Jews held the opinion that the spirits of the righteous were conveyed by angels to heaven at their death. Our Saviour speaks in accordance with this opinion; and as He expressly affirms the fact, it seems as proper that it should be taken literally" (Barnes 234).

At his death Lazarus was immediately carried into the presence of the saints. The phrase "*Abraham's bosom*" is "taken from the practice of reclining at meals, where the head of one lay on the bosom of another—and it denoted, therefore, intimacy and friendship" (Barnes 234).

The Rich Man was buried, and no doubt had an elaborate funeral. The fact that there was no mention of Lazarus being buried could indicate that his body was not disposed of with dignity (Barnes 234).

### **Expositional evidence from Christ's vivid description of hell, Luke 16:23-24.**

*And in hell he lift up his eyes.* The Rich Man, immediately upon death, was ushered into *hades*. There was no intermediate state. He was in this life one moment and in *hades* the next. The fact that he lifted his eyes indicates that he still had the ability to see as he did on this earth. He was still conscious and able to recognize those on the other side of the gulf.

He was *in torments*. The word torments means torture, torment, or acute pains (Online). Barnes indicates that it was particularly the pain inflicted to induce men to confession of their crimes (235). Since the phrase is in the present active form,

he was presently enduring these torments. This is a clear indication that *hades* is a place of immense pain and suffering. There is no suggestion that Jesus was trying to be grotesque. He was mercifully presenting a realistic warning. This is further exemplified in the next phrase.

The Rich Man *seeth Abraham afar off* indicating a considerable distance between paradise and *hades*. The only indication as to the vastness of this separation is found in verse twenty-six when Jesus said there was a "great gulf" between the two locations.

The Rich Man *cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me*. "The songs of his riot and revels are all turned into lamentations" (Henry 1477). Barnes points out that he did not ask to be released or to join Lazarus. Evidently he knew that was impossible. Even his request for mercy was denied, as all mercy ends when the soul is lost (235).

*Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue*. It is well to note the change of attitude that the Rich Man had once he was in hell. The poor beggar that was previously despised is now summoned to bring him relief. The severity of the pain is manifest by the desire for even one drop of water to cool his tongue. Even such an insignificant amount of water was thought by the tormented to be of help. Such relief as a drop of water hardly seems of benefit, but again Jesus' choice of words emphasizes the excruciating pain that hell produces.

The damned in hell cried out, *I am tormented in this flame*. He uses the present passive form of "tormented" when he describes one of the sources of his anguish as flame. Though many commentators consider this flame metaphorical, Jesus gives no clue that this fire is anything other than literal. Only some form of a material fire could produce such literal effects of fire: it caused him agonizing pain and the great heat dehydrated his tongue.

### **Expositional evidence from the description of hell's permanence, Luke 16:25-26.**

*But Abraham said, Son remember*. Remembering the damning mistakes of the past and the foolish rejections of the Gospel will be one of the many tormenting aspects of hell. It will be no "mitigation of the suffering, to spend an *eternity* in which there will be nothing else to do day or night but to *remember* what was done, and what *might have been*, if the life had been right" (Barnes 235). This also indicates that the socioeconomic status one enjoys in life will have no bearing on his eternal destiny.

The reality of the words, *"he is comforted, and thou art tormented"* must have been like salt in his wound. Jesus again uses these words to paint a picture of the diametric differences between being with God and being separated from God.

*And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed*. Jesus used plural pronouns for the first time in the story to indicate that the Rich Man was not alone

in the torments of hell. "The word translated *gulf* means *chasm*, or the broad yawning space between two elevated objects, or precipices" (Barnes 235). The perfect tense of the word "fixed" states that God placed this division in the past, and that it continues to be divided at the present (Zodhiates 855). There was no way to get from one side to the other, there never had been, and never would be. Since this great gulf was fixed, it could not be changed or altered. The Rich Man could see and communicate with those on the other side, but he could not cross the divide.

### **Expositional evidence drawn from the Rich Man's concern for those still living, Luke 16:27-31.**

Attention is now turned to those still living as the Rich Man begs that Lazarus might be *sent to his father's house*. The torments of hell transformed this self-centered opulent man into a compassionate evangelist, but it was too late. He knew that his five brothers were destined to follow him to that *place of torment*.

*They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.* God owes no man a miracle to bring him to repentance. The Word of God presents the plan of salvation as clearly as any man is going to get it. It is the Word of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit that lead men to repentance (John 16:8-12; Hebrews 4:12).

*If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* The Rich Man now realized that a change of mind about one's sin and God's way of salvation is mandatory before one can be saved.

*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, nothing will persuade them.* The emphasis here is on the fact that the destiny of all men's souls is determined in this life, and hinges on how they respond to the message of salvation found in the Scriptures. When men reject the clear teachings of the Bible, there is nothing else that can be done to help them escape their forthcoming damnation.

## **Conclusion**

It has been the intent of this paper to present sufficient evidence to conclusively substantiate that hell is a literal place as presented in Luke 16:19-31. By "literal" it is meant that hell is a real place, with literal fire, and severe torment, from which those who reject Christ will never escape.

The exegetical evidence presented calls for a literal interpretation of hell. A vast majority, if not all, of the references to *sheol* and *hades* refer to the abode of the dead and not simply the grave. It is likely that *sheol* and *hades* are identical, and that they contained two compartments (one for the wicked and another for the righteous) prior to the resurrection of Christ. At His resurrection, those in Paradise (the abode of the righteous dead) were taken to heaven. The eternal torments of *gehenna* and its descriptive synonyms further reinforce the literality of its

predecessor, *hades*.

The hermeneutical evidence presented calls for a literal interpretation of hell. Though the descriptions of the damnation of the wicked found in the Old Testament are not as clearly delineated as they are in the New Testament, it cannot be denied that they exist. Such descriptions in the book of Luke as well as in the other books of the New Testament are in complete harmony with those found in Luke 16. A careful examination of the context reveals no need for anything other than a literal interpretation of hell as presented in the text.

The doctrinal evidence presented calls for a literal interpretation of hell. Because the Bible is 100% trustworthy, its presentation of a literal hell of torments need not be questioned. This fact is strengthened by the veracity of Christ and His frequent warnings of the forthcoming eternal damnation of the wicked. All men, wicked and righteous, have been created by God and are accountable to Him. As accountable creatures, they must conform to God's absolute standard of holiness if they want to spend eternity with Him, because God absolutely hates sin. Unfortunately such conformity is impossible for sinners. Their only hope is to repent and trust in the substitutionary atonement of Christ as payment for their sin. God in his justice, must punish unpenitent sinners, and has sovereignly decreed to do so in an eternal place of torment.

The expositional evidence presented calls for a literal interpretation of hell. The entire text is pregnant with graphic descriptions of the torments that await those who reject God's plan of salvation. The text does not read like a science fiction story, but as a literal account of suffering of unsurpassed magnitude.

Yes, hell is a real place with literal torments exactly as described in Luke 16:19-31 and other Scriptures.

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