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# GOD'S LOVE ON TRIAL

**A** WRONG view of God's character is one of the main reasons why people have trouble getting to know and trust Him. The teaching of eternal torment has done more to drive people to atheism and insanity than any other invention of the devil. It is slander and blasphemy to portray the loving character of a tender, gracious heavenly Father as a cruel vindictive tyrant. God Himself tells us that He has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11); it is called a strange work (Isaiah 28:21). The very idea of a fair and just God visiting eternal torment upon everyone regardless of their sin is wholly contrary to God's love and mercy and to the Scripture testimony regarding Him. What just and fair judge upon earth would sentence a criminal, regardless of his crime, to be beaten continuously, and roasted slowly over a fire for any length of time? The very thought should send shivers of disgust down one's spine. Shall not "the judge of all the earth" "judge righteously?" (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 96:10); for "the wages of sin is death," *not* eternal torment (Romans 6:23).

So then, what really happens when someone dies? and what will happen to the wicked? First we need to consider

## THE NATURE AND SPIRIT OF MAN

After sin entered the world, mankind lost the right to eat of the fruit of the tree of life:

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever ... — Genesis 3:22

By sin man was doomed to die, but praise God that we can once more eat of the tree of life and have immortality through Christ. This, however, is granted to us on certain conditions:

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. — Revelation 22:14

## MAN IS MORTAL

We don't have life inherently. We are mortal:

Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? — Job 4:17

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

Put not your trust in . . . the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. — Psalm 146:3-4

Lest we should forget this fact, Paul speaks of God as the one “who only hath immortality” (1Timothy 6:16). We only receive immortality as a gift through Christ:

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. — 2 Timothy 1:10

Immortality is received at the “last trump,” when Jesus returns and resurrects those who sleep in Jesus:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. — 1 Corinthians 15:51- 53

This mortal “flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of God,” yet there is an immortal body, called a “spiritual body,” that will (1 Corinthians 15:50; see also verses 35-56). The righteous must be resurrected before going to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and the wicked must be resurrected before they are judged (Revelation 20:5, 13). Until the resurrection they are said to be sleeping:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring (Grk. *lead*) with him. — I Thessalonians 4:14

## DEATH IS A SLEEP

When Lazarus died, Jesus called it a sleep:

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep . . . . Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. — John 11:11, 14

The idea that man's spirit can have a separate conscious existence from his body, either before or after death, is an idea borrowed from paganism. It is founded on Satan's first lie to Eve in the garden, "ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). The Scripture testifies that when a man dies, "in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:4).



Man's spirit is not conscious when he dies and his body decomposes. Without the body the spirit has no consciousness of its own. It therefore becomes obvious that it would be impossible to communicate with the dead. This is why we are told:

The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything. — Ecclesiastes 9:5

## MAN ONLY RECEIVES IMMORTALITY AT THE RESURRECTION:

We have already seen that man is mortal, and receives immortality only upon the condition of his acceptance of Christ as his Lord and Savior. We have also seen that the righteous receive immortality when they are resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Let's have a look at some further evidence for this.

David expected to receive immortality when he awoke in the resurrection, not when he died:

I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. — Psalm 17:15

Peter tells us that king David, who died a forgiven sinner, had not yet gone to heaven, a thousand years or so after his death:

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day . . . For David is not ascended into the heavens: . . . — Acts 2:29, 34

Peter, in order to prove that David was not in heaven, stated the fact that David's body was still in the tomb. Clearly revealing that he understood there is no such thing as disembodied souls in heaven or hell. Christ, Elijah, Enoch, and Moses all ascended to heaven bodily. Other than a few exceptions, the righteous dead have not been raised, and have not yet gone to heaven.

Consider also the words of Paul, who did not expect to receive his crown until the day of Christ's second appearing, along with the rest of the righteous:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. — 2 Timothy 4:7, 8

## THE REWARD OF THE WICKED IS COMPLETE ANNIHILATION:

Take careful note of the following facts regarding fate of the wicked:

### 1. The soul that sins shall die:

Behold, all souls are mine; . . . the soul that sinneth, it shall die. — Ezekiel 18:4

### 2. This death is a total destruction:

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

### 3. They are "consumed" by fire:

Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame:

there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.  
— Isaiah 47:14

#### **4. Which turns them to ashes:**

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. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 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

#### **5. Which is referred to as “a perpetual sleep” from which they shall “not wake”:**

In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD. — Jeremiah 51:39

#### **6. Resulting in their being as “though they had not been”:**

For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.  
— Obadiah 16

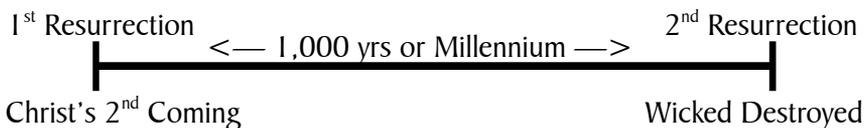
### **WHEN ARE THE WICKED DESTROYED AND WHERE?**

No one is burning in hell-fire right now. This destruction is spoken of as in the future:

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.

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. — 2 Peter 2:9

The final destruction of the wicked is a thousand years after the resurrection of the righteous. Revelation 20:4-6 describes the resurrection of the righteous, and says, “the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years are finished.” A blessing is then pronounced on him “that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power . . .” Next is described the final judgment of the wicked: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).



It is important here to note that the lake of fire (commonly referred to as “hell”) happens on this earth:

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

Malachi 4:3, which we quoted earlier, tells us that the wicked will be “ashes under your feet.” This passage is speaking of the saints in the new earth, and clearly shows us that the place where the wicked suffer their final destruction is this earth (Matthew 5:5). Revelation 20:8, 9 gives us the details of this final destruction, when the resurrected wicked are gathered from “four quarters of the earth,” then we are told that, “. . . they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

The fact that the wicked are destroyed in the very place that is the eternal habitation of the righteous clearly shows us that there is no such place called “hell” where the fire is always burning, but that the “hell-fire” together with the lives of the wicked must be extinguished before the righteous can inhabit the earth.

The condition of the earth as a result of God's judgment upon sin and sinners is described in Isaiah 24:1, 9. Jeremiah also, describes it in these words:

I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man . . . and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger. — Jeremiah 4:23-26

After the destruction of the wicked and the world by fire, the earth will then be recreated or renewed:

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. — 2 Peter 3:12-13

While the Bible does speak of a "hell" to come, yet it makes it clear that there is *no hell burning right now*; rather we see that the wicked *will* (future) be judged, and destroyed in the lake of fire after the 1,000 years, so sin and sinners will cease to exist. They will not burn and suffer throughout eternity. There are scriptures that seem to say otherwise, but God does not contradict Himself. We need to study deeper for ourselves, and adjust our understanding to encompass, not just *some*, but *all* the light which God has given us in His Word.

## EVERLASTING FIRE, ETERNAL TORMENT?

The Scriptures have been understood by some to teach that there is an everlasting fire and eternal torment:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire. — Matthew 25:41

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. — Revelation 20:10

The issue in these passages is in regard to the words "forever and ever" and "everlasting".

The sense in which the Bible writers use the words “everlasting,” “forever,” and “eternal” is much like we would use the word “tall” to describe a person. For as the word “tall” describes an unmeasured or indeterminate height, so the words “everlasting,” “forever,” and “eternal,” denote something as being of an unmeasured or indeterminate extent. The meaning varies depending on what is being described. We have *tall* mountains and *tall* men, but they are not the same height; so too we have “everlasting hills” and an “everlasting God,” but you can be sure that the hills are not as “lasting” as is God; for they have their end, where God does not. It is the same with the word “for ever”. The prophet Jonah, when describing his experience of being swallowed by a whale, initially tells us that he was in the belly of the whale for “three days and three nights.” Later on in his book he describes this same length of time as “for ever”:

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. . . . I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.  
— Jonah 1:17; 2:6

Another example of this is found in Deuteronomy 23:3, where *forever* means 10 generations. In other cases, it meant “as long as he lives” or “until death”:

. . . He shall be thy servant for ever. — Deuteronomy 15:17  
(See also 1 Samuel 1:22, 28; 28:2; Exodus 21:6; Psalm 48:14)

As we’ve already mentioned, hills that might only be a few thousand years old, dating back to the time of the flood, or possibly to creation, are called everlasting:

The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. — Genesis 49:26

The Hebrew words for “everlasting” are also translated in other ways that obviously do not mean “without beginning” or “without end.” Examples of this are where they are translated days “of old,” referring to the time Israel entered the promised land, a few centuries previous (Micah 7:14), the creation of the world (Job 20:4), and Moses’ time (Isaiah 63:11).

## UNQUENCHABLE FIRE

He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. — Matthew 3:12

The fire spoken of is unquenchable because it cannot be put out by man, God Himself will not put it out, the wicked cannot put it out, and there is no celestial fire department that will come to their rescue. Everything that is wicked will be consumed, and only then will the fire “go out” or “be quenched,” when that which it is to consume is “no more”. There are parts on modern planes that are made of combustible metals, that if ignited, cannot be quenched by any fire extinguisher. They will simply burn until they are entirely consumed. There is no known way to quench these metals once they are ignited.

We were given an example of this unquenchable, eternal fire at work in the story of Sodom and Gomorrha:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha . . . are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. — Jude 1:7

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes . . . making them an example to those that after should live ungodly. — 2 Peter 2: 6



Just as we all know that Sodom and Gomorrah are not burning today, so also we may know that the wicked will not “burn for ever and ever”.

## WHERE THEIR WORM DIETH NOT

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. — Mark 9:43

If we take this verse literally, we must conclude that worms are immortal, but such a conclusion is neither a sound explanation, nor a fair reading of the text. The worm still symbolizes spoilage and decay to us today, just as it did to those who penned the words of Scripture so many centuries ago. To them as to us the worm was synonymous with corruption, mortality, and death:

I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. — Job 17:14

For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. — Isaiah 51:8

An undying worm is simply a symbol for corruption and decay, whose results are, like unquenchable fire, unchangeable and eternal.

## WHAT DOES “HELL” MEAN?

The Hebrew word for *hell* is pronounced **sheoul**. This word simply means the grave. It was translated 31 times as “hell,” 31 times as “grave” and 3 times as “pit.”

There are two Hebrew words translated hell in English: **ab-badon** which simply means *destruction*, and **sheoul**, which denotes the *grave*. The word *sheoul* is accurately translated *grave*, *hell*, and *pit*, and actually has no inference to a place of burning, but to the place where dead go – into the ground, i.e., the *pit* or *grave*.

Likewise in the New Testament *hell* is translated from two different Greek words: The first is **hades**, and like its Hebrew counterpart *sheoul*, it signifies the *grave*. The other is **gehenna**, which was the word for the *valley of Hinnom*, the city

dump, where the garbage was burned. Therefore it soon came to symbolize *destruction by fire*, but not eternal torment. This is why it can be said of hell that it will be destroyed along with the wicked, in the lake of fire after the thousand years.

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. — Revelation 20:14

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. I — Corinthians 15:26

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. — Revelation 21:4

Next time you read the word hell, remember it refers to the grave, and the certain mortality of man. Soon there will be no more death. I encourage you to do your own word study of the above words.

## THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

In this parable Christ tells of a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Both die. The poor beggar goes into Abraham's bosom, while the rich man lands in hell, and there cries in his torment unto Abraham, who is in paradise, desiring to be relieved from his torments. Shall we conclude that Christ was teaching his listeners that the righteous will witness the agony of those in hell throughout eternity, and hold conversation with them? Was he instructing them that the dead go straight to heaven or hell at death? Certainly not! Jesus certainly did not intend each minute detail of an illustration to be taken literally. What about the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, the great banquet, or the workers in the field? Shall we take these literally also? Is Christ teaching that coins are saved or lost? Are we going to be re-incarnated as sheep? Is heaven just one grand supper? Are there just 12 hours that we are to work for Jesus?

This parable is intended to teach the folly of riches and how a physical lineage with Abraham or a mere profession of faith

won't save anyone (See John 8:39; Matthew 19:23). It was not given to teach about death, heaven, or hell.

### **THE THIEF ON THE CROSS**

Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. — Luke 23:43

Jesus was not here saying that they would both be in heaven that same day, for He told Mary, soon after His resurrection, "I have not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17). So why the seeming contradiction? The answer is really very simple. In the original Greek, punctuation was not used. The translators, not the inspired Bible authors, inserted it. Try reading this verse again in your Bible with the comma placed after the word "today." A modern English translation of this text would be: "Today, (when it seems that you are forsaken of God and man, dying for your criminal acts), I can truly say, you will be with me in paradise."

### **ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND PRESENT WITH THE LORD**

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. — 2 Corinthians 5:8

There can be no issue with this verse if it be understood as the apostle intended it to be. Consider his words just two verses prior to the above statement:

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. — 2 Corinthians 5:6

The apostle's argument is clear – If being at home in our bodies (being mindful of earthly things) makes us "absent" from the Lord, then it makes perfectly good sense that being "absent" from our bodies (that is, being unmindful of earthly things) is to be "present" with the Lord. While it is true that the apostle speaks of his being present with the Lord after his death, yet this is only in the sense of being physically present; however, the burden of the apostle's remarks is to show how

that we can be present with him in mind and heart while here on earth. One day we shall all be “present” with the Lord physically, but we can begin to be “present” with him now by learning to “mind” heavenly things, and by keeping our eyes focused on Jesus.

Let us not be guilty of putting a construction upon the apostle’s language which was clearly not his intent. He was not attempting to contradict what he told the church in his previous letter to the Corinthians, where he said that death is a “sleep,” out of which we will be awakened “at the last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

He was looking past the time of his sleep in the grave, to the time when he would receive an immortal body at Christ’s return and be present with the Lord:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. — 2 Timothy 4:8

## **NO SECOND CHANCE:**

While the punishing is not eternal, the punishment or result (death) is.]:

And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. — Matthew 25:46

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. — Psalm 37:10

Dear reader, God is love. He is just and kind, He is a personal being with emotions and He desires to receive our love and acknowledgment. He is a God we can trust. He has displayed His love for us in a way that could not have been expressed more strongly, in the gift of His only begotten Son. I want to live forever with this kind of God. I want to live in a place where there will be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying or pain. Will you join me there?

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. — Revelation 21:4

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. . . . And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. — Revelation 22:12 17

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