
The
Punishment
of the
Wicked

*The wages of
sin is death.*
—Rom. 6:23

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED

Does the Bible teach that the wicked will be punished by being cast bodily into hell?

What kind of hell awaits the final impenitent, and those who will not turn and obey God? We shall let Christ answer this question.

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:47, 48).

Notice this. Jesus declared that the impenitent sinners will be cast into hell. Hell fire is a grim reality. Make no mistake about that. The Bible teaches it. You and I must also teach it.

Many believe that when a sinner dies the soul leaves his body and goes straight into hell. Is this what Christ taught when He said,

... it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than

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having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where . . . the fire is not quenched?

What Will Go Into Hell?

Jesus taught that when the wicked go into hell fire, they will have a real physical, flesh-and-blood body. The body would be complete with two hands, two arms, two eyes, etc. This is fully borne out by Him in verse 45 when He said,

... having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.

If people are to have "two feet" they must have two real legs, and of course a real body. In verse 47 it says, "*... having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.*" If one has eyes they also have a head. So the Bible teaches that when the wicked go into hell fire they will go with two feet, two hands and two eyes. They will go in bodily form, just like we see men have today. In Matthew 5:30 Jesus says, "*thy whole body should be cast into hell.*" There is not one text which says the soul separates from the body and goes into hell.

Time of Reward

The question arises when will this be? The answer is found in 2 Peter 2:9:

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

It is not consistent then, to suppose that

God would send some people to hell at death, then perhaps thousands of years later call them out of hell to see if they deserved to go there in the first place.

In civil law every man is entitled to a hearing or a trial. It would be wrong for a judge to sentence a man to twenty years in prison, and after he had served half the term, for the same judge to call him back into judgment to decide if he should have been sent to jail in the first place. The Bible asks the question, "*... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Gen. 18:25). Therefore we know according to 2 Peter 2:

8 that God is reserving the unjust, and will not punish them until the day of judgment.

The day of judgment had not come in Paul's day, for we read of his conversation with Felix in Acts 24:25. Here we are informed that Paul spoke to Felix about "*righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,*" so the judgment day had not yet come in their day. Jesus tells us definitely when the judgment would be.

... the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

Again Jesus says, "*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works*" (Matt. 16:27).

So far, we can see plainly that God's judgment has not come; therefore, the wicked have not yet received any punishment, but are being reserved for their punishment.

Where does a man go when he dies?

So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave, that thou wouldst keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldst appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come (Job 14: 12-14).

Job, under inspiration of God, knew he would not go to heaven at death, but he would be reserved in the grave until, "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee..." (Job 14:15).

This was also taught by Jesus when He said,

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28, 29).

The reward of the righteous is everlasting life. The reward of the wicked is death.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Here death means death and not life. When a man is dead, he is dead. When a man is alive, he is alive. The dead are not alive.

The Two Deaths

The Bible teaches two deaths. One is the natural death when we cease to breathe and fall asleep, as did Lazarus. (See John 11: 11-14.) Then the body is placed in the grave and there awaits "...the voice of the archangel and... the trump of God..." (1 Thess. 4:16).

The other death is called the "second death" (Rev. 2:11). It takes place after the thousand-year reign of the saints on earth with Christ. (See Rev. 20:4, 5; also Rev. 5:10.) Furthermore we read, "... He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11).

More is said about the second death in Rev. 21:8.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

This whole earth will become a great lake of fire in which all wickedness will perish, and all evil will be completely destroyed. Even the devil will not be able to survive when God decides to call a halt to sin and sinners.

Notice 2 Peter 3:7-13, which in part reads,

The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved... the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise,

look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

That fire will be much hotter and more destructive than most preachers believe today. Many are teaching that the fires of hell will only torture the wicked while the Bible teaches they shall be burned up and nothing left of them.

Complete Destruction

Jesus taught a complete destruction of the wicked when He said,

... *fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matt. 10:28).

Some have been taught that the soul is indestructible, and cannot die or be destroyed. The Bible is squarely against this for Jesus Himself said to "*fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body*..." In other words, fear Him who can destroy both life and body.

How will the wicked be destroyed?

But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away (Psalm 37:20).

John the Baptist describes the destruction of the wicked as follows:

... *he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire* (Matt. 3:12).

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into

life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:45, 48).

From these two references some have concluded that the wicked will burn throughout all eternity; however, the Bible is its best expositor, and to understand its language we must turn to other references where the same word or phraseology is used as the one in question.

In Jeremiah 17:27 we find a prophecy which reads,

But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day... then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof...

Note this fire: "*and it shall not be quenched.*" In spite of this warning the people continued in sin, until at last we find the judgment fell on them and the prophecy was fulfilled thus,

... *came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, which served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, and burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire* (Jer. 52:12, 13).

The prophecy was given that this fire would "*devour the palaces of Jerusalem*," and this was with a fire that could "*not be quenched.*" The fire which burned that day was "*an unquenchable fire.*" It devoured the palaces and the houses, turning them into ashes. When

the flames had done their work they went out of their own accord.

Notice again how this was fulfilled.

To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years (See 2 Chron. 36:21.)

According to these texts the fire that could "not be quenched" made Jerusalem desolate. Likewise the fire that destroys wickedness, sin and sinners will make the earth desolate of wicked creatures. In fact, there will not even be a "hell" full of sinners left, for they will be all turned into ashes and smoke.

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts (Malachi 4:1, 3).

What Is Everlasting Fire?

Some may have been puzzled over the reference to "everlasting fire" in Matt. 25:41. It reads as follows,

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed,

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into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

You will notice it does *not* say the wicked are everlasting, or that the fire will burn through all eternity, but it says, "everlasting fire." Thus we understand that Christ used the phrase, "everlasting fire" and "unquenchable fire" interchangeably, but denoting the same meaning.

Now, dear seeker for truth, turn to Jude and the 7th verse. We read.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

We are told here that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was for "an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." In other words Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with everlasting, eternal fire. Are Sodom and Gomorrah burning today? No! The Dead Sea rolls its murky waves over the very spot where once stood these wicked cities. Yet we read the fire was an "eternal fire," or an "everlasting fire," and surely it was *everlasting fire*, for the work that fire accomplished that day was everlasting in nature, but not in duration. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will never be rebuilt or inhabited again, and in this sense it was "eternal fire," which God visited upon them that day long ago.

Of this same event we read further,

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And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly (2 Peter 2:6).

Sodom and Gomorrah were burned and turned into ashes for an example to the wicked who should spurn the pleadings of God, and choose to live in their "ungodly" ways. What a tragedy to wilfully reject the grace of God! In that great day the ungodly will be turned into ashes as the ungodly earth cleanses His property of sin. The wicked will not be like ashes, but they will actually be ashes, as it tells us in Malachi 4:3.

The destruction of the wicked will be "everlasting," and the punishment of the wicked will be "everlasting." It is *not* the *torment* destruction and *punishment* that will be for eternity. Note how forcibly this is brought to mind in the following:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

It is "everlasting destruction," meaning the destruction of those destroyed will be forever in a state of complete destruction.

It does not say, "everlasting punishment," but rather "everlasting destruction." The punishment for sin is death; then the death is "everlasting" in that they will never be brought back to life again. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death" and not eternal life in misery. (See Rom. 6:23.)

Sorrow Will End!

In the book of Revelation we are told, *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).*

This is a scene which follows the destruction of the wicked, and is a fulfillment of 2 Peter 3:13.

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

On the Isle of Patmos John sees,

... a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea (Rev. 21:1).

It was on this new earth that John saw there would be no "sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." This could not be true if billions of people were in a burning fire, just hot enough to torture them, but still not hot enough to bring death. If there were going to be, or if there

were such a place as some picture "hell" then how would the people survive since it would be impossible to grow grains, fruits or any vegetation whatsoever. The saints are to plant vineyards and eat the fruit thereof, and also to eat of the tree of life, but nowhere are we told how the wicked would be fed in such a place as hell. They would not have access to the tree of life. Surely, the Lord would not be benefited nor would His name be glorified by the endless shrieks and cries of agony that would fill His ears for eternity. No Scripture tells us that the wicked are promised eternal life. Therefore we must conclude as the Scripture says,

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

The time is coming when every trace of sin will be forever gone and this earth will be the home of the saved.

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm 37:10, 11)

Again,
Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner (Proverbs 11:31).

We have been showing in this study that the wicked both living and dead do not re-

ceive their punishment until the day of judgment which is still future. Man does not go to heaven or hell at death, but to the grave which is his resting place until he either arises in the first resurrection or in the resurrection at the close of the millennium.

What Is the Worm that Dies Not?

Some have been puzzled over the quotation used by Jesus when He said, "*Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched*" (Mark 9:48). Here Jesus was taking a common illustration and presenting to them a truth they needed to know. When He wanted to illustrate God's care He said, "*... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow*" (Matt. 6:28).

When Christ wanted to illustrate the love of God for sinners, He told the story of the prodigal son. So, one day Jesus wanted to illustrate the terrible results of sin in the life. He used an illustration with which they were all familiar. He took His illustration from Gehenna, a valley in Hinnom where they kept a fire burning day and night to burn up the garbage and refuse from Jerusalem. In order to fully understand this, let us read Mark 9:43, 47, from the Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament,

And if should cause to offend thee thy hand, cut off it: good for thee it is maintained into life to enter, (rather) than the two hands having to go away into the Gehenna, into the fire the unquench-

able, where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye should cause to offend thee, cast out it into the kingdom of God, (rather) than two eyes having to be cast into the Gehenna of fire where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.

Thus we see in the original the word "hell" is not used, but the translators used that phrase to express what they felt was a true rendering of the word "Gehenna," because that place was a place of fire where the flames were continually burning up the rubbish and garbage. The carcasses of animals and bodies of criminals were thrown into Gehenna, not only to show to the living that sinners and lawbreakers came to an awful fate, but that they might be reduced to ashes, never to bother society again.

Edgar J. Goodspeed on Mark 9:43-47

"If your hand makes you fall, cut it off. You might better enter upon life maimed, than go with both your hands to the pit, into the fire that cannot be put out."

"And if your eye make you fall, tear it out. You might better get into the kingdom of God with only one eye than to be thrown with both your eyes into the pit, where the worm that feeds upon them never dies and the fire is never put out."

Richard F. Weymouth on Mark 9:43, 47

"If your hand should cause you to fall,

cut it off: it would be better for you to enter into Life maimed, than possessing both your hands to go into Gehenna, into the fire which cannot be put out.

"Or if your eye shall cause you to fall, tear it out, It would be better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye, than possessing two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out."

The Emphatic Diaglott on Mark 9:43, 47

"And if thy hand insnare thee, cut it off, it is better for thee to enter Life crippled, than having two hands to depart to Gehenna, into that inextinguishable fire."

"And if thine eye insnare thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter one-eyed into the Kingdom of God, than having two eyes to be cast into Gehenna."

The Illustration Explained

What Jesus was teaching when He spoke these words was that the place of destruction for all sinners would be somewhat like the place called "Gehenna" outside Jerusalem. Gehenna was where the garbage and waste material from about half a million inhabitants was constantly being consumed or destroyed. It was a place of destruction, not torture.

The gray haired men who lived in that country had seen the smoke rolling up to heaven since they could remember, but no one ever dreamed of getting out there with the fire fighting equipment of their day to put

out those flames. So it will be when God destroys this earth by fire, all the fire engines in the world will be unable to combat the flames. All the chemicals discovered by man, which work so well today, will fail in that great day. God has told us He will destroy the earth and the works therein by flame, and that this very earth when cleansed by fire will be the home of the saved.

The very best we can do is to live according to God's will; then when that day comes we may find refuge under His mighty wing. In that day God will protect His people as He protected the three Hebrew children who walked in a fiery furnace made seven times hotter than normal. They came out of that furnace unharmed and without the smell of smoke on their clothes. So God will wonderfully provide a way to preserve His own people in the day of destruction.

We know the flames of Gehenna are not burning today, yet they were not quenched, put out, or extinguished. The flames burned so long as any material was left in that valley to burn. Now this illustration of the fire in Gehenna is exactly the way the fire of God will be in the day of final destruction. Please read 2 Peter 3:10-13.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be

dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

After the flames have completely purified this earth, consumed the wicked, yea, turned them into "ashes under the soles of your feet" then this earth will be restored, without sin, to its condition before sin entered the garden of Eden.

Now concerning the word "worm" in the Scripture. Does it mean the "conscience or soul of man"? There is not a text in the Bible that says, "worm" means soul, and never in the English language has the word "worm" been given for the meaning of "soul." A worm is a worm, and a worm means a worm. This has rightly been translated in some versions as "maggot," which of course could never mean the "soul" or "conscience" of man. Such worms, or maggots can be found around garbage after flies have had access to it, and to this Christ referred as He spoke that day.

All the trash and garbage that was thrown into Gehenna did not fall into the fire which burned there. Some rolled to the side and was untouched by the fire. Christ brought out the fact that this was the place where the

worms did not die, but were always at work. By this Christ showed the people that none of the garbage was left undestroyed; for what was not burned up was eaten up by the worms; likewise He was teaching that none of the unrighteous would escape *destruction* in the day when God cleanses the earth with fire. When the flame which God lights that day has done its complete work in cleaning this earth of sin and evil the flames will go out as surely as they have gone out in the rubbish heap near the city of Jerusalem. Jesus used this valley as an example and an illustration of what the future holds for wicked men and the lesson He wished to teach us is unlearned unless we consider the complete illustration. When we use this illustration to prove the theory of an eternal, never-ending, everlasting hell for sinners, we are not being honest with His Word, for when the whole illustration is considered it shows the very opposite is true. Gehenna has burned itself out. Why? Because centuries ago they ceased to throw the garbage into this valley to be burned, so centuries ago the flames had nothing to burn and have long since died out. This is what the Bible teaches of "hell." This is what Christ taught while He was here among men, and since His Word is dear to us we will accept it, believe it, and teach it in its full meaning.

The End of the Wicked

What is the final destruction of the wicked called? Revelation 20:13, 14, tells us,

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [margin, grave] delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

From this death there is no return. One of our favorite Bible quotations reminds us, "...that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). There is no promise, no hope of eternal life outside of Christ. We are never told in the Scriptures that sinners will be given eternal life. This alone is the "gift of God," and He does not find pleasure in the death of the wicked, much less to give them this gift of eternal life, and then torture them in untold agony for eternity as it is taught by some. The Bible says,

The soul that sinneth, it shall die....
(Ezekiel 18:20).

A Warning.

A serious question and statement is made in Nahum 1:9,

What do ye imagine against the Lord? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time.

Praise God for that promise! Praise God for one day Christ will step forth from the presence of God and call a halt to the reign of sin! At that time there will be upon the earth two great groups. On one hand will

he those who know Christ as Redeemer, Saviour, and King. On the other hand will be those who are destined to be destroyed. Root, branch, soul and body will be completely consumed in the fire that will be unquenchable. The Psalmist expresses it this way,

But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away (Psalm 37:20).

The wicked shall be like Sodom and Gomorrah upon whom was visited "eternal fire," they shall be *turned into ashes*, never to practice sin again. (See Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6.)

The wicked people will be so completely destroyed that Obadiah was lead by the Holy Spirit to write,

....and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been (Obadiah 16).

Conclusion

The great day of final judgment is rapidly approaching upon the world. Everyone who hears the message of the Gospel of Christ should heed the warning it contains. Everyone who continues to reject the call of the Saviour, and who continues in sin, is earning the wages of sin which is death, eternal death! Those who choose to accept the way of Christ and to walk in the Christian way of life, do not earn eternal life, but it is the

"gift of God" and that gift in our life enables us to walk, "even as he walked."

The day of the second coming of Christ will be a glorious and happy time for all who have accepted Him and who have walked in His way. Unto them He will say,

... Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34).

But there is also a sad time coming for great numbers of those who hear the Gospel message and reject it. They choose the way of the sin of this world rather than the way of righteousness and separation from the ways of the world. To these the Lord will say,

... Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

Of this time Jesus said, "*there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" The sadness, the regret, the torture and pain of that time will be beyond imagination. It is often described as a "punishment" and truly it will be a terrible punishment, an agony greater than ever known on earth. A just God will see that these lost ones get a just punishment, but it will be punishment from which there will be no return.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matt. 25:46).

The terrible torture and agony caused by

the unquenchable fire will last for a period of time as decreed by God.

Of this terrible scene we read,

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev. 14:10).

Oh, what an awful punishment, what a terrible fate! But a just God will bring it to a conclusion in accordance with His divine decree of justice. The wicked will finally be reduced to absolute ashes as described in Malachi 4:3, but the "smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." (Rev. 14:11). The ascending smoke symbolizes the fact that the punishment is everlasting, from which there can be no return. Thus will be the great suffering, the awful end, the final destiny of all who turn from God's one and only plan of salvation.

How thankful we should be that the door of mercy is still open, the opportunity to escape is still with us.

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).

Let us accept the Lord Jesus Christ and the full truth of His Word and at last be among those of whom it will be said,

Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in (Isaiah 26:2).

REV. 14:10-11

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