

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 28 June 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Location and Structure of Hell

Probably most of us know someone (or, at least, have met someone) who loves to go out on extreme, death-defying expeditions, in places that most of us wouldn't even consider visiting (such as on a mountain-climbing expedition to Mount Everest, or on a trip to Antarctica). Well, a century and a half ago, there was a man named **Carl Steinman**, who was one of those mad adventurers. All his life, he had been fascinated by volcanoes; and during a trip to Iceland, he had the chance to see a volcano up-close-and-personal—in fact, *too* up-close-and-personal. While he was visiting Mount Hecla, he ignored the warning of his mountain guide, and went right up to the edge of the volcano. As he approached the edge, the volcano was rumbling, shaking, and angry, and was showing “every sign of erupting”; yet, like a fool, he kept edging forward.¹ Then, the earth suddenly quaked, and catapulted him right toward the yawning, fiery abyss. The only thing that kept him from plunging into the molten lava was that his feet got caught in some rocks; and he was literally hanging upside-down, with the fire directly below him.²

Later on, Steinman described his experience. He said, “Oh, the horrors of that awful realization! There, over the mouth of a black and heated abyss, I was held suspended, a helpless and conscious prisoner, to be hurled downward by the next great throe of trembling nature! ‘Help! Help! Help!—for the love of God, help!’ I shrieked, in the very agony of despair. I had nothing to rely upon but the mercy of Heaven, and I prayed to God as I had never prayed before, for the forgiveness of sins, that they might not follow me to judgment.”³ Well, after a little while longer of his hanging over the pit, and of hearing the mountain rumbling, and rocks tumbling down into the volcano, his guide heard his shrieks of terror, and risked his own life to save him. As the guide was in the process of rescuing him, he said to Steinman, “I warned you!”⁴ Ashamed and frightened to the core of his being, all Steinman could manage to studder was, “You did...but forgive me, and save me, for I am perishing.”⁵

To have an experience like Steinman's would be incredibly terrifying. However, there is something infinitely more terrifying, which untold billions of people will one day experience. The most terrifying thing that anyone could ever experience is to hear the words that the Lord Jesus Christ will say to those who rejected Him. Christ Himself solemnly warned that one day, lost souls will hear Him say, ***“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”***

Friends, if Hell were not a real place, filled with unquenchable fire and endless torment, then Jesus' words would have no meaning. However, the Lord Jesus doesn't mince words. Jesus' words have the most profound, sobering, and literal meaning. Hell *is* a real place; and at this very moment, untold billions of souls in that place are screaming and crying out in anguish, and pleading to be rescued. But unlike Steinman, who was able to be delivered from an *earthly* fiery abyss, those in the fiery abyss called Hell will *never* receive deliverance. *Never*. Their cries will go unheeded for all eternity.

This morning, we are, once again, talking about the reality of Hell; and to show that Hell is, indeed, a real place, I will show you Hell's location. Just as surely as Mount Hecla has a definite geographical location, with known coordinates, so Hell has a definite location. It is not a nebulous, mythical, or metaphorical place: it is *real*. The title of this message is ***The Location and Structure of Hell***.

Read Matthew 25:40-41, 46.

Read Luke 16:19-31

I. The physical location of Hell

Many of us have, at some point, seen children's cartoons in which Hell is joked about and made light of. From the earliest days of the Hollywood movie industry, the subject of Hell occasionally popped up in cartoons, and was portrayed as cute and funny. For example, there might be a character who is being tempted to do evil by a little devil on his shoulder; and meantime, on the other shoulder, there is a little angel trying to urge him to do right. Of course, the character decides to *yield* to temptation; and the instant he does, the little devil, with pitchfork in hand, begins to laugh hysterically, and drag the character straight down into the flames of Hell. Somehow, though, the character gets out of the predicament, and gets back up to earth. For a century, Satan has used this kind of "entertainment" to create the impression that Hell is just a big joke—and that even if there be a Hell, you'll get off the hook somehow. Satan also uses Hollywood to teach *false ideas* about Hell (such as the notion that the demons in Hell are *enjoying* themselves, while the souls of people are in anguish). Many modern movies turn the truth completely on its head, and portray Hell as a place of carnal fun, pleasure, and partying. Folks, this is a brazen lie! Hell is *not* a place of partying. The Bible says that Satan and his demons *fear and tremble*, because they know that they, too, will be tormented in the Lake of Fire one day. Satan is a master liar, and the king of "misinformation." Yet, Satan doesn't always tell complete, 100% untruth. He often *mixes* a little bit of truth with lies, to confuse people: and if there be one truth about Hell that Satan seems to admit readily, it is the fact that Hell is *down*.

Now, how do we know that Hell is "down"? Well, there are several different words for "Hell" in Scripture; but the word for "Hell" that is used most frequently in the Old Testament is the word *she'ol*. Now, most of the time, the word *she'ol* means "grave"; and those who believe in "annihilationism" (the idea that the souls of the wicked simply cease to exist upon death) love to highlight this fact. They see, "See? *She'ol* means 'grave'; and there is no life in the grave. This means that the souls of the lost cease to exist when they die!" Folks, if you ever hear someone make this argument (and you are bound to hear it sooner or later), please realise that they are telling a half-truth. (And a half-truth is a *lie*.) While the word *she'ol* does often refer to the physical grave, this is *not* its only meaning. In many Scriptures, the word *she'ol* describes a *spiritual* realm, in *regions below the earth*, where departed souls go after death. A good example is Isaiah's prophecy about the king of Babylon, and his descent into Hell.

Read Isaiah 14:4-11.

In this passage, Isaiah is prophesying of the death of a future king of Babylon. (Most likely, this king was Belshazzar, the very last king of Babylon.) Right up to the time of Babylon's overthrow, the empire (and especially the city of Babylon itself) appeared to be invincible; yet, in one night, the Persians overthrew the city, and slew King Belshazzar, after they had made a surprise breach under the city walls. However, this passage isn't merely about Belshazzar's humiliating death; it is about the *torment* that awaited him *after* his death. In **verses 9-11**, we are told that there would be a multitude of souls *awaiting him* in Hell. In fact, we are told that these citizens of Hell were once kings and princes on earth. Now, how could this be? If

she'ol simply mean “a grave where a dead body is placed,” how could this grave be populated by a large host of *rephaiym* (“the dead”), from many different nations? Even more importantly, how could these dead ones *talk*? These “dead ones” are obviously aware of their surroundings; and they are *sadistically happy* to find that the once-powerful king of Babylon, who had been a thorn in their side while they lived on earth, has come down to join them in their misery. The “worms” that cover the king of Babylon, and that are spread out underneath him, aren’t garden worms feasting on Belshazzar’s dead body: these “worms” are *other damned souls* swarming around Belshazzar, and writhing in anguish. “But pastor, how do we know that Isaiah *isn’t* talking about garden worms feasting on a dead body?” Here’s why.

Read Isaiah 66:22-24.

In **verse 24**, Isaiah says that in the future, after the New Heavens and New Earth have been created, the saints will occasionally be able to “***look upon the carcasses***” of those who have transgressed against the LORD. Now, the word “*carcase*” would normally refer to a dead, lifeless, rotting body; but that is clearly *not* what it means here. Isaiah says that *their* worm (the “worm” of the transgressors) will “***die not***.” Are you getting the picture? Isaiah isn’t talking about a *garden worm* that never dies: he’s talking about the *carcasses of sinners*, which never die. The “carcasses” of the transgressors in Hell are like “worms” that never die, and that are an “abhorring to all flesh.” In other words, lost people in Hell will have resurrected bodies that are grotesque, carcass-like, and writhing in fiery torment, like a “worm”: yet, they will be alive, and keenly aware of other sufferers around them. Folks, to dismiss these words as mere “poetic language” is foolish. If Hell were merely a symbol of blissful non-existence, God surely would not have given us this scene of dead people in Hell conversing with each other, and tormenting each other with their taunting words! (Would this not give us the impression that there is *life after death* for the lost?)

Folks, Hell is very real; and time and time again, Hell is described as being “down.” Let’s look at another passage where we are told that Hell is “down.”

Read Ezekiel 32:17-32.

In this passage, God instructed the prophet Ezekiel to “***lament***” (to “cry” or “mourn”) over the multitude of Egyptian soldiers that had died in battle. He was to lament over them because they had died with their sins still upon them, and because they had gone down into Hell (or into “the pit”). He was to mourn because he knew that these damned souls would, in Hell, be sadistically mocked by people from other nations, and from all ranks and stations of life, who were already down there, suffering in torment. In fact, in **verse 31**, we are told that Pharaoh himself would draw a sadistic kind of “***comfort***” in knowing that his own Egyptian soldiers were joining him in Hell! By the way, this goes to show that the hearts of sinners will not change in Hell. Their suffering and torment will not make them humbler in spirit, or more merciful. They will still be as selfish, spiteful, and perverse in Hell as they were on earth! (We will talk more about that in a later message.) But for now, here’s what I want to drive home. Did you notice that twelve times in this passage, the word “***down***” is repeated? Six times the word “***pit***” is mentioned; and twice the phrase “***in the nether parts of the earth***” is used. Are you getting the idea that Hell is deep in the earth? Make no mistake about it: the location of Hell *is* “***down***,” far from the presence of God in the heavenly New Jerusalem.

II. The supernatural structure of Hell

We've seen that Hell is "down" somewhere beneath the earth. Does this mean that Hell is a physical place, then? No, it doesn't. Geographically, Hell is located somewhere deep inside the earth; yet, Hell itself is a spiritual realm, not a physical one. Hell is not a physical pit of molten lava down in the core of our physical globe; it is a *spiritual* prison that is in a *spiritual* dimension, yet that is located *within* our physical earth. In Hebrew, Hell is often called the *be'or* (the "pit"). It is a kind of gigantic "cistern" in the spiritual realm, in which those who reject God will dwell. In **Matthew 25:41**, we are told that Jesus will say to those who rejected Him, ***"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."*** By the way, you'll notice, from what Jesus said, that God didn't originally create Hell to be inhabited by mankind: He created it to be inhabited by the Devil and his angels, after they attempted to overthrow Him. However, because man *also* sinned against God in the Garden of Eden, and took sides with Satan, Hell is now the default place to which *all* men and women go after death—*unless* they repent, and receive the gift of salvation that God has provided. That is why, if you've never been saved, you must *repent*. Flee from the wrath to come! Satan knows that *he* will go to the Lake of Fire one day; and He wants to drag you down into the bottomless pit with him. Don't join him!

Now, there are some things you need to know about Satan. In many professing Christian religions, people have been told that Satan is chained in Hell. Many others have, somewhere along the line, picked up on the notion that Satan is sitting on some kind of throne in Hell—and that from his headquarters in Hell, he dispatches his demons to torture the poor souls that are suffering there, or to tempt people up on the earth. Folks, nothing could be further from the truth! The Bible says in **1 Peter 5:8** that the Devil is currently roaming up and down in the earth, and is seeking souls ***"whom he may devour"*** and destroy. This is what Satan has been doing for the last 6,000 years, ever since man fell into sin. However, **Revelation 20** says that the day is coming (just after Christ's return to earth) when Satan and his demons will be bound and cast into the ***"bottomless pit."*** Mighty Lucifer, who once tried to ascend above the heights of the clouds, and to be like the Most High, will be ***"brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."*** Even now, a portion of Satan's angels has already been cast into this fiery, bottomless pit, in chains of darkness. You see, thousands of years ago, before the Flood (and even for some centuries after the Flood) these angels committed a terrible crime—the crime of cohabiting with human women, polluting the human genome, and creating a hybrid race of giants.

Read Genesis 6:1-4.

Read Jude 6.

The demons you've just read about are in the bottomless pit right now; and they are *not* torturing people; they are suffering! As for the demons that are still roaming the earth, they tremble at the thought that one day they, too, will join their fiendish cohorts in the bottomless pit. **James 2:19** says, ***"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."*** In **Matthew 8** and **Luke 8**, we are told about the time when Jesus was about to cast a legion of demons out of two men; and the demons, fearing that Jesus had come to ***"torment"*** them ***"before the time,"*** pleaded with Jesus not to cast them into ***"the deep"*** (literally, "the abyss"). Satan and his demons know full well that they are destined to an eternity of conscious torment in the Lake of Fire; and they are doing everything in their power

to ensure that as many souls as possible will reject God's gift of salvation, and join them in the supernatural, extradimensional prison called "the Lake of Fire."

III. The temporary compartments of Hell

Now, at this point, you're probably wondering what else could possibly be said about the location and structure of Hell. Is there more to know? Yes, there *is* more to know; and it is *really* important! You see, the spiritual realm called *she'ol* once housed not only the souls of the *damned*, but also the souls of the *saved*. Now, some of you are probably thinking, "Whoa! Wait a minute, Pastor! Are you saying that the saved once went to Hell?" Yes—but not the *partition* of Hell that we usually think of. Take Job, for instance. Job was a righteous man; yet, he knew that after death, he would go down to *she'ol*. As he was speaking to God, Job said, ***"For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."*** Did you catch that? Job said that *everyone* (everyone in his day, at least) went to the same "house" after death. But how could this be? Did the saved *suffer torment* in this "house," along with the wicked? No. Quite to the contrary, the saved were *at rest* in *their* quarter of this semi-detached house.

You see, the subterranean "house" of *she'ol* once had two compartments. One compartment was the place for the righteous dead; and the other compartment was the place for the damned; and between these two compartments was an impassable gulf. The place for the righteous dead was a place of comfort and rest; but the place for the damned was (and still is) a place of fiery torment. The place for the righteous was called "Paradise"; and it was a place of *waiting* for God's saints. What were they waiting for? They were waiting for the Messiah to come and redeem them, and take them to the *ultimate* Paradise—the city of New Jerusalem! They couldn't yet be in God's immediate presence in Heaven, because the price for their sin had not yet been paid by Christ's death and resurrection. That is why, after His death on the cross, Christ went down to Paradise for three days. Remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross, shortly before He died? He said, ***"Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."*** The "Paradise" to which Jesus went was a beautiful place of rest and comfort for the righteous dead; but it wasn't the same Paradise where believers go today (the city of New Jerusalem, in Heaven). Paradise was one of the two compartments of *she'ol* (or "Hell"), under the earth. The Bible says in **Ephesians 4:9**, ***"Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?"*** For three days, Christ was in the *saints'* portion of Hell (which is also called "Paradise"); but after three days, He arose triumphantly from the grave, and brought the spirits of all the righteous saints with Him up to Heaven. King David prophesied of all these things—Christ's death and descent into "Hell" (or Paradise); His resurrection; and His taking the saints up to Heaven.

Read Psalm 16:8-11 / 68:18.

After Christ's death and resurrection, the "address" of Paradise was changed permanently. The compartment of *she'ol* called "Paradise" was emptied; and now, the city of New Jerusalem is the "***paradise of God.***" In **Revelation 2:7**, the Lord says, "***To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.***" We know, from **Revelation 22**, that the "tree of life" is in Heaven. Thus, "Paradise" today *is* the city of New Jerusalem; and those who have placed their faith in Christ go to the heavenly Paradise immediately after they die. But what about the *other* compartment of Hell—the place of the damned? Is it still located in the same place, down in the earth? Yes. Hell (the place of torment for the lost) is still in a spiritual realm deep in the earth; yet, it, too, is a temporary place. It is like a "county jail," where condemned souls are incarcerated (without bail) until their final court date. This trial will be at the end of the world, at the Great White Throne judgment. **Revelation 20:11-15** says that at the Great White Throne Judgment, the final sentence will be passed; and "***death and hell***" (all the spiritually dead inhabitants of Hell) will be cast into an eternal prison called "***the lake of fire.***" And they will *never* escape from it!

IV. **The cry from Hell**

In light of these things, it seems almost incomprehensible that *anyone* would neglect God's offer of salvation. Yet, every single day, most people ignore God's call to salvation. They choose instead to pursue sinful pleasures, and the worthless trinkets of this world. The inhabitants of Hell are crying out for just one more chance to be saved, while lost souls on earth foolishly throw away opportunity after opportunity to receive God's gift of eternal life. Perhaps the most sobering example of this truth can found in **Luke 16**.

Read Luke 16:19-31.

In this passage, Jesus gave the true account of a "certain rich man," and of a poor man named Lazarus. During his lifetime, Lazarus had gone regularly to the rich man's gate, in the hope of receiving something from the rich man's table; and the rich man had given him a small portion of food. Yet, despite the rich man's charitable deed of giving Lazarus a little food, he was not "***rich toward God.***" Though he may have been a moral man in other people's eyes, he had never repented of his sin; and he did not know the Lord. But finally, the day came when Lazarus died; and upon his departure from this world, the angels carried him to "***Abraham's bosom***" (another name for "Paradise"). Shortly afterward, the rich man died, as well. And where did he go? Jesus said that "***In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.***" The word for "Hell" here is the Greek word *Hades*; and, just like the Hebrew word *she'ol* (and our English word "Hell"), this word refers to the subterranean place for departed souls. In this context, though, it refers specifically to the place for departed *lost* souls. We know this to be the case, because Jesus says that this man was in "***torments.***"

Now, in this horrible place, the rich man had not so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue. Yet, he was able to see across the impassable gulf that separated Hades from Abraham's Bosom (another name for Paradise). There he saw his ancestor, Abraham, and Lazarus standing by him; and somehow, he instantly knew who Abraham was. He cried out to Abraham, and begged him to send Lazarus over to him, to give him but a drop of water to cool his tongue; however, Abraham reminded the rich man that he, in his lifetime, had received ***"thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."*** Furthermore, Abraham reminded the rich man that there was an impassable gulf between them, which neither of them could cross to reach the other. The rich man then begged Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead, to warn his five brothers not to come to the place of torment in which he found himself. (The rich man must not have paid too much attention to the Scripture readings in the synagogue, if he actually thought that Abraham had the power to send Lazarus back from the dead. Only God has this power!) Abraham reminded the rich man that his five brothers had ***"Moses and the prophets"*** (in other words, the Scriptures); therefore, he said, ***"let them hear them."*** To this, the rich man objected, ***"Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they would repent."*** However, Abraham responded with this solemn statement: ***"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."*** In other words, if sinners won't listen to the Scriptures, then they will never respond to God's call to salvation, no matter how many miracles God may grant them to see!

My friends, there is no way to allegorise or spiritualise away this account of the rich man and Lazarus. This is *not* a fictional story to illustrate some spiritual truth. It is *not* a parable. Jesus' parables, though fictional, were real-to-life, everyday stories, illustrating spiritual truths: but they were *never* fairy tales (which this story certainly *would* be, *if there were not* a real place of conscious, fiery torment after death). Also, in Jesus' parables, He never gave His characters names. In contrast, one of the people in this account *does* have a name—the name Lazarus! Lazarus was a real man in Jesus' day, just as was the rich man was; and both of them still exist to this day. Lazarus is now with the Lord, in the glories of Heaven; but the rich man is still writhing in anguish, in Hell. What sent the rich man to Hell was *not* the fact that he had wealth, but the fact that *he never repented* of his sin, and placed his trust in Christ.

Friend, Hell is real: and no matter how far down in the earth it may be located, it is only a heartbeat away for those who have never believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. If you haven't been born again, don't gamble with your soul! Don't throw away your opportunity to repent and be saved. Don't sin away your day of grace, as the rich man did. Stop thinking that you are a good person. You *are not* a good person: you are a sinner! Place your complete trust in the Son of God, who died in your place, and shed his precious blood for your ransom, and rose again! ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"***

Conclusion: Maybe some of you are wrestling with God, and are trying to find reasons not to receive His gift of salvation. Perhaps you doubt that God really loves you, or that He would really want to save you. If so, remember what the Lord told Ezekiel when He gave him the prophecy about the Egyptian soldiers that went down into Hell! God commanded Ezekiel to ***"lament"*** for the Egyptians. Similarly, God

commanded Isaiah to “**cry out**” for the Moabites, and to “**bewail**” them, and “**water them with tears,**” because of the judgment that was coming to them. The Egyptians and Moabites were Israel’s bitter enemies (which means that they were *God’s* enemies); yet, God commanded Isaiah and Ezekiel to mourn for their enemies from their very *heart*. Why would God command Isaiah and Ezekiel to mourn for God’s enemies (and their enemies)? Because *God Himself* was grieving for them, and mourning for them. As a just God, He is angry at sinners every day; yet, it grieves Him at His heart that they are rejecting Him, and that He must cast them into Hell. God is not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance. If you are not saved, run to Christ for salvation today!

Now, if you *are* saved, don’t give up on the lost people around you. They may be ignoring your warnings right now (just as Carl Steinman ignored the warnings of his mountain guide); but the day may come when God will open their eyes, and cause them to see that they are dangling by a thread over the fiery abyss. When that day comes, be on hand to help draw them to the Saviour; and until that day, *pray for them!* Let your heart be broken by the things that break God’s heart!

¹ D.L. Moody, *Prevailing Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.). p. 81, cited in Robert Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 433.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*