

# THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON HELL

## I. SETTING UP THE DISCUSSION

### A. Are Unbelievers

1. Destined for an eternity of conscious torment in a real place (lake of fire - Gehenna)?
2. Annihilated?
3. Put in a position to eventually receive the grace of God's salvation (2<sup>nd</sup> chance) - after a time of "purgatory"?

### B. Key words used in the Biblical text to describe the final end of the lost. Are they intended to transmit the idea of annihilation.

1. Forever - Rev. 14:11; 20:10; Jude 13 (2 Peter 2:17 same darkness, forever is not used).
2. Destroy - Mt.10:28; 2 Cor.10:5. Destroy is not used to indicate "annihilation" in its other uses - Mt.6:19; 26:61; Rev.11:18.
  - b. Destruction - Mt.7:13; Rom.9:22; Phil.3:19 - again this word is not used to indicate "annihilation" - Rom.3:16; I Cor.5:5; Phil.1:28; I Thes.5:3.
  - c. Perish - Mt.5:27-30; 18:13; Lk.13:2-5; 2 Pet.3:8 - perish does not equal annihilation - Mt.26:52; Lk.13:33; 21:16; Heb.11:31.
  - d. Ruin - I Tim.6:9
3. Eternal - Mt.25:46
4. In Rev.14:9-11 (people) and Rev.20:10 (angelic beings) are the terms "torment, forever", "no rest day and night", "tormented day and night", and "forever and ever", intended to describe a continuous situation or something that is temporary?

### C. There are words used by the Bible writers that convey the idea of annihilation which they could have used and did not when speaking on the subject of hell.

1. Col.2:14 - "cancelled out"; Acts 3:19 "wiped away", Rev.3:5 "erase"; and Rev.7:17; 21:4 "wipe (away)" are translations of the same word which indicates a complete end to the subject. These last 2 passages state that certain things are no longer present and never will again be present with the saved. If the Bible writers wanted to describe the punishment of hell ending, they had the ability to do so with these words.

2. Some things are said to not be “quenched” (put out, going out) - Mt.12:20; 25:8;. The fire of hell, Mk.9:48, is described with the same word with the emphases being that it “will not be quenched. The adjective form of the word “unquenchable” is used to describe hell’s fire - Mk.9:43; Mt.3:12; Lk.3:17. In Eph.6:16, the “shield of faith”, “extinguishes” (quenches, puts out). the fire of the enemies flaming missiles. I Thess.5:19 states “quench not the Spirit”. Whatever form the word “quench” takes and means when describing hell, the fires are opposite of that which is quenched.

3. Cease - I Cor.13:8 - occurs in the N.T. but not in relation to hell.

4. Phrases that could have been used as they were elsewhere are not connected with hell:

Rev. 21:1 - “no longer any”

Rev.18:21 - “will not be found any longer”

An argument from silence is not a deciding argument but it adds weight to other clear statements describing the fire of hell.

#### D. Key texts

1. Mt.25:46 - The writer asserts that “eternal life” and “eternal punishment share a common characteristic. The contrast is differing qualities of existence rather than that duration of time.

2. Mk.9:43, 48 - “unquenchable fire” must have an endless supply of fuel and the worm does not die implying an endless supply of food.

3. Jn.3:36- The true believer has eternal life and the unbeliever has God’s wrath abiding.

4. 2 Thess.1:9 (with Mt.10:28) - Eternal existence in a ruinous state.

5. Rev.14:10-11

a. The torment occurs in the presence of the angels and the Lamb.

b. The torment is an eternal phenomenon (smoke means fire means fuel).

c. They have no rest.

6. Rev.19:20 and 20:10 - After spending 1,000 years. The beast and the false prophet are still alive.

7. Rev.22:15 - Continued outside existence is indicated.

8. Lk.16:19-31 - Points to lasting, conscious torment. Note: This torment precedes entrance into Gehenna - Rev.20:13-15.
9. Mt.10:15; 11:22,24; Lk.20:47 - Degrees of condemnation don't fit degrees of annihilation.
10. Dan.12:2- "everlasting" describes both ends and both the righteous and the lost are raised - Jn.5:29.

E. The argument is made that a loving God would not inflict eternal torment as a punishment because it would be too much punishment for the sins committed. - Punishment does not equal the crime! There are many situations described in the Bible that these same people would have trouble explaining.

1. Sufferings of Job and God's allowance of it - Job 1-2.
2. Sin of Achan - Josh 7
3. Sabbath restrictions - Num.15:32-36.
4. The death of different peoples groups - Num.21:1-3.

## II. THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

A. Coupled with the above are the "small things" that Jesus said are deserving of hellfire.

1. Mt.5:22 - Calling a brother "you fool".
2. Mt.5:28-30 - Lusting after a woman.
3. Mt.7:13 - Choosing the broad way.
4. Mt.7:23 - Practicing lawlessness. (Mt.13:41-42).
5. Mt.12:36-37 - Words
6. Mt.13:49-50 - Being wicked.
7. Mt.18:7-9 - Becoming a stumbling block.
8. Mt.22:12-13 - Failing to wear wedding clothes.
9. Mt.23:2-33 - Practicing hypocrisy.
10. Mt.24:50-51 - A lack of watchfulness.

11. Mt.25:29-30 - A lack of obedience.

12. etc...

B. Mt.25:31-46 esp. vs. 41,46 “the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels, eternal punishment.

1. Eternal - This term occurs 74 times in the N.T.. It always has something that is unending or without time limitations in view. 71 times it is used to look forward to eternity future, and only 3 times refers back to eternity past. (Rom.16:25 - “long ages past”; 2 Tim.1:9 “from all eternity”; and Titus 1:2 - “long ages ago”). In Mt. 25:46, whatever eternal does to life it also does to punishment.

2. Fire -

a. Jesus spoke of the burning of fire 12 times:

Mt.7:19; 13:40, 42, 50; 18:8; 25:41; Mk.9:43, 48-49; Lk.16:24; Jn.15:6

b. Jesus used the term Gehenna 11 times always stressing the misery of eternal punishment:

Mt.5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk.9:43, 45, 47; Lk.12:5

Gehenna was a valley to the south and southwest of Jerusalem where garbage was dumped to furnish fuel for a fire that burned continually. Prior to this the Israelites had sacrificed their children to the god molech there - 2 Kings 23:10; Jer.7:31, etc...

c. John the Baptist spoke of this fire 5 times: Mt.3:10, 11, 12; Lk.3:9, 17.

d. The fire of hell is different than earthly fire because it is “unquenchable” Mk.9:43. It never runs out of fuel and burns out. Jesus said it will be a fire that acts like salt, preserving rather than destroying - Mk.9:49.

e. Nothing in the teaching of Christ indicates that ending up in hell results in a person ceasing to exist and no mention is made of any post world opportunity to avoid this eternal fate.

### III. THE APOSTLE PAUL’S TEACHING ON THE SUBJECT

A. Rom.2:6-10

1. Context of this passage

a. All in the human race are guilty of sin - Rom.3:23.

b. All are in need of justification by faith - Rom.1:16-17; 3:24-26,28

- c. Those who fault others do nothing more than indict themselves and become ripe for God's judgment - Rom.2:17-29.
- d. Those who maintain that they are not in need of salvation are "storing up" wrath.
- e. A human's work is said to be the basis for their final judgment. The focus is that which they "seek" (believer) verses that which they do (unbelievers) - Rom.2:7-8.

## 2. The passage itself

- a. The punishment is described with 2 sets of 2 words - Rom.2:8-9.

1. Wrath and Indignation - This describes God's displeasure with those who have not believed Him, Rom.1:1-5, and have disregarded His kindness, forbearance, and patience - Rom.2:4.

2. Tribulation and Distress - These are God's response to all those who have set themselves against Him by rejecting what His Son has done for them; they are awaiting a showdown with God.

The nature and duration of this experienced tribulation and distress is not spoken of by Paul here, but a future time of wrath is spoken of in many other places in the Bible - Mt.3:7-8; Rom.2:5; 5:9, I Thess.5:9;

He does state that the retribution directed at the lost results in their being paid "the penalty of eternal destruction" - 2 Thess.1:8-9. As has been shown, destruction does not equal annihilation, and we could, therefore, conclude that eternal destruction equals eternal wrath.

B. Rom.9:22-23 - The unsaved are "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction" in contrast to "vessels of mercy" which He prepared before hand to glory.

- 1. Vs.20-21 - God, being the potter, shapes people! (16,18).
- 2. The Bible is not shy concerning this "fact" - I Thess.5:9; I Pet.2:8; Rev.13:8.
- 3. God is said to take an active role in the lives of the saved "vessels" "which He prepared" while "enduring with much patience" taking a passive position with the unsaved. This means that people are also responsible for developing their own destiny.
- 4. Other Bible passages indicate that people are responsible for their own destiny. They must believe and are condemned because they do not Jn.3:16, 18-19, 8:24; Rom.9:30 - 10:4. Note: I believe both of the above truths unconditionally.
- 5. This passage tells us that God "forms" some for glory in the final, ultimate sense, and because of who He is and His part in our destiny, this end is certain. The same can also be said of the lost.

6. At the same time, Phil.3:18-19, tells us the vessels of wrath...

- a. are enemies of the cross of Christ.
- b. whose god is their appetite.
- c. whose glory is their shame.
- d. who set their minds on earthly things.
- e. whose end is destruction.

They have earned their place and at the same time they have been chosen for this end.

7. Of believers it is said... Phil.3:20-21

- a. Our citizenship is in heaven, vs.20.
- b. We live waiting for the return of our God, Savior, vs.21. (I Thess.4:13-18).
- c. The transformation of our body into a body like His, vs.21.
- d. Waiting for God's kingdom and glory - I Thess.2:12.

8. The picture for the lost is not one of annihilation, but of ruin and emptiness void of all that eternity could mean.

9. Rom.6:21-23; Mt.25:46.

C. 2 Thess.1:5-10

- 1. For believers who are hurt by persecutions now, vs.3-6. God will give them "relief" when Christ comes for them, vs.7. The unsaved have the upper hand now, but ultimately God will punish them - 2 Pet.2:4-9, esp.vs.9.
- 2. Dan 2:31-35; Mt.16:27 - Jesus comes from heaven in a fiery flame which will be followed by the "unquenchable" fire one thousand years later. Rev.20:14-15. A fire that is literal but of a unique nature suited to judging humans eternally without incinerating them - real punishment bringing agony beyond what human minds now are capable of grasping.

#### IV. A FEW CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TEACHING OF JOHN.

- A. John's revelation is focused on God's wrath upon the earth prior to His kingdom being established. He includes within His revelation a torment which extends beyond time and human history - Rev.14:9-11; 20:10-15. These individuals are further defined in - Rev.21:8 and 22:15.
- B. The second death is defined as the lake of fire - Rev.20:14. All those who end there, do not have their name recorded in the book of life - Rev.20:15.
- C. The intermediate state "death and Hades" - 20:13, releases its grip. The permanent state takes over. Note that no mention is made of a single individual escaping Gehenna when they are released from Hades.
- D. Being subject to wrath, being made to drink of the cup of God's anger, and being tormented forever, without rest day and night, hardly seems like God is attempting "once again" to save the lost. Today is the day for salvation, that coming day is the day for God's wrath.

#### V. Some additional thoughts

- A. Why would God wait until after death to try and deliver the unbeliever?
- B. Does man render himself unsavable by passing beyond the place and time of God's grace?
- C. The first death removes a person from life in the present creation but without ending his existence. The second death removes that same person from the new creation. Being absent from the new creation is never equaled to non-existence.
- D. Unsaved humans and wicked angels share the same fate. Since Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are all three said to occupy the same place as lost man, is there any basis for arguing a different fate for man? Could it not also be asked how bad lost man is when realizing that both Satan and his final end is the same?
- E. Because the ability to repent is a gift from God, those in hell never repent of their sin. They remain in a state of rebellion toward God, because their fallen nature does not contain the ability to recognize its own depravity, the extent of it and their need of God.
- F. Final judgment hinges on decisions made in this life before the first death and not in some future life or state.
- G. If unbelieving man is without excuse in this life - Rom.1:20, what could be said of his position after this life?

H. Hell is a real threat! God has not made it shallow by not intending to carry it out!

I. Hell is not a benevolent act of God, it is judgment. The moment a person passes, the irreversible consequences of his failure to be saved is set for all eternity.

J. What does all this mean to us, to others? What can we, what should we do?