

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT “ETERNAL FIRE”?

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1.6.24

Last week we started looking at the fate of the “wicked”.

The traditional view among most churchgoers is that they will live forever — in conscious torment in an ever-burning Hell.

A second idea is that the wicked will eventually be “refined” in Hell — and then released to go to Heaven. So Hell may finally be empty (Pope Francis has such a hope).

A third view of Hell is the total destruction of the wicked — for eternity. No way back. Often known as “Annihilation”.

THREE VIEWS OF HELL

1 FIRE THAT TORMENTS FOREVER

2 FIRE THAT PURIFIES

3 FIRE THAT CONSUMES (MOST BIBLICALLY CONSISTENT VIEW)

What’s important is what the Bible teaches!

Last week we looked at the type of language used in the Bible — what illustrations — word pictures — does it give?

TOTAL DESTRUCTION!

Descriptions we saw last week about the wicked:

- **Vanish away**
- **Like smoke**
- **Ashes**
- **Burned like stubble or chaff**
- **Perish**
- **Be destroyed**

Matthew 7:13-14

13 “**Enter by the narrow gate**; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

14 **Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life**, and there are few who find it.

A CONTRAST: LIFE FOR THE SAINTS — DESTRUCTION FOR THE WICKED

2 Peter 3:5-13

5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,
6 **by which the world that then existed perished**, being flooded with water. (*Referring back to Noah’s day*)

7 **But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.** (*“Perdition” — Greek: Apoleia — destruction*)

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, (*to return*) as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

10 **But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, (to the scoffers — not us!) in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.**

11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which **the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?**

13 **Nevertheless we**, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

PERISH = DESTRUCTION

By fire — remember John Baptist's warning of unquenchable fire.
The language is consistent.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

6 since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble (*tribulate*) you,

7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

FLAMING FIRE — BURNS AND DESTROYS — FULLY!

The punishment of everlasting destruction. Once destroyed — no hope of reprieve — it's final!

Not endless conscious torment.

So ... the language of scripture is consistent. All points to the final destruction of the wicked — they cease to be — are annihilated.

Yet there are some passages that we haven't looked at ... that people turn to to show otherwise. We see the language of **eternal punishment ... unquenchable fire ... torment ... weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

Let's have a look at a few of those passages.

Matthew 3:7-12

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, **“Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”**

8 Therefore **“bear fruits worthy of repentance,”**

9 and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

10 And **even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

11 **I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I,** whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**

12 **His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”**

The descriptions are of burning up ... **“unquenchable fire” — FIRE THAT CANNOT BE EXTINGUISHED** ... that cannot be put out — **until it is finished!**

The picture is of the WICKED BEING DESTROYED — JUST ASHES!!

No suggestion here of endless torment in the flames.

Matthew 13:24-25, 30

24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;**

25 **but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.**

30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, **“First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them,** but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ’

BURN THE TARES — DESTROY THEM!

Matthew 13:40-43

40 **Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.**

41 **The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, (ungodly ... wicked)**

42 **and will cast them into the furnace of fire.** There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

THE WICKED ARE CAST INTO A FURNACE OF FIRE ...

unquenchable as per John Baptist.

BURNED UP. ASHES.

“Wailing” ... of deep regret! “Gnashing of teeth” ... ANGER!

Probably a time element being hinted at? **NOT INSTANT ANNIHILATION?** It implies a sufficient period for the wicked to be aware of their fate ... to reflect ... to realise and contemplate the consequences of their lifetime decisions?

I think there is an indication of this in the following verses:

Luke 12:45-48

45 But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,

46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

47 **And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.**

48 **But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.** For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

A distinction — few stripes ... or many stripes? A light beating ... or a severe beating?

The punishment will “fit the crime”. For some the punishment will be lighter (perhaps shorter??) — for others longer?

But — when it’s over — **the end is the same — BURNED UP ... VANISHED AWAY ... DESTROYED — FOREVER.**

Matthew 25:31-32

31 “**When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.**

32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and **He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.**

Matthew 25:41-46

41 “**Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:**

42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

44 “**Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’**

45 Then He will answer them, saying, ‘**Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.**’

46 **And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

EVERLASTING FIRE. EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT — versus ETERNAL LIFE. GREEK: AIONIOS — lasting for an age.

Verse 31:

Rotherham Emphasised Bible: “The age-abiding fire”.

YLT: “The fire, the age-enduring”

It seems this fire may be kept burning throughout the Millennium?
The “Age” of the World Tomorrow?

But note **it’s primary purpose is for the devil and his angels. Not mortal human beings — they will simply be burned up to ashes.**

Eternal punishment is punishment where the effects last forever. There is no way to reverse it!

It doesn’t mean eternal punishing ... that goes on torturing forever.
When a mortal body goes into a fire it burns up totally in a couple of hours.

Jude 1:5-7

5 But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, **afterward destroyed those who did not believe.**

6 **And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;**

7 as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, **are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance (punishment) of eternal fire.**

Sodom and Gomorrah — suffering the “vengeance of eternal fire”.
(The same Greek as Matthew 25).

The fire totally destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. It was not reversible. **But ... it is not still burning on and on. It is not burning today.**

The term “eternal fire” is focusing on its impact being eternal — not its duration. And — the cities were totally destroyed — that’s the fate of the wicked!

2 Peter 2:4-6

4 **For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;**

5 **and did not spare the ancient world**, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, **bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;**

6 **and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes,** condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;

Sodom and Gomorrah were turned to ashes — this is an example to the wicked (the ungodly) — of how they'll end up.

Verse 6: “Destruction” in Greek here is **KATASTROPHE** (KJV: “an overthrow”).

Mark 9:42-48

42 **“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.**

43 **If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.** It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, **to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—**

44 **where**

**Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’**

45 **And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.** It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, **to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—**

46 **where**

**Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’**

47 **And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.** It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, **rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—**

48 **where**

Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.

It shows us the importance of dealing with sin!

“Hell” here is the Greek word **GEHENNA**. It was (still is) a place in Jerusalem — a valley. The Valley of Hinnom. Today it’s a restful park.

In ancient Judah they had pagan idols there ... and used to sacrifice their children in fires (to Molech).

In Jesus’ day it had become a refuse/rubbish dump — for the city’s garbage — even some dead bodies. Fires burned endlessly ... flies and maggots bred in the decaying food and flesh.

It was an abominable place with an evil history. A place of death and decay.

Jesus used the place which everyone was aware of as a symbol. It’s not literal. The wicked will not actually end up in a small valley outside of modern Jerusalem.

Jesus’ symbol is consistent with everything we’ve seen so far about the fate of the wicked. To be cast aside as so much refuse — worthless — to be destroyed.

“Worm doesn’t die” isn’t about immortal worms!

Jesus is quoting a passage from Isaiah that colourfully describes the fate of the wicked.

Isaiah 66:22-24

22 “For as the new heavens and the new earth
Which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD,
“So shall your descendants and your name remain.

23 And it shall come to pass
That from one New Moon to another,
And from one Sabbath to another,
All flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD.

24 “**And they shall go forth and look**

Upon the corpses of the men (*dead bodies ... carcasses*)
Who have transgressed against Me.
For their worm does not die,
And their fire is not quenched.
They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

The picture is of rotting corpses (e.g. after a battle) ... maggots breeding in the decaying flesh and fires burning to try to incinerate all of the dead bodies.

Jesus could refer to this because it pictures **TOTAL RUIN ... DESTRUCTION.** (The corpses aren't writhing in agony in an ever-burning hell surrounded by demons!)

So the language of scripture seems consistent throughout.

MAN IS MORTAL. WHEN HE DIES — HE'S DEAD!

NO ONE GOES TO HEAVEN OR HELL IMMEDIATELY UPON DEATH. ALL ARE ASLEEP.

The saints will be resurrected at Jesus' return.

The rest of mankind who are not saints (most people) will get an opportunity in the future. But if they remain unrepentant — their fate is annihilation — **TO VANISH AWAY... BE LIKE SMOKE ... MELT LIKE WAX ... BURN IN UNQUENCHABLE FIRE ... BE ASHES UNDER THE FEET OF THE SAINTS — TO FACE UTTER DESTRUCTION.**

But!! What about ...

Revelation 14:9-11

9 Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, **“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand,**

10 **he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone**

in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

11 And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

EXPLANATION NEXT WEEK!!