

# ESCAPE THE HELL MYTH

REDISCOVER THE TEACHINGS  
OF JESUS ON LOVE



ANSILO BOFF

# **Escape The Hell Myth**

*Rediscover The Teachings Of Jesus On Love*

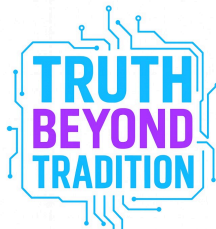
by Ansilo Boff



[www.ansiloboff.com](http://www.ansiloboff.com)

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## *Dedication*

*To those who have lived with a hidden weight,  
a quiet dread pressed beneath every choice,  
beneath every act of service,  
beneath even the most heartfelt worship,  
the unspoken fear that somewhere in the universe  
there burns a chamber of eternal torment,  
and that the God who formed you  
could somehow call such suffering "justice."*

*This book is for you,  
for the ones brave enough to look within  
and see the subconscious force that has shaped  
your devotion, your morality, your very sense of self.  
May these pages help you recognize the shadow  
that has long followed you.*

*May you step, at last,  
into the freedom that was always yours.*



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# Introduction: Hell Hath No Fury?

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**T**he silence was awkward.

I could tell most of the people in our living room were puzzled. Where exactly was I going with this line of questioning?

The twelve of us gathered around the fireplace had become close friends. Tuesday nights were always something to look forward to... not just for the coffee and cookies, but for the chance to exchange ideas on spiritual matters and pray for one another in the chaos of modern life.



*"What's your definition of hell?"* I asked.

The group hesitated, searching for an acceptable answer.



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John spoke first, with his usual confidence. *"I think the most accurate definition of hell is eternal separation from God."*

He took a slow sip of his mocha-java, the way John Wayne might holster his gun after a clean draw.

My reply came perhaps too quickly. *"If that's correct, then David made no sense when he said, 'If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there.' I believe that's Psalm 139."*

Jenny gave it a try next, though less confidently. *"Hell might not be a literal place. But whatever, or wherever, it is, I'm certain there'll be intense suffering for those who end up there. And it'll last forever."*

Everyone **stared** into the fire.

The logs **popped** and **hissed**.

*"If that's true, Jenny," I said, "why would Job, the man who lost everything, say the only home he hopes for is hell? In Job chapter seventeen, verse thirteen, he talks about it as if it's the only light at the end of his tunnel."*

Jenny frowned. *"Couldn't Job have been speaking poetically? Like when someone says, 'I'd rather have nails drilled into my skull than go to the dentist'?"*

*"You could make that argument," I conceded. "But most translators have replaced hell with the grave, which is the correct meaning of sheol wherever it appears in Scripture. Job wasn't longing for eternal fire. He was longing for rest, the end of suffering."*

I glanced around. *"Anyone see it differently?"*

**Silence.** So I pressed on.

*"Think of those who rebelled against Moses under Korah's leadership. Scripture says they went to hell ... but the wording's odd. Let me read it."*

I turned to the marked passage.

*"The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and possessions. They went down alive into the grave with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community."*

I paused, letting the image settle.

*"Chances are they owned livestock, maybe pets. It seems unfair that the animals would burn forever just for belonging to the wrong household. But if sheol means the grave, the passage makes perfect sense. Translating it that way in every Old Testament occurrence would make all those verses line up."*

I was on a roll. Why stop now?

*[ 'But God will redeem my life from the grave.' — Psalm 49:15*

*"In Psalm 49:15, David says, 'But God will redeem my life from the grave.' If sheol meant hell, then David was expressing confidence that he'd be redeemed from hell, which is strange, since you'd think he'd just hope not to go there in the first place."*

Sensing the group's fatigue, I decided to shift gears.

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*"Let's set definitions aside for a moment," I said. "Are there any babies in hell?"*

**That woke everyone up.**



*"Definitely not," came the unanimous chorus.*

A few even looked **horrified**. How could I imagine such a thing?

*"Are we not all born sinners?" I asked quietly. "The Bible says everyone is born in sin. So wouldn't that condemn babies too?"*

They knew the verse. Romans 3:23.

I tossed another log into the fire, watching the sparks leap.

John wasn't backing down. *"You're forgetting about the age of accountability,"* he said, balancing his mug on one knee. *"We're all innocent until we can take responsibility for our choices. Only God knows when that age is. It's different for everyone."*

I took a sip of hot chocolate before replying. *"John, I'll happily believe that if you can show me where Scripture even hints at an age of accountability."*

**Silence.**

I decided to **push further**. *"Here's a real story,"* I said, holding up a yellowed clipping. *"This happened in the United States."*

I smoothed it out. *"A woman killed her two children, three months and eighteen months old. Her defense? She believed that if she took their lives before they reached the age of accountability, they'd go straight to heaven. But if she let them grow up, they might make bad life choices, reject Jesus and burn forever."*

**Gasps filled the room.**

*"She was convicted of manslaughter, served eight years, remarried, and had another child. A few months later, she killed that baby too. For the exact same reason."*

The room was **still**, except for the crackle of the fire.

John shifted uneasily. Somewhere outside, an ambulance siren wailed.

*"Want my take?"* I asked. When they nodded, I spoke slowly and deliberately.

*"If what traditional Christianity teaches about hell is true, that woman should be **rewarded** for robbing Satan of three souls. In fact, if we truly believed what we say we do, we'd **march into neonatal wards with semiautomatic weapons** and send every baby to heaven before they could sin. Hell would be emptier,*

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*Satan poorer, and God richer. We'd have robbed them of a few decades on earth, sure. But isn't that worth an **eternity of bliss?**"*



The words **hung in the air**. One by one, I saw **realization dawn** on their faces:

their **childlike acceptance** of the doctrine of hell was **riddled with holes**.

So let's get straight to it.

One of the more **devastating, seldom-spoken myths** is that there exists a place called **Hell**: a place of **extreme, everlasting fiery punishment** for those who fail to make the right spiritual decision before death.

Until a few years ago, if someone had told me hell wasn't a place of eternal torment, I'd have looked at them with the same suspicion you're probably feeling toward me right now.

That night, as the embers faded to ash, I knew a **line had been crossed**.

The doctrine I'd defended for **decades** had **collapsed** under **its own weight**.

If **eternal conscious torment** is true, then the gospel **isn't good news** —

it's **COSMIC BLACKMAIL**.

But **Jesus never preached blackmail**.

He preached **love that refuses to fail**.

## **This book is about recovering that Jesus**

— the one whose Father runs toward prodigals,

who said the Father judges no one,

who spoke of fire that purifies rather than tortures.

We'll expose how the myth of hell crept in,

why it stuck,

and how Jesus dismantled it long before the Church rebuilt it.

You'll find no angry God here.

No eternal furnace disguised as justice.

No threats dressed up as love.

Only the blazing, restorative heart of the Father Jesus came to reveal —

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the one whose light still reaches into the places  
religion called hell.

ANSILO BOFF

# Part 1

Unmasking the Myth



# Chapter 1: The Invention of Eternal Fire

*"If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there." — Psalm 139*

No child ever imagines eternal flames.  
They have to be taught to.

Usually it starts with a preacher's voice and a few trembling Bible verses – "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Then come the pictures, the sermons, the whispered warnings about what happens to "the unsaved."

Fear doesn't just creep in; it becomes **holy**.

Parents call it love because they think it saves souls.

But love never needed flames to get its message across.

If you open a Hebrew scroll, long before the word hell existed, you find something quieter: **SHEOL**.

No fire.

No screaming.

No pitchforks.

Just the grave: the shadowy realm of the dead, the same for kings and beggars alike.



Jacob said he would go down to Sheol mourning for his son. Job begged for Sheol as rest from pain. David wrote, "If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there."

*"If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there."*

*- Psalm 139:8*

It was a place of silence, not torment.

More hospice than furnace, offering rest and freedom from pain.

The idea that God *burns His enemies forever* would have been unthinkable to the Hebrews who wrote those lines.

## The Shift: From Valley to Volcano

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Outside ancient Jerusalem was a valley named **Ge Hinnom**, or **Gehenna**.

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It had a *dark reputation*. In the days of certain kings, children had been sacrificed there [some say to Molech... others say as 'Moloch' sacrifices *to Yahweh!* Numerous Old Testament verses make it very clear these child sacrifices were *to Yahweh!* For evidence of this, check out "**Liberating Humanity: How Jesus Exposed The Evil God Of Moses And Warned Of Paul**".] By Jesus' time it had become a **waste dump** where fires *smoldered* to consume the refuse of the city: a living **metaphor for corruption and decay**.



So when Jesus warned religious leaders about being "in danger of **Gehenna**," His hearers didn't picture an *underworld dungeon*. They pictured that valley: *smoldering, foul, and visible* from their city walls.

He was talking about **consequences on earth**: the *spiritual rot* that would eventually consume the nation if it clung to **hypocrisy and violence**.

The fire was real, but local.

Moral, not metaphysical.