

Heaven or Hell: Real or Fiction?

Abraham Adebajo Okunade

INTRODUCTION

Eschatology is that branch of theology concerned with the study of the “last things”, that is what will happen in the future both to individuals and to the world as a whole of which the final state of heaven or hell is of great concern. There are various schools of thought about the certainty and reality of heaven and hell, one school of thought avers that the duo are real while the other posits that heaven and hell is just a fiction and mere human imagination which is abstract. But the concern here is on the reality of heaven and hell.³⁷⁰

The quest to know the state of man after death prior to resurrection and final judgment has been a reoccurring issue from time immemorial among Christians and theologians. This has resulted into various perspectives and presuppositions about the intermediate state of man after death and the final destination of man between Heaven and hell and the reality or fiction thereof. The big question facing humanity is whether heaven and hell is real or a mere fiction or mirage and the intermediate state of man. This is because there is no one that has gone to either heaven or hell and came back with the empirical report of what the two places (Heaven and Hell) look like.

The Bible does not reveal a lot about the intermediate state but rather teaches more about the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final state of the

³⁷⁰ David Horton et al Eds., *The Portable Seminary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bethany House, 2006), 192.

righteous and the wicked (Heaven or Hell) than it does about the present state of the dead before resurrection.³⁷¹ This is probably because in the New Testament times, the Parousia or second coming is imminent, thus, little is known about the life after death before resurrection. The bible says that it is expected for a man to die once after which is judgment. Davis asserts that it is often said that nobody can accurately predict the future and it seems nobody has ever died, experienced the afterlife, and come back to give us reliable information about the reality of heaven and hell.³⁷² But where does the soul of men go to after death? Does the soul go to heaven or paradise, hell or Hades before the final judgments? Is the concept of heaven and hell real or mere human imagination? Consequently the burden of this paper is to examine the conceptual overview of the intermediate state, concept of heaven and hell, and the reality of heaven and Hell. There is the need to examine the concept of the intermediate state of man because death is a precursor to either heaven or hell.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

According to N.T. Wright, the New Testament attests to an intermediate state in which the dead are conscious prior to the general resurrection and the intermediate state in question is a place of uneventful happiness that does not involve purification.³⁷³ This will be for the righteous as there are two destinations for the intermediate state as seen in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (paradise and hades). According to Aquinas, Jesus entered the intermediate state after His crucifixion and liberated the holy people of God who were waiting for him because when he died on the cross, some

³⁷¹ Richard J. Gehman, *Who Are The Living-Dead?: A Theology of Death, Life After Death and the Living-Dead* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 221.

³⁷² Stephen T. Davis, *After We Die: Theology, Philosophy, and the Question of Life after Death* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2015), 1-2,

³⁷³ Levering, 26.

tomb were opened and some of the dead rose from their grave.³⁷⁴

A major solution to the fear of sickness and death and the living-dead, can be found in the Biblical teaching on death, life after death and the reality of heaven and hell. This is because when human beings are abreast of their hope of being in heaven with Christ immediately after death, like the penitent thief that was crucified alongside with Christ, they will receive courage to face death without fear and hopelessness and it will encourage believers to work out their salvation on a daily basis with fear and trembling.³⁷⁵ On the other hand once man know that he is likely to end up in Hell if he fails to repent he will know his final abode. For Christian theologian, Life after death suggests intermediate state that is the state of the dead between the time of their death and the time of the resurrection of the dead. Knowing the condition or place of the dead immediately after their death as God has revealed it will help Christians to deal with fears, uncertainty and man's relationship with the living-dead.³⁷⁶

The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology describe the intermediate state as the period between death as an individual phenomenon and the final judgment and consummation.³⁷⁷ This suggest the interval or break between death and the final resurrection. Death is a profound and complex object; it is the one universal and undeniable fact of life irrespective of age, culture, ideology or belief, death is universal but reactions to it are distinctive based on the state

³⁷⁴ Levering, 26.

³⁷⁵ Richard J. Gehman, *Who Are The Living-Dead?: A Theology of Death, Life After Death and the Living-Dead* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 217.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, Eds. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Third Edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 429.

of man after death.³⁷⁸ The Africans belief in the spirit world with the awareness that their deceased forbears are living with them as living dead whose spirit is not asleep.

For Apostle Paul to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord, in like manner, Jesus told the thief by his side: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).³⁷⁹ Paradise in this infer heaven as against hell where the other thief on the cross is likely to go. The intermediate state in Horton’s view refers to the condition of the person between the time of death and the resurrection. When a man die, his spirit moves from one point to another. This is because the spirit cannot be affected by physical death; the story of the rich man and Lazarus is an indication of an intermediate state.³⁸⁰

Aremu and Malomo opines that intermediate state refers to the condition of humans between their death and the resurrection and some of the temporary place for both believers and non-believers are: Sheol (the place where the Spirit of man goes to at the time of physical death), Hades (the place of the dead), Abraham’s Bosom or paradise (a place of rest till resurrection day), Abyss (Bottomless pit), Tatarus (a place of the dead souls till judgment day).³⁸¹ All these are the likely destination of the dead who have departed this terrestrial world for the hereafter both for believers and unbelievers’ prior to the final resurrection of the dead and judgment; this can also be referred to as ‘waiting room’.

Furthermore, intermediate state is the state of continuing transformation as death cannot separate believers from Christ

³⁷⁸ Wayne A. Patton, *An Examination of the Doctrine of Death and the afterlife from a Biblical and Historical Perspectives compared to the level of sophistication among Laity* (Dissertation) (Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 1.

³⁷⁹ Grudem, 817.

³⁸⁰ Dag Heward-Mills, *Basic Theology* (Benin: Hosanna Christian Bookshop and Publishing House, 2012), 71.

³⁸¹ Tunde Aremu and Emmanuel Malomo, *Christian Theology in African Context* (Ilorin: Amazing-Grace Print-Media, 2016), 250-254.

and the Holy Spirit; some scholars alludes that the intermediate state is Paul's symbolic universe that is inhabited by deceased believers prior to Parousia.³⁸² In the thought of Stephen Yates, intermediate state is the apparent interval between the death of individual human beings and the final consummation of all created beings or things which is due to occur at the resurrection.³⁸³ To John Yates intermediate state exists after death in which the believer enters into a temporary interim existence which is an existentially penultimate one which awaits the Parousia or second coming of Christ to judge the world.³⁸⁴ The intermediate state is not for believers alone but for both Christians and non-Christians alike.

Intermediate state is the state of existence between death and resurrection; the New Testament offers no sustained reflection on the intermediate state probably because the Parousia was perceived as so real and imminent that it would have seemed irrelevant to reflect upon the state of the dead.³⁸⁵ There are differs perspective about the state of the dead in the hereafter before the final resurrection and Judgment from different schools of thought which are worthy of examination. The controversy of the state of the soul during the interval between death and the resurrection of the body at Parousia and the reality of the final destination of man has been recognized ever since the closing of the New Testament canon.

Incidentally the New Testament never devoted more time in dealing with the state of the dead before resurrection as they are preoccupied about the urgency of the second coming of Christ which is perceived as coming like a thief in the night

³⁸² Sarah Harding, "Paul's Eschatological Anthropology: The Eso Anthropos and the Intermediate State" *Transformation* (2016), 1-16.

³⁸³ Stephen Yates, *Between Death and Resurrection: A Critical Response to Recent Catholic debate concerning the intermediate State* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1.

³⁸⁴ John Yates, "Immediate or Intermediate? The State of Believer upon Death" *Churchman* 101:4 (1987), 7.

³⁸⁵ Patton, 72-75.

without prior notice. It is disturbing that the future beyond the grave holds some rather critical unknowns by way of polarizing mindset which make some speculate that there is nothing like heaven or hell.

Thus, the nature of this interim period continues to be a matter of dispute disseminating seeds of confusion and pessimism on the reality of heaven and hell. The idea has tempted creative minds to fill the space with imaginative happenings, perspectives and the tendency to moralize resulted to the doctrine of purgatory and other unscriptural and unevangelical notion about postmortem state of man.³⁸⁶ The existence of souls between death and resurrection is usually called the intermediate state which is in between temporary and incomplete. The intermediate state in question which has different perspectives covers both the existence of the believers and unbelievers during this time.³⁸⁷

Today many believe they truly know what awaits us on the other side of death's door (heaven or hell), while others are just as convinced that this, the greatest mystery, will never be solved because it is a mirage. Consequently, cultures all over the world once believed very much that people had two souls which is likely to separate from one another at death with each going on to an entirely different afterlife experience of either heaven or hell.³⁸⁸ This suggests the views of some about the intermediate state before resurrection. The question about the future of man and the hereafter is indeed an ultimate question, thus, people fear death for fear of: dying painfully, hell, absolute solitude, separation from loved ones, earthly fate of loved ones, unfulfilled goals, being forgotten and not

³⁸⁶ Abel Aor Inyaregh, *The Mystery of the Doctrine of Death and the Intermediate State: Panacea for the Dilema of the Unknown* (National Open University of Nigeria), 1.

³⁸⁷ Jerome M. Julien, *The Intermediate State* www.christianstudylibrary.org. Accessed 14/04/2021

³⁸⁸ Peter Noval, "Division of the Self: Life After Death and the Binary Soul Doctrine" *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 20(3), (Spring 2002), 143-189.

knowing their final destination; but the knowledge about the condition of people will allay the fear people have about death and the afterlife coupled with their likely destination.³⁸⁹

Man' final destination has been a subject of debate from time immemorial, some owe to the tradition of their ancestors while other struggle with conflicting ideas; Buddhist and Hindus believed they will undergo repeated rebirths, transmitting from existence to existence (suggesting that there is no heaven or hell), Islamic beliefs recognize seven heavens and the Christians has a strong hope about heaven after death for what Jesus has done and hell for sinners (suggesting the reality of heaven and hell).³⁹⁰ The question of the intermediate state of the dead prior to general resurrection has inspired numerous debates among 20th century theologians; the modern critique of the intermediate state leads to a rejection of the very idea of the soul which is posit as antithetical to Christianity.³⁹¹

From the foregoing, the pertinent question is: “when a Christian dies, is he then in an unconscious state awaiting the resurrection or does he have a conscious existence living in heaven in an intermediate state between death and resurrection?”³⁹² The Protestants sees the intermediate state as a paradise while the Catholics see it as a purgatory, the debate is endless³⁹³. Some of the perspectives of intermediate state among others are as follows:

1. Soul sleep- This is also known as unconscious existence until the resurrection (Psychopannychy).³⁹⁴

³⁸⁹ Davis, 4.

³⁹⁰ Billy Graham, *Death and the Life After* (Dallas Texas: Word Publishing, 2001 , 149-150.)

³⁹¹ John Gavin S. J. “On the intermediate state of the soul” *Nova et Vetera* Vol. 15, NO. 3 (Summer, 2017), 925-926.

³⁹² Patton, 75-76.

³⁹³ Patton, 86.

³⁹⁴ Inyaregh, 3.

The human soul sleeps between death and resurrection with the paucity of scripture teaching on the intermediate state.³⁹⁵ This doctrine according to Grudem teaches that when believers die, they go into a state of unconsciousness existence, and the next thing that they are conscious of will be when Christ returns and raises them to eternal life.³⁹⁶

2. Paradise- This is the place of blessedness of which Jesus promise the criminal that was crucified with Him, by implication Jesus referred to paradise as intermediate state before the final resurrection.³⁹⁷

3. Purgatory- Purgatory is the place where certain people who are eventually bound for heaven will go after death or the state that they will be in. These are people who have been forgiven from the guilt of sin but have spiritual liabilities and are not yet ready for the kingdom of God. They need to be cleansed from the stain of sin.³⁹⁸ The Roman Catholics believes in a place of purgating in preparation for the future life.³⁹⁹

4. The Traditional Orthodox View- This view about intermediate state holds that believers experience a state of conscious bliss in the presence of the Lord, while unbelievers are tormented by separation from the presence of God.⁴⁰⁰

5. Liberal view- This connotes immortality of the soul, that is, the body may die and decompose but the

³⁹⁵ Patton, 76.

³⁹⁶ Grudem, 819.

³⁹⁷ Patton, 78.

³⁹⁸ Davis, 105.

³⁹⁹ Horton, 193.

⁴⁰⁰ David Horton et al Eds. *The Portable Seminary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bethany House Publishers, 2006), 193.

soul being immortal lives on.⁴⁰¹ This is in line with the Biblical injunction that the soul after death goes back to where it came from.

6. Sheol and Hades- This is another view on the intermediate state as a type of existence which is post mortem and pre-resurrection.⁴⁰² This is the place of punishment for the wicked and the realm of the dead and a place for judgment.⁴⁰³

7. Neo-orthodoxy- This suggest bodily resurrection that stem from the view that man is a monistic idea; a radical unity of the human person, existence means bodily existence.⁴⁰⁴

8. Instantaneous Resurrection- This is the view that upon death, the believers receives his heavenly body at the moment of physical death.⁴⁰⁵ The heavenly body will be given only at resurrection in which the dead in Christ will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye.

9. The Intermediate State as Life after Life: Conscious Post Mortem Existence- The post mortem conscious existence of the “intermediate state” as the condition of all mankind between death and resurrection lies between two fixed points; the period of time that elapses between the death of the individual and the consummation of history. It is momentary, in due course being eclipsed by the ‘final state’ of mankind.

⁴⁰¹ Aremu and Malomo, 25.

⁴⁰² Patton, 78.

⁴⁰³ Jerome M. Julien, *The Intermediate State* www.christianstudylibrary.org. Accessed 14/04/2021

⁴⁰⁴ Aremu and Malomo, 25.

⁴⁰⁵ Aremu and Malomo, 253.

10. Materialism or physicalism- This holds that human beings are only material beings, thus the mind and body are one and indivisible, so when people die they completely cease to exist, but through resurrection they will exist again in the future. Therefore, there is no intermediate state, one simply does not exist until the Lord returns and the dead shall be reconstituted as it were.⁴⁰⁶

From the foregoing perspective on the intermediate state, it can be deduced that after the physical death of man he/she is believed to be in a state and place prior to the final judgment and the place in question is a destination whether temporary or permanent destination. The likely destination of man after death before and after judgment could either be in heaven or hell. Thus, there is the need to examine the concept of heaven and hell of which the next section will focus on.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF HEAVEN AND HELL

The fear of death is common among every human being probably because of the uncertainty of the state of man after death. Is there life after death? Where is the final destination of man in the hereafter?⁴⁰⁷ There is biblical view of life after death and the only two likely destination beyond the grave is Heaven and Hell: The Spirit of those who were righteous in Christ go to be with the Father in Heaven while the Spirits of those who rejected Jesus will be cast down to Hell.⁴⁰⁸ Consequently, the two destination that calls for eschatological consciousness is heaven and hell.

Granted that there are no record of those that have been to heaven or hell and return, thus, there are debates and counter

⁴⁰⁶ Patton, 76.

⁴⁰⁷ Moses Audi et al., *Contemporary Issues in Systematic Theology: An African Perspective* (Kaduna: Dee Ypoung Printing Press, 2019), 159.

⁴⁰⁸ Dag Heward-Mills, *Basic Theology* (Benin: Hosanna Christian Bookshop and Publishing House, 2012), 70-71.

debates whether heaven and hell is real or is a mere fiction and human imagination. In this “eloquent understanding of how death is viewed through many spiritual traditions”, Bart Ehrman recounts the long history of the afterlife, ranging from The Epic of Gilgamesh up to the writings of Augustine, focusing especially on the teachings of Jesus and his early followers. He discusses ancient guided tours of heaven and hell, in which a living person observes the sublime blessings of heaven for those who are saved and the horrifying torments of hell for those who are damned. This implies that heaven is for those who are saved while hell is meant for the condemned. Some of these accounts take the form of near death experiences, the oldest on record, with intriguing similarities to those reported today.⁴⁰⁹ Heaven, hell and purgatory certainly involve the dead, but dead souls were not completely absent from earth and continued to haunt their families.⁴¹⁰

Heaven is part of God’s creation above the earth and the waters including “air” and “space” and serving as home for God and His heavenly creatures such as Angels and other heavenly creatures or celestial beings.⁴¹¹ Some equate the Garden of Eden to paradise from which Adam and Eve were chased out from after the fall and no one know the exact location of the Garden till date except God. Hell is usually understood as the final abode of the unrighteous dead wherein the ungodly suffer eternal punishment. In the Old Testament, Hell is referred to as *Sheol* (abode of both the righteous dead and the ungodly dead) while in the New Testament, Hell is referred to as *Gehena*, *Hades*, and *Tartarus*.⁴¹² This suggest the various nomenclatures used for Hell as one of the final destination of humanity in the hereafter.

⁴⁰⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife*

⁴¹⁰ Alane E. Bernstein, *Heaven, Hell and Purgatory*

⁴¹¹ Chad Brand Et al Eds., “Heaven” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 734.

⁴¹² Chad Brand Et al Eds., “Hell” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 745.

In traditional English versions, he does occasionally seem to speak of “Hell” – for example, in his warnings in the Sermon on the Mount: anyone who calls another a fool, or who allows their right eye or hand to sin, will be cast into “hell” (Matthew 5:22, 29-30). But these passages are not actually referring to “hell.” The word Jesus uses is “Gehenna.” The term does not refer to a place of eternal torment but to a notorious valley just outside the walls of Jerusalem, believed by many Jews at the time to be the most unholy, god-forsaken place on earth. It was where, according to the Old Testament, ancient Israelites practiced child sacrifice to foreign gods. The God of Israel had condemned and forsaken the place.

In the ancient world (whether Greek, Roman, or Jewish), the worst punishment a person could experience after death was to be denied a decent burial. Jesus developed this view into a repugnant scenario: corpses of those excluded from the kingdom would be unceremoniously tossed into the most desecrated dumping ground on the planet. Jesus did not say souls would be tortured there. They simply would no longer exist.

Jesus’ stress on the absolute annihilation of sinners appears throughout his teachings. At one point he says there are two gates that people pass through (Matthew 7:13-14). One is narrow and requires a difficult path, but leads to “life.” Few go that way. The other is broad and easy, and therefore commonly taken. But it leads to “destruction.” It is an important word. The wrong path does not lead to torture.

So too Jesus says the future kingdom is like a fisherman who hauls in a large net (Matthew 13:47-50). After sorting through the fish, he keeps the good ones and throws the others out. He doesn’t torture them. They just die. Or the kingdom is like a person who gathers up the plants that have grown in his field (Matthew 13:36-43). He keeps the good grain, but tosses the weeds into a fiery furnace. These don’t burn forever. They are consumed by fire and then are no more.

Still other passages may seem to suggest that Jesus believe in hell. Most notably Jesus speaks of all nations coming for the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). Some are said to be sheep, and the others goats. The (good) sheep are those who have helped those in need – the hungry, the sick, the poor, the foreigner. These are welcomed into the “kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” The (wicked) goats, however, have refused to help those in need, and so are sent to “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” At first blush, that certainly sounds like the hell of popular imagination.

But when Jesus summarizes his point, he explains that the contrasting fates are “eternal life” and “eternal punishment.” They are not “eternal pleasure” and “eternal pain.” The opposite of life is death, not torture. So the punishment is annihilation. But why does it involve “eternal fire”? Because the fire never goes out. The flames, not the torments, go on forever. And why is the punishment called “eternal”? Because it will never end. These people will be annihilated forever. That is not pleasant to think about, but it will not hurt once it’s finished.

Is there really a place of total darkness, eternal suffering, constant pain, loneliness, weeping and wailing and gnashing (grinding) of teeth, a place where there is no light, joy, laughter, happiness, fellowship, mercy, forgiveness or peace? Does such a horrible place exist? Jesus said in John 14 that if heaven wasn’t real He would have told us. So it’s safe to say that if hell isn’t real He would have also told us. Hell is a topic you don’t find many people willing to talk about. It ceases to be in the vocabulary of more and more preachers. And fewer and fewer people believe hell actually exists and is a reality for untold multitudes now and will be a reality for millions more if they don’t trust Christ as Savior.⁴¹³

⁴¹³ James H. Cagle, *Is Hell real, I mean really real?* Valdosta Daily Times, June 6, 2018.

Unlike most Greeks, ancient Jews traditionally did not believe the soul could exist at all apart from the body. On the contrary, for them, the soul was more like the “breath.” The first human God created, Adam, began as a lump of clay; then God “breathed” life into him (Genesis 2: 7). Adam remained alive until he stopped breathing. Then it was dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Ancient Jews thought that was true of us all. When humanity stop breathing, our breath doesn’t go anywhere. It just stops. So too the “soul” doesn’t continue on outside the body, subject to postmortem pleasure or pain. It doesn’t exist any longer. From the foregoing it can be deduced that heaven and hell is not real but a fiction and thus everything ends in the dust from which man was created from.⁴¹⁴ Some of the views about heaven and hell are: Heaven isn’t now; Heaven isn’t for everyone; Heaven isn’t cute and ethereal; Heaven isn’t a state of mind or a mindless state; Hell isn’t funny; Hell isn’t a bearable annoyance; Hell isn’t just for Hitler and those Columbine shooters and maybe a few more.⁴¹⁵ These are some people’s opinion about heaven and hell and what hell and heaven is not.

There is a longing hope within men that death does not end all existence—that somehow, the life now begun will have a continuation. Questions often accompany the grieving heart: *"Where is my departed loved one?" "Do good people go to heaven and bad people to hell?"* Many hard questions need to be answered to assure us that God truly is love and that He has a wonderful plan of salvation for all. When God sentenced Adam to death for the sin of disobedience, there was no mention of an immortal soul burning eternally. God tells us the penalty for sin: *"the soul that sinneth, it shall die."* So how, then, did this doctrine of a burning hell enter church doctrine? Christians need to be armed with the facts as to the proper definitions of *"death"* and *"grave,"* and the correct interpretation of the word *"hell."* Topical studies on the subject

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ehrman,

reveal the logical and harmonious truth, that the word "hell" in both the Hebrew and the Greek means "grave."⁴¹⁶

REALITY OF HEAVEN AND HELL

Is hell real? Do Christians really believe in it? Why would a loving God send people to hell forever? These and other questions about the doctrine of hell may not be pleasant to address, but they often come up as objections to Christianity, even puzzling Christians at times. Theologically speaking, the doctrine of hell relates to personal eschatology. While eschatology is popularly known in relation to end-times events and various interpretations of the book of Revelation, it also encompasses what may be termed the "final state" of individual souls. In other words, is our ultimate and eternal destiny heaven or hell? Despite God's offer of redemption and salvation through Christ, not everyone will be redeemed, resulting in those who reject God being destined for hell.⁴¹⁷

There are some presuppositions about the reality of heaven and hell which is often in doubt whether heaven and hell really exist or a mere fiction. There are over two billion Christians in the world, the vast majority of whom believe in heaven and hell. You die and your soul goes either to everlasting bliss or torment (or purgatory en route). The vast majority of these people naturally assume this is what Jesus himself taught. But that is not true. Neither Jesus, nor the Hebrew Bible he interpreted, endorsed the view that departed souls go to paradise or everlasting pain.⁴¹⁸ This in a sense deny the reality of a place call hell. The doctrine of Hell was created by the Catholic Church, in order to scare people into

⁴¹⁶ Death Grave and Hell *Explore Bible Topics*

⁴¹⁷ Robert Velarde, *Is Hell Real?* <http://www.focusonthefamily.com> January 1, 2009.

⁴¹⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, "What Jesus Really Said About Heaven and Hell" *The New York Times* (May 8, 2020).

becoming Catholics. And the doctrine worked so well, that protestant preachers added it to their church doctrines.⁴¹⁹

Traditional Israelites did not believe in life after death, only death after death. That is what made death so mournful: nothing could make an afterlife existence sweet, since there was no life at all, and thus no family, friends, conversations, food, drink – no communion even with God. God would forget the person and the person could not even worship. The most one could hope for was a good and particularly long life here and now.

Some thinkers came up with a solution that explained how God would bring about justice, but again one that didn't involve perpetual bliss in a heaven above or perpetual torment in a hell below. This new idea maintained that there are evil forces in the most important, this new earthly kingdom will come not only to those alive at the time, but also to those who have died. Indeed, God will breathe life back into the dead, restoring them to an earthly existence. And God will bring all the dead back to life, not just the righteous. The multitude who had been opposed to God will also be raised, but for a different reason: to see the errors of their ways and be judged. Once they are shocked and filled with regret – but too late — they will permanently be wiped out of existence.⁴²⁰

But Jesus put his own twist on the idea; contrary to what other Jewish leaders taught, Jesus preached that no one will inherit the glorious future kingdom by stringently observing all the Jewish laws in their most intimate details; or by meticulously following the rules of worship involving sacrifice, prayer, and observance of holy days; or by pursuing one's own purity through escaping the vile world and the tainting influence of sinful others. Instead, for Jesus, the earthly

⁴¹⁹ D. A Taylor, *Executed to suppress His message: There is no punishment in Hell*

⁴²⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, "What Jesus Really Said About Heaven and Hell" *The New York Time* (May 8, 2020).

utopia will come to those who are fully dedicated to the most pervasive and dominant teachings of God's law. Put most simply, that involves loving God above all things despite personal hardship, and working diligently for the welfare of others, even when it is exceedingly difficult. People who have not been living lives of complete unselfish love need to repent and return to the two "greatest commandments" of Jewish Scripture: deep love of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-6) and committed love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18).

Lost Springs, Wyoming, boasts a population of one. Jesus clearly indicated a population for hell that's much greater than that of Lost Springs: "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matthew 7:13, NIV). Heaven and hell are not ideas tacked onto a religious faith, manipulating people into adherence to some moral code. They are part of the larger story we see through the pages of Scripture. Heaven and hell are the final, ultimate, and logical ends of the story – ends we all decide for ourselves without coercion. This implies that scriptural passages have proof beyond reasonable doubt that heaven and hell is a reality and not a fiction

The Bible teaches about the existence of heaven (a place of eternal joy where believers are in the presence of God), and of Hell (a state of anguished separation of unbelievers from the presence of God). These are fixed states or destination, determined by the decisions made within this life.⁴²¹

Hell is not a place of reform but a place where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:44); the scripture judge us about Hell and its unimaginable horrors, and offers us a wonderful and better alternative-Heaven. Jesus said: "I go and prepare a place for you... that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).⁴²² The story of the rich

⁴²¹ David Horton et al Eds., *The Portable Seminary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bethany House, 2006), 193-194.

⁴²² Heward-Mills, 71.

man and Lazarus suggest the existence of Heaven and Hell, thus, the souls of men who died without Christ are located in Hell

Scripture teaches that when we die we go to be with Christ, immediately joining him in heaven. For example, Jesus tells the thief crucified along with him, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The Scripture also speaks of a new earth: a transformed creation that will be the eternal dwelling place of God’s people. Even in Scripture, vision into the future is often blurry lacking distinction and clarity. Some theologians have suggested the following taxonomy of terms: When a Christian dies, he or she enters into what theologians call the intermediate state, a transitional period between our past lives on Earth and our future resurrection to life on the New Earth. Usually when we refer to “Heaven,” we mean the place that Christians go when they die which implies the intermediate Heaven.⁴²³

Hell is not an easy belief to accept. Even a seasoned Christian like C.S. Lewis said of it, “There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord’s own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason.” According to Lewis, then, hell is a biblically supported doctrine, has been accepted by the Christian church throughout the centuries, and in his assessment is also reasonable. Like a funeral, heaven and hell can be nothing more than the pleasant or not-so pleasant afterthoughts of our Christian life. But they were intended to be the lifeblood that animates it, much as they do the Scriptures. For even when not explicitly

⁴²³ Strider,

referred to, these two realities lie just beneath the words of every page of Scripture.⁴²⁴

What surprises some who object to the doctrine of hell is the fact that Jesus had a lot to say in support of the belief. In fact, scholars have determined that he said more about hell than about heaven. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left ... Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."⁴²⁵ This suggest the reality of hell as the final destination for sinners and those who fails to do the will of the master.

Christ, then, had much to say about hell. Rather than being cruel, however, His intention then and now is to offer a way out of such a horrible destiny. But people must be willing to embrace this opportunity. Another aspect of the doctrine of hell that is key to understanding it has to do with the nature of God. He is all-loving, but also completely sinless, holy and just. This means that anything unholy cannot enter His direct presence. As a result, those who fail to accept His truths must reside somewhere else which is Hell. God is also loving, but this characteristic means that He does not force belief upon anyone, but instead seeks to persuade us but the choice of heaven and Hell lies with the individual concern.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Brian Strider, *Heaven and Hell* www.corechristianBeliefs

⁴²⁵ Robert Velarde, *Is Hell Real?* <http://www.focusonthefamily.com>
January 1, 2009.

⁴²⁶ Ibid

Hell is full of believers. There are no atheists in hell. Everyone who didn't believe in Christ, or that there was a hell, and have died and gone to hell believe now, but their belief is due to them experiencing the reality of hell. They know now when it's too late that surely everything else in the Bible is true including Heaven, for hell is definitely true. Hell is not forever though. Hell will at the end of the Millennial (A Thousand Years) Reign of Christ, be emptied of its inhabitants to be judged by Christ at The Great White Throne Judgment. After the Judgment, fallen man who rejected God's mercy, love and salvation will be cast alive into the "lake of fire" where Satan, the Beast and False Prophet who were first put in, will be. No one is put back into hell (Rev. 20: 10-15).⁴²⁷

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the concept of the intermediate state, heaven and hell and the reality of two eternal destination of humanity-Heaven and Hell. Granted that there are various assumptions and presuppositions about heaven and hell, scriptural evidence ascertain the reality of heaven and hell which are the likely destination of man after judgment. Consequently, heaven is really real and hell is really real and peradventure if the duo is a fiction admitting the reality is never a disadvantage to man because it will be unfortunate for man to consider heaven and hell as a fiction only to get there and discover that it is reality and not a fiction.

Sources

Aremu, Tunde and Emmanuel Malomo, *Christian Theology in African Context* Ilorin: Amazing-Grace Print-Media, 2016.

Audi, Moses Et al., *Contemporary Issues in Systematic Theology: An African Perspective* kaduna: Dee Ypoung Printing Press, 2019.

Bernstern, Alane E. *Heaven, Hell and Purgatory* N.P.

⁴²⁷ James H. Cagle, *Is Hell real, I mean really real?* Valdosta Daily Times, June 6, 2018.

- Brand, Chad Et al Eds., "Heaven" *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003.
- Brian Strider, *Heaven and Hell* www.corechristianBeliefs Accessed 27/11/2021.
- Cagle, James H. *Is Hell real, I mean really real?* *Valdosta Daily Times*, June 6, 2018.
- Davis, Stephen T. *After We Die: Theology, Philosophy, and the Question of Life after Death* Texas: Baylor University Press, 2015.
- Ehrman, Bart D. "What Jesus Really Said About Heaven and Hell" *The New York Time* (May 8, 2020).
- Gavin, John S. J. "On the intermediate state of the soul" *Nova et Vetera* Vol. 15, NO. 3 Summer, 2017.
- Gehman, Richard J. *Who Are The Living-Dead?: A Theology of Death, Life After Death and the Living-Dead* Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1999.
- Graham, Billy *Death and the Life After* (Dallas Texas: Word Publishing, 2001.
- Harding, Sarah "Paul's Eschatological Anthropology: The Eso Anthropos and the Intermediate State" *Transformation*, 2016.
- Heward-Mills, *Basic Theology* Benin: Hosanna Christian Bookshop and Publishing House, 2012.
- Horton, David et al Eds., *The Portable Seminary* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bethany House, 2006.
- Inyaregh, Abel Aor *The Mystery of the Doctrine of Death and the Intermediate State: Panacea for the Dilema of the Unknown* National Open University of Nigeria.
- Julien, Jerome M. *The Intermediate State* christianstudylibrary.org. Accessed 14/04/2021
- Noval, Peter "Division of the Self: Life After Death and the Binary Soul Doctrine" *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 20(3), Spring 2002.
- Patton, Wayne A. *An Examination of the Doctrine of Death and the afterlife from a Biblical and Historical Perspectives compared to the level of sophistication among Laity* (Dissertation) Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013.
- Treier, Daniel J. and Walter A. Elwell, Eds. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Third Edition* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017.
- Taylor, D. A *Executed to suppress His message: There is no punishment in Hell* N.P.
- Velarde, Robert *Is Hell Real?* <http://www.focusonthefamily.com> January 1, 2009.
- Yates, Stephen *Between Death and Resurrection: A Critical Response to Recent Catholic debate concerning the intermediate State* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Yates, John "Immediate or Intermediate? The State of Believer upon Death" *Churchman* 101:4 1987.

