

CHAPTER 8

MORE BAD NEWS - JUDGMENT, HELL AND THE LAKE OF FIRE IN CLOSER DETAIL

*Before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth;
He will judge the world with righteousness
And the peoples with equity.*

Psalm 98:9 (NASB)

because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31 (NASB)

⁹Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰For the stars of the Heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. ¹¹I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless.

Isaiah 13:9-11 (RSV)

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Romans 2:5 (NASB)

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

John 3:36 (RSV)

²⁶"For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.

John 5:26-27 (NASB)

Many people have heard the phrase 'the Day of Judgment'. It is not surprising that most people view it as just one single event. It is actually much more complicated than that. There are a number of separate judgments which take place at different times, for different reasons and for different groups of people. We need to work briefly through each of these judgments and distinguish them from each other. In particular we need to remember that Christians will be judged separately from non-Christians, and on a different basis. So, firstly, God will separate out the Christians from the non-Christians:

⁴⁰Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. ⁴¹The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Matthew 13:40-43 (RSV)

⁴⁹So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

Matthew 13:49-50 (RSV)

His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Matthew 3:12 (NIV)

The last two verses illustrate the difference between the judgment for believers (wheat) and the final judgment for unbelievers (chaff) at the end of time. However, there are other aspects and stages of God's judgment as well, which occur much earlier. The first type of judgment God brings has already been experienced. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, and the sins of all of us since then, the natural world itself has been cursed by God:

*¹⁷To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'
"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.*

*¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

*¹⁹By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV)

Instead of being the paradise that was originally created for the human race, the world is now a place of pain, suffering, death and injustice. All of this is because of sin. That curse is, in itself, a form of immediate judgment here and now. The difficulties we experience in the natural world are the direct and indirect consequences of our sin, which are rebounding on us. We are already experiencing this judgment or curse right now, during our mortal lives. However, there will also be a number of other future judgments. These will be covered in greater detail in subsequent books in this series but the major one, for non-Christians, is the "*Great White Throne Judgment.*"

The Great White Throne Judgment – the judgment for all non-Christians

This is the largest and the final judgment which comes at the very end. It is the main judgment that affects all people who are not genuine Christians. In other words, it is for all people who have not been born again because they have not genuinely repented and believed in Jesus Christ. We need to be clear about that. It does not only relate to people who do not believe that Jesus *exists* or those who do not believe that He is the Son of God. There are many people who believe Jesus exists and that He is the Son of God, but they are still not born again and they are not saved.

The Bible tells us that even demons believe in who Jesus is. They know very well who He is. In fact, they tremble when they think of Him. However, demons are not "*believers*" in the sense that we mean here. Thus, tragically, many people will go to the Great White Throne Judgment, and then to the Lake of Fire, even though they were '*churchgoers*' or even church leaders. That is because, despite all appearances, they were never real Christians. That is a frightening thought, but it is the truth.

When I use the word "*churchgoer*", I don't mean it as a compliment. It usually suggests (to me) someone who has no genuine personal relationship with God, but who merely has the outward form of religion, rather than anything real and sincere. Churchgoers are not necessarily saved, because they may never have truly repented or believed. I have never heard a real Christian refer to himself as a "*churchgoer.*" It is usually a word used by or about nominal Christians. They attend churches and observe all sorts of man-made traditions, rituals and liturgies, but they have never truly repented.

Neither have they sincerely believed in Jesus in the biblical sense, by putting all their trust in Him to save them. See Jesus' words in Matthew:

⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸"These people honour me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me.

⁹They worship me in vain;

their teachings are but rules taught by men."

Matthew 15:7-9 (NIV)

Jesus is talking about people who appear to be believers. They attend church meetings and they seem to say and do all the right religious sounding things. But, they aren't real. They are, in some way, phoney, shallow and superficial. I was one of those people myself for the first 19 years of my life when I was in the Roman Catholic Church. Many people would have said I was "religious", but I now know that I was unsaved and unforgiven.

Mere "churchgoers", whatever denomination they belong to, may well receive a terrible shock when they die. They may discover that all their years attending church were of no use, because Jesus might say "I never knew you". Those are terrible and frightening words. We must therefore assess ourselves soberly and test whether we really are genuinely in the faith or just shallow and false. We must also ask ourselves whether we are willing to be openly identified with Jesus Christ. If so He will accept us and endorse us in front of God the Father. But if we deny Him now, He will deny us then:

³²"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in Heaven. ³³"But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in Heaven.
Matthew 10:32-33 (NASB)

So, the Great White Throne Judgment will be conducted by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It involves a far larger number of people than the Judgment Seat of Christ. It will involve all people throughout history who have not put their trust in Jesus by repenting, and truly believing in Him in order to be forgiven. In other words, it will involve everyone who is not judged at the earlier, and quite separate, Judgment Seat of Christ. That is solely for genuine believers.

Those two judgments are mutually exclusive. You can't be at both. We do not know how many people will be at each of these two separate judgments. The numbers will be vast at both. What we can say, however, is that most people will go to the Great White Throne judgment, for non-Christians. There are many reasons for saying that. The simplest would be to refer to the words of Jesus Christ Himself, who said:

"Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few".
Matthew 7: 13-14 (NIV)

At the very least, we know that there will be a majority who go to the Great White Throne Judgment and on from there into the Lake of Fire. We do not know how large a majority that is. We are not told. But the clear implication of that passage, and of other passages, is that it is a large majority. That is real Christians are in a small minority. It is not just a situation of 49:51, but perhaps 1:10 or 1:20 or even 1:100. It varies from country to country and from one time in history to another.

Nobody knows how many real Christians there are, as opposed to apparent believers or mere churchgoers. Only God knows which of us are genuine and which of us are not. There is no way for us to count and no way of judging. That is because we are not competent to know the real nature of another man's heart and motives, even if he is sitting next to us in church. You cannot know for sure

whether he is saved. We can only know what we ourselves are. There are going to be many surprises in both directions when we discover, in the end, who was genuine and who was false, who really was a Christian and who only seemed to be.

It is a dreadful prospect to think that most of the people who have ever lived on the earth will end up standing before the Lord Jesus Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment for unbelievers. They will have to give an account of all the sins they have committed in their lives. This will not be to decide whether or not to allocate rewards to them, as at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is for real Christians. On the contrary, it will be in order to assess and publicly expose the precise level of sin in a non-Christian's life and the intensity of punishment that will be given to each of them. I do not want to be at it. Consider the following passages:

¹¹Then I saw a Great White Throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire is the second death. ¹⁵If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.
Revelation 20:11-15 (NIV)

Note that in the passage above, *Hades*, which is the Greek word for Hell, is itself thrown into the Lake of Fire in its entirety. That shows the vastness of the Lake of Fire. It also proves that Hell is not the same thing as the Lake of Fire. Hell is only temporary. It is where non-Christians are held until they are finally judged at the Great White Throne, whereas the Lake of Fire is eternal. Let us look at a description of some of the people who will go to the Lake of Fire at the end:

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.
Revelation 21:8 (NIV)

Jesus will judge each of the unbelieving dead (non-Christians) at the Great White Throne Judgment. He will do so according to what particular sins they have committed in their lives. Note that in the passage above the first type of person listed is the *cowardly*. That is perhaps more significant than you may realise. Many would not even consider cowardice to be a sin. In fact it is a major one, because it causes us to fail to do our duty across the board and to persistently avoid pressure or conflict. We often choose to sin rather than do what is right, purely because of our cowardice. It is a form of selfishness. No action, word or thought, however small, will be forgotten or ignored at the Judgment. Everything will be dealt with:

³⁶But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.
Matthew 12:36-37 (NIV)

And, what's more, it will all be made public. That is very significant. Each person's own judgment will not be a private or confidential matter. Things will be revealed publicly. Every spiteful, selfish, cowardly, dishonest, corrupt or manipulative thing that a non-Christian has ever said or done will be publicly revealed. Everyone, or at least everyone who needs to hear it, will do so. That is a very sobering thought.

It may be that through carefulness and deception you have managed to conceal something you have done. There may be crimes or sins that nobody knows about. If so, you can only cover them up during this life. After your death, if you go to the Great White Throne Judgment, they will be made

known to everyone who was ever affected by your actions or words. Nobody who goes to that judgment will ever get away with anything. Neither will they be able to keep anything hidden any longer:

²*There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.*

³*What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.* *Luke 12:2-3 (NIV)*

So, anything an unsaved, non-Christian person does, even in secret, and even if it was when they were on their own with nobody watching, will all come out at the Great White Throne Judgment. Everything an unsaved person has ever done will be revealed. Even the things that have been whispered in private rooms will be made known to everyone. Thus, even the most secret murder, lie, adultery or theft, that no one has ever detected, will be revealed publicly and punished at the Great White Throne Judgment.

But, note that this public exposure of *sin* does not apply in the same way at the Judgment Seat of Christ, i.e. for genuine Christian believers. Their sins have been forgiven and will not be exposed, publicly, or at all. It is vital to keep that distinction in mind. However, the only way we can avoid this public disclosure of our sins is to seek God's forgiveness now and become a real Christian. (See Book Four for a much more detailed discussion of the types of things which will, and will not, be publicly revealed about the lives of real Christians at the Judgment Seat of Christ.)

No unsaved person will ever truly get away with anything. If a man's crimes have gone undetected in his earthly life, he is no better off. They will all be revealed publicly at the Great White Throne Judgment. It will be a day of terrible shame and humiliation. Punishment will then be given that will match the crimes exactly. Therefore we can trust God to correct all the injustices of this present life. We know that in this world most crimes are never detected. Even those that are detected are not properly punished.

Therefore, most people get away with most things. However it is only for a time. In the end, every crime and every sin will be punished. The wrongdoer will not get away with anything at all. It will all be straightened out and fully dealt with at the Great White Throne Judgment. Complete justice will be done and every record will be set straight. Every person who was ever falsely accused will be vindicated. Moreover, every false accuser will be exposed. That is why the Bible says that we must not, and don't need to, take personal vengeance for any injustice. God will do it all for us:

³⁰*For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people."³¹*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

Hebrews 10:30-31 (NIV)

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. *Romans 12:19 (NIV)*

We do not need to take any vengeance ourselves in this life. God will take vengeance upon all those who commit acts of wickedness or injustice. It is His responsibility, not ours, and He will not overlook it. God puts in place governments, whose job it is to punish crime here and now. That is valid. It is part of God's overall judgment. What is not valid is for us personally to seek vengeance against others individually. We are to let God do it, either through the police and courts now, or at the Great White Throne Judgment later. (See Book Two for a fuller discussion of what forgiveness really involves and why we are commanded to forgive others who have wronged us and not seek for any vengeance ourselves.)

It is impossible for us to imagine exactly what the punishment will consist of and how it will be different for one person than for another. The Bible does not tell us in detail. In one sense the question of the degrees of punishment between one unbeliever and another is not so important. The real point is that every single person who goes to the Great White Throne Judgment will be sent on from there to the Lake of Fire. Thus, it is not only the destination for famous people like Adolf Hitler, but also for every ordinary sinner who does not repent and believe in Jesus Christ. It is not just for extreme cases, as many complacently assume. The Great White Throne Judgment is for *every* sinner who does not put their trust in Jesus Christ.

Yet the fact is that in the Western church today judgment, Hell and the Lake of Fire are barely ever spoken about. If they are, then it is usually only to dismiss them as old fashioned imagery, mythology or metaphor. They are not metaphors. Be assured, they are real and literal. Yet, even if we were somehow to say that the Great White Throne Judgment and the Lake of Fire were metaphors, we would still have to ask, “*metaphors for what?*”

In other words, even if they were metaphors, which they clearly aren't, it can still only mean that they represent something indescribably awful which is the fate awaiting all unbelievers. Thus it would not be much of a comfort to think that the Lake of Fire was not literal if, instead, it simply ‘represented’ something equally terrible. So, even those who interpret the Lake of Fire as a metaphor or symbol should still be just as concerned as I am.

Remember that, of all the references in the Bible to Hell and the Lake of Fire, most of them come out of the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself. You are, of course, free to reject Him and disbelieve Him if you wish. But you need to be very clear that if you are rejecting the concepts of Hell and the Lake of Fire and treating them as a myth, then you are directly contradicting Jesus Christ Himself. He spoke of them not just once, but many times and in very plain and clear terms.

Some people have also tried to reduce the significance of the Lake of Fire by suggesting that those who enter it are simply destroyed in its flames and cease to exist. This is called “*annihilationism*”. However there is no biblical basis for it. On the contrary, the Bible is clear that the opposite is the case. Those who enter the Lake of Fire do so for eternity and remain in a fully conscious state. Though they are in the flames, they are never consumed by them. That is because their resurrection bodies are indestructible, just as a Christian's resurrection body will be eternal and indestructible. Therefore, for the unsaved, their punishment will go on forever and ever and will never cease:

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
Revelation 20:10 (NIV)

The punishment that takes place in the Lake of Fire is eternal and it is also conscious. If those who go there were not conscious, they could not experience torment at all. Also, if their lives were simply ended then it would not make sense to refer to their torment as going on forever and ever. It would obviously stop at the point when they ceased to exist. Therefore annihilationism is not true. The Lake of Fire goes on forever and those who go into it remain fully conscious forever. This is undoubtedly true of Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet. Logically, it must be equally true of all those human beings who are sent to the same place.

There can be no doubt that the Lake of Fire is presented by Jesus as real, literal and eternal. The words used are absolutely clear. It is only doubted by those who do not *want* to believe in it. People do not want to believe in the Lake of Fire, or judgment, or even sin, because these things offend them. They just do not like these ideas. Yet we have already made the point that a thing does not become untrue simply because we do not like it. It is either true or false as a matter of fact, irrespective of whether we are for it or against it. Judgment and the Lake of Fire are classic examples of this.

For completeness I should add that there are some other aspects to the concept of judgment, apart from the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment. There will also be some other smaller scale judgments. However, I will explain those in later books in this series, in particular in Book Four, so as to avoid too much complexity at this stage. Those other judgments also require us to have some understanding of the return of Jesus to the earth.

The distinction between “Hell” and the “Lake of Fire”

There is a difference between ‘Hell’ and the ‘Lake of Fire’. They are not the same place. In most people’s minds these are blended into one, but that is not biblically accurate. We therefore need to distinguish these places from each other and define them clearly.

Hell

Hell is not the Lake of Fire. At this moment, as you read this, nobody is yet in the Lake of Fire. The first person to go into the Lake of Fire will be the antichrist, followed by the false prophet and then, 1000 years later, by Satan himself. This will occur in the future, after Jesus has returned to the Earth. It is not until after these enter it that the great mass of unbelievers will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. Thus, nobody is in the Lake of Fire at the moment. Yet, there are countless people currently in Hell. What then is Hell?

The simplest way to describe Hell is to refer to some of the words that are used in the Hebrew and the Greek of the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament uses a Hebrew word “*Sheol*” and the New Testament uses a Greek word, “*Hades*”. These both refer to the same thing. Until the time of Jesus, Sheol or Hades, was divided into two sections. One of those is what we now call Hell. This was for unsaved unbelievers. The other section was for genuine believers who lived in Old Testament times, i.e. up until the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Until then, any genuine believing Jew would go to the good part of Sheol or Hades which was set apart for them. This was given another name, i.e. “*paradise*” or “*Abraham’s bosom*”. It was not Heaven, but it was a place where those people were sent by God to wait until the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After Jesus came and paid for their sins on the cross, those believing Jews and also faithful believers in God before the time of Abraham such as Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, Job, etc, were then taken to Heaven. That is where they are now. We are now required to put our faith in Jesus Christ and in the sacrifice that he made (in the past) on the cross at Calvary. However, the Jewish people and other believers in the Old Testament did not know that that was going to happen. Therefore, they had to put their faith in God to forgive and save them. That is what God eventually did do when Jesus, their Messiah, finally came.

The Jewish People did not have a full understanding of what exactly the Messiah would do. They had no expectation of the cross, or the death of their Messiah on their behalf. But they knew that their Messiah would one day come. Thus, when He did actually come, it was possible for those who had already died prior to then to receive their complete salvation and to have it more fully explained to them. They were then taken up from that temporary paradise, or “*Abraham’s bosom*”, to Heaven itself. That is where they have been since that time.

Therefore, from then on, since the time of the resurrection, when Jesus removed the Old Testament believers from it, Sheol/Hades has been populated only by unsaved people. Thus only the ‘bad’

section remains in operation. This is now where a person goes when they die, if they are an **unbeliever** and are unsaved. Our word for it is 'Hell'. They go there to wait for the judgment at the Great White Throne which is to come in the future.

They have at least 1000 years to wait for the Great White Throne Judgment, even if they were to die today. The millennial reign of Jesus Christ on Earth will itself last for 1000 years and that period has not yet begun. Some people have been in Sheol or Hades, or what we now call Hell, for thousands of years already. We know from the Bible that the people in Hell are fully conscious and waiting for what lies ahead of them. They are therefore in a dreadful condition of torment, fear and anxiety, combined with extreme regret and bitterness. It is difficult to imagine what a harrowing place Hell must be.

Consider how it must be waiting for a judgment, from which you know that you will inevitably go on to the Lake of Fire. The only question is the precise degree of punishment that you will have to receive there. It is a terrible prospect. It should motivate us to give our lives now to tell others about Jesus while we, and they, still have the chance. Consider this important passage from Luke chapter 16. In it Jesus speaks about a man who was already in Hell:

¹⁹"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

²⁴So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' ²⁵"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

²⁷"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ³⁰" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Luke 16:19-31 (NIV)

Many people assume that Jesus is teaching a parable here when He speaks about the rich man and Lazarus. A parable is a story which is not literally true, but which illustrates a point or a message. Jesus told many of these, such as the parable of the sower, or the wheat and the tares, or the grain of mustard seed and so on.

However the account of the rich man and Lazarus is not actually a parable, even though some people wrongly assume that it is. Here Jesus is giving a true account which involves the real facts of two real men who had died. The people in parables were never given names. So, we learn from this literal account that Jesus gives in Luke 16 what Sheol/Hades was like at the time prior to Jesus' resurrection, when it was divided into two parts. It is Hell that is being referred to in the next passage from Psalm 49. We are warned not to trust in or focus on financial wealth, because we cannot take any of it with us when we die:

*¹⁶Do not be overawed when a man grows rich,
when the splendour of his house increases;
¹⁷for he will take nothing with him when he dies,
his splendour will not descend with him.
¹⁸Though while he lived he counted himself blessed
and men praise you when you prosper-
¹⁹he will join the generation of his fathers,
who will never see the light of life.
²⁰A man who has riches without understanding
is like the beasts that perish.*

Psalm 49:16-20 (NIV)

The rich man described in this psalm is pictured here in Hell (without his money) awaiting the final Great White Throne Judgment. That thought is meant to sober us.

The Lake of Fire.

Just to clarify again, the Lake of Fire does not at present, have anybody in it. But in the end, there will be thrown into it not only the antichrist, the false prophet and Satan, but also all of the fallen angels that we know as demons. They fell with Satan out of Heaven when he rebelled against God. This took place before the world was created.

At that time, Satan had the name ‘*Lucifer*’ and was the most senior angel in Heaven. He was, in effect, God’s Prime Minister. But his pride swelled up and he decided that he wanted to be like the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. He envied the Son of God and wanted His place and started to look upon himself as equal to Him. There began in him at that time a hatred for, and a rivalry with, the Son of God that has continued ever since.

God exposed Satan’s rebellion, and threw him out of Heaven. But He did not do so until approximately one third of the angels in Heaven at that time had joined with Satan to rebel against God. Because of this, they too were thrown out of Heaven. They now operate as demons, causing havoc on this earth. They do so through opposing and sabotaging the work that God wishes to do in our lives, particularly the preaching of the gospel and the saving of human beings from their sins.

Satan and his demons have pledged themselves to oppose God in all of this and especially to resist people’s salvation. They are filled with hatred and do all that they can to attack, undermine, deceive, demoralise and discourage God’s people. (See later books in this series for more details of what Satan and his demons are and how they operate in your life day by day).¹

The demons will, one day, go into the Lake of Fire for eternity. Indeed the Lake of Fire was originally created for them, not for us. It was intended for Satan and his fallen angels before any human being was ever created. Therefore those human beings who end up in the Lake of Fire are going to a place that was never originally intended for them.

I regret the fact that I have had to dwell so long upon these very unpleasant and terrifying things. But, without doing so you cannot understand what the good news is, because Jesus Christ came to save us from these very things. Without realising how terrible they are, we cannot fully appreciate what a magnificent thing Jesus has done for us. He died on the cross to suffer all that punishment in our

¹ Note - for a brief summary of Satan's background and personal history, read Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. These passages show what he once was and how pride caused his downfall

place. That enables us to be saved and to avoid Hell, the Great White Throne judgment and the Lake of Fire. Please remember that God does not want anybody to go to Hell or the Lake of Fire. He takes no pleasure in condemning any of us:

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"
Ezekiel 33:11 (NASB)

What about when children die?

I feel that I ought to add a brief explanation about children, and what happens when they die. Strictly speaking, the Bible does not directly address this question. Nor does it define what a 'child' is exactly, i.e. what age childhood goes up to. Presumably the age of responsibility for one's own sin varies from child to child, depending on their level of knowledge and circumstances. We are not told. We can however look at 2 Samuel chapter 12, which refers to the death of King David's baby son:

²¹His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!" ²²He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' ²³But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

2 Samuel 12:21-23 (NASB)

Note that King David says "*I will go to him, but he will not return to me*". That is a very important indicator of what had happened to that baby. We know, because the Bible makes it clear elsewhere, that King David was saved and has now gone to Heaven. King David himself knew that he was going to go to Heaven. So, when he said "*I will go to him*" he meant he would see his dead child again in Heaven, i.e. after his own death. That seems very clear.

So, if anybody reading this has lost a young child, you have a valid basis to be comforted by King David's words. The above passage strongly suggests that the child is safe and has eternal life. The reason why a young child is not condemned is, presumably, because they are not yet at the age of accountability i.e. where they become responsible for their own sins. Prior to that they are, evidently, deemed to be innocent. That is my understanding.

But what is the exact age of accountability or responsibility? The Bible does not tell us. However, Jewish tradition, which may be an indication, is that it is at the age of 12 or 13. That is when a Jewish child has its Bar Mitzvah and becomes legally an adult. At that point they are said to become responsible for their own sins. Whether that is the actual age or not, I do not know. Only God knows that. I expect it varies from child to child, according to their knowledge and maturity.

What about baptism for babies?

Should babies be baptised? The answer is no, because baptism is something that each believer must choose to do when they have repented and believed in Jesus for themselves. Baptism is not something that we can do to, or for, our infant children. They must choose for themselves later, when they are old enough. Our task is to bring them up to know and fear the Lord and to encourage them to believe and be baptised. But they must, in the end, do it for themselves.

That said, they can make that decision while still children, even if they are quite young. All that is required is that they know and understand the gospel and are genuinely able to realise what they are doing. The age at which they become ready for that varies from child to child.

What we can say clearly is that the Bible does not support “*infant baptism*”. That is where people baptise their children while they are young babies. That practice is an invention of men, brought into the church after the first century. It is not biblical. Ironically, one generally sees nominal Christians baptising their babies, whereas Bible believing Christians do not. That apparent contradiction confuses some people, but the thinking behind it is as I have set out above. (See chapter 16 for more detail on baptism in water).