

PUNISHMENT of The WICKED

The divine verdict of God upon the sinner is, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:20) It does not say that the soul that sinneth shall have no resurrection, but "it shall die." This is a penal death due for one's personal sins. In this case it does not mean the natural death that all undergo because of Adam's transgression. True, Adam brought death into the world through disobedience, and all are subject to death in this life, both saint and sinner, (Rom. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:21) but penal death for one's own sins is different.

Those death that people undergo in this present life is because of Adam's transgression, and is not wholly a penalty for one's own sins. The penalty for an individual's own sins is the second death; (Rev. 2:11; 20:13-15) to undergo the second death necessitates a resurrection from the dead. And this resurrection of the wicked from the dead occurs at the end of the millennium. (Rev. 20:5) When God said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," He also meant that those who do not sin—whose sins are atoned for—shall not die; that is, they shall not die the second death.—Jno. 11:25; 26; 3:16; Ezek. 18:21.

From the 18th chapter of Ezekiel, we learn definitely that there is a death pronounced upon individuals for unrepented sins, which the repentant sinner will not have to undergo. Since everybody has to die the natural death of the present because of Adam's transgression, and then, if a sinner must also die for his own sins, it absolutely necessitates a resurrection of the wicked from the dead, followed with a second death as decreed in Rev. 20:13-15. The second death is not a death for the body only; but the whole being. When brought to life again by union of body and spirit (Ezek. 37:14) it will then be destroyed. (Matt. 10:28) To destroy means to "blot out." He (God) who is able to destroy the body is also able to destroy the

soul, which of course means the body and spirit combined (the whole being). It was this combination that produced a living soul. (Gen. 2:7). It does not say that a soul was imparted to the body, but the spirit, or breath of life, was breathed into original man's nostrils, and by this combination a living soul came into existence.

No life of any kind is promised in the Bible to the sinner. Eternal life is to be acquired through Christ only. "For the wages of sin is death (not continued existence): but the gift of God is eternal life (continued existence after the resurrection) through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:23). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jno. 3:16.

In meaning, death is just the opposite of life. If life means to exist, then death means to come to an end. In the second death sinners will be wiped out of existence. God chose to purify the primeval earth by water; but the final purification of this earth will be by fire, and will be more searching and severe. Sin and sinners will be swept away by the lake of fire, and the universe will no longer be defiled.

The destiny of the wicked is destruction. To destroy means to "kill, to exterminate, to cause to cease, to consume, to come to an end, to annihilate." Such is meant in Jno. 3:16; that is, to perish is to become extirpated, which is just the opposite of everlasting life.

The following citation from the Scriptures of Truth are definite as to what it means by perish, destroy, consume, and the second death:

"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 wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume... when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it." (Psa. 37:10, 20, 34; 59:13; Luke

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"And the destruction of
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13:3; 2 Pet. 2:12) Let sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. . . ."—Psa. 104:35; see also Psa. 112:10, and 145:20.

"But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."—Prov. 2:22; see also chap. 13:13.

"And the destruction of the transgressor and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed."—Isa. 1:28; see also chap. 41:11, 12, and 66:17.

"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, and it shall leave them neither root nor branch (nothing left to exist without end in a hell-fire of torment) . . . 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."—Mal. 4:1, 3; Matt. 3:12; 2 Pet. 3:7; Jude 7.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna, in the Greek)."—Matt. 10:28.

Notice the word destroy. If the body is destructible, then the soul, or in other words, the whole being is destructible. And since the soul is destructible it is not immortal. The word destroy applies with equal force to both body and soul.

"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction (not everlasting torment) from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power."—2 Thess. 1:8; Psa. 37:38; 92:7; Phil. 3:19; 2 Thess. 2:8.

"And they went upon the breath of the earth, and command the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."—Rev. 20:9.

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Still it seems very evident that some of the lost will suffer
more severe and longer punishment than other. Study the
statement of Jesus in Luke 12:47, 48—about some receiv-
ing more stripes than others. Also read Heb. 10:26-31,
and notice the "sorer punishment" to be meted out to
certain individuals. In Rev. 20:10, "day and night" are
mentioned, thus showing that time is involved to be sure.
The turning of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into
ashes is given as an example of how the ungodly will be
destroyed at the end yet to come. (2 Pet. 2:6; Gen. 19:24-
28) Just how long those cities burned we are not told, but
surely, they are not burning today.

The love of God is a wonderful love (Jno. 3:16, 17;
Rom. 6:23; 8:32; Isa. 49: 15, 16; Psa. 103:10-15), and the
Son of God suffered for us that we might be saved. (Isa.
53rd chapter) But when man spurns this wonderful love
he brings upon himself death and destruction. He is
a free moral agent, and makes his own choice. If he chooses
death, that is his own fault.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as
some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward,
not willing that any should perish, but that all should
come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) "For the time is come
that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it
first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey
not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be
saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?
Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of
God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well
doing, as unto a faithful Creator."—1 Pet. 4:17-19.

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Punishment of the Wicked

By John A. Gray

The Human Race Series

No. 4

And that is the end of sinners. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. This refers to the second death. Please recall all the Bible terms—perish, destroy, consume, devour, be as nothing, rooted out, and cut off, shall burn them up, shall be ashes, and leave neither root nor branch. If language means anything at all, then how can anyone believe that sinners will be tormented unendingly?"

Do we believe in a hell-fire? Yes, we do believe in one to come which will be so hot (hotter than many think) that it will wipe all sin and sinners out of existence. Perhaps you will say the penalty will not be severe enough if sinners will simply be devoured by fire. But wait a minute. The Bible does not say exactly just how long the wicked will burn until they will be consumed. We must remember that hell-fire is not an ordinary fire as we know it now. It is a divine fire. Brimstone is one of the elements. It is an unquenchable fire, and will devour as long as there is anything to devour. "Our God is a consuming fire."

Before you make the statement that the penalty is not severe enough for sinners if they are annihilated, wait until you know all of the agonies of the second death, wait until you have heard the "weeping and gnashing of teeth," wait until you have considered how long you would want to suffer if you were lost, although you tried your very best to do right. The teaching that there is a cruel God who tortures his creatures throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity has caused many to become infidels. Our Father is a God of love and mercy, and tells us to be merciful, even as he is merciful.

We are sometimes referred to the expression, "tormented for ever and ever," as proof for an endless misery for the lost; but be it known that the word "forever" does not mean "unceasingly" in every case where it occurs in the Bible. Jonah was in the "belly of the fish" only "three days and three nights," and that short time is termed as "forever." Jonah 2:6. For other examples that "forever" some-

times means only a limited time duration, see Ex. 21:2-6; 27:21; Lev. 16:34; Num. 15:1 to 5; 18:8; Deut. 15:17.

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